

Enoch Powell, Immigration and English Nationalism

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Abstract:

Focusing on the nature of the intra-national relations among ‘indigenous’ British peoples and their attitudes towards the ‘alien’ population that had started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s, I propose that Enoch Powell’s 1968 speeches reflected a ‘traditional’ stance towards the colonial ‘other’ as well as a concern about the demographic changes taking place in parts of Britain, especially in England, in the late 1960s. I then approach the British political elite’s treatment of Powell in the context of the prevailing institutionalised dislike for so-called populist politicians and populist politics in Britain, arguing that this was a ‘timely’ intervention to curb the rise of ‘ethnic’ English nationalism when Britain was moving from an Empire to a nation-state. The essay concludes with an assessment of the impact of Powell’s outright castigation by the officialdom on British politics and the immigration debate in Britain.

1. The British Empire and multiculturalism

Referring to the 1858-1914 period, the heyday of colonialism, Stephen Neill notes:

The foolish and unnecessary Crimean war had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion; the Indian Mutiny had been suppressed, with terrible deeds on both sides. Peace reigned almost unbroken for more than half a century. The whole world was open to Western commerce and exploitation, and at a point after point Western man had demonstrated his military superiority to any enemy that had entered the field against him. The day of Europe had come.¹ [16, p. 273]

The period in question was especially favourable to the British Empire. Imperial Britain had learnt a valuable lesson from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 regarding its future treatment of the subjugated peoples. The end of the mutiny brought to an end the rule of the East India Company. From 1858, the British Crown took direct control of India. Throughout their presence in India since the start of the seventeenth century, unlike other European colonisers of this huge country, the British had tried not to interfere too much with the Indians’ religions, cultures, costumes and traditions. As long as the Indians paid their taxes regularly, the British were happy to maintain their detached attitude.

Britain’s colonial policy in South Asia, unlike that of Portugal and Spain, on the whole was never inspired by or presented as a religious mission. In spite of some efforts by the Church of England and other British Protestant sects to convert to Christianity as many Indians as possible, the British did not go to India to claim it in the name of Christ but for its wealth. India was immensely important to

Britain especially by the time the British lost their first empire in North America and tried to build their second empire in Asia and later on in Africa.

This typically British ‘non-interference’ policy in India was often unwittingly compromised by the officials of the East India Company, especially in the 1840s and 1850s. The greed for profit had made some British officials increasingly cruel and insensitive to the Indians’ various traditions, cultures and religions. Indian farmers, *sepoys* (native Indian soldiers enlisted in the East India Company’s army), and aristocrats were becoming increasingly annoyed by heavy taxation, land appropriation, racist attitudes and annexation of several Indian kingdoms.

To address the deteriorating situation, the British Crown hastened to convince the Indians, especially the Indian elite classes, that Britain was committed to respect their ancient, rich and varied religious and cultural heritage. This new official policy was expressed very clearly in Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858:

*Firmly relying ourselves on the truth of Christianity, and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects. We declare it to be Our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law... And it is Our further will that, so far as may be, Our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to offices in Our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity, duly to discharge.*² [16, p. 274]

As it is obvious from the royal proclamation, the British masters were eager to assure their Indian subjects, and for that matter all the colonised peoples, that institutionalised discrimination on any grounds – religious, ethnic, racial, cultural – would no longer be tolerated across the breadth of the vast and ever expanding British Empire.

Victoria’s claim, of course, was both incongruous and paradoxical at an age when, like any colonial European power in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, imperial Britain was implementing the tenets of the racial superiority doctrine and preaching the unfitness of the colonised Asian and African countries for self-government. On the other hand, Victoria’s 1858 message was a timely and well thought-out public relations gesture that was meant to appease the angry Indians in the wake of the defeat of their mutiny and at the same time to signal a new stage in their relationship with their British rulers. The royal document is also significant because it heralds, at least in theory, the dawn of a new legal era in India as well as in other British controlled territories. The Queen’s message was intended to make millions of imperial subjects worldwide believe that, be they Indians, African, Jamaicans, St Lucians, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, or Sikhs, from now on they were all equal in the face of British law.

The cleverly composed proclamation is important also because it is perhaps the earliest official articulation and endorsement of what a century later would be known as ‘multiculturalism’. The royal statement itself did not necessarily bring about ‘multiculturalism’, as this concept is understood in early twenty-first century Britain. On the other hand, one could trace in the proclamation elements of the multiculturalist discourse employed in Britain as early as the 1950s and more clearly since the 1980s.

1. Between myth and reality

Queen Victoria’s ‘equal-opportunities-for-all’ proclamation of 1858 was important in sowing the seeds of the myth about Britain as a fair ‘mother country’ that was committed to treat all its overseas subjects equally, irrespective of their colour, ethnicity, creed and culture. Britain would

benefit enormously from this carefully crafted public image especially when the British Empire needed its overseas 'equal' subjects' commitment and sacrifices for the 'common good'. Hundreds and thousands of colonial soldiers would enlist in the British army during the Great War and especially throughout World War II. Numerous soldiers of various nationalities and creeds made enormous sacrifices in the name of 'their' Empire and the imagined 'mother country' they had heard so much about but had never visited.

The first opportunity for many such devoted colonial soldiers to get to know their 'mother country' came by the end of the Second World War. Throughout the war a large number of foreign subjects enlisted in the British army were stationed in Britain. After the war many of them wanted to stay in Britain. As many as fifty per cent of the West Indian servicemen, for instance, expressed the wish to settle in the 'mother country'.³ Much to their surprise and disappointment, however, their requests were turned down.

To get back on its feet after the war Britain needed especially manpower. The British political elite knew that the required workforce could be secured from the colonies but they were apprehensive of the move to bring immigrant workers from overseas, especially in large numbers. The late 1940s marked the beginning of the immigration debate in Britain, a debate which at first was conducted prior to the arrival of the 'alien' workforce. At this stage the debate involved only members of the British establishment, who did not always agree with each other on many immigration issues. Many of the participants of this 'closed-door' debate were against bringing any foreign workers from overseas. In the end the more practical-minded had it their way and the first immigrant workers started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

An important moment in the history of post-war immigration in Britain is the docking of the freighter *Empire Windrush* in England with 492 Jamaicans on 22 June 1948. For this contingent as well as for the 125,000 West Indians immigrating to Britain throughout the 1950s, arriving in the 'mother country' did not turn out to be the home-coming they had expected. No matter how much the immigrants were needed in Britain, the 'mother country' was apparently neither prepared nor willing to treat the new comers equally not only in employment but also in housing and education. The first generation of immigrant hopefuls 'came of age' very soon. They were left in no doubt that in spite of their significant contribution to Britain's economy, they were essentially considered as an imposition which the British could well do without.

It would be wrong to see the unfair treatment the West Indian immigrants and later on the South Asians received in Britain as something that had to do only with their physical appearance, although this certainly played an important part. Behind the officially endorsed welcoming rhetoric about the hospitality of the British nation towards foreigners who come to settle in Britain and, what Tony Blair calls, the British people's 'innate sense of fair play' [3, p. 105], there is a less savoury reality. Enoch Powell's claim in his Birmingham speech on 20 April 1968 that '[t]he Commonwealth immigrant came to Britain as a full citizen, to a country which knew no discrimination between one citizen and another' [19, p. 39.] could hardly be further from the truth. As Bill Smithies and Peter Fiddick put it in their 1969 book *Enoch Powell on Immigration*, far from being the epitome of fairness, 'Britain has an impeccable pedigree of racial and cultural intolerance of any new – and therefore fearsome – element in the population dating back in to the nineteenth century'.⁴ [26, p. 55] In 1902, for instance, Major William Evans Gordon, Tory MP for Stepney, urged the House of Commons to put immigration urgently under control because his countrymen 'were ruthlessly turned out to make room for foreign invaders'. [26, pp. 55-6.] In this case the 'invaders' were Italians, Romanians, Russians and Poles. To Gordon, the invasion was so serious, that '[i]t is only a matter of time before the population becomes entirely foreign'. The immigrants had allegedly turned everything upside down: rents were raised fifty to 100 per cent, schools were overcrowded with 'thousands of children of foreign parents', and more importantly, the country was on the verge of moral collapse. Gordon warned his peers that a

considerable proportion of the thousands of immigrants were of ‘bad characters’. Britain was obviously swamped by alien criminals, gamblers, bandits, and prostitutes. Gordon foresaw that a storm was brewing, which ‘if it be allowed to burst will have deplorable results’. [26, p. 56.]

The hostile tone about immigration would continue in parts of Britain after World War II. This hostility was felt also in the Midlands. In some areas with clusters of immigrants the public discussion was hardly diplomatic or polite when it came to the ‘alien’ people who were seen as a ‘threat’ to the local white population. Some Midlands newspapers such as the *Birmingham Post, Evening Mail* and *Sunday Mercury* would often publish ‘politically incorrect’ outbursts of local people and civic leaders well before Powell made his inflammatory speeches in 1968. On 25 September 1959, for instance, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* published Councillor Collett’s following outburst against:

the coloured immigrant who comes in peace and humility and ends by being the arrogant boss. For proof speak to or visit the white people living under a coloured landlord. On Monday a T.V. programme showed how a coloured man suffered when he came to live amongst us. He was expected to do the menial jobs and why shouldn’t he? Few if any are capable of doing a skilled job and they could, of course, return home. But do they? Not on your life! Whether they be intellectual or not, they stay on, hoping to wear us down with the old theme ‘love thy neighbour’. Only good coloured immigrants should be allowed to come here, good in morals and health, and they should be licensed so that their good behaviour and limitation is guaranteed.

Collett’s hostility towards ‘coloured’ immigrants is reminiscent of Gordon’s tirade against ‘white’ foreigners mentioned earlier. The apocalyptic tone, pathos and diction apparent in Gordon’s speech and Collett’s outburst make for uncanny precursors of Powell’s equally doomsday – like future allegedly awaiting Britain almost seven decades later. So much so that it seems that Powell had blatantly plagiarised the speeches of these two public figures.

2. British Media and the inferior ‘other’

There are several reasons why some people in Britain and British politicians used to and still have a low opinion of as well as strong phobias towards foreigners. In this essay I will concentrate primarily on the high level of self-esteem the British used to have throughout the empire period as a ‘nation’ with, to borrow a phrase from Max Weber, “a providential ‘mission’ “, [23, pp. 171-9.] and especially on the negative role of the British print media in making the ‘indigenous’ British population believe in the ‘supremacy’ of the British ‘race’.

In its modern sense, the notion of Britain as a political and national entity had its genesis in the early seventeenth century. In spite of their many and at times irreconcilable differences, the peoples living in the British Isles were well on the way of forging a new collective identity from 1603 when King James VI of Scotland became King James I of England and was proclaimed ‘King of Great Britain’. The British identity became even more of a common denominator for the nations of the British Isles especially after the 1707 Act of Union when the United Kingdom was born from the union of England and Scotland and the establishment of one common parliament. The passing of the 1800 Act of Union by the British and Irish parliaments resulted in the merger of the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that was created on 1 January 1801 adopted the Union Flag/Jack as a national symbol. Having secured and endorsed the political loyalties at home, the British felt ever more confident of their destiny as an aggregate nation. ‘Rule, Britannia!’, which was composed by Thomas Augustine Arne in 1740 and was first heard in London in 1745,

acquired a new meaning and significance at the turn of the nineteenth century, by which time Britannia apparently arose again 'at Heaven's command'.

The print media would play a significant role in inventing, promoting and consolidating the imperial British identity. Newspapers in Britain were instrumental in starting and maintaining what Ernest Renan referred to in his Sorbonne lecture '*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*' as 'an everyday plebiscite'. [22, pp. 26-9] The British press was also crucial in forging Britishness as, to borrow Benedict Anderson's phrase, an 'imagined political community'. [1]

The 'cohesion' and 'superiority' of the British nation were constructed at the expense of the 'fragmented nature' and 'inferiority' of the subjugated nations and to some extent of any foreign country, power and culture. The degradation of the 'other', the 'alien', the 'stranger', the 'exotic' that does not conform to the British 'norm', which is still strong in contemporary British media,⁵ had its genesis in the early eighteenth century, if not earlier. The British press, which was keen to bring the four nations constituting the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland together, had a detrimental impact on the 'home' readership when it came to the representation of foreigners.

Concentrating on magazines such as the *Gem* and *Magnet*, in his essay 'Boys' Weeklies', George Orwell draws attention to media stereotyping and ridiculing of foreigners in the British press in the first half of the twentieth century. Orwell observes that the two outlets' basic assumptions are that 'nothing ever changes, and foreigners are funny'. [18, p. 178.] So for instance, in the *Gem* of 1939, Frenchmen are Froggies, Italians are Dagoes, Indians are comic babus of the Punch tradition, the Americans are the old-style stage Yankees dating from a period of Anglo-American jealousy, and the Chinese are the nineteenth-century pantomime Chinamen, with saucer-shaped hat, pigtail and pidgin-English. 'The assumption all along is not only that foreigners are comics who are put there for us to laugh at, but that they can be classified in much the same way as insects'. [18] Orwell notes that in papers of this kind it occasionally happens that when the setting of a story is in a foreign country some attempt is made to describe the natives as individual human beings. When it comes to national identities, however, they are very much presented as stereotypes that never change. In Orwell's words:

as a rule it is assumed that foreigners of any race are all alike and will conform more or less exactly to the following patterns:

FRENCHMAN: Excitable. Wears beard, gesticulates wildly.

SPANIARD, MEXICAN etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

ARAB, AFGHAN etc.: Sinister, treacherous.

CHINESE: Sinister, treacherous. Wears pigtail.

ITALIAN: Excitable. Grinds barrel-organ or carries stiletto.

SWEDEN, DANE etc.: Kind-hearted, stupid.

NEGRO: Comic, very faithful. [18, pp. 178-9]

Gem, *Magnet* and other boys' weeklies were intended for people between the ages of twelve and eighteen. As Orwell rightly observes, the majority of such readers were unlikely to read anything else except newspapers, which depicted foreigners much in the same light. This means that, traditionally, British papers have hardly helped young readers to have a realistic view of or sympathetic attitude towards the 'other'. This was especially the case throughout the first half of the twentieth century when editors would constantly feed readers, especially the vulnerable young ones, on a constant diet of 'snobbishness and gutter patriotism' [18, p. 181] while failing all the time to inform them of the peoples and cultures making up the British Empire. As far as editors and their brainwashed readers were concerned, 'they do not feel what happens in foreign countries is any of their business'. [18, p. 180] What mattered was that their own country was 'always in the right' and 'always wins', [18] 'that

foreigners are unimportant comics and that the British Empire is a sort of charity concern which will last forever'. [18, p. 183]

3. Immigrants? What immigrants?!

In view of the kind of press the British were exposed to from the start of the British Empire and especially throughout the first half of the twentieth century when the empire covered one-fourth of the world, it is no surprise that the people living in the British Isles would hardly welcome immigrant workers that started arriving in Britain in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. The British, who had conquered and ruled the world for so long, would soon discover how little they actually knew of their rapidly shrinking vast empire when their fellow empire subjects started arriving on their doorsteps. By the time the British people and the first immigrants came face to face in Britain in the mid-twentieth century they did not know much about each other and whatever they knew was hardly accurate.

Another feature of immigration in post war Britain is that foreign workers settled in a limited number of areas. The British government did not have any clear policy not only in terms of how many immigrant workers would be allowed to enter the country but also regarding their dispersal around Britain. As a result, while some areas witnessed a large influx of immigrants, others received a few or none. While some parts of Britain would witness an unexpected clustering of the immigrant population, most of the country did not know much about the 'strangers within'. Up until the late 1960s, immigration remained largely a local issue which neither the government nor most British people seemed to be properly informed of or care about. This explains why when some local councillors and Members of Parliament raised the issue of immigration publicly throughout the 1950s and in the early 1960s there was no national audience that was capable of understanding what they were on about. As far as the majority of Britons were concerned, immigration was hardly an issue. The authenticity of Enoch Powell's stories about the 'plight' of some of his constituents suffering as a result of the so-called 'peaceful invasion' was and remains very much a contested issue, but he was convinced that the lives of his constituents (white as well as non-white) were affected as a result of the large number of immigrants settling in their neighbourhoods and that the overwhelming majority of his parliamentary colleagues were hardly aware of the situation. This is one of the main leitmotifs of his 1968 speeches on immigration, a point he is keen to stress from the start of his address to the Walsall South Conservative Association on 9 February 1968:

There is a sense of hopelessness and helplessness which comes over persons who are trapped or imprisoned, when all their efforts to attract attention and assistance bring no response. This is the kind of feeling which you in Walsall and we in Wolverhampton are experiencing in the face of the continued flow of immigration in our towns. We are of course in a minority – make no mistake about that. Out of 600 Parliamentary constituencies perhaps less than 60 are affected in any way like ourselves. The rest know little or nothing and, we might sometimes be tempted to feel, care little or nothing... So far as most people in the British Isles are concerned, you and I might as well be living in Central Africa for all they know about our circumstances. [21, p. 19]

By the late 1950s and early 1960s immigration was a more important issue in Britain than it had been at the beginning of the twentieth century. All the same, like other local councillors and MPs, whose

constituencies had been affected by immigration, Powell felt more had to be done to turn into a 'national' concern what had been perceived for so long as a 'local' issue. Powell saw himself as a politician with a mission and the media as an indispensable tool to realise it.

4. Powell, the Media and party politics

Powell was a media conscious politician. He understood very well its role and power as an effective propaganda tool. This explains why he distributed copies of his Birmingham speech before he actually delivered it on 20 April 1968, and why he used uncorroborated examples about immigrants allegedly mistreating white people. Shortly after the Birmingham speech, far from apologising for the unethical way he used his 'case studies', Powell told the *Daily Mail* that 'the best way of getting listened to is to humanise your theme by talking about an individual'. [26, p. 14]

The unprecedented attention the local and national media paid to Powell's 'blockbuster', as the editor of the *News of the World* called the Birmingham speech, meant that Powell finally succeeded in making immigration a national issue. On the other hand, the publicity hardly brought about the results Powell had expected. His inflamed rhetoric backfired on him and he failed to secure the support of his party or of the Labour government. As far as he was concerned, Britain's parliamentarians had failed to grasp how significant an issue immigration was.

Several explanations have been given about Powell's failure to secure the sympathy and backing of the leadership of his party as well as the support of the government and other political parties regarding immigration. In his 1979 study *Enoch Powell: Principle in Politics*, for instance, Roy Lewis argues that Powell was a victim of an ongoing power struggle in the Conservative Party. In Lewis's words:

[i]t was known, or at least said, in party circles that [Edward] Heath was hoping for an excuse to get rid of Powell, and that in this feeling he had most of the Shadow Cabinet with him. They had found his dissection of party policy proposals uncomfortable; and he was finding that Heath ignored his views or prevented him increasingly from putting them forward. [15, p. 107.]

Heath apparently saw Powell as a contender for the leadership of the Conservative Party. By that time Powell was already a scholar as well as a soldier, a philosopher as well as an arch-rebel. More importantly, the maverick Powell was a statesman with valuable experience in government and in opposition. If Heath indeed wanted to rid himself of Powell, he was aware that he would need quite a strong reason to justify sacking him.

With his widely mediatised Birmingham speech Powell could not have offered Heath a better reason to dismiss him from the Shadow Cabinet. Heath wasted no time in condemning Powell's ranting against immigrants as being 'racialist in tone, and liable to exacerbate racial tensions', a verdict which even the unrepentant Powell could hardly disagree with.

Heath was also obviously annoyed because Powell failed to consult him or any other senior colleague in the party about the Birmingham speech. As far as Heath was concerned, Powell had been 'calculatedly disloyal', [15, p. 106] a charge which Powell strongly denied. As far as Powell was concerned, '[i]t was to the 'tone' of my speech that objection was taken'. [15, p. 107]

Powell's outspokenness as well as the support he received from working class people and some sections of the media obviously made Heath, his Shadow Cabinet and the Labour government feel

uncomfortable and embarrassed. Whether on purpose or unwittingly, Powell's 'prophetic' tone had obviously incurred the wrath and the jealousy of the establishment. As Simon Heffer puts it in his 1998 biography *Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell*, Powell's detractors assailed him, among other things, 'for his temerity in thinking that, at times, he knew better than the Conservative party, and had a right to condemn its moral and intellectual failings'. [12, p. 960] This point was articulated very clearly by the BBC's David Frost, who interviewed Powell on 3 January 1969. Having referred to Powell's Birmingham speech and his views on immigration as 'dynamite' several times, [8, pp. 98, 100, 102.] in a moment of frustration Frost interrupts the interviewee saying:

DF: You *underestimate* us. I feel a great sympathy for the people you talk about, make no mistake about that, but – and the people who've got a real problem now, but you – what you do is you *underestimate* us all so much. (emphasis added) [8, p. 113.]

Frost would accuse Powell of 'underestimating us' [8, p. 114] once more shortly afterwards. Obviously, Powell had 'outsmarted' many politicians and media people who were far from happy to be seen as being complete *ignoramus* regarding the emergency and importance of the immigration issue and out of touch with what people apparently thought about it.

5. Populist politicians and politics

Powell's falling-out with Heath as well as the criticism and condemnation he received from political allies and opponents as well as media circles alike can be better understood if also seen in the context of the British political elite's traditional 'contempt' for so-called 'populist politicians' and 'populist politics' as well as in the light of claims made by Raymond Williams, [24] Stuart Hall, [11] Jürgen Habermas [10] and James Curran [6] on the power of the media to 'manage' rather than 'express' the 'public will'.

Britain is hardly the only West European country where populism in politics is frowned upon. Although Western Europe is the cradle of modern democracy, its democratically elected parliamentarians have not always been seen by the 'demos' as listening to and addressing their concerns. European political and intellectual elites have a long tradition of disregard and dislike for democracy [14] and the masses, something which became even more apparent when the industrial and graphic revolutions of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries turned what was known as 'rabble', 'multitude', 'mob' and 'a Dark Continent beyond the understanding of the civilized elite' [9] into 'mass'.

Mass media and especially newspapers have been traditionally seen by European politicians and intellectuals as the means through which, populist leaders air the views of those 'dirty people of no name', as the historian Claredon referred to the masses. [5, p. 50.] Referring to the British political elite's apparently perennial disconnection 'from the public to understand what makes people tick', Frank Furedi holds that, as a rule:

the British political class assumes that the public suffers from irrational prejudice and is easily misled by xenophobic demagogues. This suspicion towards what may lurk beneath the soul of everyday society is deeply ingrained in the more leftist and liberal sections of the elite. It is paradoxical that this group, which continually denounces racism, does not recognize its own brand of contempt for those it deems morally inferior. It is worth recalling that the racial thinking first emerged in Europe among the elite that regarded the lower orders as both biologically and morally inferior to itself. [9]

Like Furedi, several other intellectuals in Britain see the British political elite as ignoring or condemning any politician who raises controversial issues deemed suitable to be addressed only by the self-proclaimed moral guardians of the society. As Brendan O'Neill observes in an article about Robert Kilroy-Silk, another outspoken and controversial former politician and television presenter addressing the issue of immigration hardly with more sensitivity than Powell, now as well as in the past, one can detect 'a barely concealed contempt for the voting masses':

The word that pops up most often in critiques of Kilroy-Silk is 'populist' – he's a 'media populist', accuses Nick Cohen; he has an 'abrasive populist manner' says one commentator; he's a 'dangerous populist' says another. What they're really saying is that Kilroy-Silk is trying to appeal to the masses and, dumbasses that the masses are, they might just fall for it and give in to his 'populist patter'. As one contributor to a web discussion board wrote: 'There is a disenfranchised proletariat rump whose opinions are informed by this sort of xenophobic, populist crap'. [17]

An impartial examination of Powell's 1968 speeches reveals that while he was indeed playing the part of the 'populist' politician he was also keen to present himself as a 'principled' parliamentarian who apparently believed that speaking out for the people who had elected him to the House of Commons was what any politician should do. Powell saw himself as *the* spokesperson of ordinary constituents who, in his view, had been ignored by the establishment. He aimed to achieve maximum publicity by using in his speeches the inflammatory diction of anonymous individuals.

Powell employed several linguistic and stylistic devices to fully identify himself with this 'ignored' and 'enraged' mass. The most effective one perhaps is the use of the first personal pronoun 'we' which makes his identification with the 'alienated' and 'forgotten' 'volks' complete. Central to his Eastbourne speech on 16 November 1968 is that 'the people of Britain are faced with a *fait accompli*, that all sorts of excuses are invented and *we* are told in terms of arrogant moral superiority that *we* have got a 'multi-racial society' and had better like it'. [20, p. 69.] (emphasis added)

Powell's multitudinous 'we' apparently makes complete his identification not only with his constituents but also with a much wider audience. In Powell's case the 'we' has no royal connotation and yet it elevates his standing and appeal. Powell the MP for Wolverhampton South West becomes the spokesperson of the whole country. He is no longer a local politician but a national figure with an important message for all white British people. He models himself as the only 'prophet' of his generation; only he apparently could see what no other politician in the 1960s could or dared to admit. Only Powell and his anonymous supporters knew the truth. The ignored mass, or the 'white ghetto'⁶, to use the phrase coined by North Carolina journalist Peter B. Young, had apparently found in Powell the leader that had been eluding them for almost two decades.

6. Powell, England and the United Kingdom

Powell would often refer in his speeches to Britain and the British. On the whole, however, he often sounded like and was an English nationalist. Although of Welsh ancestry, by the time he was born in 1912, Powell's family had lived in England for four generations.

Unless Powell's personality and work are seen primarily in the context of his attachment to England and the English, we would be unable to understand in the first place what made this educated politician employ both a 'racialist' and 'racist' discourse about non-white British subjects.

Powell's attachment to England was fostered in his early years but his devotion to the English nation resulted from the huge influence that German culture had on him in his youth, an influence that stayed with him for the rest of his life. Powell was opposed to Nazism and was eager to enlist in the

British army 'from the first day that Britain goes to war'. [12, p. 22] In spite of the threat Germany posed to Britain, Powell 'remained addicted to German culture'. [12] As Powell put it in 1966, the happiest and most glorious hours of his life with books 'have been with German books'. [12]

In spite of his aversion for Hitler, the German leader's propaganda about the superiority of the Aryan race must have made a lasting impact on the young Powell. For anyone who does not know much about German history, the fact that Powell gave his Birmingham speech on 20 January would hardly mean anything. For a highly educated politician like Powell who was so immersed in German culture, however, giving the most important speech of his life on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday was either a stupid memory lapse or a sinister choice.

England's pivotal role in Great Britain does not lessen the role and importance of the other three nations included in the union. In spite of their differences from the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, the English have always been aware that the values and aspirations they share with the other three 'ethnicities' were far more important than their differences. Hence the forging of the British identity and Britishness as a prerequisite for establishing and maintaining the British Empire.

The common 'imperial' identity of the peoples living in the British Isles throughout the imperial era was not seen as a threat to the more immediate national/ethnic identity. Members of the English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh ethnicities would not pay much attention to Britishness for as long as they lived and worked in the United Kingdom. Their Britishness became more of a signifier, an indicator of who they collectively were, when they went overseas.

The collective British nation identity had a strong appeal in the past, especially among the middle classes and the aristocracy, because, to quote Neil Davenport, 'it was based on material interest. No doubt some identified with a mythical and backward-looking idea of 'Britishness', but essentially the British nation state was seen as the best guarantor of maintaining living standards'. [7]

During the empire, as a result of the lack of Welsh institutions, different from the Scots, and the Irish, the Welsh would usually identify Britain with England, and see the English as epitomising the 'British'. There were cases when even the Scots would equate Britain with England and the British with the English. This is particularly the case in the work of two well-known nineteenth century Scottish authors, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and Samuel Smiles (1812-1904). Their seminal, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* [4] and *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character, Conduct, and Perseverance*, [25] respectively, for instance, abound in numerous references to England, the English and the Englishman's character.

Different from the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish, when Britain was a global empire, the English would normally presume that, in their case, Britishness meant Englishness, something which was reflected constantly in the English newspapers and the political discourse. When the Tory MP for Stanley demanded that the government should no longer allow European immigrants enter the country, what he was concerned about was not the detrimental effect immigration was allegedly having on Britain but on England. The victims he identifies are not British but 'English families'. He is concerned that as a result of the foreigners 'an English working man' and not a British subject is apparently unable to enjoy his day or rest.

The flagging up of Englishness by the English was always resented by the three other nations constituting imperial Britain. As long as the empire kept going, however, economic interests often took precedence over the local national pride. The British Empire was a joint enterprise of the English as much as of the other three 'lesser' British nations, especially of the Scots, who were always aware of their contribution to the imperial project.

The gradual loss of overseas influence and territories from the end of the World War I and more rapidly in the wake of the Second World War meant that Britain was well on the way of changing from an imperial power to a nation-state. The inevitable end of the empire was bound to bring to the surface and with an increased animosity and urgency the issue of the relationship of the four nations

comprising Great Britain and, more importantly, the question of England's position and role in this uneasy union. The British Monarchy and the British political elite were obviously interested to keep the *status quo* at home, which in the post war years meant that Britain should outlive its rapidly eroding empire.

The arrival of immigrants in Britain from the late 1940s made the already uneasy intra-national relationship and debate even more imperative. What seemed to have exacerbated the issue further was the concentration of immigrants mainly in England, a point which Enoch Powell makes clear in his Birmingham speech. In his view, some areas in Great Britain 'are already undergoing the total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of English history'. [19, p. 36] He mentioned the same point in Eastbourne later on in the year putting it plainly that 'it is virtually only England which is affected' [20, p. 69] by immigration.

Powell was criticized by his political opponents and sections of the media, especially by David Frost during the 1969 televised interview, [8, pp. 106-9] for painting an unrealistic picture of the effect the immigration would have in England. He was especially opposed for his 'unrealistic' predictions that by the year 2000 the immigration population in Britain 'must be in the region of 5-7 million, approximately one-tenth of the whole population', [19, p. 36] a figure which he later put at one-eighth, [8, p. 107] and that '[w]hole areas, towns and parts of towns across England will be occupied by different sections of the immigrant or immigrant-descended population'. [19, p. 36]

According to the 2001 Census, the ethnic minority population in the UK was 4.6 million (i.e. 7.9% of the country's total population). In England, immigrant or immigrant-descended population made up 9% of the total population whereas in Scotland and Wales only 2% and in Northern Ireland less than 1%. Today there are areas, towns and parts of towns across England whose population is predominantly non-English.

7. The inevitable trend

It has been suggested that Powell's controversial speeches on immigration in 1968 were not in keeping with his interest on this issue but a publicity stunt which he apparently hoped would further his chances of securing the leadership of the Conservative Party. Powell was an ambitious politician and if indeed he chose to use the immigration card to further his political career, he was neither the first nor would he be the last British politician to do so. I propose that Powell's ranting against immigrants should also be seen in the context of other controversial speeches he made before and after 1968 on issues other than immigration.

Powell took pride in the British Empire. He regretted the demise of the Empire and was adamant that the USA was one of its greatest enemies. This is one of the reasons why he was always critical of the USA, a stance which he started to articulate more clearly in the early 1940s arguing that America was using World War II to put an end to the British Empire. [20, p. 75]

Powell was first and foremost a nationalist and a staunch believer in the United Kingdom, and he would raise his voice any time he believed the Union was in any danger. This is one of the reasons why he was totally opposed to the idea of Britain joining the European Economic Community (EEC). In 1969 Powell expressed clearly his opposition to Britain joining the EEC. Edward Heath took the country into the EEC in 1973; a year later Powell resigned from the Conservative Party in protest, believing that the European Community would undermine the United Kingdom and the sovereignty of the British Parliament.

According to Simon Heffer, Powell's 'main, unresolved conflict with his opponents was the question of whether the British people wished to remain a nation'. [12, p. 959] In spite of his attachment to England, Powell was essentially a Unionist and he saw the preservation of the Union as

vital to the survival of the British nation. This explains, to some extent, why he was in favour of the complete integration of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Powell apparently saw the arrival of a large number of immigrants into the UK in the 1960s as a 'threat' to the 'cohesion' of the British nation. He obviously failed to see that in the wake of the World War II, immigration was an almost unstoppable phenomenon. The end of the British Empire, the need for immigration work force and the trend of globalisation which was in its inception in the 1950s made demographic changes in the United Kingdom and other former colonial powers in Western Europe almost inevitable. Britain and other European countries were heading towards a multiculturalist future. The issue was how Britain and other former colonial powers would handle multiculturalism.

Powell's 1968 speeches, especially the Birmingham speech, could well be seen as an attempt on the part of a romantic English/British patriot who put his country before everything else not so much to make history rather than to preserve history. Powell's nationalism is partly motivated by what Heffer calls, the British people's clinging to the idea of a nation 'as a safeguard of democratic freedoms', and 'therefore must order their politics accordingly'. [12, p. 958]

Powell obviously believed that the only way for the British nation to survive was to follow the German model. As Walker Connor notes, prior to the break of the World War II Germany was among the handful of states that clearly qualified as a nation-state, which means that the 'state' and the 'nation' were indistinguishably linked in the popular perception. To the Germans, 'Germany was something far more personal and profound than a territorial-political structure termed a state; it was an embodiment of the nation-idea and therefore an extension of self'. [13, p. 42]

In the case of Britain, the embodiment of the nation-idea and its self extension should be seen in the context of the close ties between the English and their next-door although weaker neighbours: the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish. While English identity was and remains unique, part of its uniqueness comes from the direct positive impact these three nations have historically had on its culture, politics and wealth. In this context, Heath's decision to condemn Powell's Birmingham speech immediately after it was made (as well as after Powell's death) and the fact that the English elite did not rally behind Powell is a reflection of the silent acknowledgment on the part of the English of the benefits of having a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society much earlier than the heated immigration debate began. The decision of the British political elite to distance themselves from and condemn Powell's ethnic/nationalist rhetoric at a time when the debate in Scotland shifted from being an ethnic nation to a civic nation was probably one of the wisest decisions taken by the British establishment after the Second World War, a decision which with hindsight was perhaps paramount for the survival of the United Kingdom as a state.

8. Powell and the multiculturalist debate

The British political establishment's attitude towards Powell immediately after his 1968 speeches would have a lasting, and on the whole negative, impact on the 'official' discourse on multiculturalism in the United Kingdom. The condemnation of Powell did not initiate political correctness in British politics and media. One can find the genesis of political correctness British-style in Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858 mentioned at the start of this article.

Enoch Powell was not right. Some of his views, especially his comments of non-white people, were and remain deeply offensive and repulsive. Powell's views on immigration, however, should be seen in the context of the time when he expressed them. To study a controversial figure like Powell does not mean to endorse his views. Rather than seen as taboos which are best ignored, his speeches should be read, critiqued and criticised.

In a parliamentary democracy, the public should be treated as an adult who is capable to distinguish what is right and wrong. Powell has been for almost four decades the bogeyman of British

politics. He continues to be used and abused by whoever has an interest in resurrecting temporarily his ghost only to dump it again. Among politicians, one has to have the untouchable status of Margaret Thatcher to dare to mention and even make a positive remark on Powell. Several minor political figures that have referred to him, some rather childishly and out of context, have been forced by their political leaders to resign.

Powell is mentioned often in the work of British social scientists, especially if they come from ethnic communities. In almost all cases, however, Powell's name crops up only to be condemned but never critiqued. A Powell-like politician would make any foreigner, myself included, seriously consider if Britain is the right country to live in. On the other hand, British citizens like myself should use our 'foreignness' as an advantage to try to understand where Powell came from.

In the modern world almost any society and country is multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual and multireligious. In this multilayered world, it is important that citizens keep their identities and respect the identities of others as well as try to find out what, in spite of their differences, they share. Without this sharing, multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity *per se* do not result in a cohesive society. At times and in certain places, British multiculturalism has the signs of a self-imposed and officially endorsed apartheid.

In a considerable number of studies carried out by social scientists of various ethnic origins, the dominant theme is that the British society should be more tolerant and welcoming towards foreigners. These studies have played a major positive role in highlighting important social problems, difficulties and injustices faced by ethnic communities, especially the new ones. On the other hand, British-foreign social scientists like myself should conduct more research amongst members of our own ethnic communities to see the extent to which our fellow ethnic people are working to integrate with and respect the culture of the 'indigenous' population in Wales, England, Scotland or Northern Ireland. This would hopefully make us increasingly aware of what we share and forge a spirit of togetherness.

This togetherness is possible if we do not see our original/native cultures as set in stone and incapable of dialogue and fusion. Powell did not even consider that such togetherness could be possible. All indications are that this togetherness, although 'dismantled', [2, p. 119] is already here, and social scientists should make more efforts to detect and promote it.

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Notes

1. The Crimean War lasted from 1854 until 1856, and the Indian Mutiny from 1857 to 1858.
2. According to Stephen Neill, the words in italics were added by Queen Victoria herself to the original draft of the proclamation.
3. For more information on the West Indian servicemen's wish to remain in Britain at the end of World War II and the British government's plans to ship them home, see E. Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1990.
4. For more information on racial and cultural intolerance in Britain since the nineteenth century, see P. Foot, *Immigration and Race in British Politics*, London: Penguin, 1965, pp. 80-102.
5. The author has addressed the tendency of the contemporary British press to denigrate foreigners in his article 'Western media and the European 'other' – images of Albania in the British press', included in his book *Encounters with Civilizations: From Alexander the Great to Mother Teresa*, New Brunswick, USA & London: Transaction Publishers, 2011, pp. 117-51.
6. As a consultant to the US President's Commission on Violence in 1968-1969, Peter B. Young 'reported (as if from another planet) the existence of a large underclass of deeply troubled Whites in North Carolina and elsewhere. I described this phenomenon as a 'White ghetto', with social pathology remarkably similar to that which is so well known in the Black ghetto: ignorance, unemployment, poor health, a drenching saturation of racism and random Saturday night violence'. P. B Young, 'Greensboro Deaths Were Foretold', *Southern Changes*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 1980, p. 12.