'White flight'? How ethnicity matters for migration in Britain

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"Britons self-segregate as white flight soars" (The Sunday Times, 27th May 2013)

"How rise of 'white flight' is creating a segregated UK" (Mail Online, 6th May 2013)

"Why have white British left London?" (BBC, 20th February 2013)

The release of 2011 Census data showing the ethnic make-up of local areas across Britain produced news headlines in Spring 2013 emphasising the decline of the white British population in some parts of the country. This was framed as a social concern, and explained in relation to ethnic segregation and migration of white (British) populations from diverse areas, commonly termed 'white flight'. These discourses that explain population change in terms of ethnic conflict are by no means new; they were deployed to interpret 2001 and 1991 census data on ethnic group (Finney and Simpson 2009). Furthermore, they draw on decades, even centuries, of racialized interpretations of place (Waquant 2008, Slater and Anderson 2011) and notions of ghettos heavily influenced by north American experiences in the early 20th century and the writings about Chicago by Park and colleagues (Park et al 1925). Popular imagery of racial ghettos as places of deviance, deprivation and danger combined with the authority of census data give social currency to claims that Britain is pulling apart along racial lines as whites flee minority neighbourhoods.

Of course, there is always a news story in segregation, because segregation is never zero; populations are never spread completely evenly by ethnicity (or other social markers) across cities, towns or villages. What is particularly interesting about the recent framing of 'segregation' news stories is that the focus has been on the processes of population change, or, more specifically, the relative change in

population size of white and ethnic minority groups, and the migration patterns that are assumed to shape the ethnic mosaic of Britain. This emphasis on migration patterns, and particularly migration patterns of the white majority, has been the focus of writing by prominent social commentators. David Goodhart, for example, claimed that "It is the figures on racial mix and segregation which reflect the most intractable concerns. The white population is shrinking in all three towns [Bradford, Burnley, Oldham] and the ethnic minority population, mainly south Asian Muslims, is rising." (Goodhart 2011, no page number). As the headlines above illustrate, the predominant interpretation of local ethnic group population change is of ethnically distinct internal migration patterns, particularly 'white flight'.

These interpretations are concerning for two reasons. First, they are not based on evidence. They are not based on data about internal migration and ethnicity that would allow us to assess whether the geographical patterns of population movement within Britain were substantively different for white populations and minority populations. This is because the only data source that has sufficiently large numbers to make robust claims about population change for ethnic groups, and sufficient geographical detail to make robust claims about neighbourhoods, and appropriate information about change of address to allow analysis of internal migration, is the census. At the time of writing in Summer 2014 (let alone at the time of the headlines shown above, in Spring 2013) 2011 Census data on ethnic group and internal migration have not yet been published.

Census data is unrivalled at allowing us to assess, for local areas, how ethnic group populations have changed and how internal migration has contributed to this. However, census data tells us little about the reasons for particular patterns of population change, particular patterns of migration. Claims of 'white flight' – imbued with contentions of ethnic conflict – stretch even the marvellous census data too far.

A second concern about 'white flight' reactions to ethnic group population change is that they detract from issues of social inequality and from scrutiny of British society, its politics, systems and structures that allow and enable inequalities to persist. As James Nazroo has commented, "When was the last time you heard a MP, let alone a minister, talk about ethnicity in terms of inequality?" (Nazroo 2013: 1). To understand why some people (from some ethnic groups) live in some places more than others, it is necessary to understand how choice about place of residence is enabled and constrained which, fundamentally, comes down to where people can afford to live.
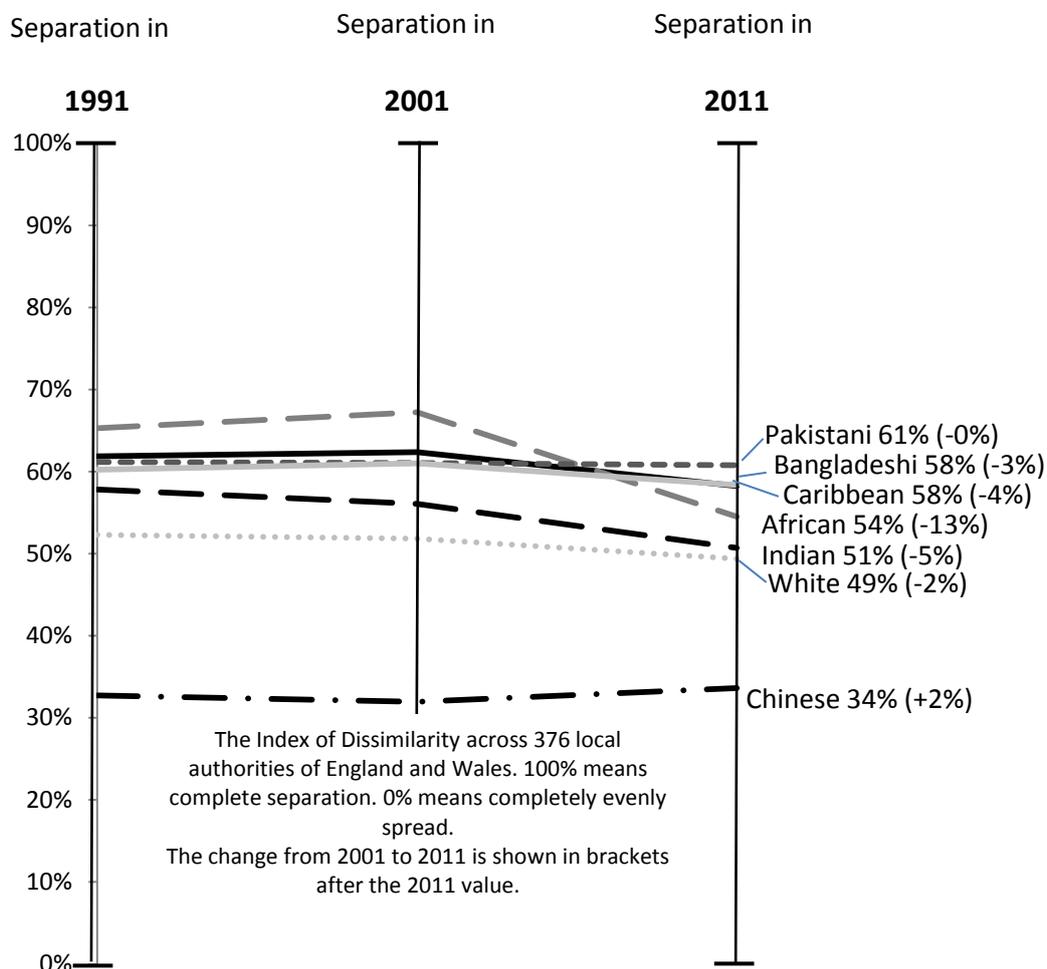
In this article I want to develop these two lines of argument about why we should be sceptical about 'white flight' being a significant social process. In the next section I argue that ethnic mixing rather than segregation characterises population change in Britain; that the best evidence does not concur with 'white flight' claims. I go on to suggest that rather than obsessing over segregation, or speculating about ethnic conflict driving internal migration, research and policy should be directed to ethnic inequalities and to understanding why, after decades of residence in the UK, many minority groups remain severely disadvantaged in ways that impact where they live, and, crucially, where they *can* live. I conclude that analysis of forthcoming 2011 Census data on ethnicity and (internal) migration should be situated in broader understandings of local population change and ethnic inequalities in order to constructively contribute to ongoing debates about 'white flight', the 'housing crisis' and social-spatial polarisation (for a comprehensive review of the latter see Lloyd et al 2014).

Ethnic mixing

If the contention that Britain is pulling apart along racial lines, and white flight is driving division of communities were correct, we would expect to see this reflected in an increase in ethnic residential segregation as neighbourhoods polarise by ethnic group. This is not what was seen in the 1990s (Finney and Simpson 2009) and is not what the latest evidence shows us for the 2000s. For this evidence I draw on work from the ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, namely the series of briefings "Dynamics of Diversity: Evidence from the 2011 Census" (available at www.ethnicity.ac.uk).

Simpson (2013a) shows us that for districts across England and Wales, ethnic residential segregation, measured using the Index of Dissimilarity for Local Authority Districts in England and Wales, decreased between 2001 and 2011 for the Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, Black African, Black Caribbean and White groups (Figure 1). In other words, across districts, these groups were more evenly spread in 2011 than 2001. Local Authority Districts, you might argue, are rather large areas for thinking about segregation, especially if the supposed negative effects are imagined for smaller areas, such as neighbourhoods. Gemma Catney (2013) has taken this on, examining ethnic residential segregation at very small geographical scales. She uses 2001 and 2011 Census data, analysing segregation (Index of Dissimilarity) for Output Areas within Districts. Her results show increased residential mixing within districts for all ethnic minority groups.

Figure 1: Decreasing ethnic residential segregation 1991-2001-2011 (from Simpson 2013)

Separation in   Separation in   Separation in

1991   **2001**   **2011**

Pakistani 61% (-0%)
Bangladeshi 58% (-3%)
Caribbean 58% (-4%)
African 54% (-13%)
Indian 51% (-5%)
White 49% (-2%)

Chinese 34% (+2%)

The Index of Dissimilarity across 376 local authorities of England and Wales. 100% means complete separation. 0% means completely evenly spread.
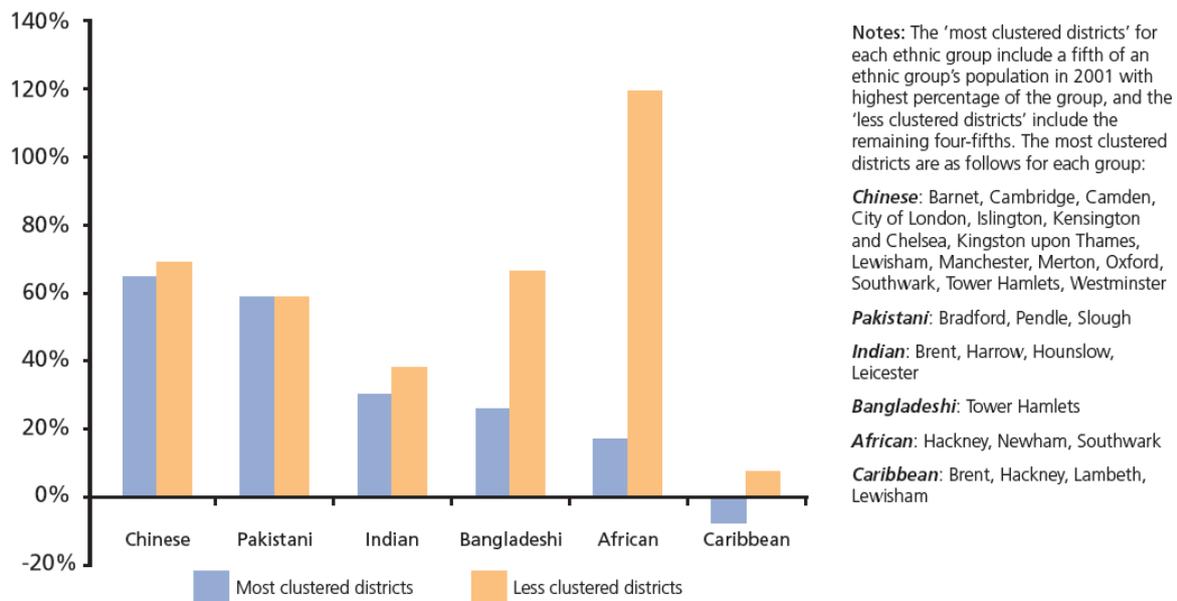The change from 2001 to 2011 is shown in brackets after the 2011 value.

Note: England and Wales. Source: 1991, 2001, 2011 Censuses.

Census data allow us to drill down even below neighbourhood level, to the level of households. For example, it is possible to identify the number of multiple ethnic group households and doing this shows that the 2000s saw increased ethnic mixing in households such that in 2011 one in eight households with more than one resident included people identifying with different ethnic groups (Simpson 2013a).

Although 2011 Census data to directly measure how population movement contributes to this pattern of residential mixing are not yet available, Jivraj (2012) provides an indication of the likely direction of movement by assessing population change in districts where ethnic groups are clustered and elsewhere (Figure 2). The population of each group has grown in places where it is clustered, but the growth has

been greater elsewhere, outside these clusters. This is particularly the case for the Bangladeshi and Black African ethnic groups with the latter seeing their population more than double over the 2000s in areas where they were least clustered in 2001.

Figure 2: Greatest growth of minorities 2001-2011 in districts in which they were least clustered (from Jivraj 2013)

Notes: The 'most clustered districts' for each ethnic group include a fifth of an ethnic group's population in 2001 with highest percentage of the group, and the 'less clustered districts' include the remaining four-fifths. The most clustered districts are as follows for each group:

Chinese: Barnet, Cambridge, Camden, City of London, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston upon Thames, Lewisham, Manchester, Merton, Oxford, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Westminster

Pakistani: Bradford, Pendle, Slough

Indian: Brent, Harrow, Hounslow, Leicester

Bangladeshi: Tower Hamlets

African: Hackney, Newham, Southwark

Caribbean: Brent, Hackney, Lambeth, Lewisham

Note: England and Wales. Source: 2001, 2011 Censuses.

Of course, some of this growth will be natural change, particularly for ethnic minority groups with young population structures (Finney 2010). However, internal migration will be a key driver and these results suggest that dispersal of ethnic minority groups from areas in which they were concentrated that was evidenced in the 1990s continued into the 2000s. Table 1 illustrates this dispersal using 2001 Census data. It shows the net out movement of each minority group from districts in which it was clustered, and net out-movement of the white group from the same set of districts. For example, between 2000 and 2001, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Other South Asians on balance moved out of districts in which they were concentrated (including Bradford and Tower Hamlets) at a rate of 0.34% and Whites moved out of those same districts at a rate of 0.79%. The only exception to these patterns of dispersal common to whites and minorities is of white net in-movement to districts where Black populations were clustered which can be interpreted as an effect of regeneration, particularly in some London boroughs (Butler and Hamnett 2011).

Table 1: Dispersal: net migration of ethnic minority groups and white group from minority concentrations, 2000-2001

	Balance of migration, % of population	
Group concentrations	*Group*	*White*
Indian	**-0.40**	**-1.23**
Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Other South Asian	**-0.34**	**-0.79**
Chinese	**-0.21**	**-1.23**
Black	**-1.65**	**0.13**

Source: Simpson and Finney (2008) using Census 2001 Special Migration Statistics, districts of GB. Migration between 2000 and 2001. Group concentrations are districts containing a fifth of the group population where that group is most concentrated.

Given this evidence, on population movement in the 1990s, and population change producing de-segregation in the 2000s, it would be very surprising if 2011 Census data on ethnicity and migration revealed patterns other than continued dispersal from diverse areas for White and minority groups alike.

What shapes ethnic geographies?

Census data tell us a great deal about patterns of population change. But studying patterns of change takes us only so far in understanding the drivers of that population change, and, more specifically, what ethnicity has to do with it. I suggest here two perspectives – demographic and socio-economic - that can help reveal the processes of population change that shape Britain's ethnic mosaic, and how they can add to our understanding of residential patterns by ethnicity.

Demographic drivers of population change

The population of any place, and the sub-population of any place that may be of particular interest, can grow or decline through two processes: natural change (the balance of births and deaths) and net migration (the balance of in-migration and out-migration). We know that (in the UK) having children and migrating are most common for young adults and dying is most common at older ages. We know too that ethnic minority groups have young age structures and the White British group has a comparatively older age structure (Simpson

2013b). For example, in 2011, 37% of the Pakistani ethnic group was aged under 40 compared to 23% of the White British group in England and Wales. Thus, it is entirely expected that rates of (internal) migration and rates of natural growth will be greater for minority groups than for the White British group. This has and will continue to affect the ethnic mix of local populations and the dynamics of their population change (Finney 2010). In particular, a young minority population will grow in-situ, with or without migration, as families are built. For example, between 1991 and 2001 the Pakistani population in Bradford grew by almost 20,000; this was a result of gains from migration into the city on balance over the decade, but more significantly from natural growth. Indeed, 80% of the population growth – an addition of just under 18,000 people - was a result of an excess of births over deaths (Finney and Simpson 2009). At the same time the White population of Bradford decreased as a result of natural decrease (and out-migration). Absolute and relative changes in ethnic minority population which Goodhart and others are so concerned about, may be largely driven by what can be seen as benign demographic processes of family building.

Socio-economic inequalities and ethnic inequalities in housing

Where people of different ethnic groups live within Britain is part of the story of immigration and colonial history. Where people of different ethnic groups *can* live is part of a story of marked and persistent inequalities. People's residential location is driven not only by preference (for certain facilities or environments, or to be near to family or friends, for example) but by housing markets. Housing choice, or access to various housing markets, depends upon economic means. Those with most resources, in general, have more choice and, in Britain, it is, on the whole, ethnic minorities who have fewest economic resources.

Nazroo and Kapadia (2013) illustrate this in relation to economic activity, showing how some ethnic groups are disadvantaged in the labour market. For example, in 2011 around 6% of White Irish, White British, Chinese and Indian ethnic groups were unemployed; the figure was 10% for Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups and 16% for Black Caribbean and Black African groups. This is concurrent with evidence from the Family Resources Survey that minority groups are more likely than the White British to be poor (Nandi et al 2015 forthcoming). This will inevitably have an effect on the (types of)

neighbourhoods, or housing markets, that are accessible to some ethnic groups, and the type of housing.

One way that differential access to housing is manifest is in changing tenure patterns. A major social trend of the 2000s has been the rise in private renting compared to relative stability of the social renting and owner occupied sectors: between 2001 and 2011 the number of households in private renting grew by 63% to account for the experience of 18% of households in 2011 compared to 12% in 2011. However, both the level of private renting and the change over the 2000s vary between ethnic groups (Finney and Harries, 2015 forthcoming). For example, Chinese, Black African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups have the highest proportions in private renting persistently since 1991 (Finney and Harries 2014): in 2011 a third of Chinese and Black African households lived in private renting compared to the 18% average. Between 1991 and 2011 the rate of increase in proportions in private renting was greatest for Indian, Pakistani and Black Caribbean ethnic groups whose proportion in private renting more than doubled (Figure 3).

These ethnic differences can be seen as problematic because the private rented sector is seen as precarious; relatively insecure and unregulated. Thus some minority groups are particularly exposed to this insecurity and to what has been termed the 'housing crisis' (Smith et al 2014). In relation to understanding migration patterns and local population change, the concentration of some minority groups in certain tenures is relevant because there is a geography to housing by tenure (Thomas and Dorling 2007). If, as has been suggested, the private rented sector has grown because of people facing difficulty accessing home ownership (Smith et al 2014), we can expect migration of minority groups who are over-represented in private renting to move between particular (types of) neighbourhoods where housing of this tenure is available. We might also expect to see increased levels of internal migration or residential mobility given the insecurity of tenancies in the private rented sector and the well-established association between residential mobility and private renting. Taken to a hypothetical extreme, we may see high levels of mobility of Pakistani population between areas characterised by private renting and low levels of White British residential mobility between areas characterised by owner-occupied housing. In this situation we would see ethnically distinct migration patterns driven by socio-economic inequalities rather than ethnic conflict.
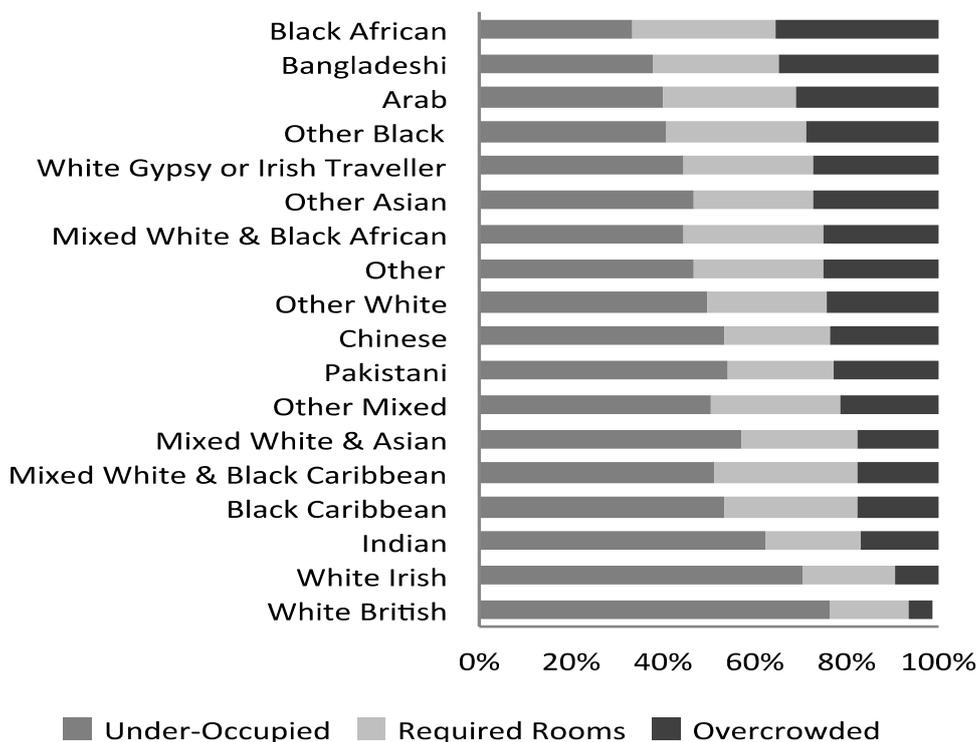
Figure 3: Proportion of ethnic groups in private rented accommodation 1991, 2001, 2011
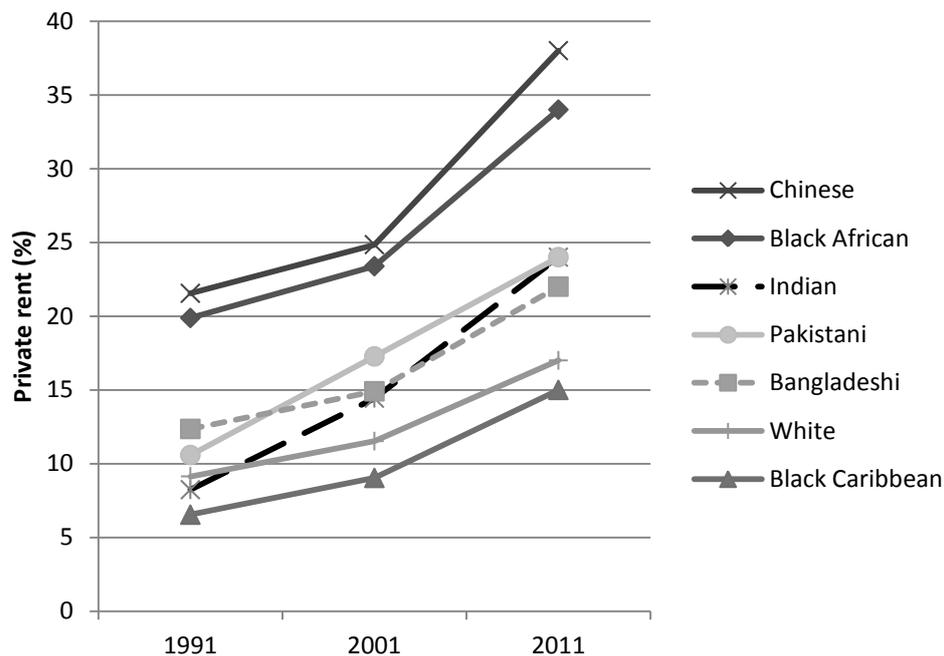
Note: HRPs. England and Wales. Source: 1991, 2001, 2011 Censuses.

Socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups are also evident in housing overcrowding. Figure 4 shows that in 2011 there were large ethnic differences in overcrowding: a third of Bangladeshi and Black African households did not have enough rooms compared to 6% of White British households. Conversely, a third of Bangladeshi and Black African households had spare rooms compared to three quarters of White British households. It has been argued that chronic under-occupancy represents reproduction of inequalities as the wealthy effectively store their assets in surplus rooms (Dorling, 2014). The results in Figure 4 suggest that this reproduction of inequality has an ethnic dimension. Furthermore, in relation to understanding internal migration, these results raise questions about whether there are particular barriers to migration for the purpose of securing housing that better meets the household's needs (housing adjustment migration) for some ethnic groups.

Figure 4: Proportion of ethnic groups in under-occupied, required-size and overcrowded accommodation, 2011

Black African
Bangladeshi
Arab
Other Black
White Gypsy or Irish Traveller
Other Asian
Mixed White & Black African
Other
Other White
Chinese
Pakistani
Other Mixed
Mixed White & Asian
Mixed White & Black Caribbean
Black Caribbean
Indian
White Irish
White British

0%   20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Under-Occupied   ■ Required Rooms   ■ Overcrowded

Note: based on number of rooms, England and Wales. Source: Census 2011.

The 2011 Census data measures overcrowding using an 'occupancy rating'. This is calculated from information from the census household questions which identify who usually lives at the address, the number of people who usually live there and the relationship between residents, together with the age and sex of each resident, combined with responses to questions about the number of rooms in a households. An occupancy rating of zero shows required number of rooms, a positive value shows under-occupancy, and a negative value shows overcrowding. Finney and Harries (2015, forthcoming) provide a definition of ONS calculations of room requirements.

Conclusion

I have argued, primarily by use of census data, that interpreting the changing ethnic mosaic of Britain in terms of 'white flight' is not evidenced and is unhelpful. My argument rests on two pillars: First, that the best evidence of local population change shows desegregation and dispersal from minority clusters which does not suggest that ethnic conflict is the driver of the changing ethnic make-up of neighbourhoods. Second, I have argued that a focus on 'white flight' and ethnic conflict ignores the benign demographic change of family building, which is the primary driver of population growth in many

areas for ethnic minority groups due to their young age structures; and distracts from more fundamental social questions about socio-economic inequalities. Socio-economic inequalities, particularly as they relate to housing and housing choice, influence where people live, and, crucially, where people *can* live.

Despite my argument, I am conscious that interest in segregation is not going to go away. In this case, I suggest that we focus on distinguishing examples of 'good segregation' and identifying problems of 'bad segregation' (Peach 1996) rather than focusing on segregation *per se*. There is no escaping this as a political matter, but discussion of the meaning of segregation is better than unfounded assumptions. And focusing on the meaning of segregation requires attention to be paid to the processes – demographic and social – that drive and result from residential patterns of ethnicity. Robust analysis can contribute to the debate about the meaning of segregation, sometimes challenging conventional discourses. For example, Bangladeshis have been found to have highest levels of very strong neighbourhood belonging, particularly in areas in which they are residentially concentrated, suggesting that these are neighbourhoods that policy-makers should look to for good-practice examples of community cohesion (Finney and Jivraj 2013).

It is hardly possible to emphasise enough the importance of the UK Census for studies of ethnic group populations and their geographies. The Government's agreement, in July 2014, to the UK Statistic's Authority recommendation for a 2021 Census (primarily online) is thus heartily welcomed by those of us interested in small area and ethnic group statistics. As many countries move away from traditional censuses, scholars of ethnicity and population change must relish the opportunity to continue analyses into the 2020s with use of the 2021 UK Census. Yet it is also crucial to take heed of experience from ethnicity debates that have been provoked by the 1991, 2001 and 2011 censuses and to analyse forthcoming 2011 Census data on ethnicity and internal migration, as well as future census data, with a mind on the processes and meaning of population change. This will encourage more constructive debates about segregation and the processes driving it, particularly those that contribute to such marked and persistent disadvantage for some ethnic minority groups.

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