

# **Upward mobility: the socio-economic and educational achievements of Britain's visible minorities**

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## **1 Do handicaps always cause failure?**

As the previous Chapter very clearly demonstrates, members of all of Britain's visible minorities still routinely find themselves exposed to various forms of racial exclusionism; and since such exclusion most frequently occurs – and also bites most deeply – in situations where they are competing with members of the indigenous majority for access to scarce resources of one kind or another, they are inevitably disadvantaged as a result. However it is one thing to observe that a members of a certain social category have been treated in a disadvantageous fashion by having a wholly unjustified handicap imposed upon them, and quite another to conclude that they will therefore, of necessity, finish last in every race. On the contrary there is always a very real possibility that despite being subjected to such a disadvantage, the handicapped will develop all manner of skills and strategies with which to resist and circumvent its consequences, so much so that they may ultimately perform as well as, and sometimes even more successfully than, their myopically self-interested excluders.

It is also worth remembering that such achievements cannot be taken as evidence that the handicapping process itself does not exist. Far from it. Instead they are much better understood as an indication of the extent to which the otherwise-handicapped have looked to their own internal resources – if only by working twice as hard as everyone else – so much so that they have been able to catch up with, and not infrequently to overtake, those who have sought to sustain their position of privilege by imposing a quite unjustified handicap on their 'upstart' rivals. Moreover those who do find themselves overtaken in this way often feel completely non-plussed, and most especially so when they have grounded their exclusionistic practices in assumptions about the innate inferiority of their rivals – as routinely occurs with respect to majority attitudes towards the visible minorities. Hence if members of excluded minorities do – despite everything – manage to succeed, this is best read not so much as an indication of the absence of exclusionism, but rather as an indication of just how threadbare the excluders' strategies have become, and just how comprehensively they have misread – and indeed both overlooked and devalued – the alternative energies, competencies and resources on which those they have sought to exclude have been able to draw.

This Chapter is written against a background of these concerns. It seeks to explore firstly the *extent* of upward socio-economic mobility that members of Britain's visible minorities have managed to

achieve during the course of the past half century; secondly to explore how far these patterns of mobility have *varied* as between different sub-sections of the visible minority population; and thirdly to provide at least an outline of how both these achievements, and these inter-community variation, might best be explained.

## **2 The initial socio-economic position of Britain's visible minorities**

Having just entered the new millennium, it is instructive to reflect on just how much upward mobility the visible minorities have managed to achieve during the half-century which has passed since they first started to establish themselves in Britain in significant numbers. At the outset times were hard, but nevertheless the socio-economic position in which the newcomers found themselves is relatively easy to specify in analytical terms.

As the post-war economic boom took off Britain found itself acutely short of labour, and despite regular economic upswings and downswings the labour market – and most especially the market for more-or-less unskilled labour – remained extremely tight for the best part of the next two decades. By now, however, Britain's traditional reservoirs of reserve labour power, Ireland and Eastern Europe, were either exhausted or inaccessible; hence labour migrants began to draw from Britain's more distant Imperial possessions in ever-increasing numbers, despite the introduction of a whole series of Commonwealth Immigration Acts which were deliberately aimed at excluding them.

Whilst only a small minority of these non-European had either professional qualifications or immediately marketable skills, those that did soon find that these potentialities were routinely overlooked. Their skin colour was used to define their competence – or rather their assumed lack of it. Hence whether qualified or unqualified, educated or uneducated (and the vast majority of migrants fell into the latter categories) they all found themselves consigned to a similar position in the local labour market can very easily be defined. Whether they took menial jobs in hospitals, catering or transport across the length and breadth of Britain, worked the night shifts in textile mills in Yorkshire and Lancashire, made bricks in Bedfordshire, or took the dirtiest, heaviest and most dangerous jobs in steel mills, foundries or rubber factories, the pattern was always the same: members of this new and very visible minority population soon found that the jobs towards which they were invariably directed, as well as those to which they had any prospect of easy access were those which indigenous workers sought at all costs to avoid. As such they rapidly came to form what can best be described as a racially marginalised and socially subordinated sub-proletariat.

### 3 Subsequent developments

Much has changed since then, however. Since the late nineteen seventies Britain's labour market has undergone all sorts of transformations. First of all the mean level of unemployment soared to unprecedented levels, with the result that the opportunities right at the bottom of the pile on which the newcomers had so long relied simply evaporated; secondly many of the very industries in which they had for so long been employed – such as textile manufacture, steel-making, and heavy engineering – disappeared with equal speed; and thirdly whilst the centre of gravity of the post-war labour market lay in manufacturing industry, it now lies very firmly in the service sector. Given that all these changes have had a particularly drastic impact on just those sectors of the labour market into which post-war labour migrants were initially directed, they were not only disproportionately disadvantaged – at least by comparison with the indigenous majority – by these developments, but have also had to make by far the largest adjustments to survive them.

At the same time the whole character of the visible minority population has changed dramatically. Although patterns vary as between its different communities, in most cases only a rapidly diminishing minority can now properly be identified as immigrants. Instead the ever-growing majority are British-born, British-reared and British-educated, and their families frequently established themselves in Britain two or even three generations back.

In view of all these changes, there some obvious questions which need to be asked. How are they faring? How far have the older generation of settlers – many of whom are now reaching retirement aged – managed to overcome the sub-proletarian status to which they were initially assigned? And yet more pertinently still, have members of the locally-born second and third generation been any more successful – given their much greater familiarity with English ways – in overcoming the obstacles of exclusionism than were their parents and grandparents? Not only are such questions now well worth asking, but thanks to the inclusion of a explicitly formulated ethnic question in the 1991 Census, together with its use in all manner of other data collection activities, we can at long last begin to answer those questions in a systematic and reasonably reliable way.

Looking firstly at the position of the visible minorities in the class hierarchy, one of the most striking features of Table 1 is how far members of the visible minority population taken as a whole had managed to distance themselves from the sub-proletarian position in which they began by the time the census was taken in 1991. Perhaps not unexpectedly it is members of the oldest age cohort, and women much more than men, who have made the least progress. The great majority lacked any kind of formal educational qualification when they first arrived in the UK, and English very often

was not – and still very frequently is not – their first language. Be that as it may, any suggestion that the members of the far right hand column of the can still be described as a sub-proletariat, especially in the sense which they undoubtedly were at the very outset, is clearly erroneous. Whilst older women and men of colour are indeed rather more heavily concentrated in semi-skilled manual work than are their White counterparts, the difference between them – although significant – is no longer so great that it can reasonably be described as a yawning gulf. Meanwhile at the other end of age scale we find yet more dramatic signs of progress, so much so that a higher proportion of ethnic minority men aged between 18 and 29 are now to be found in each of the top three social classes than is the case amongst their white counterparts; controlling for gender, younger minority women do not lag far behind. In other however much of sub-proletariat members of the visible minorities may have formed when they first arrived, there is little – if any – merit in seeking to use a term of that kind as a means of explaining their current position in the British social order. It simply does not fit the facts.

Social class	18 – 29 year olds		30 – 44 year olds		45 – 59 year olds	
	Whites	Visible minorities	Whites	Visible minorities	Whites	Visible minorities
<b>Men</b>						
<i>Professionals</i>	5.8	7.3	8.2	10.4	7.3	9.3
<i>Managers</i>	20.4	22.2	33.3	28.4	32.3	22.3
<i>Skilled non-manual</i>	14.8	20.5	9.5	10.4	8.5	9.3
<i>Skilled Manual</i>	32.7	24.8	31.3	28.1	32.3	28.5
<i>Semi-skilled</i>	17.1	16.5	11.9	15.9	14.0	21.2
<i>Unskilled</i>	5.5	4.0	3.4	3.4	4.2	6.8
<b>Women</b>						
<i>Professionals</i>	2.4	3.6	2.2	3.1	1.0	1.9
<i>Managers</i>	25.5	21.9	32.2	31.3	27.5	33.4
<i>Skilled non-manual</i>	45.1	49.6	36.2	29.9	35.4	14.1
<i>Skilled Manual</i>	7.7	5.2	6.1	6.2	7.3	7.4
<i>Semi-skilled</i>	15.2	14.5	15.8	22.9	16.9	28.8
<i>Unskilled</i>	3.0	2.4	6.8	4.4	11.1	12.2

**Table 1 Percentage distribution of economically active non-white men and women to their white counterparts, by age-group and social class.**

Source: 1991 Census, *Ethnic Group and Country of Birth*, Table 16.

That does not mean, however, that the facts themselves are at all straightforward, or in any way easy to explain, not least because the figures in Table 1 conceal at least as much as they reveal. In the first place the figures in Table 1 make no reference to levels of unemployment – which were substantially higher amongst most sections of the visible minority population than they were amongst the indigenous majority in 1991, and remain so to this day. Secondly, and perhaps even

more importantly, the visible minority population is not – at least in its members' own terms – a homogeneous population group. To be sure they form a social category of those subjected to racial exclusionism, thanks to the continued commitment of members of Britain's white majority to using skin colour as an inescapable indicator of alterity; however in their own terms, rather than those laid down by their excluders, members of this section of the population see themselves as being affiliated to a whole host of ethnically specific communities. And once we begin to factor these considerations into the statistics, some yet more complex patterns begin to emerge.

Once the catch-all 'visible minority' category has been exploded into those of its ethnic components which the census data currently allows us to identify – as has been done in Table 2 – it becomes clear that many further complexities lie concealed behind the broad patterns revealed in Table 1. In particular it is immediately apparent that inter-minority differences are at least as great, and certainly just as analytically significant, as those thrown up by a simplistic juxtaposition of the achievements of 'whites' as against 'blacks'.

Nevertheless these figures still need to be approached with very considerable care. Hence, for example, whilst the exceptionally high proportion of 45 – 49 year old Bangladeshi women and men who show up as professionals is statistically accurate, the figures displayed in the table also need to be understood against an awareness of their specific ethnic context, namely the exceptionally low levels of economic activity displayed by older Bengalis of rural origin, which are in turn due to very high levels of long-term unemployment and ill-health (for men), together and their wives' equally striking reluctance to enter the waged labour market. Hence even though doctors only form a very small proportion of Britain's Bangladeshi population, given that most of them were recruited in the sixties and seventies, many are now in their fifties but still very actively employed, whilst an unusually high proportion of their labour-migrant peers have now withdrawn from active participation in the employment market.



Age Group	18 – 29 year olds						30 – 44 year olds						45 – 59 year olds							
	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Black Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Black Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Black Caribbean	Black African
Professional	21.4	11.1	6.5	2.8	2.8	7.9	8.2	17.2	12	6.8	4.2	4.1	15.7	7.3	9.2	14.8	7.2	10.5	1.4	12.9
Intermediate	18.7	25.4	19.2	7.2	19.3	17.2	33.3	22.9	30.4	23.4	14.3	22.2	27.8	32.3	18.5	30.8	25.2	14.7	10.3	24
Manual	16.4	21.1	18.3	14	19.8	23.2	9.5	19.5	10.3	9.7	21.2	8.9	13.4	8.5	24.3	12	10.8	20.5	4.4	14.8
Qual	25.7	20.9	23.7	31.7	31.7	17.7	31.3	31	25.6	32.7	33	42.7	17.4	32.3	38.4	20.2	27	21	42	18
Non-qual	12.6	15.9	23.3	37.3	17.4	16.6	11.9	6.3	16.8	20.2	22.2	14.9	14.1	14	5.6	16.3	20.6	22.5	28.4	18.9
Unemployed	2.7	3	4.8	2.5	4.2	7.9	3.4	0.7	2.8	4.3	1.9	3.9	6.3	4.2	2.5	3.8	6.4	7.1	10.7	7.6
Unemployed	14.6	5.6	3.2	0.9	1.5	4.5	2.2	6.1	4	3.7	7.3	1.4	4.1	1	2.7	4.4	6.2	17.3	0.2	1.1

	2	21.1	20.2	20.1	14	23	23.7	32.2	35.9	26.1	34.3	27.4	38.8	31.9	27.5	28.6	26.1	35.3	34.6	37.3	39.9
<i>manual</i>	4	34.3	49.9	42.7	37.9	53.5	38.5	36.2	30.3	28.6	23	17.7	34	24.2	35.4	25.9	19	14.5	17.3	9.8	16
	7	6.9	3.7	6.2	10.3	5.7	5.4	6.1	13	6.3	6.4	8.1	5.7	8.1	7.3	19	6.7	6.5	5.8	7.8	6.3
	1	17.9	17.1	22.9	28	11.4	14.7	15.8	9.8	30	25.8	27.4	14.3	16.4	16.9	12	35.3	28.7	15.4	26.5	18.3
	3	3.1	1.5	1.2	0.9	1.8	8.7	6.8	3.1	3.2	2.2	2.4	3.9	12.2	11.1	10.2	6	4	7.7	16.3	14.9

**Table 2 Percentage distribution of economically active non-white men and women to their white counterparts, by age-group and social class.**  
*Source: 1991 Census, Ethnic Group and Country of Birth, Table 16.*



But although this serves to remind us that the specific character of the group in question must always be borne in mind when analysing ethnic data – if only to ensure that one is really comparing like with like – the most salient feature of the array of figures set forth in Table 2 is comparatively easy to identify. In the first place no ethnic group – and no age group within any given ethnic group – is now so heavily concentrated at the bottom of the class hierarchy as to suggest that it is any way appropriate to identify its members unambiguously as an ‘under-class’ or ‘sub-proletariat’; but secondly, and just as importantly, the figures also show that both the extent and the character of the upward mobility achieved by the minorities varies enormously – and no less so by gender and age than by ethnic group. From this perspective Chinese and Indian men in the 18 – 29 year old age-cohort appear to be amongst the most successful of all, at least by comparison with their white counterparts, whilst older Afro-Caribbean men appear to be amongst the least successful. But before leaping to instant conclusions about the possible associations between ethnicity and success, it is also worth noting that women’s achievements differ quite strikingly from men. Hence for example, an exceptionally high proportion of older Afro-Caribbean women are classified as being of managerial status, whilst younger Afro-Caribbean women’s achievements compare well with that of all other women in that age-group, apart from the exceptionally successful Chinese. Hence although the Table reveals an extensive degree of inter-ethnic differentiation in upward social mobility, it is nevertheless quite impossible to rank members of the six major ethnic categories along a single continuum from the less to the more successful.

Such a finding is by no means novel, of course, for this picture complex differentials by gender, by age, as well as by ethnic affiliation is wholly congruent with the conclusions which Modood et. al. (1997) draw from the data collected in the 4<sup>th</sup> PSI Survey. Yet although it is now becoming increasingly clear that explaining these multi-dimensional patterns of inter-ethnic difference – as opposed to merely seeking to measure a unilateral condition of racial disadvantage – is the central issue which analysts in this field need to address, the results of the 1991 Census, as well as of the 4<sup>th</sup> PSI Survey, are becoming increasingly ill-suited for this task. Thus whilst the Census has the huge advantage of being based on a 100% sample, its data was not only collected the best part of a decade ago; and whilst the PSI survey was conducted rather more recently, and its relatively small sample data was drawn up in such a way that it cannot be viewed as perfectly statistically representative of the population as a whole. Hence in the remainder of this Chapter I have relied on data drawn from two much more recently constructed datasets: the Labour Force Survey for the period 1996 – 1998, and 1998 University entrance data released by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service – both of which include ‘ethnic group’ in the sense used in the Census as a variable.

Yet although these datasets allow us to ask some much more detailed, more penetrating, and of course more up-to-date questions about inter-ethnic differentials in upward mobility than is possible with either the Census or the PSI, representing the complex patterns which emerge in a way which will be comprehensible to readers is an extremely challenging task. The solution adopted here as is follows. Tables 3 and 4 have exactly the same format Table 2, but by using data drawn from LFS, it is not only possible to identify a considerably wider range of occupational groups, but also the numbers – and hence the proportion – of men (Table 3) or women (Table 4) drawn from that ethnic group and falling into that age category who are ‘actively looking for work’, and hence unemployed. Last but not least the LFS also counts the number of people who are neither working nor looking for work – although given the LFS’s priorities, it provides a poor guide as to how many of these individuals are primarily engaged in looking after themselves and others at home, and how many are students.

Yet although the differentials revealed in Tables 3 and 4 are undoubtedly extremely significant, the underlying patterns are hard to detect, and even harder to digest. Hence Tables 5 and 6 are based on exactly the same data as that set out in Tables 3 and 4, but this time the figures are *ratios* of the proportion of persons in any given ethnic group and age cohort as compared with their white counterparts. Hence whilst whites always by definition always score 1.0, a figure of 2.0 in any cell indicates that those persons are twice as frequently found in that occupational category than their white counterparts, and a figure of 0.5 that they are only half as likely to be so. To further aid comprehension I have set all scores greater than 1.5 in **bold**, and all those less than 0.5 in *italics*.

Men	20 – 29 year olds							30 – 39 year olds							40 – 49 year olds							50 – 59 year olds						
	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African
<i>Professional occupations</i>	11.0	7.4	10.8	7.9	8.6	1.5	5.7	19.0	29.0	22.9	14.6	9.2	11.0	10.3	21.9	25.0	26.2	8.9	18.5	11.5	10.3	19.9	34.6	16.4	10.0	10.5	6.3	7.1
<i>Managers and administrators</i>	5.6	8.6	9.9	4.3	0.0	2.2	5.0	9.5	21.0	20.7	11.1	3.1	7.3	14.1	13.1	14.6	16.0	4.8	7.4	11.5	11.5	8.1	7.7	10.7	4.3	5.3	3.1	19.0
<i>Assoc professionals &amp; technicians</i>	6.1	2.5	9.9	2.4	1.4	7.3	2.1	9.7	4.8	6.1	4.1	1.5	7.8	10.3	7.5	4.2	4.9	1.4	3.7	3.1	14.9	6.2	11.5	4.2	1.4	0.0	2.1	7.1
<i>Clerical, secretarial occupations</i>	7.9	4.9	10.8	7.1	4.3	10.9	4.3	4.7	1.6	5.9	7.6	4.6	3.7	8.3	3.8	2.1	5.2	2.1	0.0	4.2	8.0	4.0	0.0	5.1	5.7	0.0	1.0	4.8
<i>Craft and related occupations</i>	18.7	1.2	6.8	5.9	2.9	9.5	2.1	19.2	0.0	10.1	5.8	0.0	17.8	2.6	15.5	2.1	12.5	8.9	7.4	20.8	2.3	15.7	3.8	7.0	4.3	5.3	13.5	4.8
<i>Personal, protective occupations</i>	6.7	11.1	1.5	4.7	45.7	8.8	8.5	5.7	24.2	3.2	2.3	38.5	5.9	9.0	4.8	22.9	1.5	3.4	22.2	6.3	9.2	3.4	19.2	2.3	1.4	5.3	7.3	9.5
<i>Sales occupations</i>	5.2	3.7	10.5	7.1	5.7	5.8	7.1	3.9	3.2	3.5	6.4	4.6	3.2	3.8	2.0	4.2	3.8	4.8	3.7	1.0	2.3	2.4	0.0	3.3	2.9	0.0	2.1	0.0
<i>Plant and machine operatives</i>	9.5	1.2	7.1	16.9	1.4	9.5	6.4	11.5	1.6	12.8	18.1	1.5	13.2	7.7	11.7	2.1	13.7	21.2	0.0	16.7	9.2	13.1	3.8	8.9	14.3	0.0	26.0	11.9
<i>Other occupations</i>	8.8	4.9	1.9	5.5	2.9	6.6	5.0	5.1	1.6	4.3	3.5	6.2	7.8	5.1	4.8	2.1	4.4	2.7	3.7	3.1	8.0	4.2	0.0	5.1	7.1	5.3	8.3	2.4
<i>Currently looking for work</i>	9.0	8.6	10.5	20.1	11.4	21.2	22.0	4.1	9.7	5.9	15.8	18.5	13.2	12.8	4.8	6.3	5.5	16.4	7.4	12.5	9.2	4.7	0.0	9.8	12.9	15.8	8.3	19.0
<i>Inactive (includes students)</i>	11.0	45.7	18.8	17.7	14.3	15.3	30.5	7.2	3.2	4.5	10.5	10.8	8.2	14.1	9.8	10.4	6.1	24.0	25.9	5.2	14.9	18.3	19.2	26.6	35.7	52.6	21.9	14.3
<i>Number of persons in sample</i>	809	81	324	254	70	137	141	1030	62	376	171	65	219	156	918	48	344	146	27	96	87	860	26	214	70	19	96	42

**Table 3 Proportion of men in each ethnic group and in successive ten-year age cohorts by major occupational group;**

*Source: QLFS96q4 + QLFS98q1, using 100% of minority cases, and a 5% sample of white cases*

Women	20 – 29 year olds							30 – 39 year olds							40 – 49 year olds							50 – 59 year olds						
	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African
<i>Professional occupations</i>	7.2	3.3	4.6	1.3	0.9	2.7	5.1	10.9	11.0	7.6	2.6	2.9	7.9	3.6	10.0	7.3	6.6	0.6	2.1	3.8	1.4	6.9	21.6	5.5	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.0
<i>Managers and administrators</i>	5.1	9.8	7.0	3.5	1.7	3.4	0.0	7.1	8.2	7.1	2.6	2.9	7.5	3.6	8.8	4.9	6.0	3.6	0.0	5.5	5.4	6.4	8.1	5.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.0
<i>Assoc professionals &amp; technicians</i>	7.2	6.6	5.3	3.2	0.9	3.4	5.1	9.3	8.2	6.7	0.0	0.0	11.8	6.7	8.2	18.3	7.6	3.6	0.0	17.5	10.8	5.5	5.4	4.0	0.0	0.0	18.9	20.9
<i>Clerical, secretarial occupations</i>	21.5	8.2	18.9	7.6	6.1	18.4	5.1	16.9	13.7	16.0	4.5	2.9	22.3	8.7	19.0	7.3	12.6	3.6	0.0	19.7	10.8	14.5	2.7	4.0	0.0	3.3	1.6	9.3
<i>Craft and related occupations</i>	1.0	0.0	2.3	3.2	0.9	2.0	0.7	1.3	1.4	5.3	3.2	0.0	0.7	0.0	2.6	1.2	8.3	0.6	0.0	1.1	0.0	2.2	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.0
<i>Personal, protective occupations</i>	13.5	11.5	1.3	2.9	2.6	15.0	9.6	9.0	8.2	4.4	2.6	5.7	10.5	13.3	10.5	8.5	4.6	3.0	0.0	13.7	13.5	9.6	2.7	3.5	7.5	0.0	19.7	7.0
<i>Sales occupations</i>	7.1	6.6	9.6	4.4	5.2	4.8	5.1	7.1	8.2	5.1	1.9	0.0	3.3	4.6	6.4	6.1	3.3	1.8	2.1	2.7	6.8	7.2	2.7	3.0	1.5	0.0	1.6	0.0
<i>Plant and machine operatives</i>	3.7	0.0	4.0	2.2	1.7	0.0	0.7	2.7	1.4	5.1	0.6	5.7	1.0	1.0	4.6	2.4	8.6	2.4	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.8	5.4	6.5	3.0	0.0	8.2	0.0
<i>Other occupations</i>	3.5	1.6	1.0	0.6	0.0	0.7	7.4	6.2	2.7	4.0	0.6	0.0	3.9	8.2	5.4	6.1	5.6	1.8	0.0	6.0	8.1	5.3	5.4	2.5	1.5	0.0	12.3	2.3
<i>Currently looking for work</i>	5.1	3.3	9.6	7.6	6.1	16.3	16.2	3.2	5.5	4.7	4.5	2.9	6.9	12.8	2.9	6.1	3.3	4.8	2.1	5.5	12.2	2.2	2.7	5.0	4.5	0.0	3.3	11.6
<i>Inactive (includes students)</i>	25.0	49.2	34.8	62.2	73.9	32.0	44.1	25.9	31.5	32.9	76.8	77.1	23.9	37.4	21.4	30.5	32.5	73.7	93.6	23.5	31.1	37.7	40.5	57.2	82.1	96.7	29.5	46.5
<i>Number of persons in sample</i>	865	61	302	315	115	147	136	1145	73	450	155	35	305	195	973	82	302	167	47	183	74	853	37	201	67	30	122	43

**Table 4 Proportion of women in each ethnic group and in successive ten-year age cohorts by major occupational group;**

*Source: QLFS96q4 + QLFS98q1, using 100% of minority cases, and a 5% sample of white cases*

Men	20 – 29 year olds							30 – 39 year olds							40 – 49 year olds							50 – 59 year olds						
	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African
<i>Professional occupations</i>	1.0	<b>1.6</b>	<b>1.8</b>	0.8	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.4</i>	0.9	1.0	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.2</b>	1.2	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.8</i>	<b>1.5</b>	1.0	1.1	1.2	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.9</i>	<i>0.9</i>	1.0	0.9	1.3	0.5	<i>0.6</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<b>2.3</b>
<i>Managers and administrators</i>	1.0	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.8	<i>0.1</i>	0.5	1.0	<b>1.5</b>	1.2	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.5	1.0	1.1	1.2	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.8</i>	0.5	0.5	1.0	<b>1.7</b>	0.8	0.5	<i>0.5</i>	<i>0.3</i>	0.4
<i>Assoc professionals &amp; technicians</i>	1.0	<i>0.4</i>	<b>1.6</b>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.2</i>	1.2	<i>0.4</i>	1.0	0.5	0.6	0.4	<i>0.2</i>	0.8	1.1	1.0	0.6	0.7	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.5</i>	0.4	<b>2.0</b>	1.0	<b>1.9</b>	0.7	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.3</i>	1.2
<i>Clerical, secretarial occupations</i>	1.0	0.6	1.4	0.9	0.5	1.4	0.5	1.0	<i>0.3</i>	1.3	<b>1.6</b>	1.0	0.8	<b>1.8</b>	1.0	0.5	1.4	0.5	<i>0.0</i>	1.1	<b>2.1</b>	1.0	0.0	1.3	1.4	<i>0.0</i>	<i>0.3</i>	1.2
<i>Craft and related occupations</i>	1.0	<i>0.1</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.2</i>	0.5	<i>0.1</i>	1.0	<i>0.0</i>	0.5	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.0</i>	0.9	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.3	0.1	1.0	<i>0.2</i>	<i>0.4</i>	<i>0.3</i>	<i>0.3</i>	0.9	0.3
<i>Personal, protective occupations</i>	1.0	<b>1.7</b>	<i>0.2</i>	0.7	<b>6.8</b>	1.3	1.3	1.0	<b>4.2</b>	0.6	<i>0.4</i>	<b>6.7</b>	1.0	<b>1.6</b>	1.0	<b>4.8</b>	<i>0.3</i>	0.7	<b>4.6</b>	1.3	1.9	1.0	<b>5.7</b>	0.7	<i>0.4</i>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.8</b>
<i>Sales occupations</i>	1.0	0.7	<b>2.0</b>	1.4	1.1	1.1	1.4	1.0	0.8	0.9	<b>1.7</b>	1.2	0.8	1.0	1.0	<b>2.1</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.9</b>	0.5	1.2	1.0	<i>0.0</i>	1.3	1.2	<i>0.0</i>	0.9	<i>0.0</i>
<i>Plant and machine operatives</i>	1.0	<i>0.1</i>	0.7	<b>1.8</b>	<i>0.2</i>	1.0	0.7	1.0	<i>0.1</i>	1.1	<b>1.6</b>	<i>0.1</i>	1.2	0.7	1.0	<i>0.2</i>	1.2	<b>1.8</b>	<i>0.0</i>	1.4	0.8	1.0	<i>0.3</i>	0.7	1.1	<i>0.0</i>	<b>2.0</b>	0.9
<i>Other occupations</i>	1.0	0.6	<i>0.2</i>	0.6	<i>0.3</i>	0.7	0.6	1.0	<i>0.3</i>	0.8	0.7	1.2	<b>1.5</b>	1.0	1.0	<i>0.4</i>	0.9	0.6	0.8	0.7	<b>1.7</b>	1.0	<i>0.0</i>	1.2	<b>1.7</b>	1.3	<b>2.0</b>	0.6
<i>Currently looking for work</i>	1.0	1.0	1.2	<b>2.2</b>	1.3	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.4</b>	1.0	<b>2.4</b>	1.4	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.1</b>	1.0	1.3	1.2	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	1.0	<i>0.0</i>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>4.1</b>
<i>Inactive (includes students)</i>	1.0	<b>4.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>1.6</b>	1.3	1.4	<b>2.8</b>	1.0	<i>0.4</i>	0.6	<b>1.5</b>	<b>1.5</b>	1.1	<b>2.0</b>	1.0	1.1	0.6	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<i>0.5</i>	<b>1.5</b>	1.0	1.1	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.9</b>	1.2	0.8

**Table 5 Ratios of non-white men to their white counterparts, by age-group, ethnic group and occupational category**

Source: QLFS96q4 + QLFS98q1, using 100% of minority cases, and a 5% sample of white cases

Key: Since the figures in this grid are *ratios*, White always = 1.0; if the proportion of members of a minority group involved in a given occupation is twice as great as amongst the whites, they are recorded as scoring 2.0; if half as great they score 0.5, etc. For ease of comprehension if the score is greater than 1.5 it appears in **bold**, and if less than 0.5 in *italics*.

Women	20 – 29 year olds							30 – 39 year olds							40 – 49 year olds							50 – 59 year olds						
	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African	White	Chinese	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Caribbean	Black African
<i>Professional occupations</i>	1.0	<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.4</b>	0.7	0.3	0.7	0.0	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.4	0.4	1.1	0.5	1.0	0.6	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.6	1.0	1.3	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0
<i>Managers and administrators</i>	1.0	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.7	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.2	0.3	0.7	0.3	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.1	1.0	<b>3.1</b>	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0
<i>Assoc professionals &amp; technicians</i>	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.5	0.7	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.7	1.0	2.2	0.9	0.4	0.0	2.1	1.3	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	3.4	<b>3.8</b>
<i>Clerical, secretarial occupations</i>	1.0	0.4	0.9	0.4	0.3	0.9	0.2	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.3	0.2	1.3	0.5	1.0	0.4	0.7	0.2	0.0	1.0	0.6	1.0	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.6
<i>Craft and related occupations</i>	1.0	0.0	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.1</b>	0.8	<b>2.0</b>	0.7	1.0	1.0	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2.5</b>	0.0	0.5	0.0	1.0	0.5	<b>3.2</b>	0.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	1.0	0.0	<b>1.8</b>	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0
<i>Personal, protective occupations</i>	1.0	0.8	0.1	0.2	0.2	1.1	0.7	1.0	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.6	1.2	<b>1.5</b>	1.0	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.0	1.3	1.3	1.0	0.3	0.4	0.8	0.0	<b>2.0</b>	0.7
<i>Sales occupations</i>	1.0	0.9	1.4	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.0	1.2	0.7	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.4	1.1	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0
<i>Plant and machine operatives</i>	1.0	0.0	1.1	0.6	0.5	0.0	0.2	1.0	0.5	<b>1.9</b>	0.2	<b>2.1</b>	0.4	0.4	1.0	0.5	<b>1.9</b>	0.5	0.0	0.2	0.0	1.0	<b>3.1</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>1.7</b>	0.0	<b>4.7</b>	0.0
<i>Other occupations</i>	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.2	<b>2.1</b>	1.0	0.4	0.6	0.1	0.0	0.6	1.3	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.3	0.0	1.1	1.5	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.0	<b>2.3</b>	0.4
<i>Currently looking for work</i>	1.0	0.6	<b>1.9</b>	1.5	1.2	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.2</b>	1.0	<b>1.7</b>	1.4	1.4	0.9	<b>2.1</b>	<b>4.0</b>	1.0	<b>2.1</b>	1.2	<b>1.7</b>	0.7	<b>1.9</b>	<b>4.2</b>	1.0	1.2	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.0</b>	0.0	<b>1.5</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<i>Inactive (includes students)</i>	1.0	<b>2.0</b>	1.4	<b>2.5</b>	<b>3.0</b>	1.3	<b>1.8</b>	1.0	1.2	1.3	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	0.9	1.4	1.0	1.4	<b>1.5</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>4.4</b>	1.1	1.5	1.0	1.1	1.5	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.6</b>	0.8	1.2

**Table 6 Ratios of non-white women to their white counterparts, by age-group, ethnic group and occupational category**

Source: QLFS96q4 + QLFS98q1, using 100% of minority cases, and a 5% sample of white cases

Key: Since the figures in this grid are *ratios*, White always = 1.0; if the proportion of members of a minority group involved in a given occupation is twice as great as amongst the whites, they are recorded as scoring 2.0; if half as great they score 0.5, etc. For ease of comprehension if the score is greater than 1.5 it appears in **bold**, and if less than 0.5 in *italics*..

What, though, about the patterns which emerge as a result of performing such an exercise? As the figures in Table 5 yet again confirm, the Chinese and the Indians are not only achieving by far the highest level of upward social mobility of all the visible minority communities, but are now significantly outperforming the white population as a whole in terms of the scale of their entry into professional occupations. Indeed by the time they reach their thirties, men from both groups are more than twice as likely as their white counterparts to be professionally employed; moreover by comparison with their achievements, Pakistani and the African men fall some way behind, whilst both the Black Caribbeans and the Bangladeshi yet further behind still. Turning next to the extent that minority women have found their way into the top three occupational categories, the Chinese and the Indians once again stand out as being the most successful, even if this has not been – or at least has not yet been – quite so dramatic as their male counterparts, whilst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women have as yet achieved very much less, Afro-Caribbean women, and most especially those in their thirties, have made a very creditable showing in the top three occupational categories.

If, next, we turn to the bottom end of the occupational hierarchy, Table 5 not only confirms the success with which visible minority men have moved away from the jobs as plant and machine operatives in the now much depleted industrial sectors in which they began, but also that there is an ethnic dimension to that exodus, since only the Pakistanis (and to a much lesser extent the Afro-Caribbeans, the Africans and the older Indians) are over-concentrated in this sector. But in identifying where they have gone, it is worth noting just how heavily over-represented the Bangladeshis and all but the youngest age-cohort of Chinese are in the ‘personal and protective’ sector – which along with sales, is where those working in restaurants and the fast-food trade are routinely categorised. Turning next to their female counterparts, it is striking that whilst older Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani women are all still very strikingly over-represented in what one might describe as ‘bottom of the pile’ manufacturing jobs, this tendency has wholly evaporated in every group but the Indians drawn from amongst the youngest age cohort, all of whom – with the exception of Bangladeshis and the Africans – are heavily over-represented in Craft and related occupations if they have not moved on into Professional jobs.

Finally it is also worth taking a close look at what is going on right at the bottom of the Tables in the rows marked ‘Currently looking for work’ and ‘Inactive’. Moreover if we look back to Tables 3 and 4, the currently looking for work figures could equally well have been marked ‘percentage unemployed’, and from this perspective some very striking differentials arise, not least because in every group but the Chinese (and this would appear to be a sampling error), levels of

unemployment amongst the visible minorities are higher – and often strikingly higher – than they are amongst the white majority; a similar pattern can also be found amongst women. Hence if the upper portions of these Tables provides plentiful evidence of minority success, these rows provide the clearest possible evidence that such achievements are not plain sailing: higher levels of unemployment provide a very clear measure of the greater degree of difficulty which members of the visible minorities encounter in actually getting a job.

Finally an examination of the last row in the four tables is also instructive, even though the catch-all ‘inactive’ category rather unhelpfully aggregates full-time students (who presumably will enter the employment market as soon as they have gained their qualifications) with those who are not participating for all manner of other reasons. Nevertheless the inter-ethnic variations in this sphere are no less striking than those elsewhere. Whilst sharply raised levels of inactivity amongst both men and women of all the minority groups is best accounted for as the outcome of their much higher levels of participation in higher education (a subject which will shortly be addressed in its own right), patterns of inactivity amongst the older age groups, and especially amongst older women, deserve very careful attention. Assuming that involvement in full-time education is not statistically significant amongst the over-40s, one of the most striking features of the figures in Table 4 is that the great majority of older Pakistani, and even more so of Bangladeshi women are non-participants in the waged labour market. By contrast Indian women in their 40s, and even more so Caribbean women in that age-cohort are a great deal more likely than their white counterparts to go out to work. Given the ever increasing importance of women’s contribution to the budgets of most households, the reluctance of most older Pakistani and Bangladeshi women to seek employment outside the household will inevitably have a negative impact on household budgets, just as the enthusiasm with which Indian women have sought paid employment has had just the opposite effect. Meanwhile Caribbean women stand in a special category of their own, for although no less than half of all Caribbean women head single-parent households, they are not only more likely to go out to work than their white counterparts, regardless of household structure, but are also significantly out-performing Caribbean men in terms of their upward mobility through the employment market. Ethnic agency is clearly at work here.

Since agency is above all a qualitative phenomenon, quantitative data tends, by its very nature, to offer few indications of how such processes of agency actually operate: the only evidence it normally provides are empirical outcomes such as those explored in the last few pages, and for which the only plausible explanation is that the differential patterns we have detected are the outcome of processes of ethnic agency. Sometimes, however, it is possible to go rather further than



this by exploring the differential basis on which upward mobility appears to have been achieved. It has, of course, long been argued that self-employment can often provide an effective means of circumventing the worst of racial exclusionism, on two grounds: firstly that the kinship-based resources which facilitate the development of entrepreneurial initiatives – and most especially resilient extended family networks – are differentially distributed by ethnicity; and secondly on the grounds that despite the extreme reluctance of most white gate-keepers to allocate scarce resources to members of visible minorities whilst there is still any kind of prospect of diverting them to members of their own group, those self-same excluders frequently display no compunction whatsoever of purchasing goods and services from members of the minorities provided they make their wares available at the right place and the right time, as well as at a keen price. How far, therefore, does the LFS serve to confirm that such processes may currently be at work?

Tables 5 and 6 are based solely on data on those people who are actively employed, and sets out the percentage of persons in each ethnic group who fall into the nine major occupational categories, but further differentiating them by whether, within each of these categories, those involved are paid employees or self-employed. For simplicity's sake no age dimension has been introduced into either of these Tables. In making sense of the two Tables the best place to begin is right at the bottom, for the row marked 'all occupations' gives an overall indication of the percentage of ethnic group members who are self-employed. In these terms Table 5 shows that whilst the Chinese, the Indian and Pakistani men are considerably more likely to be self-employed than their white counterparts, Bangladeshis, Black Caribbeans and Black Africans – who in broad terms are also less upwardly mobile – are considerably less likely to be so. It is also worth noting how far the various groups differ in terms of the sector of the employment market where self-employment is most salient. Thus whilst for the whites self-employment is a particularly strongly preferred option amongst skilled craftsmen, the figures suggest that our three most upwardly mobile minority groups – the Chinese, the Indians and the Pakistanis – have used self-employment as a means of breaking into the otherwise highly privileged bastion of the professions. Over and above this the Pakistanis also make a strong showing as self-employed plant and machine operatives, largely as a result of the heavy involvement of middle-aged Pakistani men in driving taxis. By contrast the differential patterns for women set out in Table 6 are so far rather less dramatic, although they also suggest that professionally qualified minority women from all groups except the Black Africans and the Black Caribbeans are finding self-employment offers a particularly effective way of overcoming the obstacles they face.

Men	White		Chinese		Indian		Pakistani		Bangladeshi		Black Caribbean		Black African	
	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed
Professional occupations	18.1	3.9	13.3	16.7	14.0	10.6	8.4	7.7	10.8	5.0	9.8	1.0	11.9	1.5
Managers and administrators	8.8	2.3	16.7	2.7	14.2	4.6	7.9	2.0	4.2	0.0	7.1	1.3	13.7	3.7
Associate professional & tech	7.2	1.8	6.0	0.7	6.8	1.3	3.5	0.5	2.5	0.0	6.0	2.0	11.9	1.1
Clerical, secretarial occupations	5.9	0.1	4.0	0.0	8.3	0.3	9.4	0.0	5.0	0.0	7.1	0.0	10.4	0.0
Craft and related occupations	14.5	6.4	2.0	0.0	9.6	2.2	8.2	2.0	4.2	0.0	17.9	3.5	3.3	0.7
Personal, protective occupations	6.1	0.1	21.3	5.3	2.7	0.0	5.0	0.5	49.2	4.2	9.1	0.5	14.1	0.0
Sales occupations	3.4	0.6	4.0	0.7	5.9	0.8	8.2	1.2	4.2	2.5	4.5	0.0	5.6	1.1
Plant and machine operatives	12.6	1.3	2.7	0.0	12.5	1.2	15.8	12.6	0.8	0.8	18.4	2.5	10.0	2.6
Other occupations	5.8	1.0	4.0	0.0	4.6	0.2	7.2	0.0	6.7	0.0	8.6	0.8	8.1	0.4
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>78.8</b>	<b>21.2</b>	<b>73.5</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>88.4</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>88.9</b>	<b>11.1</b>

**Table 7 Percentage distribution of employed men in each Ethnic group by status as Employee and Self-employed and by major occupational categories**

*Source: QLFS96q4 + QLFS98q1, 100% of minority cases, and 5% sample of white cases*

Women	White		Chinese		Indian		Pakistani		Bangladeshi		Black Caribbean		Black African	
	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed	Employee	Self-employed
Professional occupations	10.3	2.6	6.8	9.6	7.4	3.8	3.0	2.4	6.1	3.0	7.3	0.2	5.3	1.9
Managers and administrators	9.1	1.0	12.3	0.7	10.3	1.1	11.6	1.2	9.1	0.0	7.9	0.4	3.8	1.4
Associate professional & tech	9.8	1.3	16.4	2.1	9.9	1.0	8.5	1.2	3.0	0.0	18.5	0.8	15.8	1.9
Clerical, secretarial occupations	25.0	0.9	14.4	0.7	24.6	0.1	22.0	0.6	27.3	0.0	26.8	0.0	17.2	0.0
Craft and related occupations	2.1	0.5	1.4	0.0	8.8	0.3	9.1	0.6	3.0	0.0	1.4	0.2	0.0	0.5
Personal, protective occupations	14.4	0.9	13.7	0.7	6.1	0.3	12.8	1.2	12.1	3.0	20.8	0.0	24.4	0.5
Sales occupations	9.7	0.3	11.0	0.0	9.3	0.3	12.8	0.0	21.2	0.0	4.8	0.0	9.1	1.0
Plant and machine operatives	4.5	0.2	3.4	0.0	10.3	0.1	8.5	0.0	12.1	0.0	3.0	0.0	1.4	0.0
Other occupations	7.1	0.5	6.8	0.0	6.1	0.0	3.7	0.6	0.0	0.0	7.9	0.0	15.8	0.0
<b>All occupations</b>	<b>91.9</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>86.3</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>92.9</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>92.1</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>93.9</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>98.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>92.8</b>	<b>7.2</b>

**Table 8 Percentage distribution of employed women in each Ethnic group by status as Employee and Self-employed and by major occupational categories**

*Source: QLFS96q4 + QLFS98q1, 100% of minority cases, and 5% sample of white cases*

#### 4 Upward mobility through the educational system

Once they had established a toehold in Britain, the only way in which most of the first generation of settlers could hope to dodge the worst impact of racial exclusionism, and hence press their way upwards through the local social order, was through endless hard work, further reinforced by making the most of their own individual and collective entrepreneurial resources; but in the course of so doing only a tiny minority were able to rely on any educational and professional qualifications which they might have brought with them, for even if they possessed such qualifications they soon found that they were routinely devalued by virtually all potential employers. As a result most members of the first generation had little alternative but to start again, virtually from scratch, in their new, largely unfamiliar, and all too often hostile environment.

By contrast the second and third generation have found themselves in a rather different position, not so much because the forces of exclusionism which they encountered were any less, but rather because their own personal experiences were very different. Given that they had been born and brought up in Britain, they were not only far more familiar with the ways of the native English than their parents ever could be, but they also had direct access to the British educational system. It would, of course, be idle to suggest that educational success removes all the obstacles in the way of rapid socio-economic advancement – most particularly if one has the misfortune to belong to an excluded and socially disadvantaged minority. Nevertheless it is equally clear that educational success is a necessary precursor to any kind of upward economic mobility, for without the necessary skills and qualifications there is absolutely no chance whatsoever of challenging those exclusionary tendencies. Hence in making any assessment of the likely future prospects of Britain's visible minority populations – let alone of explaining the developments highlighted in the previous section – assessing the educational achievements of the rising generation becomes a crucial issue.

Until recently it has been virtually impossible to undertake such an exercise: there is little coordination between Local Education Authorities, so despite much verbal commitment to the importance of ethnic monitoring, data on pupils' ethnic affiliation is neither routinely nor systematically recorded. But although similar deficiencies can also be observed in many other areas of public service delivery, there is one very significant exception to this regrettable tendency: for some years the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) has collected (and more recently begun to publish) detailed figures on the ethnic affiliation of all home-based students by applying for – and accepted onto – undergraduate degree courses in the UK. Moreover the dataset

also includes a number of other critical variables, including every applicant's sex, age, A level point score, the type of educational establishment they previously attended and their parents' social class. Since UCAS data is assembled on a national basis, and since more than a third of all school leavers now apply to enter Universities or Colleges through UCAS, it not only provides a unique insight into the frequency with which minority applicants are gaining access to the higher educational system, but also – and just as illuminatingly – to data on their parents' social class, the A level scores which they achieved, and the types of schools they attended in order to obtain them. All these issues are explored in some detail in the Tables which follow.

#### ***4.1 A level scores of minority applicants***

Given that virtually everyone who takes A levels submits an application for university entrance – regardless of whether they actually take up any offer which they may receive, the data available from UCCA provides an extremely reliable, and nationally comprehensive, indicator of school performance. With issues of ethnic pluralism in mind, three sets of questions are worth exploring in detail. Firstly the participation rate: or in other words the proportion of school-leavers in each ethnic group who sit A level at all, regardless of the results they achieve; secondly the point-scores which they actually achieved; and thirdly the type of educational establishment they attended whilst doing so.

Looking firstly at what can best be described as the A level participation rate, one of the most striking features of Table 9 is that in every group except Caribbean men, the participation rate amongst young people of minority descent is now at least closely akin to that displayed by the white majority, and that amongst the Indians, and even more so amongst the Chinese, the participation rate is now very substantially higher than that found amongst the white majority. The figures also serve to demonstrate that the widespread belief that Muslim parents are strongly resistant to the prospect of seeing their daughters gain advanced educational qualifications is wholly unsound. In both of Britain's two largest Muslim communities, the Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis, the A level participation rate is now higher for women than it is amongst the white majority.

A further striking feature of Table 9 is that even amongst those groups where a disproportionately high number of youngsters take A levels, their mean performance does not suffer as a consequence: hence whilst the Chinese display an extraordinary high participation rate, their over-all pattern of the results is nevertheless still better than those achieved by the white majority; and whilst the mean A level performance of the Indians is still slightly lower than that achieved by the whites, their participation rate is now very substantially higher.

	Whites		Chinese		Indians		Pakistanis		Bangladeshis		Afro-Caribs		Africans	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Total applicants with A levels</i>	82,048	98,831	968	943	3,954	4,263	1,923	1,868	564	592	683	1,273	661	904
<i>A level participation rate<sup>1</sup></i>	26.55	33.68	81.76	85.05	49.34	55.54	29.16	30.62	23.15	26.83	18.31	34.79	21.65	30.39
<b><i>A level results</i></b>														
<i>% group scoring 26 – 30 points<sup>2</sup></i>	23.51	23.21	30.17	26.19	25.59	18.65	17.47	14.35	20.21	12.50	10.83	8.01	13.46	12.17
<i>21 – 25 points</i>	15.90	17.47	14.36	14.85	13.28	14.03	12.48	12.42	10.82	14.70	8.64	11.23	11.65	12.39
<i>16 – 20 points</i>	25.68	26.76	20.25	23.75	20.94	24.26	23.09	25.00	23.58	22.97	24.45	24.98	23.00	25.33
<i>11 – 15 points</i>	16.59	15.95	16.22	18.24	16.77	17.97	17.21	19.43	17.02	17.57	18.45	21.60	18.76	21.79
<i>6 – 10 points</i>	16.40	15.00	16.01	14.63	20.13	21.84	25.17	25.00	25.53	28.89	31.77	30.09	29.20	24.56
<i>0 – 5 points</i>	1.91	1.62	3.00	2.33	3.29	3.26	4.58	3.80	2.84	3.38	5.86	4.08	3.93	3.76
<i>Mean A level score</i>	18.39	18.66	18.87	18.64	17.88	16.99	16.31	16.01	16.73	15.71	14.54	14.66	15.48	15.73
<b><i>Type of school attended</i></b>														
<i>Independent</i>	13.14	10.03	24.46	17.79	14.74	10.71	5.83	5.49	6.97	6.50	2.96	2.35	4.73	5.57
<i>Grant maintained</i>	9.79	8.20	9.83	8.02	11.57	13.00	6.74	8.66	4.84	6.10	4.44	4.17	3.93	3.59
<i>Comprehensive</i>	30.84	32.32	20.14	22.14	18.02	21.93	15.61	22.42	13.61	28.86	9.91	7.76	6.70	10.53
<i>HE College</i>	32.10	35.69	33.65	40.52	43.10	43.61	53.89	49.63	58.61	47.15	51.94	59.93	43.66	49.19
<i>Unknown</i>	13.72	13.47	11.67	10.94	11.93	9.99	16.88	13.34	15.41	11.11	29.38	24.56	40.38	30.26

**Table 9 A level scores and schools attended of applicants to UK Universities by ethnicity and sex**

Source UCAS: *Applicants to Universities and Colleges in UK, 1998.*

<sup>1</sup> This figure has been calculated by dividing the number of applicants with A levels by my best estimate – using the results of the 1991 Census - of the number of men and women who would have reached the age of 18 in 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Points are assigned on the basis that A grade = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2 and E = 1.

By contrast the Bangladeshis, the Afro-Caribbeans and the Africans not only under-achieve in terms of participation, but the mean levels of performance of those who do get that far is also disappointingly low. Last but not least the bottom five rows in the Table clearly provide an important indicator of one of the reasons – although it is clearly not the only reason – as to how and why these differential levels of performance may have come about. A much higher proportion of Chinese students, and a slightly higher proportion of Indian students than white studied for their A levels at independent schools; meanwhile a disproportionately large number of Africans, Afro-Caribbeans and above all Bangladeshis came in through the HE College route.

#### **4.2 *Ethnic minority participation in Higher Education***

Whilst it is only to be expected that higher levels of participation at A levels, together with better than average performance in the exams themselves will translate into better than average levels of participation in Higher Education itself, one of the most striking features of Table 10 is that all the minorities have yet further increased their level performance at this level: everyone but Afro-Caribbean men, and by a very small margin Bangladeshi women display a higher participation ratio than whites. The best explanation for this is that whilst a significant number of white students drop out at this stage, either because their results are too poor to secure a University place, or because they move straight into employment, the minorities are not only much less likely to take the latter option, but if their grades are inadequate, they are much more likely simply to resit their exams, and to apply again the following year. The figures in Table 10 also serve to remind us that A levels do not provide the only route into University courses, and that mature students (i.e. those aged over 22) may also be accepted on the basis of a wide range of alternative qualifications. Such students often performed relatively poorly – at least in academic terms – at school, and use the FE system to catch up later on. Hence what is also striking about the figures in Table 10 is the extremely high frequency with which Afro-Caribbean and Black African students enter higher education along this route. Turning next to the social class background of the recruits, one of the most striking features of Table 10 is how unimpressed members of all the minorities appear to be with the long-standing English view that working class people have no place in Higher Education. Hence whilst two thirds of White students' parents are in non-manual occupations, leaving the children of non-manual workers heavily under-represented in the Higher Educational system, this is very clearly *not* the case amongst the visible minorities. Indeed if we assume (as seems reasonable) that virtually all those parents whose social class was recorded as “unknown” in the UCAS were in fact unemployed, and most of these would have been doing manual jobs if any had been available, occupations, the capacity of the visible minorities to overcome the British educational system's well known obstacles of class can only be described as truly remarkable.

	Whites		Chinese		Indians		Pakistanis		Bangladeshis		Afro-Caribs		Black Africans	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Entrants</i>														
<i>Total entrants</i>	99,740	117,142	1,251	1,197	5,271	5,398	3,158	2,587	889	738	1,406	2,611	1,986	1,976
<i>Entrants aged 17 – 21</i>	87,212	100,951	1,132	1,091	4,930	5,103	2,783	2,311	789	683	833	1,525	910	1,146
<i>Participation ratio (17 – 21 year olds)</i>	28.2	34.4	95.6	98.4	61.5	66.5	42.2	37.9	32.4	31.0	22.3	41.7	29.8	38.5
<i>Entrants aged over 22</i>	12,528	16,191	119	106	341	295	375	276	100	55	573	1,086	1,076	830
<i>% of entrants aged over 22</i>	12.6	13.8	9.5	8.9	6.5	5.5	11.9	10.7	11.2	7.5	40.8	41.6	54.2	42.0
<b><i>Parental social class</i></b>														
<i>Non-Manual</i>	67.1	67.4	52.5	52.7	48.5	48.4	36.5	36.1	36.3	35.8	52.1	56.4	51.5	54.8
<i>Manual</i>	25.2	24.6	33.7	33.7	39.5	39.7	39.7	38.2	39.2	38.9	26.9	24.4	20.5	19.3
<i>Unknown<sup>3</sup></i>	7.7	8.0	13.8	13.6	12.1	12.0	23.8	25.8	24.5	25.3	21.0	19.2	28.1	25.9
<b><i>Course taken</i></b>														
<i>Medicine</i>	1.6	1.9	3.5	3.7	7.8	5.1	3.7	3.7	4.5	3.9	0.7	0.5	1.0	1.6
<i>Science and Engineering</i>	31.3	23.7	32.1	21.6	25.9	22.7	28.3	25.5	31.2	22.1	23.7	17.2	30.2	23.0
<i>Maths and computing</i>	10.4	2.3	22.6	10.2	25.7	8.9	26.6	7.5	20.3	5.4	15.4	3.5	20.2	9.2
<i>Business studies</i>	11.1	9.5	11.1	21.3	14.0	16.6	13.6	13.0	13.6	9.6	11.8	9.5	12.9	15.8
<i>Social Studies</i>	18.1	21.3	13.8	22.3	17.6	26.7	20.2	33.0	22.2	37.5	22.2	32.8	21.8	31.5
<i>Arts</i>	27.5	41.2	16.8	21.0	9.1	20.1	7.6	17.3	8.3	21.4	26.2	36.6	13.9	18.9

**Table 10 Undergraduate entrants to UK Universities by ethnicity, sex, participation rate, A level point score, parents' social class and course taken**

*Source UCAS: Entrants to Universities and Colleges in UK, 1998.*

<sup>3</sup> The vast majority of parents whose social class UCCA classifies as unknown appear to have been unemployed.



	Whites		Chinese		Indians		Pakistanis		Bangladeshis		Afro-Caribs		Black Africans	
	<i>Entrants</i>	%	<i>Entrants</i>	%	<i>Entrants</i>	%	<i>Entrants</i>	%	<i>Entrants</i>	%	<i>Entrants</i>	%	<i>Entrants</i>	%
<i>Oxbridge</i>	5,171	2.41	89	3.73	130	1.29	21	0.38	17	1.12	16	0.42	16	0.38
<i>Civic Universities</i>	68,202	31.84	945	39.62	3,074	30.43	1,527	27.96	487	32.10	667	17.46	847	20.01
<i>Former Polytechnics</i>	74,486	34.77	997	41.80	6,057	59.96	3,263	59.75	903	59.53	2,747	71.91	3,128	73.91
<i>Colleges of Higher Education</i>	21,448	10.01	83	3.48	451	4.46	205	3.75	54	3.56	291	7.62	136	3.21
<i>Colleges and Universities in Wales</i>	3,600	1.68	16	0.67	32	0.32	29	0.53	8	0.53	19	0.50	12	0.28
<i>Colleges and Universities in Scotland</i>	30,696	14.33	195	8.18	201	1.99	337	6.17	23	1.52	46	1.20	57	1.35

**Table 11 Distribution of undergraduate entrants to UK Universities in 1998 by ethnicity and type of institution**

*Source UCAS: Entrants to Universities and Colleges in UK, 1998.*

It is also worth giving close consideration to the kinds of degree courses on which minority students are managing to secure places, and here again we find some quite remarkable trends. Given that medical colleges routinely set the highest points score before admissions are considered, the fact that all sections of the minority population bar the Afro-Caribbeans and the Africans are very heavily over-represented in this sphere provides yet more evidence not just of students' tenacity, but of their very considerable success in overcoming the many obstacles which are so routinely strewn in their path. Moreover the strong showing of most groups in Maths and Computing, together with their parallel tendency of all groups except the Afro-Caribbeans to avoid "soft" areas such as the Arts, provides clear statistical confirmation for the frequent observation that minority students tend – most usually with the enthusiastic backing of their parents – to view the opportunities available in higher education in strongly instrumental terms. If their parents have moved up through the employment market largely on the basis of hard work and entrepreneurial flair, the figures in Table 10 provides dramatic evidence of how heavily – and how successfully – they are now engaged in acquiring the educational qualifications which are a necessary precursor to achieving further progress into the upper echelons of the social order.

But despite the extent to which all sections of Britain's minority population have managed – albeit at very varied speeds – to overcome the well-known obstacles to upward mobility which are embedded in the British educational system, it must not be forgotten that the Higher Education system is itself strongly internally stratified; in this respect the figures in Table 11, which set out the distribution of minority students across the various categories of degree-awarding institutions are of considerable significance. Above all they show that although the visible minorities are broadly over-represented in the system, they are currently much more heavily represented in the former Polytechnics than they are in the longer established, and generally much more educationally prestigious civic Universities. Hence even if they are disproportionately successful within the system as a whole, at an institutional level their status is still one of relative disadvantage.

However it is equally important to emphasise that this is not universally the case. We have already noted the disproportionate presence of the minorities in the extremely competitive sphere of medicine. What Table 11 also reveals is that although minority students as a whole are still under-represented at the elite Universities of Oxford and Cambridge – which is hardly surprising vigour with which places are competed for, and the two Universities' reputation for social exclusivity – British students of Indian origin are in the midst of cracking that mould, whilst those of Chinese origin are best described as having overwhelmed it. Not only do nearly twice the proportion of

Chinese University entrants secure places as Oxbridge than is the case amongst the whites, but a much higher proportion of young Chinese people enter Higher Education in any event.

## **5 Making sense of it all: inequality and diversity in polyethnic Britain**

Just how have all these outcomes – whether in terms of the degree of upward mobility through the employment market achieved by members of the first generation of migrants, or the equally dramatic, and even more varied, educational successes of their British-born offspring – been attained?

### **5.1 Overcoming adversity**

The ground which the minorities have made up has clearly not been easily gained. As almost every Chapter in this Report serves to demonstrate, the obstacles of racial exclusionism are not only a routine feature of the contemporary British social order, but they also operate in every conceivable institutional context. If the minorities have achieved as much as they have, it is only too clearly *despite* the many handicaps they have encountered, rather than because the established order smoothed the paths along which they have advanced. Thus whilst the minorities may indeed have sought to make the maximum use of whatever opportunities they were able to identify, their efforts to do so were contested at every stage. Hence no matter how successful they may have been in overcoming – or at least circumventing – the obstacles they faced, they have had actively to force open the gates to every new field they have entered, a process which still continues to this day. How, then, have they managed to pull off this feat, given that it is one which has eluded so many members – and especially the working-class members – of the more indigenous sections of Britain's population?

One point is immediately clear: nobody has gone out of their way to help them. Although the introduction of Race Relations legislation in the mid nineteen sixties certainly provided some degree of relief, at least in the sense that it eliminated the overt indications of exclusionism (“coloured people need not apply”) which had previously been far from uncommon, it would be idle to suggest that such legislation actually halted the practice of exclusionism. Instead it was simply driven underground: provided employers avoided the most immediate pitfalls (as their personnel departments took care to ensure was done), the prospect of bringing a successful challenge in the courts was and remains minimal. Hence if the minorities have achieved as much as they have it is overwhelmingly by dint of their own efforts: in a phrase, they have pulled themselves up by their own boot-straps. Thanks to an immense amount of hard work, together with an explicit acknowledgement that they would be have to be twice as competent, twice as well qualified, twice

as entrepreneurial and twice as imaginative as their competitors if they were to beat them at their own game, members of the new minorities have indeed managed the obstacles they faced, and hence to belie the indigenous majority's exceedingly limited expectations of their capabilities. As a result they are slowly beginning to penetrate even the most exalted echelons of the British social order.

However surprising such developments may seem to some observers, and not least to those members of the race relations industry whose world view was – and often still is – predicated around the inevitability of black failure (Ballard 1992), it is worth emphasising that success-against-the-odds in this sense is in no way an unprecedented phenomenon. To be sure the Jewish predecessors of the newer minorities were invisible rather than visible, but nevertheless the exclusionary pressures which bore down on the former were clearly just as intense – and certainly just as overtly articulated, at least until the horrors of the holocaust began to filter into public consciousness – as that now directed at the latter. Nevertheless during the course of little more than a century Britain's Jewish population – and especially its Ashkenasi majority – has managed wholly to transform its social status. The immigrants from Eastern Europe who flooded off steamers from Hamburg during the closing decades of the nineteenth century immediately found themselves pressed into just the same sub-proletarian position as any other group of labour migrants. But now, at the end of the twentieth century, their situation could not be more different. Despite all the many forms of exclusionism they have encountered along the way, members of Britain's Jewish population – still no more than around a third of a million strong – have pressed their way forward so successfully that they clearly hugely over-represented in the upper echelons of the business and professional world.

## **5.2 *The roots of resistance***

Yet just how have Britain's various minorities set about achieving all this? One point can, of course, be made on a wholly *a priori* basis: if the excluded manage to overcome – or at least to circumvent – the handicaps they face, it necessarily follows that that their success must in some way be grounded in the minorities own activities, and more specifically on the resources on which they themselves have been able to draw, in resisting their exclusion. But even if we can agree on that, we are still left with a further problem. Just what are those what resources? And just how have they been utilised to achieve what might otherwise seem to be a quite impossible task?

Insofar as survey data of the kind that has been presented in this Chapter amounts to a statistical snapshot of outcomes at a given point in time, it cannot provide us with any direct answers to such

qualitative questions: in and of itself quantitative data can only tell us how things are – not how and why they have come to be that way. Nevertheless careful analytical reflection of the character of those outcomes can begin to provide us with an understanding of the dynamic of the processes which have led to these outcomes – especially if we also take the trouble to introduce a more qualitative, and more specifically an ethnographic, perspective into our analytical model. But before doing that, let us begin by reflecting on the numerical data itself.

Two themes stand out with particular clarity. Firstly that Britain's visible minorities have, in aggregate terms, left the sub-proletarian position to which they were initially consigned far behind them. They no longer form an underclass. But secondly, and in many ways even more importantly, the minorities also display an immense amount of *diversity*. Hence in mean terms the difference in the levels of achievement of the different sub-sections of the population which we are currently able to identify are very much greater than that between the minorities as a whole and the majority. How is such diversity to be explained?

### **5.3 Explaining diversity**

One possibility that is at least worth considering – if only to rule it out – is that the varied trajectories of upward mobility which have been highlighted here are the outcome of differential reactions of the indigenous majority to different sub-sections of the new minority population. Could it be, for example, that the intensity of racial exclusionism is directly proportional to the darkness of person's skin colour, such that black Africans find themselves much more seriously handicapped than do brown Asians? Alternatively, could it be that exclusionism is predicated on the precise character of a given minority group's ethnic distinctiveness, such that Muslims, for example, are additionally handicapped as a result of their exposure to Islamophobia?

Whilst explanations of this kind – all of which are predicated around majority reactions to various forms of minority distinctiveness, rather minority distinctiveness *per se* – may seem very plausible in principle, careful examination of the numerical data in this Chapter offers very little support for such hypotheses. For example if skin colour – or to be more precise the reactions of the not-coloured majority to varying degrees of skin pigmentation – were the principal determinant of differential degrees of upward mobility, we would expect to find a clear gradation from the least handicapped Asians to the most handicapped Africans. But no such gradation can be detected. The Indians and the Chinese may indeed be the most upwardly mobile, but thus far at least the Indians and the Bangladeshis lag far so far behind that they have at least in some senses been overtaken by both the Afro-Caribbeans and the Black Africans. Nor is everything straightforward on this latter

front: however whilst members of both groups are equally black, African men – especially of the first generation – have substantially outperformed their Afro-Caribbean counterparts, the reverse is the case for Afro-Caribbean women. Similarly whilst there is plentiful evidence that members of Britain’s indigenous majority can easily be swept away by powerful feelings of Islamophobia, and although this is clearly congruent with the fact that the Muslim components of the South Asian population, namely the Pakistanis and Bangladeshi have as yet achieved much less upward mobility than their Indian counterparts, it is extremely difficult to demonstrate that the relationship is causal, not least because there is no evidence the most potential discriminators could accurately distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Last but not least it is also worth emphasising that even if there were some merit in explanations of this kind, they still could not explain why it is that following an initial period of adjustment and consolidation, *all* sub-sections of the visible minority population have achieved a substantial degree of upward mobility. Hence the issue before us is not so much to explain why some groups have been successful whilst others have not, but rather how and why different groups have followed such strikingly varied trajectories of adaptation. Moreover it is precisely the answers to those questions which are most likely to open the way to the most challenging question of all: just what is the secret of the minorities’ success?

#### **5.4 *Alterity as a resource***

The broad agenda which we need to follow in doing so should now be clear enough. If racial exclusionism is primarily directed at *people of colour*, regardless of their precise shade of non-whiteness, and if such exclusionism imposes a broadly similar handicap on all members of the visible minorities, it necessarily follows that if different subsections of that population respond to exclusionism in differential ways, this can *only* be explained as an outcome of each group’s own specific concatenation of skills, resilience, experiences and resources. Nor is it difficult to identify just what these resources might be, especially in the case of immigrant minorities. No matter how routinely members of the indigenous majority may overlook such matters, every single migrant minority has its own distinctive historical and geographical roots, which in turn have had – and continue to have – a powerful impact not just on the specific character of the intellectual, social, cultural, religious and material capital which members of each group brought with them to Britain, but also on the strategies which they have deployed as they set about devising their own self-generated strategies of survival in their new an alien environment.

Nor is ethnic resistance of this kind a temporary flash in the pan. In so far as racial exclusionism is not just a permanent handicap, but one whose impact on the second and subsequent generations is even sharper than that experienced by the first generation of immigrants, it constitutes a long-term challenge to all members of the new minorities. Moreover in meeting that challenge, all sections of this population group have begun to develop a similar response: rather than seeking to emulate the social and cultural conventions of Britain's indigenous majority, they have looked, instead, to resources of their own alterity as a means of coping with adversity. Hence the vast majority not only relied on the reciprocities of their kinship networks to facilitate the immediate challenges of migration and resettlement, but on that basis were soon busily engaged in a very active process of community building. However the resultant ethnic colonies – whose presence is now such a salient feature of the social order in every major industrial city – were not only constructed by people of like backgrounds, but precisely because they were organised *on their own terms*, offered their members a powerful alternative source of moral, psychological, strategic and spiritual inspiration on the basis of which to devise strategies which would enable them at least to survive – and better still to circumvent and to overcome – the exclusionary handicaps with which they were faced.

So it is that no matter how much the members of the indigenous majority assumed – and indeed may still assume – that cultural traditions deployed by people of colour were at best misguided and at worst oppressively barbaric, and no matter how comprehensively such negative views may be entrenched in publicly transmitted ideologies, such ideas have had very little impact on members of the minorities themselves. On the contrary they have moved off in precisely the opposite direction. By treating their alterity as a positive asset they have not only been able to resist the worst ravages of racial and ethnic denigration, but also found a means of developing strategic responses with which to confound majority expectations of their inevitable failure.

However these responses have been anything but uniform. Precisely because their success was very largely predicated around a failure to conform to majority expectations, members of each of the resultant ethnic colonies were (and indeed still are) inspired by the unique – and hence intensely varied – features of their own specific moral, linguistic, religious and cultural heritage. But in doing so migrants were engaged in a far more complex activity than generating simple carbon copies of their prior heritage: rather they were drawn into a richly creative process in which they reinterpreted (and where necessary reinvented) familiar ideas, conventions and understandings to meet the many and varied challenges which were thrown up in their new environment. As a result these processes of ethnic and cultural reconstruction are not only highly adaptive in character, but in no way limited solely to the first generation of migrants. Quite the contrary. As the British-born second and third

generation emerge into adulthood it is becoming increasingly clear that they are just as actively, and in many senses even more inventively, engaged in so doing than their parents.

Set within the context of such developments, the broad pattern of upward mobility displayed by the new minorities as a whole, as well as the yet more diverse trajectories of adaptation being followed by each of their many component communities not only becomes much more comprehensible, but does so in such a way as to puncture one of the most deeply entrenched assumptions of racist thought: that people of colour lack the capacity to set – and to successfully pursue – purposeful agendas of their own. If that hypothesis were true, the minorities would indeed be reduced to the condition of helpless pawns, with their fate being wholly determined by the irresistible forces of racial exclusionism. Hence the most important lesson to be learned from this Chapter is that no matter how severe the forces of exclusionism may become, the visible minorities – no less than any other similarly marginalised group – have remained active agents in their own cause, and as such have constantly sought out strategies with which to resist, to circumvent and best of all to confound such forces.

Such a perspective also brings with it a radical shift in analytical focus. Rather than being reduce to the status of helpless victims seeking slavishly (and of course unsuccessfully) to emulate the goals, strategies and tactics of the dominant majority, the minorities begin to spring to life as active agents in their own cause, fully capable of revamping the resources of whatever assets they can lay their hands on the better to pursue their own self-defined agendas. Given that there is no section of the minority population whose members are not engaged in so doing, it should come as no surprise whatsoever that their the trajectories of adaptation have become so positive – and so diverse. Nor are such outcomes in any way unprecedented. If a example is needed, the dramatic levels of upward mobility achieved by members Britain's Jewish minority during the course of the past century provides a particularly clear indicator of just how strategically beneficial access to networks of ethnic reciprocity and solidarity can be to members of otherwise marginalised minorities.

Yet however illuminating such an analytical perspective may be in principle, it still leaves many more specific issues unresolved. In the first place it offers few clues as to the precise character of the resources on which the minorities have drawn to achieve these outcomes; and secondly it still leaves the issue of inter-group differentiation largely unresolved. Whilst this is no place to develop comprehensive answers to such conundra, the most salient components of the kind of analysis which would enable us to address them more fully can be laid out without too much difficulty.



### *5.5 The assets of alterity: peasant lifestyles and extended kinship networks*

In considering the extent to which the new minorities have overwhelmingly drawn on extra-European moral, ideological, spiritual and organisational traditions as they set about fashioning their strategies of resistance, it is also worth noting a further common characteristic that almost all of them share: each of those traditions is also grounded in a rural, and above all a peasant, experience. This is also most significant, for no matter how strongly negative a connotation the term peasant may have in the contemporary English vernacular, a careful examination of the social and cultural conventions characteristic of peasant societies reveals a very different picture: one which immediately illuminates the ideas, assumptions and strategies which have been so crucial to the new minorities' mould-breaking trajectories of upward mobility.

Although many observers have commented on the apparently 'middle class' outlook of members of the most successful components of the new minority population, that label is in fact highly misleading. To be sure the offspring of professionally qualified migrants have performed exceptionally well in the British educational system; but at the same time it must also be remembered that such people only made up a very small minority of the total inflow, and that amongst the Indians and the Chinese in particular, the children of non-professional migrants – or in other words those of peasant origins – are performing almost as well as those of professional parentage.

How has this come about? Rather than trying to explain such outcomes by shoe-horning peasants into the more familiar category 'middle-class', it is far more appropriate to focus in on the specific kinds of values and behaviours which are cultivated within such societies. Amongst other things peasants everywhere invariably exhibit a strong commitment frugal living, and hence to economic self-reliance in order to avoid the demeaning condition of dependency invariably precipitated by debt, are masters of long term financial planning, given that this has to stretch at the very least from harvest to harvest, accompanied by a routine expectation that the best route prerequisite to collective security – and hence prosperity – is through the mobilisation of the resources of the entire extended family, most especially since they also start from the premise that no-one is going to help them but themselves. But however much those who operate in those terms may be dismissed as rural backwoodsmen by educated urbanites, it is now becoming increasingly obvious that such lifestyles are at least as adaptive to urban industrial contexts as they were in the rural environments where they were first devised. So it is that no matter how much such possibilities are routinely overlooked in post-peasant societies, the plain fact is that peasant modes of behaviour have an immensely great adaptive potential than those found in the more unskilled sections of Britain's

indigenous working class. Amongst the latter several generations of proletarian dependency on a weekly wage packet, reinforced by ever more intense exposure to the illusory temptations of credit-led consumer capitalism has not only almost completely overwhelmed the more frugal assumptions of their long-departed rural ancestors, but in so doing almost entirely eroded their capacity for autonomous thought and action, and with that both the confidence and the ability to challenge the subordinate positions into which the wider social order so efficiently directs them. Viewed from this perspective, it comes as no surprise whatsoever that members of virtually all sections of the new minorities should so rapidly have performed the kind of escape-trick which has so for long eluded that section of the indigenous working class who initially appeared to be their peers. So it is that whilst the visible minorities (no less than their less visible predecessors) may initially have formed an excluded sub-proletariat, it is precisely through the resourceful utilisation of their alternative cultural traditions that they have been able to pull off – much to the bewilderment of many observers – the feats of upward mobility outlined in this Chapter.

Nevertheless this analysis still leaves one very pressing question untouched. If the cultural capital associated with migrants' peasant origins is the key to these developments, how are the high levels of inter-community *diversity* – both in the trajectories of adaptation which have been followed, and the speed with which they have been traversed – to be explained? On the face of it such varied outcomes cannot be explained if members of every group were drawing on broadly similar assets.

Whilst that would indeed be so if migrants of peasant origin formed a homogeneous social category, it is only too clear that that is not the case. In the first place a full analysis needs to take cognisance of a range of crucial intervening variables, such as the level of economic development in each group of migrants' home base immediately prior to their departure, the speed at which they chose (or were able) to reunite their families, such that their children were able to begin to take advantage of the British educational system, and the economic fate of the specific niche in the British economy which each group initially chose to exploit, all of which have had a far-reaching impact on the trajectories of settlement, adaptation and mobility which specific communities have followed (Ballard 1991). However as Ballard shows in the course of so arguing, a further set of variables is now proving to have an even more far reaching impact: the precise characteristics of each group's kinship system, which in turn largely determine both the form of, and the quality of the internal dynamics generated within, the structures and networks of mutual reciprocity which members of each group have constructed around themselves since their arrival.

To find that issues of kinship should loom so large within communities of peasant origin is no way a cause for surprise: not only do a complex set of kinship conventions invariably provide the foundations around which peasant agriculturalists construct the greater part of their social world, but the value of these resources becomes particularly salient in conditions of severe adversity. Yet if kinship is to peasants as horses are to carts, the actual *content* of those kinship conventions, and hence the character of the social networks they generate, is extremely varied.

Hence whilst some communities, such as the Cantonese (Watson 19\*\*) and the Punjabi Sikhs (Kessinger 1975), may support heavily extended and strongly corporate descent groups, those found within others, such as the Sylhetis (Gardner 1995) descent groups may be much shallower more loosely organised; in some communities, such as the Gujarati Hindus, marriage transactions are not only caste-endogamous but also governed by elaborate rules of clan exogamy, with the result that any given family's affinal ties spread out over a wide geographical arena (Pocock 1972), whilst in others a strong preference for marriage with close kin, as for instance amongst the Mirpuris (Ballard 1990) precipitates precisely the opposite outcome; and whilst most peasant traditions are strongly patrilineal in character, others – and those found amongst rural Afro-Caribbean are a dramatic case in point (Driver 19\*\*) – produce much more strongly matrilineal and hence matrifocal outcomes.

Unfortunately there is no space here actively to explore just how such qualitative differences have led all the many different components of Britain's visible minority populations to follow such dramatically varied trajectories of adaptation and mobility, so precipitating that widely varying quantitative outcomes which have been highlighted in this Chapter. Nevertheless two points should by now be very clear. Given that their imported cultural capital has been one of the key resources on which members of all migrant minorities have drawn, it was only to be expected that variations in the precise character of that capital – no matter how arcane some of those variations may still seem culturally ill-attuned observers – would have a far-reaching impact on each group's trajectory of adaptation. Secondly, and just as importantly, it should also be remembered that these trajectories are on-going processes, of which there is still much more in the pipeline. Hence, for example, whilst surveys may repeatedly demonstrate that Sylheti Bangladeshis constitute one of the poorest of Britain's minority communities, partly because of their overwhelming reliance on the low-waged and allegedly 'dead-end' restaurant trade, and partly because only a very small minority of Sylheti women are currently economically active (Modood *et. al.* 1997), it would be quite wrong to conclude that the Sylhetis are bound to remain at the bottom of the pile. After all whilst the Chinese were equally heavily concentrated in the fast-food trade only a generation ago, their children are now achieving higher levels of educational success than anyone else. Moreover as the

rising generation of British-born Sylheti women emerge into adulthood with even better academic qualifications than their brothers, the current pattern of non-involvement in the waged labour market is most unlikely to last for very much longer. In South Asian contexts Bengalis have a long standing – and in many respects well-merited – reputation for intellectual excellence. With this in mind there is no reason why the currently much pitied Sylhetis should not eventually turn out to be Britain's new Chinese.

## **6 Conclusion**

Last but not least it is also worth giving brief consideration to the consequences of these developments for social policy in general. If the exploitation of the resources of their cultural alterity has had such a far reaching – and so positive – effect on the minorities' progress through both the employment market and the educational system, it is only to be expected that they will continue to deploy such strategies for the foreseeable future; if so, it also follows that the condition of cultural pluralism thereby engendered must be regarded as a permanent feature of the British social order, and that this will have an equally far reaching impact in all sorts of spheres besides those on which this Chapter focuses.

To the extent that members of all of Britain's minority communities are continuing to sustain a large measure of religious, cultural, moral and linguistic distinctiveness in personal and domestic contexts – if only because they find it so strongly advantageous to do so – then it also follows that the resultant condition of cultural plurality generates all sorts of challenges to the organisation and delivery of public services, and most especially when those services impinge in some way on their recipients' personal and domestic lives. No less than police officers, all manner of other public services professionals, be they doctors, health visitors, psychiatrists, judges, lawyers, probation or prison officers, teachers or social workers now find themselves facing a whole series of challenges for which – as the Macpherson report has emphasised, they are currently almost completely unprepared.

Unless and until all these professions take much more explicit cognisance of the increasingly plural character of Britain's contemporary social order, and until they take institutional initiatives to overcome the systemic problems identified by the Macpherson report – not least by ensuring that their members develop sufficient cultural competence to deliver as professionally effective services to those who of their clients who differ as they do to clients drawn from the indigenous majority – the minorities will continue to view established professional practices as constituting a very significant portion of the exclusionary handicaps which still stand in their way.

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