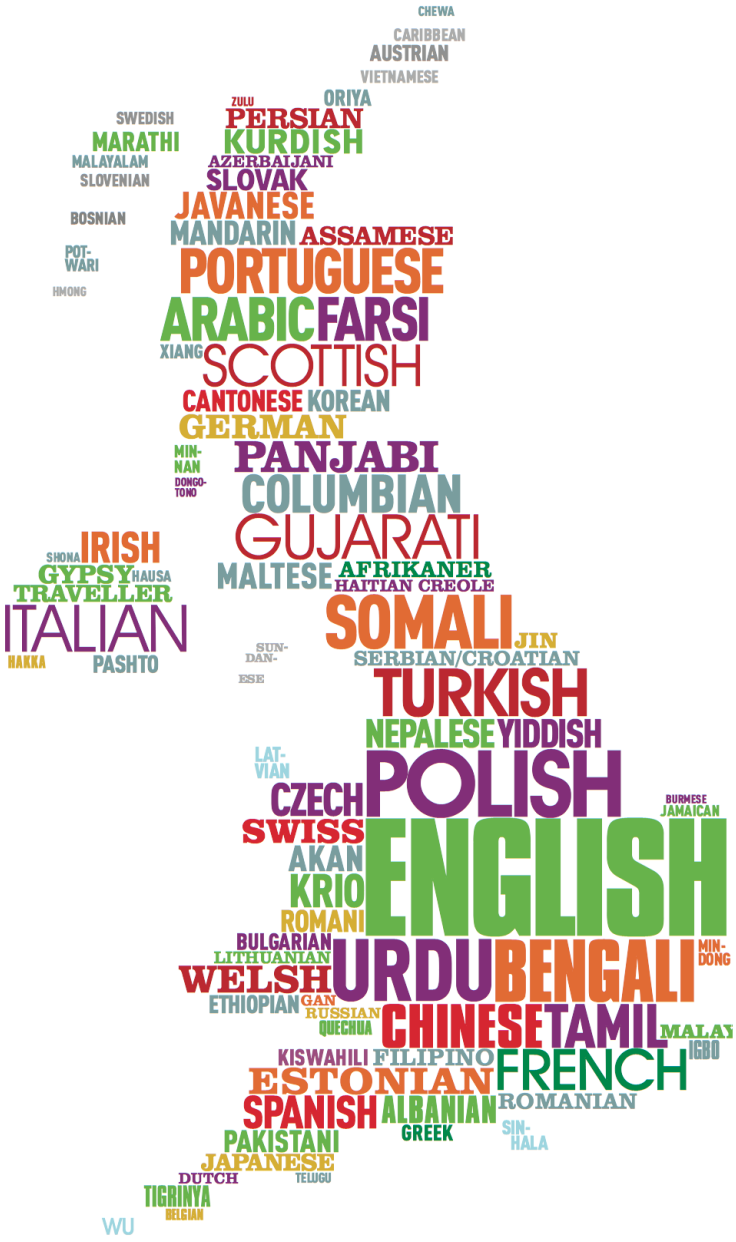


British Identity & Multiculturalism

2p En

Middelfart Gymnasium & HF

Le

2024/25

Contents

A nation shaped by immigration *

Typical images of Britain

1. Write down ten to twelve words that you think would characterize a typical British person (name, hair colour, hobbies, habits, favourite food and drink, typical clothes, typical likes, dislikes, etc.).
2. Search images on the Internet with expressions such as "typical" or "stereotypical Englishman", "John Bull" or "British/English people." Make a few notes about the most common features and how they match with your own.

Explain the meaning of the following words

- National narrative
- National image
- The national "we"
- White nation
- Homogeneous society
- Immigration
- People of colour
- Multicoloured society
- Multicultural society

While-reading: A nation shaped by immigration *

Please, pay attention and take notes to the following:

- Where immigrants mainly arrived from after the Second World War.
- The British response to mass immigration.
- The dominant image of Britain.
- Attempts to change the dominant image of Britain (by who and why).

A nation shaped by immigration *

Britain has been made and shaped by migration – like Denmark or Germany or any other European country. The earliest people crossed to the British Isles along a land bridge around 900,000 years ago, and the oldest complete human skeleton that has been found (the 10,000 years old Cheddar Man) was of a blue-eyed human with black skin – ten per cent of the white British population carry his DNA. Farming populations with origins in present day Turkey arrived 6,000 years ago, and a second wave 4,400 arrived years ago, with origins in the grasslands of Eastern Europe and Asia. The ancestors to those who would later call themselves the Celts arrived from the European continent around 2,700 years ago.

They were mixed in turn by waves of later European invaders: the Romans (from 43 to c. 410), Anglo-Saxon tribes (the 400s onwards), the Vikings (the late 700s – c. 1066) and the Normans in 1066. The Anglo-Saxons (mixed with everyone else) developed into the white English culture we typically associate with Britain today, alongside the Celts. With the global expansion of European power, people of colour began to arrive in Britain in large numbers (again). By the late 1700s, the British Empire covered vast parts of the planet, and it is estimated that tens of thousands of people of African descent lived in Britain, mainly in London.

Modern Mass Migration to Britain

But it was in the twentieth century, after the Second World War, that the size and speed of modern migration to Britain increased dramatically, owing to both a shortage of labour in Britain and the increased ease of international movement (e.g. motorized ships and air travel). Large numbers of immigrants from all corners of the British Empire – Asia, Africa and the Caribbean – came to work and live and to educate themselves in Britain. Approximately three million people arrived between the late 1940s and the beginning of the 1970s (an average of almost 10,000 per month). After World War Two, all colonial subjects were given the right to freely reside, work and study in Britain as British subjects.

The ship *The Empire Windrush* has become an icon of the mass arrival of people from the former colonies. It landed the first group of Caribbean immigrants – 492 Jamaicans – in 1948 at the Tilbury docks on the river Thames just south of London. Many writers among the new immigrants would soon start using literature to tell their stories and to reshape the dominant national narrative of Britain, from an excluding one to an inclusive one. They

became known as the Windrush generation. You can see images of *The Empire Windrush* in the timeline below.

However, the era of mass immigration did not last long. Britain's very hospitable immigration policy was gradually abolished during the 1960s and 1970s. In these years, most of the British Empire was also abolished and, at home in Britain, hostility to immigration kept growing and burst into racial tensions in the country. You can read Enoch Powel's infamous racist anti-immigration speech from 1968 in this book as a historical example of that, and in the timeline you can see how more or less racist immigration laws have gradually limited immigration to Britain to a minimum right up to our day.

The Dominant Image of Britain as White

Although Britain today is a truly multicoloured and multicultural society, the story of Britain's migratory and multicultural past and present does not really match the common image we have of Britain. Why? Because that story was never told. It was never told by those who have had the power to define the image of Britain. As in other European countries, the main national narrative tells the story of the British as a white nation with a homogeneous and white cultural identity that has always been the same. According to this image, to be truly British is to be white and to have white parents, grandparents and great grandparents, all born and bred in Britain through generations.

Because of the dominant image of Britain as a white nation, the idea of people of colour as not really British, in spite of being born in Britain, is still widely present, even if unconsciously so, and even in political speeches and texts that aim to acknowledge the great diversity of colours in Britain – such as in former Prime Minister David Cameron's famous speech in this book. Although Cameron's speech appeals to the acceptance of diversity, his use of the word "we" may very easily be understood as a *white*, *Anglo-Saxon* "we" looking at a non-white "them" as "the others".

For generations, this dominant white Anglo-Saxon narrative of who the British are has been actively challenged by those it excludes: black and brown Britons, immigrants and their descendants. The black and brown struggle for unambiguous inclusion in the national picture

has taken place in the streets by activists and rioters, and by spokespeople in the media and public institutions.

In 2020, hundreds of thousands of people have participated in anti-racism demonstrations all over Britain with and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. It all started as a response to the May 25 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In Bristol demonstrators tore down the statue of the slave trader Edward Colston and threw it into the harbour. In London, the authorities removed a statue of the slave trader, Robert Milligan after much public pressure. Slave trader and slave owner statues are seen as racist monuments that contribute to a whitewashing of history by concealing or banalising the fact that Britain's slave trade was a crime against humanity that has caused suffering right up to our day. Similar attention is now being called to racially dubious monuments, statues, murals and street names all over Britain, and the debate continues whether these symbols should be taken down or be left to stand for educational purposes.

But since the question of identity is very much a cultural matter, literature and all other kinds of *cultural* products – art, music, film, TV, etc. – have also always played a very central role in the struggle to redefine Britain and who the British are as well as how to deal with Britain's historical past.

Reflection and discussion: Immigration and the national image *

1. In small groups, briefly talk about what you found most relevant/surprising in the text. Then continue to questions 2-4.
2. Consider your answers to Pre-reading I. How well do they correspond to the image of Britain you got after reading the text?
3. Why do you think white images of Britain are still the dominant ones?
4. In class, briefly compare Britain's history of immigration with immigration in your own country. What are the similarities? What are the differences?

Borders and binary oppositions are known to create divisions between people. Binary opposition is a term for when two things are made to oppose each other. Examples of binary oppositions are: "us" versus "them", "white" versus "black", and "self" versus "other".

1. Note down all the kinds of borders and binary oppositions that you can think of that separate people from each other (it could be borders of gender that separate men from women or borders of class that separate rich from poor, and so on).

John Agard is a British poet. He was born in 1949 in British Guyana (now Guyana). He came to Britain in 1977. His poetry is often characterized by a mischievous voice. The poem "Encounter" is from the poetry collection *We Brits* from 2006. Like all Agard's works, *We Brits* redraws the image of Britain as a multicultural and multicoloured society.

John Agard: Encounter (2006)

What makes you you
and me me?
What makes us us
and them them?
Is it the anthem
that rouses to attention?
Is it the flag
we wave on occasion?
Is it the passport
that punctuates a border?
Is it the unofficial
stamp of undeclared genes?
Is it the voice's colour
that's a dead giveaway?
Or is it the baggage
of skin and creed
that makes one say
not one of us, one of them?
And so missing the chance
of getting closer
to that image
reflected in the mirror –
yourself unmasked
in the Other's plumage.

Analysis:

1. Why is the poem called "Encounter"?
2. What does the poem want to say or show with its list of all kinds of borders and binary oppositions?
3. What message does the poem create?
4. Try in your own words to describe what happens in the last three stanzas. If you need a little help, you can do so by answering these questions:
    - What is the last "encounter" in the poem? How does the last encounter melt away all the other borders that the poem refers to?
    - Why would the word "unmasked" in the last stanza be important in the poem?
    - What does it mean that you will see "the Other's plumage" in the mirror if you "unmask yourself"? How does that connect with the "missed chance" of "getting closer"?
5. Does the form of the poem in any way underscore the content of the poem (its themes and messages)? Here you can consider the effect of rhymes or half rhymes, alliterations, the many repetitions and questions.
6. Can multicultural literature help unsettle borders between people?
7. Can it help abolish the "us against them" mindset?

Immigration special

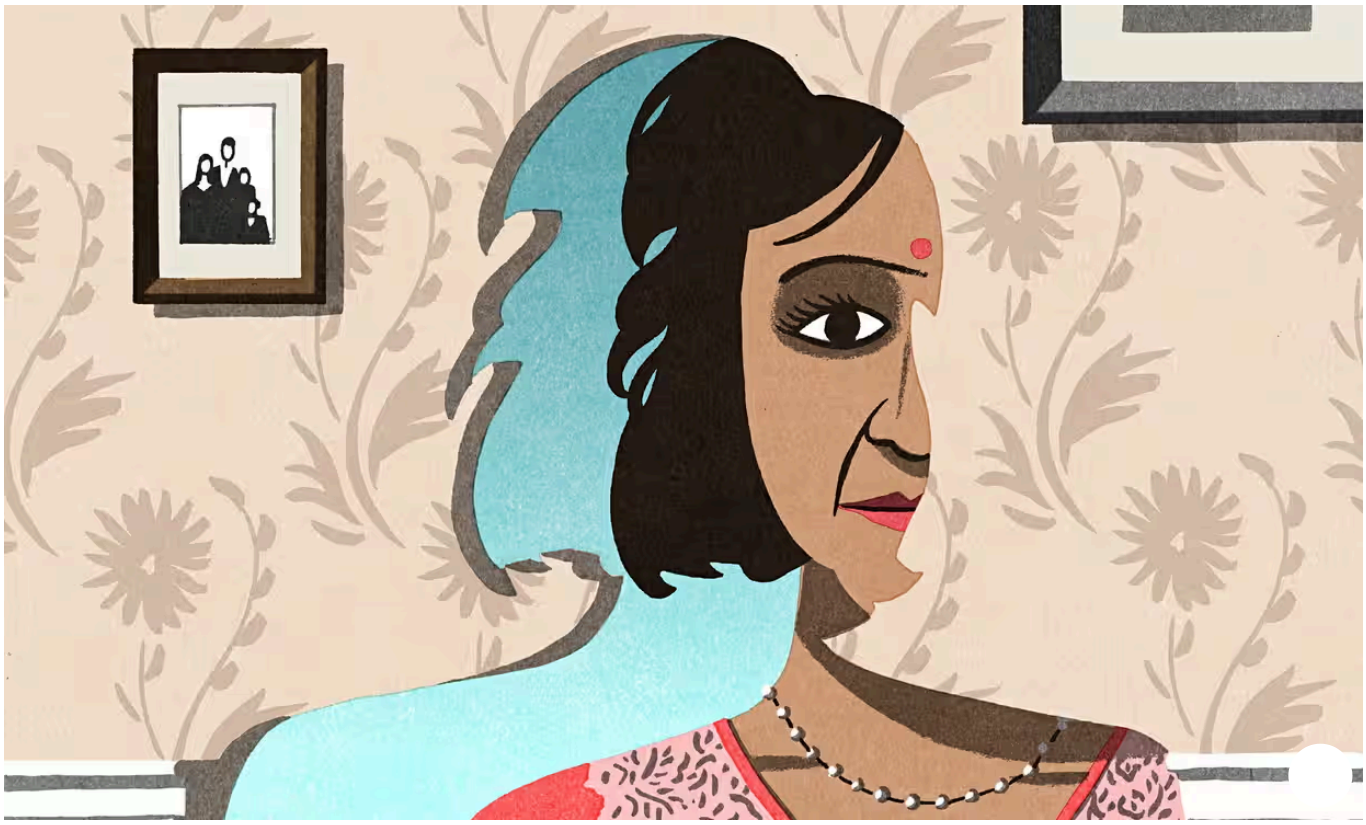
This article is more than **9 years old**

Growing up between cultures is tough – until you realise it's a creative blessing

Meera Syal

Belonging without being erased is a challenge for every generation. But most of us turn it into a virtue

Tue 24 Mar 2015 07.00 CET



Songs, like smells, can dump you in your past in faster than you could say Blue Mink. And on the odd occasion I hear that band's 1969 hit Melting Pot, I'm back in front of the telly in my jammies watching Top Of The Pops on our tiny black and white TV. There are frost patterns on the window as there's no central heating – or indeed a bathroom – in our Black Country village home. Mum is

cooking our nightly Punjabi supper using hoarded spices she guards like gold; dad is surrounded by paperwork from his clerical job because no one wants to hire a philosophy graduate from New Delhi to do anything vaguely philosophical; and I'm holding in a wee because I don't want to run to the outside loo.

But it was worth it, to watch the divine Madeline Bell with her huge afro sing out the liberal mission statement of the 70s: What We Need Is A Great Big Melting Pot! Its message seemed to be targeted at kids like me, the first generation born in Britain to newly immigrated Indian parents: fit in, work hard, don't frighten the neighbours, and one day maybe you too could be accepted into the pot and go on to create, as Madeleine promised, "coffee-coloured children by the score".

Given the song came out the year after Enoch Powell's infamous Rivers Of Blood speech, I was keen not to be one of the bodies floating down the foaming Tiber and duly worked my little brown butt off. I came top of the class in English and passed on to the grammar school, sighed over the blonde heroines in Jackie magazine cartoons, wrote furiously in my diary about my unlikely acting and writing dreams, and daily repeated my parents' mantra: "You can do well in this country but you have to work twice as hard as the white person next to you. And that coffee-coloured children thing? Graduate first and then we'll see."

It was inevitable that our parents' view of integration would not be ours. They believed wholeheartedly in British meritocracy, having left family and roots behind for the promise that their children would have the chances not offered back home. Yet their new home in Britain was also a place where their mother culture continued. Of course they went out into the world and worked hard, but they also shrugged off their office clothes and factory uniforms like disguises when they came home. Then they sat on the floor, ate with their fingers, sang tunes from the old country like every newly arrived immigrant before them.

It didn't make them less engaged in British society, less willing to slog hard, less appreciative of the opportunities for which they had to fight. But they never expected the state to celebrate their differences. We were already doing that at home, within our own communities.

As many of our parents came from the world's biggest democracy and multi-faith country, living alongside a mesh of other faiths and customs was nothing new, not exactly a melting pot but separate and equal pots all bubbling away together. "Yours looks nice - want a taste of mine? Up to you." And that's how it went until the defining moment when my generation looked into the pot and said: "Please Sir, I Want Some More."

The Southall uprising of 1979, when the Asian community ejected the far-right National Front who had provocatively decided to march through the area, came as a shock to many people. Those nice, well-behaved Asians who never made any trouble had finally fought back.

It was a sign of the pressures that my generation was buckling under. I had spent much of my adolescence trying to fit in, but struggled. On the one hand I was already too western for the gaggle of parents who brought us up communally ("You want to study English? Useless. Go for medicine. A spleen is the same in every country"). On the other hand I was too foreign for the cool kids at school ("Why can't you come to the disco? Will your dad beat you with a barbed wire brush?"). We had to manage a supreme cultural juggling act: to belong without being erased; to hold on to those aspects of our mother culture that nourished us, but to discard those that were becoming irrelevant in this new country.

> *It was fascinating to understand what abuses had been justified and continued under the false banner of 'tradition'*

It was a confusing and sometimes exhilarating process, choosing what to keep, what to let go. Respect for elders? Tick. Speaking Punjabi? Must try harder but tick. Wearing shalwar kameez? Probably not outside the home, it makes people stare and shout instructions at me in bad English - so weddings only, small slightly embarrassed tick. Knowing your basic history, colonisation, Indian independence, partition, Britain's invitation for labour from the former colonies, essential and huge tick. (When you are continually asked why you are over here, you really should know the answer.)

And then there was the bin list: forced marriage, female subjugation, religious bigotry. It was fascinating to understand what abuses had been justified and continued under the false banner of "tradition".

And here is the surprising thing: far from turning us into a confused mongrel generation, this continuing questioning of who we were made us supremely entrepreneurial. Many of us first generation-ers are the ones who went on to carve out careers in business and the arts: not quite belonging, continually having to see society from two different viewpoints is a supremely creative place to be.

Looking at the generations below me, I realise the edges of conflict may not be so sharp for them: arranged marriage has morphed into assisted marriage. Their English friends learned to love curry and wearing bindis some time ago. Of course, there are still plenty of challenges facing us. Issues of representation and diversity are ongoing, and sometimes it can feel like one step forward and two back. But forward we must go. India's emerging superpower status is beginning to lure some of the third generation back there, seeing new opportunities in a growing economy, going back to the place their grandparents left for exactly the same reasons.

Alongside those who have walked the cultural high wire successfully are those who fell through the net, or jumped: the minority who aspire to a medieval version of their culture and religion that many of their parents fought to change. The irony is unbearably sad, and some would say, inevitable. But they are a minority.

One hopes that the majority are not forgotten, the ones who are just getting on with life, loving, living, contributing, still aspiring, still here.

Daljit Nagra: Jaswinder Wishes it Was Easy Being Black (2007)

Mum has me reared up tall
like I'm posed for a marriage
market, same as the necklaced
cow flapping our calendar
she makes me sheep my eyes,
shelled in salwaar once hers.
My Miss Dynamite strut
brings out the wag of her finger
as I servant chai and mum's
'famed' Bombay Mix
to sofas of ogling visitors
who feed on me their gobs.

Ms Victory, my English teacher,
in a voice like Maya Angelou or Toni Morrison
that she plays us with head high,
she asked us to write our imaginary homes –
our mud hut back home I can't magic-eye
so much as my house as a tucked-away
country where sorted women get a life!

Sometimes I wish I was a black woman.
Black women are chilled, get the space like white women.
Ms Victory chats English with everyone she knows.
Ms Victory from work splits for herself.
Ms Victory, *nuh uh*, she don't do shame.
Ms Victory goes clubbing. Ms Victory rules
the ball and spins them howling lyrics on their heart-
broken phones. Ms Victory cabs her rip-tight gear
and red lips through homelands of London for the island of her
home. Ms Victory is a flag of freedom.
Ms Victory spills her heels to music sphering
her ocean of parquet, her starts of spotlights
jingle the silver-chained bracelet that memories her wrist.
Surfing her world, Ms
Victory is Ella –
is Bessie –
is Nina –
is Billie –

Daljit Nagra: Jaswinder Wishes it was Easy Being Black. Look we have coming to dover! Faber and Faber Ltd., 2007.

Daljit Nagra (1966-) is a British poet. Nagra's poems relate to the experience of British-born Indians and often employ language that imitates the English spoken by Indian immigrants whose first language is Punjabi, which some have termed 'Punglish' – or Yoda-speak! Racism, belonging, alienation and assimilation are ever present themes in Nagra's poetry. "I'm working in a school, I'm teaching English, I'm living English and breathing English all the time. Some part of me wants to be Indian as well. [...] You either do it quietly and describe the Indian community in half a dozen poems or you think sod it, and go all out. The most Indian way I could think of was to do monologues and voices", Nagra has said, and poetry felt like a natural outlet for all of this. So, in his own way, Nagra brings all these "other people" into Britain.

Fra: A New Entrance, Systime 2002.

Just below the Surface

by Kate Nivison

sound sleeper person der sover dybt
somewhat i nogen grad
dispo'sition natur
what with med al den snak om
tease drille
Wanstead a London suburb
Brick Lane a London street with many immigrants
suburb forstad
leafy med træer og buske
scuffy skrabende
the dead of night midt om natten
a semi-de'tached house et halvt dobbelthus
ex'tension tilbygning
fit udstyre
throughout over det hele
pe'culiar mærkelig
decorate male og tapetsere
scrabble skrabe
play up drille

I am not what you might call a sound sleeper, being somewhat of a nervous disposition when it comes to noises at night, and what with the burglaries and people putting horrible things through letter boxes, you can't be too careful. At least that is what I say when my husband teases me about it.

"Indrani," he says. "You would wake up if a butterfly passes the window." He is more educated than I, and has many good expressions like that.

Not that I was lying there thinking about horrible things through the letter box, because that is why we moved out a little to Wanstead, so as not to worry about all that. You expect that kind of nonsense round Brick Lane and those places, but Kumar says you don't get that sort of thing where the suburbs are green and leafy and the houses expensive – although myself, I'm not sure what leafiness or double garages have to do with it.

So when I heard these scratching and scuffy noises, I thought at first it was next door even though it was the dead of night. Our house is semi-detached, but a fine big one with coloured glass windows and a lot of extensions and modernisings. The kitchen is all fitted very nicely, and there were carpets throughout, which I was glad to see because I hardly would have known where to start with all that, after only the little flat above the shop.

Anyway, there I was lying beside Kumar, who is beginning to snore a little these days, and there it was again for the second night. Then I began to think that maybe it wasn't next door with some peculiar hobby, like doing the decorating only at two o'clock in the morning. It seemed to be coming from downstairs, and in particular our own so nicely fitted kitchen. It couldn't have been the children. Hanif is only a baby, and Laila is six but never wakes all night.

It seemed to scratch and scrabble for a while, then it would stop, only to start again, and I was now thinking that this wasn't anything mechanical like the fridge playing up. It sounded alive. Suddenly I sat up in bed. It was mice! Here in our nice new home, I was hearing mice. I felt so ashamed. It was not the kind of kitchen that should be having mice, and I was sure there had been nothing like this when we had first moved in.

So I lay there for a long time worrying and thinking I would say

nothing to Kumar, or he would say I was a bad housewife, and what should I do to get rid of them. Next morning after Kumar had gone to work and Laila to school, I made sure Hanif was safe in his cot and had a good look round. I didn't see anything at first, but when I looked in the cupboard under the worktop beside the sink where I keep the rice, I could see that a hole had been chewed in one of the thick brown paper sacks and there was some grain spilt. Also there was a much larger hole in the wooden floor of the cupboard, so this must have been the rustlings and scufflings I was hearing. We were being burgled by mice, and it looked likely to continue on a regular basis.

Now that my opinion was confirmed, I still didn't know what to do. The lady next door seemed very nice when we first arrived and asked if there was anything I wanted to know about the area and didn't Hanif have lovely brown eyes. But I hadn't seen her since and didn't feel like going to her and saying "Excuse me, I think we have mice and what can be done about it?" She might have screamed and thought we were dirty or something. So I got out the Pears Cyclopaedia which Kumar had bought on recommendation to help me learn about things, but I couldn't find anything on mice, not even under Medical Matters.

Of course I know that you can get poisons and traps, but with Hanif beginning to crawl, I was hoping that there would be something new and civilised. Also Kumar always takes me shopping, and how could I explain buying a mouse-trap in Sainsbury's or wherever?

There was nothing for it but to take Hanif in his pushchair and go out looking for myself, which so far I had not done in Wanstead. It was quite a long walk to the shops past a lot of leafiness which is not safe at night from what you read in the papers they put through the door about men with no trousers in the bushes, which seems a strange and shameful thing to me.

My sandals were not really up to the walk, and by the time I got to the shops, the first thing I had to get was some comfortable shoes to walk back. So I got some trainers at Freeman Hardy's and immediately felt better, although they looked a little funny with my rose-pink sari. The girl seemed so nice that I asked her where I could buy mouse-traps. There were mainly women in there at this time, mostly pensioners or mothers with toddlers and soon the whole shop was offering advice as to which shop to try next. I felt a little embarrassed at causing such a stir, and everything was going fine until one old lady said more or less to the shop at large, "Of course, you have to keep the place clean, otherwise you'll never get rid of them," and I left feeling not much bigger than a

cot barneseng
grain riskorn
rustle rasle
burgle plyndre
look likely to se ud til at
regular basis regelmæssigt
con'firm bekræfte
Pears Cyclo'paedia familieleksikon
recommen'dation anbefaling
trap fælde
Sainsbury's supermarkedskæde
pushchair klapvogn
shameful skændig
trainers kondisko
sari Indian women's clothing
toddler lille barn
stir røre

Woolworth's varehuskæde

the creeps myrekryb

Asian person from India or Pakistan

spring smække

chickpeas kikærter

flour mel

mouse myself. "Don't forget some cheese, dear," said another as I went out. "They like a bit of cheese."

From then on, I was too embarrassed to go anywhere except to places where you can help yourself. In the end I found the traps in Woolworth's. As I was not sure how many mice there were, I thought I better get half a dozen, and the girl at the till said, "Got an invasion on your hands? They really give me the creeps, the little buggers," which made me feel much better.

"Are you having mice yourself?" I asked hopefully, thinking that perhaps here was an expert who might even know about which cheese was best, because we are not cheese eaters ourselves.

"Haven't seen one for years," she said. "Not since we got the new flat. Old place, is it?"

"It's in Broadmead," I replied.

"Oh *is* it," she said, and I knew what she was thinking straight away. What are Asians doing in nice houses like those? Turning them into slums by the sound of it.

So I didn't ask about the cheese. Hanif was getting restless so I didn't want to take him round Sainsbury's, but fortunately, I saw some cheese in a butcher's shop, which surprised me. He asked which sort I wanted and how much. Having no idea, I just pointed to one that looked hard and yellow and said, "Oh about a pound, please," and was surprised to see how much there was.

When I got home I hid everything, even my new trainers, which really I was very pleased with, at the back of the next kitchen cupboard to the one with the hole. I couldn't very well put the cheese in the fridge or Kumar would wonder why I'd bought it. Also the catches on the cupboards are the magnetic type, and as Hanif is crawling, I didn't want him opening the doors and finding the traps. So I had to wait until Kumar was getting ready for bed to fix up a trap. I put on a really big piece of cheese and wanted to do another, but my husband was calling me.

"What is that sour smell on you?" he asked when I got into bed, and I had to go and wash my hands again, but really I was quite excited lying there listening to see if my plan would work. Maybe if I managed to catch one mouse, the others would run away and I would be saved any more trouble.

There were a lot more scufflings that night, and as soon as Kumar had gone to work, I immediately went to inspect my trap. But oh the disappointment! The cheese had gone, the trap had sprung, but there was nothing in it. Worse, it looked as if the mice had been having a picnic. Grains were spilling from several holes now, and they had started on the chickpeas and chipati flour. I cleared up the mess and wondered what to do next, thinking maybe two or three traps and less cheese.

Unfortunately that evening, Kumar did something he almost never does, which is look in the kitchen cupboards, but a friend was getting us a good price on some tins of ghee, and he wanted to see how much space we had.

I watched in horror as he pulled out the trainers and cheese, all the while asking if his wife had gone mad to be buying such things without his knowledge and was I going out jogging on the quiet. Bravely I said that cheese was good for the baby, and that my feet had hurt. So he said I would soon be wearing trousers and eating roast beef, and how much of this smelly stuff was the baby to eat, for goodness sake. He got so excited that he didn't check the other cupboard.

The next night was a truly horrible one. I set three traps in the cupboard before going to bed. Maybe I dozed off, but we were both awakened by a dreadful squawking and a thumping noise.

"Whatever is that? Has a bloody cat got stuck somewhere?" cried Kumar. "Am I crazy or is the noise in the kitchen?"

Very much afraid now, I followed him downstairs. It was coming from the cupboard and I yelled at him to take care. He hooked a broom under the door and pulled, and then we got the shock of our lives. Out tumbled the biggest, fiercest rat you ever saw, thrashing about and squealing with its tail caught in the trap, which it was thumping about all over the place.

I screamed, a very loud scream, I'm afraid, and what happened next was worse. The rat somehow turned on itself and began to gnaw at its own tail. Then with a final screech that sounded as much like triumph as pain, it broke free and disappeared down the hole leaving a slimy trail of blood on the cupboard floor.

Kumar dropped the broom and the door snapped closed.

"Oh my God, this is terrible, terrible," he kept saying, and rushed to put everything he could find in front of the cupboard. At least then I could tell him about the mousetraps and the mystery cheese. "We will tell no one about this," he said. "Or they will think we are responsible. Tomorrow I will block up the hole, and get some poison and some bigger traps. Theft we must move all the food to a different cupboard."

All this was done very successfully, but the next night was even worse. At least now, Kumar was listening with me. There seemed to be even more scratching and I was sure I heard one of the traps give a hard click. There was no screeching this time, but the scratchings continued on and off for most of the night.

Next morning we opened the other cupboard, fearful of what we might find. There was a dead rat caught in one of the special

ghee flydende smør
on the quiet i smug
doze off døse hen
squawking gennemtrængende skrig
thump banke
broom kost
fierce vild
thrash about slå om sig
squeal hvine
re'sponsible ansvarlig
screech skrige
fearful ængstelig

bait lokkemad
Council kommunen
infes'tation angreb af skadedyr
port havneby
senior ældste
frostily iskoldt
be partial to have en svaghed for
curry karryret
stray omstrejfer
patient tålmodig
burglary indbrudstyveri

traps Kumar had bought, and it wasn't the one with half a tail. A nasty hole just as big as the blocked one had appeared. Some of the poisoned bait had gone and also more food.

"That is enough for me," said Kumar as he picked the whole nasty thing up on a shovel and put it outside the back door. "There are laws here about this sort of thing. We must call the Council."

How to describe the next week! Two men from the Council arrived and asked a lot of questions about the infestation – that's what they called it. I showed them the holes and the damaged food bags, also the bait and the dead one outside.

I said that it had been a great shock to me, because I hadn't been expecting to see such things, not in Wanstead where everything looked so respectable. Even in Brick Lane we had not actually seen any rats, although the market people said they were there.

"It's with London being a port in the old days," said the senior one. "They came over on the ships, you see. From out East, so they say. Still you'd know all about that, I suppose."

"I have never been out East, as you put it," I said a little frostily. "But I know many big cities have rats. They seem to like cities. But surely not in the suburbs. And why have they come to us? Can it be my fault?"

"Perhaps they fancied an Indian take-away," grinned the young one. "No offence, love – I'm partial to a curry on a Friday night myself."

The boss man was not so cheerful. "Your best hope is that you've got a few strays disturbed by cable laying or road works and they're looking for somewhere to set up house," he said, and explained that, if this was the case, they would expect to find no more than half a dozen rats which could be cleared out by bait and traps if we were careful and patient.

"And what is my worst hope?" I asked.

They looked at each other in a funny sort of way.

"We'll have to see about that," said the boss man.

He said they'd know in about a week. Meanwhile it was very important to keep a count of the rats caught, report any strange smells and how much bait or food had gone and to keep the children out of the kitchen. That week three more rats were caught, then suddenly the catching seemed to stop, and no more loose bait was taken. I reported a horrible smell from the cupboard under the stairs, and they had to take up some floor boards to find it. I didn't look, but it made me glad no more bait had gone.

That very same week, on the Friday night, one of our shops was broken into. Kumar wanted it reported as a racist attack as well as a burglary because of what they had written on the walls. It seemed

to him that the object was not so much stealing as to frighten us, which in many ways is more upsetting. After all you can insure against theft but not against hatred. But the police were not interested and said it was just an ordinary burglary.

All that was very bad and upsetting for us, so it wasn't surprising that we were not sleeping too well, even if we hadn't got our little problem downstairs.

Then one night, I heard a sort of click, but it wasn't a trap. It sounded like one of the cupboard doors closing. Since there was no way I could have left one of them open, I was very puzzled, but I didn't want to wake Kumar because the trouble with the shop had made him very exhausted.

By morning I had put it down to my imagination – until I was getting breakfast and noticed a rat dropping right on the draining board and some toothmarks on a wooden spoon. Never before had they come outside those cupboards. I squealed and rang up the rat men, and Barry, the older one, said he'd pop round for a look.

When he arrived he had a rolled map under his arm which he put on the table. He tested the cupboard catches and laughed. "Magnetic," he said. "Do you know what they do?"

I shook my head.

"They've got these sussed out," he said. "If they want to get out for a wander, they just stand up on their cute little hind legs and push. One squeezes into the space as it opens, and the rest walk over him."

"And he stays there until they want to go back inside and down the hole?" I squealed.

"Not always," said Barry calmly. "Very unreliable, rats. Dead smart – but unreliable. Know what I mean?"

It took a moment, but then I saw what he was saying. I looked round the kitchen in horror. He meant there could be one, maybe more, lurking anywhere in here right now!

"Now for the *really* bad news," said Barry and began to unroll the map. "I have to tell you that because of the pattern of infestation, we suspect that these rats are not strays. I reckon they're coming straight up from the sewers." He tapped the map. "I checked. There's a big sewer pipe right under this house."

I sat down very hard on a kitchen chair feeling a little dizzy, but not so dizzy that I didn't forget to look under it first. I said to excuse me but I didn't really understand what he was saying.

"It's quite simple, love," he said. "The sewage from half London comes through this way. Goes through Beckton and finishes up out by Barking Creek. Got to go somewhere, innit?"

"But what about the rats?" I whispered.

up'setting rystende
insure forsikre
theft tyveri
puzzled rådvild
ex'hausted udmattet
put down to tilskrive
draining board opvaskebakke
pop round smutte forbi
suss out udforske
a wander en gåtur
cute nuttet
hind leg bagben
unre'liable upålidelig
sewer kloak
pipe rør
dizzy svimmel
sewage spildevand
innit has it not

rush hour myldretid
re'do renovere
lot slags
porky løgn
bugger stodder
sur'vivor overlever
crafter snu fyr
pretty smartish ret hurtigt
stove komfur
reas'sure berolige

"Well, they come along for the ride," he said. "It's like rush hour on the Underground down there. There's millions of them, just below the surface. Makes you think, doesn't it?"

I said it certainly did, but why were they suddenly coming up in my nice new kitchen.

"System can't take it any more, know what I mean?" he said. "It all needs redoing. Meanwhile, when one of the little bastards, begging your pardon, finds a crack, he starts exploring and brings his friends."

I asked him how he could tell all this, and he said it was all quite simple, love. Rats born in sewers learned things from each other. They knew how to open unlocked doors, get out of traps or avoid them, kill cats and not to take bait. Some of them were now actually immune to different poisons, and they seemed to be growing bigger. These were called super rats. As my rats, that's what he called them, *my* rats, were no longer dying or getting caught, but were still around as large as life, taking food and playing tricks, we had to assume this is what they were.

"Do you know what I've seen 'em do?" he was saying almost fondly as I was staring at the cupboards. "A place we went to out West Ham way, the shopkeeper, one of your lot, said they were stealing eggs. Naturally we thought he was telling porkies or seeing things, so we watched one night. One of the little buggers, well, a big bugger he was – King Rat, you might say – he got this egg, rolled over on his back holding it to his belly with his front paws, and the others pulled him along by his tail. True as I'm standing here – they pulled him back to the hole, egg and all. Like I said, a bit unreliable, rats, but they're smart. Survivors. Crafters. You could almost admire them really."

"So what do we do next?" I whispered.

"Like I said, it's very simple, love. The pipe's right under your living room. We'll start there and hope we find the crack pretty smartish. That's it darling, you have a good cry, and I'll start working on how to get the floor up."

Oh my goodness. Here was this man loving and darling me, and saying he is going to dig up my living room, without even my husband here.

"But what will we do when all this is going on?" I asked, feeling as if the rats were already crawling over me.

"That's all right. We'll probably be able to leave the stove and that. You can live upstairs," he replied, as if this was quite the normal thing to do.

"What about the children?" I said.

He was very reassuring. "Don't worry about it," he said. "You

just keep them well out of the way. We'll put a grille over the hole at night."

My legs felt wobbly. I asked him how long he thought it would take. He said he couldn't say. It depended if they found the crack quickly and how bad it was. Mainly all you could do was patch it up and hope for the best.

I said all this was quite amazing. I had no idea that there was this sort of thing in a place that was supposed to be civilised and what would the neighbours think.

He shrugged. Then he said a funny thing, this man from the Council who was supposed to be helping us. "It's all down there," he said. "Just below the surface. I know it and you know it. Everyone knows it." He rolled up the map, but I didn't like the way he was smiling at me. "Anyway, we can't kill them all. The main thing is to send them back where they came from, and then pretend they ain't there. Know what I mean?"

Oh yes, this time I knew exactly what he meant.

grille gitter
wobbly usikker
patch up lappe sammen
surface overflade

Why a Royal Meghan Markle Matters

BY AFUA HIRSCH

UPDATED: MAY 22, 2018 9:22 AM [ET] | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED: MAY 17, 2018 5:01 PM EDT;

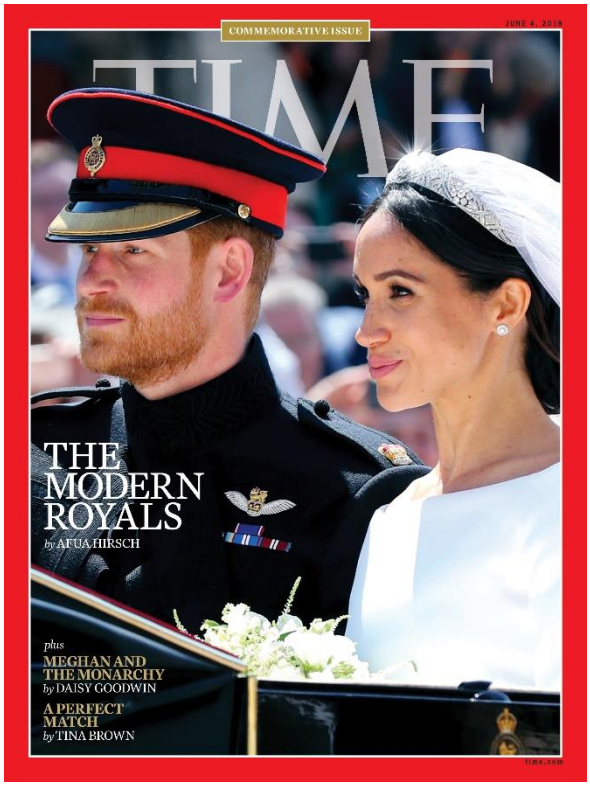
When the British press takes notice of a budding royal romance, there is usually a familiar theme. They spot the couple "getting flirty" at a polo match, for example, or leaving a nightclub in the early hours. But when it came to Prince Harry's relationship with Meghan Markle, the first clue that there was something different was the tabloids' unfamiliar, almost cryptic reaction. His new girlfriend was described as a "glamorous brunette" who was "something of a departure from Prince Harry's usual type." Markle, the public was told, was "not in the society blonde style of previous girlfriends." This language was code for something the press was simultaneously obsessed with and uncomfortable addressing directly: Markle is a woman of color.

Some references were less covert than others. A few were blatantly racist. Markle, who grew up in Hollywood and went to private schools, was referred to as "(almost) straight outta Compton" by one publication. Her family didn't escape notice either. "Miss Markle's mother is a dreadlocked African-American lady from the wrong side of the tracks," wrote another publication. Her mother is a social worker and yoga instructor.

Markle had embraced her identity as a "strong, confident mixed-race woman" long before her engagement was announced, but her arrival in the British public's consciousness was accompanied by a complex—and at times subtle—mix of romantic fairy tale, change of tradition and racial slur. Her heritage continues to attract immense attention from the public and press, partly because it is such a visible departure for a British royal. At the same time, there has been an aggressive tendency to pretend that nobody notices her race. Instead, the only reason for any hesitation about Markle stems, some in the commentariat claim, from the fact that she is American, an actor, or divorced, or that she went to Catholic school.

It all made for an uncertain prelude to a wedding that turned out to be an extraordinary celebration of inclusion, a sun-splashed day that lifted the millions watching into what felt like a new realm. The Reverend Michael Curry, the first African American to serve as presiding bishop of the Episcopal church, quoted Martin Luther King—"Love is the only way"—in a

rousing 14-minute sermon firmly rooted in the tradition of the African-American church. A gospel choir performed Ben E. King's "Stand by Me" under the direction of a black British woman, Karen Gibson, and 19-year-old Sheku Kanneh-Mason played a cello solo in a ceremony did that double duty as both a showcase of black culture and an announcement of generational change. It felt like a powerful statement—in full view of the world—that both celebrated Markle's heritage and placed it unapologetically at the heart of Britain's most elite institution.



Gareth Fuller—PA Wire/PA Images

Even before they exchanged vows, Harry and Meghan were a metaphor for the state of multicultural Britain. For some black Brits, there was a sense of pride that a woman of color has joined the royal family. For others, the union is yet another reminder of deeply entrenched class prejudice and tradition.

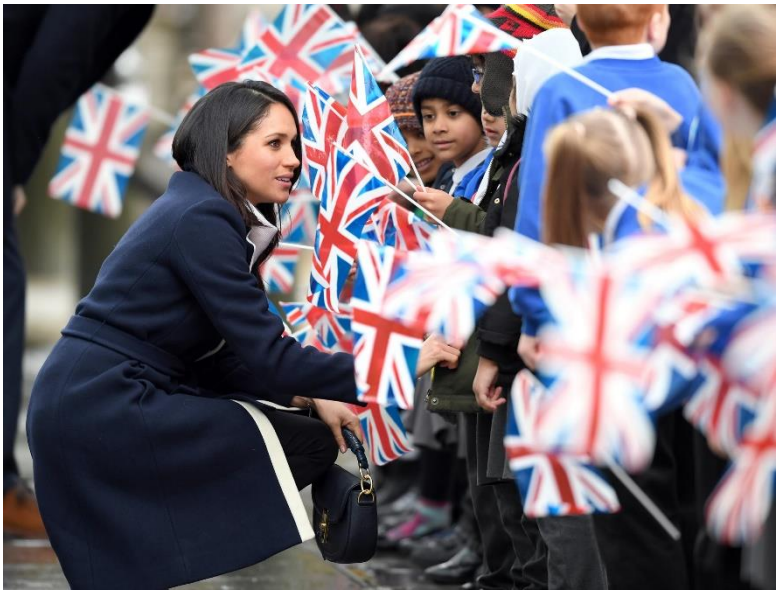
Markle was not born into poverty, but neither has she lived with aristocratic privilege. Her career and relationships both appear to have stumbled and then succeeded through a combination of merit and luck. She built an acting career and embraced her interests, using her platform to champion causes like feminism and the environment. She also happens to be marrying Prince Harry, the fun-loving and somewhat renegade royal, who has landed in trouble in the past. But his recent charity work and openness about his struggle with mental-health issues has endeared him to a public hungry for authenticity.

Wrapped up in all this is the question of the British dream—whether such a thing exists, and if it does, what it means for a class system that is anti-meritocratic and socially immobile at its roots. And wrapped up in all that is the changing racial and cultural makeup of Britain. The latest census data revealed that people who are, like Markle, biracial are the fastest growing

demographic group, with the number of people of mixed heritage almost doubling between 2001 and 2011.

Which brings us to the wedding. The historian Eric Hobsbawm, analyzing the "secular magic of monarchy," suggested that while it's tempting to ask what role a royal wedding plays in a time of social change, it is often because of that change that the weddings have such significance.

It is the perfect stage for a drama that brings together Britain's love affair with its tradition, in the figure of Prince Harry, and the symbol of its future, in the character of a brown woman. Rather than reject the monarchy, the couple are participating in its greatest contemporary act of renewal, by marrying with a huge amount of pomp and circumstance in a ritual seen by millions.



Meghan Markle and Prince Harry visit Millennium Point on March 8, 2018 in Birmingham, England.Karwai Tang—WireImage/Getty Images

To be biracial—or mixed race, as it is more commonly known in the U.K.—was not always a talked-about phenomenon. Growing up in Britain in the 1980s and '90s with, like Markle, a mother of African heritage, I was acutely aware of my visible otherness, especially in a society that was highly racialized but also deeply uncomfortable talking about race.

Britain is a cluster of islands populated by immigration. But the diaspora stretches back so many thousands of years that few Brits imagine it this way. Most are unaware that groups now considered indigenous, like the Angles and Saxons, were themselves migrants in the first millennium A.D. Their presence is predated by people of color, including Africans who have lived in Britain since at least the Roman times.

Many contemporary black British people trace their family history to the British empire, and especially the period of mass immigration shortly after World War II. The changing face of

Britain's communities during the 20th century was an integral part of its postwar renewal, and yet it created a hostile backlash that still reverberates today. It's a hostility that many British people of color perceive instinctively in the political debate that has weaponized immigration and one that is rooted in the idea that Britishness is at its core a white identity.

The royal family has not traditionally been an agent of change in this respect. During my childhood, the spectacle of an exclusively white monarchy and aristocracy helped reinforce the notion that Britishness was white. It was taken for granted that the royals appeared to make up a deliberately, permanently, white institution. Their main role in my life was to make me feel excluded from the country.

I was not alone in feeling this way. "The royal family don't stand for us. They never have," says Candice Carty-Williams, author of a forthcoming novel, Queenie, which has already been referred to as the "black Bridget Jones." "Black people would have been slaves to them. They are not friends with any of us. When we watch The Crown or Downton Abbey, there are never any black people. There is a history of them not having any interest in us."

There is discernible weariness among some black British people that the idea of a biracial woman's joining the royal family would make any discernible difference to race in Britain, where the odds remain stacked against people of color. Forty percent of families from black African and Caribbean backgrounds live in low-income households in Britain, compared with 19% of white families. Twenty-three percent of young black people and 25% of young Bangladeshi and Pakistani youth are unemployed, more than double the number of white job seekers of the same age. And there is some evidence that these figures are getting worse.

Others, however, regard the royal family as a symbolic institution, where the visibility of a woman of color in a position of such status sends a powerful message. "Black excellence in the royal family is a cool idea from a contemporary point of view," says Lola Adesioye, a British writer and journalist, who is based in the U.S. "How did this girl—who is not only of color, but didn't go to the same schools or universities as the royals, who wasn't even raised in the U.K., and so has all these points of difference and otherness—get to this place? It says a lot about diversification."

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Either way, this royal wedding has triggered a debate about black British people. TV networks, newspapers and magazines traveled to Brixton, Coventry and Nottingham—parts of Britain

with a historic black community—to ask how different generations of black British people, with their own very different experiences of empire and identity, feel about the state of the nation.

There is recognition too, in some cases for the first time, that black Britain is a complex society with no single story or voice. Even those who are skeptical about the institution of monarchy expressed an interest in this wedding; on social media, thousands expressed their changing view of the tradition-bound royal family. “Making my beautiful mixed heritage family’s shoulders stand a little taller,” tweeted British lawmaker David Lammy. “Against the odds a great new symbol of all that is still possible and hopeful in modern Britain.”

This is not the first time there have been black people involved in or closely associated with the royals. The Queen’s equerry major, one of the most senior members of the royal household staff, is now for the first time a black man, Nana Kofi Twumasi-Ankrah. Other people of color have married into the aristocracy, including the Viscountess of Weymouth, Emma Thynn, whose father is Nigerian. And there are credible theories that at least one and possibly two previous English queens may have had African heritage.

But this is the first royal wedding in Britain where racial difference has played a visible role, with a bride who has owned—rather than sought to downplay—her black heritage. In his sermon, Curry directly referenced slavery, addressing the fact that throughout history, love has transcended social boundaries. “We must discover love, the redemptive power of love,” Curry said, returning once more to the words of Martin Luther King Jr. “When we do that, we will make of this old world a new world.” And at the seat of the British establishment on May 19, Markle seemed more than ready to bring the monarchy into a new era.

Hirsch is a journalist and the author of BRIT(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging

https://time.com/5281096/meghan-markle-multicultural-britain/

How the Windrush Generation transformed British arts and culture

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On 22 June the UK marks Windrush Day, celebrating the arrival of the Empire Windrush in Britain.

In 1948, hundreds of people from the Caribbean boarded the ship and travelled to Tilbury Docks in Essex. With them they brought an explosion of dance, art, writing and music which would transform British culture.

We spoke to British Trinidad-born poet, novelist, musician and academic Anthony Joseph, about how the arrival of the Windrush changed the UK.

Who are the Windrush Generation?

*The **Windrush Generation** includes anyone who immigrated to Britain from the Caribbean between 1948-1973.*

After WWII, large parts of Britain were in desperate need of rebuilding, so the UK actively invited immigration from Commonwealth nations. There was no shortage of jobs in industries such as National Rail and the NHS, and public transport recruited almost exclusively from Jamaica and Barbados. But, despite the invitation, Caribbean people were often met with intolerance from large parts of the white population. The first Windrush arrivals were often denied accommodation and access to some shops, pubs, clubs and even churches.

Anthony reminds us that Windrush was not the beginning of multicultural Britain. "We've been coming here since the 1800s," he says. "The Windrush arrived at a particular time in UK history when British culture was open. There was a space there after WWII, and I think a lot of British people were still trying to figure out what it meant to be British."

"So, politically, the impact of the Windrush Generation’s arrival expanded the definition of what Britain was.”

Image caption,
Lord Kitchener performing at the Calypso Cabaret

A melting-pot of music

Caribbean communities were already very diverse - with musical influences from Latin America, Africa and Asia. “All of that coming into the UK had a big impact musically,” says Anthony. “You had a lot of musicians coming who could play jazz, blues, gospel music, Latin music coming into a London scene that at that time was primarily swing-based and dance bands."

"So not just African and Caribbean music, but the tins of Spanish music and Spanish and Cuban rhythms, all of that just really enriched the musical palette of London.”

Ska - a precursor to Reggae, characterised by a walking baseline and syncopated rhythms - was adopted into small clubs in Soho and Brixton where Caribbean people would perform. “The growth and the progression had been gradual. The people that came in 1948 came to scenes that were already happening and they slipped in and expanded it - they were already there.”

Many of the styles you listen to today have roots in Caribbean London. The fusion of Jamaican reggae into British music developed genres such as drum and bass and dubstep.

Soca (Soul of Calypso) was coined by artist Lord Shawty in an effort to revive traditional Trinidadian and Tobagan calypso music in the 70's. By the 1980s, soca had evolved into a range of styles and was popular in Britain to sample calypso and other Caribbean beats and rhythms into tracks. This style of sampling continued to inspire London pop

artists in the years to come, and lay the foundations for many electronic styles such as dancehall, UK garage, jungle, ragga and hip hop.

In the early 2000s, London grime artists such as Dizzee Rascal, Stormzy and Lethal Bizzle encompassed many of these styles and revolutionised the British rap scene.

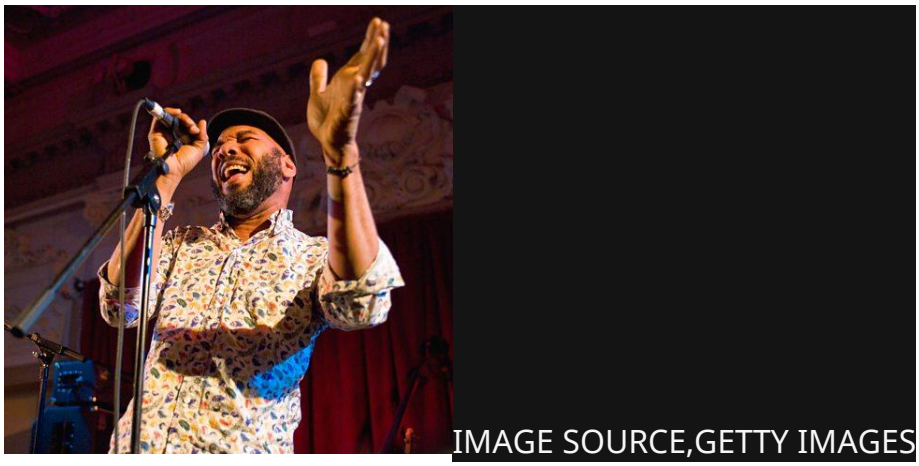

IMAGE SOURCE,GETTY IMAGES

Image caption,
Anthony performing on stage at Bush Hall in London

The language of erasure

Caribbean writers “always find a way of dismantling and questioning the English language with Creole influence”, Anthony says. “I consider myself a Caribbean writer. The language that I like to use in my work comes out of an experience of Caribbean language and how we use Creole."

"That aesthetic is important to me - the way I turn English upside down and find new ways around it. There’s a musicality and rhythm to Caribbean speech which has carried through to English.”

But the work of Caribbean people and their contributions to British arts are often under-celebrated. "People are not aware of performers and musicians and actors that were here in the 60’s. They’re just not aware.”

For example, Anthony’s second novel *Kitch: A Fictional Biography of a Calypso Icon* fills in the history of Lord Kitchener, who is described as ‘the grand master of Calypso’. “You have a man coming from Trinidad in ’48 and singing ‘London is the Place For Me’ on board the Windrush, and it’s probably one the most iconic images of the arrival - and when I said I was doing a book about Lord Kitchener people asked me why I was writing about this old English general,” he laughs. “They had no idea who he was. But I think it’s changed now, people know - but not at the time. The history is erased.”

The 2018 Windrush Scandal

Following the British Nationality Act 1948, everyone who was a British subject (having been born in the UK or a British colony) was granted the right to settle in the UK. This meant that the Windrush Generation did not need any documents to prove their legal immigration status, and were not given any following changes in immigration laws in the early 1970s. Despite this, cases of wrongful detainment, deportation and denial of benefits to British people - a majority from the Windrush Generation - started surfacing in 2018.

Anthony had arranged *Windrush: A Celebration* - a showcase of pan-Caribbean and British performance featuring artists such as Calypso Rose and GAIKA - to mark the 70th anniversary of Windrush arrival in November of last year as the scandal was unfolding.

“The Windrush show was put together to celebrate how far we’ve come, where we’ve come from and what we’ve contributed - and suddenly you had this situation where people were questioning who they were again, or where they belonged." he says.

"It was a celebration, but at the same time we couldn’t ignore the elephant in the room. The reality of 70 years of Windrush in this country is one of trauma, difficulty and racism and revolutionary behaviour - so that has to be part of it.”

But most would argue the seismic impact of the Windrush Generation, particularly on London, has sculpted post-imperial British culture.

“We’re talking about how the Caribbean influence on Britain - but what’s really important is to see how Britain has become more Caribbean," Anthony wraps up. “It’s all British culture. Britain has always been a place of migration and a movement of people and mixing - which is one of the beautiful things about the UK.”

https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z6grnrd

LOOSE CHANGE

Andrea Levy

I AM NOT IN THE HABIT of making friends of strangers. I'm a Londoner. Not even little grey-haired old ladies passing comment on the weather can shame a response from me. I'm a Londoner - aloof sweats from my pores. But I was in a bit of a predicament; my period was two days early and I was caught unprepared.

I'd just gone into the National Portrait Gallery to get out of the cold. It had begun to feel, as I'd walked through the bleak streets, like acid was being thrown at my exposed skin.

My fingers were numb, searching in my purse for change for the tampon machine; I barely felt the pull of the zip. But I didn't have any coins. I was forced to ask in a loud voice in this small lavatory, 'Has anyone got three twenty-pence pieces?' Everyone seemed to leave the place at once - all of them Londoners I was sure of it. Only she was left - fixing her hair in the mirror.

'Do you have change?'

She turned round slowly as I held out a ten-pound note. She had the most spectacular eyebrows. I could see the lines of black hair, like magnetised iron filings, tumbling across her eyes and almost joining above her nose. I must have been staring to recall them so clearly. She had wide black eyes and a round face with such a solid jaw line that she looked to have taken a gentle whack from Tom and Jerry's cartoon frying pan. She dug into the pocket of her jacket and pulled out a bulging handful of money. It was coppers mostly. Some of it tinkled on to the floor. But she had change: too much – I didn't want a bag full of the stuff myself.

'Have you a five-pound note as well?' I asked.

She dropped the coins on to the basin area, spreading them out into the soapy puddles of water that were lying there. Then she said, 'You look?' She had an accent but I couldn't tell then where it was from; I thought maybe Spain.

'Is this all you've got?' I asked. She nodded.

'Well, look, let me just take this now . . .' I picked three damp coins out of the pile. 'Then I'll get some change in the shop and pay them back to you.' Her gaze was as keen as a cat with string. 'Do you understand? Only I don't want all those coins.'

'Yes,' she said softly.

I was grateful. I took the money. But when I emerged from the cubicle the girl and her handful of change were gone.

I found her again staring at the portrait of Darcy Bussell. Her head was inclining from one side to the other as if the painting were a dress she might soon try on for size. I approached her about the money but she just said, 'This is good picture.'

Was it my explanation left dangling or the fact that she liked the dreadful painting that caused my mouth to gape?

'Really, you like it?' I said.

'She doesn't look real. It looks like ...' Her eyelids fluttered sleepily as she searched for the right word, 'a dream.'

That particular picture always reminded me of the doodles girls drew in their rough books at school.

'You don't like?' she asked. I shrugged. 'You show me one you like,' she said.

As I mentioned before, I'm not in the habit of making friends of strangers, but there was something about this girl. Her eyes were encircled with dark shadows so that even when she smiled - introducing herself cheerfully as Laylor – they remained as mournful as a glum kid at a party. I took this fraternisation as a defeat but I had to introduce her to a better portrait.

Alan Bennett with his mysterious little brown bag didn't impress her at all. She preferred the photograph of Beckham. Germaine Greer made her top lip curl and as for A. S. Byatt, she laughed out loud, 'This is child make this?'

We were almost making a scene. Laylor couldn't keep her voice down and people were beginning to watch us. I wanted to be released from my obligation.

'Look, let me buy us both a cup of tea,' I said. 'Then I can give you back your money.'

She brought out her handful of change again as we sat down at a table - eagerly passing it across to me to take some for the tea.

'No, I'll get this,' I said.

Her money jangled like a win on a slot machine as she tipped it back into her pocket. When I got back with the tea, I pushed over the twenty-pences I owed her.

She began playing with them on the tabletop - pushing one around the other two in a figure of eight. Suddenly she leant towards me as if there were a conspiracy between us and said, 'I like art.' With that announcement a light briefly came on in those dull eyes to reveal that she was no more than eighteen. A student perhaps.

'Where are you from?' I asked.

'Uzbekistan,' she said.

Was that the Balkans? I wasn't sure. 'Where is that?'

She licked her finger, then with great concentration drew an outline on to the tabletop. 'This is Uzbekistan,' she said. She licked her finger again to carefully plop a wet dot on to the map saying, 'And I come from here - Tashkent.

'And where is all this?' I said, indicating the area around the little map with its slowly evaporating borders and town. She screwed up her face as if to say nowhere.

'Are you on holiday?' I asked.

She nodded.

'How long are you here for?'

Leaning her elbows on the table she took a sip of her tea. 'Ehh, it is bitter!' she shouted.

'Put some sugar in it,' I said, pushing the sugar sachets toward her. She was reluctant, 'Is for free?' she asked.

'Yes, take one.'

The sugar spilled as she clumsily opened the packet. I laughed it off but she, with the focus of a prayer, put her cup up to the edge of the table and swept the sugar into it with the side of

her hand. The rest of the detritus that was on the tabletop fell into the tea as well. Some crumbs, a tiny scrap of paper and a curly black hair floated on the surface of her drink. I felt sick as she put the cup back to her mouth.

'Pour that one away, I'll get you another one.'

Just as I said that a young boy arrived at our table and stood, legs astride, before her. He pushed down the hood on his padded coat. His head was curious - flat as a cardboard cut-out - with hair stuck to his sweaty forehead in black curlicues. And his face was as doggedly determined as two fists raised. They began talking in whatever language it was they spoke. Laylor's tone pleading - the boy's aggrieved. Laylor took the money from her pocket and held it up to him. She slapped his hand away when he tried to wrest all the coins from her palm. Then, as abruptly as he had appeared, he left.

Laylor called something after him. Everyone turned to stare at her, except the boy, who just carried on.

'Who was that?'

With the teacup resting on her lip, she said, 'My brother. He want to know where we sleep tonight.'

'Oh, yes, where's that?' I was rummaging through the contents of my bag for a tissue, so it was casually asked.

'It's square we have slept before.'

'Which hotel is it?' I thought of the Russell Hotel, that was on a square with uniformed attendants, bed turning-down facilities, old-world style.

She was picking the curly black hair off her tongue when she said, 'No hotel, just the square.'

It was then I began to notice things I had not seen before: dirt under each of her chipped fingernails, the collar of her blouse crumpled and unironed, a tiny cut on her cheek, a fringe that looked to have been cut with blunt nail-clippers. I found a tissue and used it to wipe my sweating palms.

'How do you mean just in the square?'

'We sleep out in the square,' she said. It was so simple she spread her hands to suggest the lie of her bed.

She nodded. 'Tonight?'

The memory of the bitter cold still tingled at my fingertips as I said, 'Why?' It took her no more than two breaths to tell me the story. She and her brother had had to leave their country, Uzbekistan, when their parents, who were journalists, were arrested. It was arranged very quickly - friends of their parents acquired passports for them and put them on to a plane. They had been in England for three days but they knew no one here. This country was just a safe place. Now all the money they had could be lifted in the palm of a hand to a stranger in a toilet. So they were sleeping rough - in the shelter of a square, covered in blankets, on top of some cardboard.

At the next table a woman was complaining loudly that there was too much froth on her coffee. Her companion was relating the miserable tale of her daughter's attempt to get into

publishing. What did they think about the strange girl sitting opposite me?

Nothing. Only I knew what a menacing place Laylor's world had become. She'd lost a tooth. I noticed the ugly gap when she smiled at me saying, 'I love London.'

She had sought me out - sifted me from the crowd. This young woman was desperate for help. She'd even cunningly made me obliged to her.

'I have picture of Tower Bridge at home on wall although I have not seen yet.'

But why me? I had my son to think of. Why pick on a single mother with a young son? We haven't got the time. Those two women at the next table, with their matching hand bags and shoes, they did nothing but lunch. Why hadn't she approached them instead?

'From little girl, I always want to see it. . .' she went on.

I didn't know anything about people in her situation. Didn't they have to go somewhere? Croydon, was it? Couldn't she have gone to the police? Or some charity?

My life was hard enough without this stranger tramping through it. She smelt of mildewed washing. Imagine her dragging that awful stink into my kitchen. Cupping her filthy hands round my bone chine. Smearing my white linen. Her big face with its pantomime eyebrows leering over my son. Slumping on to my sofa and kicking off her muddy boots as she yanked me down into her particular hell. How would I ever get rid of her?

'You know where is Tower Bridge?'

Perhaps there was something tender-hearted in my face. When my grandma first came to England from the Caribbean she lived through days as lonely and cold as an open grave. The story she told all her grandchildren was about the stranger who woke her while she was sleeping in a doorway and offered her a warm bed for the night. It was this act of benevolence that kept my grandmother alive. She was convinced of it. Her Good Samaritan.

'Is something wrong?' the girl asked.

Now my grandmother talks with passion about scrounging refugees; those asylum seekers who can't even speak the language, storming the country and making it difficult for her and everyone else.

'Last week . . .' she began, her voice quivering, 'I was in home.'

This was embarrassing. I couldn't turn the other way, the girl was staring straight at me. 'This day, Friday,' she went on, 'I cooked fish for my mother and brother.' The whites of her eyes were becoming soft and pink; she was going to cry. 'This day Friday I am here in London,' she said. 'And I worry I will not see my mother again.'

Only a savage would turn away when it was merely kindness that was needed. I resolved to help her. I had three warm bedrooms, one of them empty. I would make her dinner. Fried chicken or maybe poached fish in wine. I would run her a bath filled with bubbles. Wrap her in thick towels heated on a rail. I would then hunt out some warm clothes and after I had put my son to bed I would make her cocoa. We would sit and talk. I would let her tell me all that she had been through. Wipe her tears and assure her that she was now safe. I would phone a colleague from school and ask him for advice.

Then in the morning I would take Laylor to wherever she needed to go. And before we said goodbye I would press my phone number into her hand.

All Laylor's grandchildren would know my name.

Her nose was running with snot. She pulled down the sleeve of her jacket to drag it across her face and said, 'I must find my brother.

I didn't have any more tissues. I'll get you something to wipe your nose,' I said.

I got up from the table. She watched me, frowning; the tiny hairs of her eyebrows locking together like Velcro. I walked to the counter where serviettes were lying in a neat pile. I picked up four. Then standing straight I walked on. Not back to Laylor but up the stairs to the exit. I pushed through the revolving doors and threw myself into the cold.

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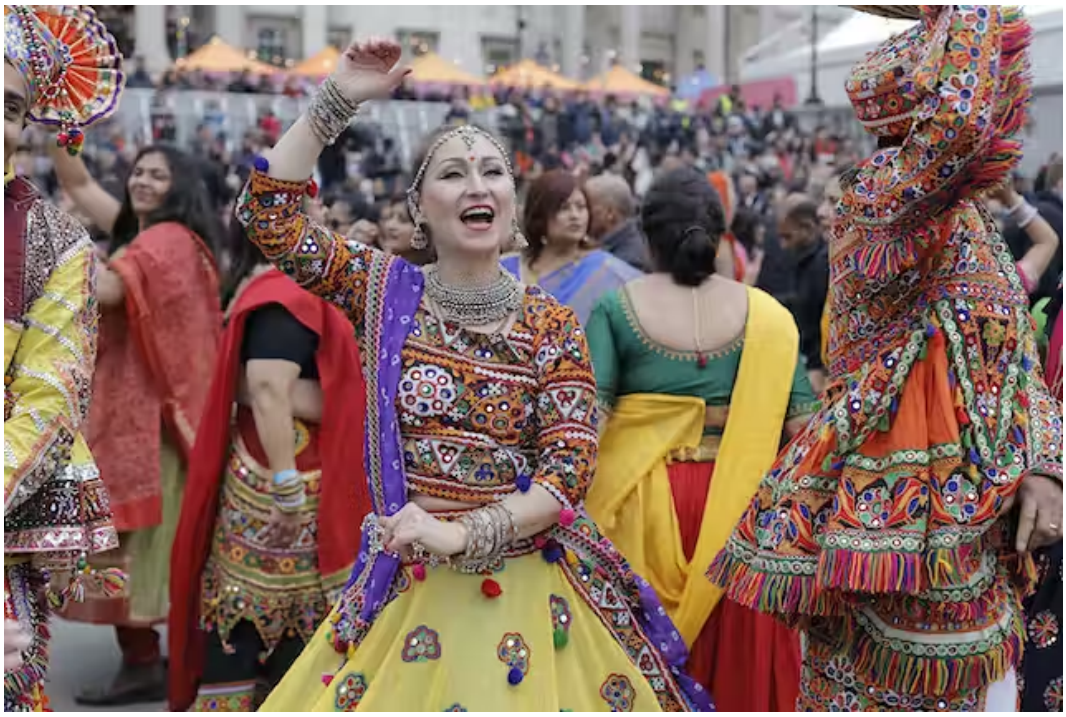

Diwali in Trafalgar Square: a celebration of multicultural Britain. Lara Ra/Shutterstock

Debating the ‘success’ of multiculturalism misses the point – it’s simply part of life in Britain today

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Suella Braverman – the home secretary in one of the UK’s most ethnically diverse cabinets in history – has declared that multiculturalism has failed. Speaking to an American think tank, Braverman spoke out against what she called a “misguided dogma” that has “allowed people to come to our society and live parallel lives in it”.

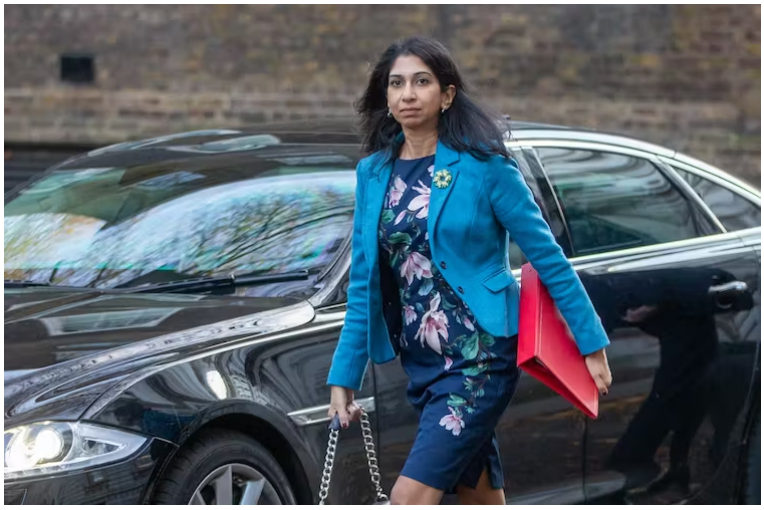
I am a historian of multiculturalism, and grew up in Balsall Heath, an area of Birmingham with a decades-long history of rich cultural diversity. My experience of multiculturalism is not as something that can fail or succeed, but as something that shaped my life and that of my peers in a meaningful way. Comments like Braverman’s – and indeed, other politicians before her – ignore the reality of what multiculturalism means to people.

In 2017, former Ukip leader Nigel Farage blamed the Westminster Bridge terrorist attacks on the idea that multiculturalism had led to “divided communities” and the presence of terrorist sympathisers.

Before Farage, the former prime minister David Cameron suggested in 2011 that multiculturalism allowed “segregated communities” to behave in ways that were at odds with British cultural norms.

In the early 2000s, Labour home secretary David Blunkett introduced a range of measures to address the notion that multiculturalism had contributed to a lack of "community cohesion" in Britain. These measures aimed to promote "British values" and prevent local schools from becoming "swamped" by immigrants.

The criticism of multiculturalism from recent governments contrasts with the approach taken in the 1970s and 80s. The 1976 Race Relations Act decreed that councils take proactive steps to bring about "good relations" between different racial groups. In the years following, local councils enacted policies of multiculturalism, particularly in education, to cater for the particular needs of ethnically diverse communities.



Braverman is not the first politician to declare the failure of multiculturalism. I T S/Shutterstock

There was a drive to allow pupils to wear religious clothing and provide information to parents in their first languages. Halal meat was made available in schools with a significant number of Muslim pupils. Councils also began to distribute funding to religious organisations, in the hope that this would help bring about better community relations.

These policies were not universally welcomed. Some on the left viewed them as an part of a wider attempt to weaken the unity of black communities by setting ethnic groups against one another in a scramble for council funding. Others thought the language of multiculturalism was patronising and tokenistic, and did little to address the real issues faced by non-white groups.

On the right, multiculturalism has been decried as a form of political correctness. It was viewed as something that, in its celebration of diversity, had the potential to bring about an erosion of British cultural values.

How multiculturalism actually exists

What both sides of the debate miss is the extent to which multiculturalism is not only a policy or a political agenda, but a way of life. This is most apparent in Britain's major cities, where immigrants from the Caribbean, South Asia and elsewhere settled in the 1950s and 60s.

By the 1960s in Balsall Heath, an inner city area of Birmingham in the Midlands, one in four residents were black or Asian, and 13% of the population were Irish. When I grew up in the same area in the 1990s, more than 75% of local residents were from ethnic minority backgrounds.

My peers and I were familiar and comfortable with our cultural differences. Friends explained the significance of Ramadan or the kara (the iron bangle often worn by Sikhs) in between lessons and unruly games of football. We even had a particular way of speaking. Our multicultural slang mixed Punjabi insults such as *teri maa di…* (your mother's…) with snippets of Jamaican patois like slack, wicked, wagwan and laters.

Balsall Heath's ethnic makeup yielded culturally significant musical exports. It is the home of UB40, a reggae band formed in 1978 by a group of young men of Scottish, Jamaican and Welsh-Yemeni descent, inspired by the house parties of their Caribbean neighbours.

A generation later, another local resident, Bally Sagoo, became a star of the British bhangra music scene. His distinctive fusions of traditional Punjabi music with hip-hop, reggae and funk earned him the first Hindi-language single to make the UK top 40 in 1996.

The picture today

Multiculturalism is one of the most significant social transformations across Britain as a whole over the last 100 years. In 1942, it was estimated that fewer than 5% of the population had experienced any direct contact with someone from an ethnic minority background. In 1958, almost 75% of people disapproved of mixed-race relationships. In 2012, that figure had dropped to just 15%.

By 2021, more than a third of the population of England were either migrants themselves or else had parents or grandparents born outside of the UK. Birmingham had become one of two cities in which a majority of residents were from ethnic minority populations. And Britain's mixed-race population was approaching two million people. The kind of diversity that I experienced in the 1990s is now a central pillar of the fabric of modern Britain.

This is not to downplay the structural issues that continue to affect ethnic minority communities in Britain, alongside the stubborn, pernicious presence of racism. Rather, it points to the problem with the tired debates about the "failure" of multiculturalism.

Despite Braverman's comments, having a home secretary of Mauritian-Kenyan heritage, serving under Rishi Sunak, Britain's first ethnic minority prime minister, only illuminates the extent to which Britain has now become irreversibly multicultural.