



Diasporas,
migration
& identities



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**From Diasporas to Multi-Locality:
Writing British Asian Cities**

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From the Belgrave Road to the Golden Mile: the transformation of Asians in Leicester

In 1972 the *Leicester Mercury* headlines expressed fear and concern about the influx of East African Asians into the city following their expulsion by Idi Amin in Uganda. Yet in 2001 when the Cattle Report on Community Cohesion was published, the local press in Leicester was considered 'very responsible' and 'seen to be helping to promote cohesion throughout the community.' (Cattle, 2001) In those thirty years Leicester has seen a considerable transformation in its attitudes towards migration into the city, to the extent that it is now considered a model for other cities to follow.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Leicester, but more specifically how areas like Belgrave, Spinney Hills, and Rushy Mead, have been transformed in past thirty-five years and how this has been 'written' about. There are a variety of different sources available which represent and analyse Leicester through different lenses; Martin and Singh (2002) produced a pictorial account; Marrett (1989) offers a historical account of the Ugandan Asians; Law and Haq (2007) have captured local oral histories; Banks (1992) focuses on the small Jain community; Westwood (1984, 1991) has conducted a number of sociological studies based on Leicester; and more recently Herbert's (2008) study of migration and ethnicity attempts to examine both the migrant community and the local white community.

The texts used in this chapter are varied and will utilise both 'official' history and 'personal' private histories. This allows an interrogation of both public and private spaces to be explored. Variations emerge out of the different genres, local government reports and official texts present the public image of Leicester while oral narratives are useful in understanding the personal and lived experiences. When the Leicester workshop was organised for this project at the Peepul Centre, a number of themes emerged. Some of these were specific and unique to Leicester's development. This chapter will therefore pick up some of these themes, such as the strength of local institutions and organisations in abetting the 'success' of the multicultural model and the dominance of the Gujarati Hindus on the characterisation of Leicester. Moreover, one aspect that came across quite strongly during this project was when writing about these cities, it is not so much the cities as it is the localities that we write about. Representing Leicester, or even any of the other cities, is much more about the narrower spaces, wards, or to use the Indian term *mohallas*. Asian Leicester is therefore, Belgrave, Highfields¹, Rushy Meads, Evington and Latimer; the areas most associated with Asians in Leicester. The Belgrave Road in this instance plays an important metaphor, symbolising the transformation of an area that was derelict and abandoned to one which emerges as the representative of multicultural Leicester. However, private histories interpret these public spaces quite differently and so it is important to juxtapose the public and private accounts of Asian Leicester.

¹ In the early 20th century a Jewish community grew up in the Highfields area and after 1945 Polish and Latvian refugees moved into this area. In the 1950s West Indians moved into the area. In the 1960s some Asians came to Leicester and their numbers were swelled in the 1970s when Indians were forced to leave Uganda. <http://www.localhistories.org/leicester.html>

In order to contextualise the city, there is a brief history of migration and settlement into Leicester. This is followed by a discussion of institutional challenges that have emerged to give Leicester its character and finally there is a discussion and a reappraisal of the Leicester model of multiculturalism.

HISTORY OF MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

The post-war history of Asian migration into Leicester has followed a similar pattern to elsewhere in Britain. Many Indians were attracted to Leicester due to the labour shortages and came here to seek prosperity. Until the 1970s, Leicester had been an extremely prosperous city, reaching the dizzy heights of being second wealthiest city in Britain in 1936. Its growth can be seen in the way it gradually absorbed suburban areas around it, encompassing areas such as Belgrave and Evington, which later become magnets for migrants into Leicester. Interestingly the Belgrave Road is also located along the Roman Fosse Way, a reminder of the constant shifting and transformation of these landscapes.

Since the seventeenth century the hosiery trade has been central to Leicester's development and it was this industry that attracted hundreds of Asian immigrants to settle in the 1950s and 1960s. Other prominent industries also included the boot and shoes industries which provided many employment opportunities. This light manufacturing was an area in which women were also able to participate in and the hosiery industry was particularly attractive to Asian women. Sallie Westwood (1984) spent a year on the shop floor with women working in a hosiery company, based on a company in Leicester where a third of the workforce were Asian women.

What is quite different about Leicester is how Asian migration into Leicester is comparatively late vis-à-vis other British cities, this in part may explain the slow development in writing Leicester; most of the literature begins to emerge in the late 1980s and 1990s. Large numbers of people only begin to migrate in the 1970s when other cities in the Midlands, such as Birmingham and Coventry, had established communities. Coventry indeed was leading the way with political activism with the establishment of the Indian Workers Association in 1938 (Virdee, 2007). These early activities in places like Coventry became an important focal point for new migrants who gravitated towards the established communities. Val Marrett suggests that one of the reasons why Leicester attracted migrants later on was that it had high female workforce working in the hosiery industry and by the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a shortage of operatives, thus prompting migrants from other cities to migrate to Leicester. This might also explain why early, predominately male, migrants were not attracted to Leicester.

Table 1 below illustrates how some migration had started in the 1950s, this gradually increased in the 1960s, but it was really in 1971 that a significant rise in the South Asian population is recorded. During the 1960s a combination of the changes in immigration law, chain migration and families re-uniting lead to significant increases in other established communities but Leicester differs from other 'Asian' cities is that a large number of Ugandan Asians made this city their home, as Table 1 indicates. Although a large segment of the Leicester mix are East African and more specifically Ugandan, it is important to highlight that Leicester has also attracted European migrants, namely the migration of Poles (3,000), Ukrainians (3,000), Serbs (500), and Lithuanians (Winstone, 1996).

New migration in the 1990s has included Poles and Somalis. Again looking at Table 1 the mix and diversity present in Leicester is considerable because it includes South Asians who are regionally, ethnically and religiously diverse. The simple race binaries of White and Black is therefore not appropriate, as the multiplicity of identities make Leicester far more complex. The ensemble of Asians in Leicester include direct migrants from the sub-continent, twice migrants from East Africa, migrants from other parts of England and this is layered with the multiple religious and caste identities. Compared to cities like Bradford and Manchester there is a more cosmopolitan feel to Leicester.

Table 1 South Asian Migration into Leicester, 1951-2001 according to place of birth

	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
India	569	1,827	11,510	18,235	20,841	24,677
Pakistan	49	109	775	1,305	1,155	1,854
Bangladesh	-	-	685	-	-	1,051
East Africa	18	1,630	6,835	18,622	17,168	18,843
Total	636	3,566	19,805	38,162	39,164	46,425

Source: Source: Bonney, 2003 and National Census

In a document by Leicester City Council, *The Diversity of Leicester* (2008) it is clear that there are significant minorities within Leicester; 45% are Christian, 15% Hindu, 11% Muslim, 4% Sikh and the Jewish, Bahai, Jain and Buddhist community all represented within this mix. Equally diverse are the multiple places of worship, accommodating the different sects, castes and regions. While going through Andrew Moore's *Where Leicester has Worshipped* (2008)² it becomes clear how the landscape has gradually changed since the 1970s. Churches, industrial premises, commercial properties, residential properties, warehouses and even a public house have all been listed as former uses for what are now places of worship. Richard Bonney during the Leicester workshop talked about the accessibility of Leicester and the convenience by which one could walk around the city and come across a number of different religious buildings. This compact nature of the city appears to give the impression of a city that is rich in ethnic and religious diversity, yet at ease with this multicultural identity (city report).

Martin and Singh (2002:16-20) provide a useful visual overview of the changing landscape in Leicester; it illustrates the wards changing and adapting to the new inflows of people. The data on the wards provides a valuable snapshot of the local populations; however, statistics always lack the human dimension in understanding how migration has effected local populations and the experiences of people who have migrated. While Martin and Singh do not include any oral accounts they do provide a useful pictorial history of the Asians in Leicester.

THE EAST AFRICAN CONNECTION

One of the striking features about Leicester is not only does it have a strong East African connection but it is also has a strong Gujarati Hindu presence. Outside London, Leicester has the largest Hindu community in England and Wales with

² The document lists: 37 Church of England, 15 Roman Catholic, 69 non-conformist, 19 Evangelical, 15 Pentecostal, 13 Baptist, 11 Methodists and 11 United Reform; 22 Hindu temples; 26 Sunni mosques; 2 Shia mosques; 7 Gurdwaras; 2 Synagogues and 1 Jain temple (*The Diversity of Leicester*: 2008:6)

41,248 at the last census. The issue of 'Hindu Leicester' was raised at the final symposium for this project and it was pointed out that many Hindus in the Midlands are drawn to Leicester because of the attractions of specialist retail outlets, the religious institutions and of course the family connections. There is in addition a Midland 'thing' about who goes to Birmingham and who goes to Leicester; their positioning within the Midlands suggests that an element of competition exists between the two cities. While London is big enough to absorb all the diversity and create clusters, regional cities are much more open and specialised in a sense.

The dominant discourse surrounding Leicester is about the story of the East African migration to Leicester. Within that broad label there are ethnic and religious differences, as mentioned previously, but there is also an over-arching regional identity which distinguishes them from migrants who come directly from the sub-continent. This group consisted of Hindus, Muslims, Ismailis, from Gujarat and also Sikhs from Punjab. As this group had already migrated from India to East Africa they are often referred to as "twice migrants" (Bhachu, 1985). They are a product of the colonial linkages between Britain, India and East Africa. Many Indians were lured and persuaded to migrate to Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi and South Africa during colonial rule in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century; having already migrated once many of these families were migrating again.

In 1972 the government of Uganda, headed by Idi Amin declared that all of the 80,000 people of Indian origin had 90 days to leave; this was part of the Africanisation policies being pursued at the time. The former residents of Uganda were forced to flee and abandon their homes and businesses. Due to the imperial links there was a responsibility on the motherland to provide refuge. However, in Britain it was a difficult time because of the increasing activities of the National Front, a slow down in the economy and strained public services; it is the backdrop of this that the city of Leicester decides to place an advert in the *Ugandan Argus* to deter further migration into Leicester. It stated:

The City Council of Leicester, England, believe that many families in Uganda are considering moving to Leicester. If YOU are thinking of doing so it is very important you should know that PRESENT CONDITIONS IN THE CITY ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THOSE MET BY EARLIER SETTLERS. They are:-
HOUSING – several thousands of families are already on the Council's waiting list.
EDUCATION – hundreds of children are awaiting places in schools
SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES – already stretched to the limit (Val Marett)

The local authority therefore urged people to accept the advice of the Uganda Resettlement Board and 'not come to Leicester'. In addition the *Leicester Mercury* also supported the campaign and had headlines of 'Whitehall told: no more – Leicester is full up' (Martin and Singh, 27). The advert since has become infamous for its treatment of the East African Asians. It is widely quoted in writing the racial history of 'Asian Leicester', with many writers using it as a convenient starting point for discussing the transformation of Leicester.

Looking the impact of the advert on the actual lives, Mahmood Mamdani provides a compelling account. He was a third-generation East African and was educated in the elite institutions of Tufts and Harvard and has since become one of the most influential intellectuals in America. In 1972 he was one of the many people who were expelled and in 1973 wrote a personal memoir of the last ninety days in Uganda, 'During the last few weeks in Uganda our thoughts wondered to Britain. What would it be like there? Every colonial child grew up with the notion that the motherland was the greenest pasture on earth, that the English tree had the sweetest fruit' (1973: 63). Though Mamdani soon discovered the reality of what might happen upon his arrival to the motherland as a Nairobi newspaper reported on the reception of new immigrants:

"He [the reporter] visited London and Leicester and wrote extensively of the graffiti on the tube station wall, on posters, on buildings, everywhere: 'wogs out.' To top it all, Uganda Argus carried a series of advertisements from the city of Leicester. The message was clear: there are too many Asians here already, so please go elsewhere. The advertisement, however, backfired. Most people had by then heard of England and of London. But now they knew there was some place called Leicester, where there were numerous Asians. All those who had been undecided as to where to go, and there were many, after reading of the hostile reactions of the British public in general, started making arrangements to go to Leicester." (Mamdani, 65)

It was the many undecided people who then opted to come to Leicester and their presence has given Leicester a completely different character to places like Bradford and Manchester; the image of Leicester is very much distinctly East African Gujarati Asian.

The background of these migrants is also important, as many of them arrived with entrepreneurial skills, a good education and skills which were easily transferable. As a result they adapted easily to the local economy by establishing a successful Asian business sector (Vertovec, 1994). One of Mamdani's stories comes to mind, when he is writing about the days leading up to their expulsion, he recounts when he was standing in the blistering heat in a queue at the Uganda Immigration Office next to his neighbour. One of the officials was checking their paperwork when suddenly his neighbour decides to question him, 'So you think we milked the cow but didn't feed it?' His neighbour continues to probe and push him further to consider what an Asian would do in his position. He then says, 'If I were in your place, I'd have a stand of Coca Cola out there, pay somebody to sell the cokes and maybe some groundnuts, and make myself some money' (pp45-46) People laughed but the next day they saw a stand of Coca Cola. Their entrepreneurial ability is something which is a key factor in re-igniting the fortunes of the Belgrave Road; a declining shopping area in mid-60 area that was designated to be demolished. Seliga in his historical account notes that in 1965, Belgrave was overwhelmingly a white working-class neighbourhood with strong community linkages amongst the population. (p 239)

Bhachu's (1985) anthropological study suggests that the skills, education and urban orientation of the Sikh community she examined meant that they became one of the most progressive communities when they migrated to the UK. Furthermore, when the community migrated to Britain there is no myth of return (Anwar, 1979), compared with the direct migrants who maintained close links

with the homeland and initially hoped to return. This illusion of return to the homeland, whether this was real or imagined, that many of the direct migrants from the sub-continent came with was largely absent amongst the migrants from Africa. On the whole they migrated as complete family units and were fleeing their homes rather than migrating for economic reasons. By holding onto this myth of returning home, direct migrants in comparison were able to minimise contact with wider society in an attempt to preserve their links with the homeland (Bhachu, 1985:166) but as a result they maintained their 'transient' (Dahya, 1973) status until the 'myth' had dissipated. Though Bhachu's study focused on the Sikh community, the analysis can be broadened to include other groups such as the twice migrant Gujaratis. The experience of migration can be said to ease the process of adaptation to a new country, a desire to rebuild their life and flexibility in learning new languages; a process the East African Asian had already been through. Singh also cites the crucial role played by the "twice migrants" with their entrepreneurial acumen. 'Ethnic business success in Leicester is symbolised in the Belgrave Road "Golden Mile" which has become a retail and commercial centre of international renown.' (Singh, 2003:45) The social capital that the Gujarati or Sikh community from East Africa had was therefore essential in ensuring their smooth and more successful transition.

Many of the migrants that first came to Leicester settled in the Highfields area. Val Marrett in her historical account of the Ugandan Asians note how the inner city ward of Highfields offered cheap accommodation which had not gone through the post-war gentrification (1989:3). Due to the neglect of this area, Highfields had already attracted other migrants, most notably the Irish, the Poles and the West Indian community. The Ugandan Asians and the in particular the Hindu community came to be much more prevalent around Belgrave and Melton Road which is located north of the city centre with an overflow into the Narborough Road in the east. The clustering of the communities, especially in the Belgrave area, occurred for two main reasons, one as Karen Chauhan from the Peepul Centre points out because of the wider racism in the community and secondly because of the 'positive reinforcement of culture'.

Jaffer Kappasi, a participant in the Leicester workshop, spoke about his experiences of coming to Leicester from Uganda in 1972. He reflected on the fact that the majority of Ugandan Asians were self-employed and had never worked for anyone. For him the Ugandan Asians were pivotal in reviving the economy of Leicester at a time when businesses were closing; the refugees were enterprising and took over flagging shops and manufacturing. The success of Asian businesses has been well documented; (Robinson, 1990; for a discussion see Westwood and Bhachu, 1988) including a separate business association, Leicestershire Asian Business Association. Singh notes that many of these businesses have 'substantial transnational trading links with Europe, South Asia and North America. Ethnic business success in Leicester is symbolised in the Belgrave Road "Golden Mile" which has become a retail and commercial centre of international renown.' (Singh, 2003 in Ali, Kalra and Sayyid: 296)

Tim Law and Bill Haq have both worked extensively in Leicester to capture the memories of the communities and producing oral accounts of migrant experiences. In *Belgrave Memories* (2007), Suraj Khandelwal, who opened one of the first businesses on Belgrave Road (later opening one of the main attractions on Melton Road, Saree Mandir), talks about the transformation of Belgrave:

All the mainstream shops were here on Belgrave Road, such as: Woolworths, John Cheatles, Fine Fare, Boots, Timothy Whites and Wilkinson. Gradually from 1964 we saw the disappearance of all the mainstream, shops. I felt quite bad because we never wanted this area to be known as dominated by the Asians. This was not our intention at all, unfortunately any derelict areas are taken over by the Asians because they are cheap. People who started coming from Africa especially from Kenya, they all decided to buy properties and business premises on Belgrave Road. (Law and Haq: 58)

As these areas grew and prospered, the Belgrave Road transformed itself into the 'golden mile'. The Belgrave Road and its surrounding areas as result became Indianised spaces, catering to the migrant community's demands of saris, religious paraphernalia and authentic *sabzis* (vegetables). Run for and by the Asian community, these spaces were initially a peripheral feature of the ethnic economy, but have consequently taken on a central feature in branding Leicester as a multicultural city.

TOWARDS AN ASIAN LEICESTER

Although Asians are most notably identified with business, early political activism has also played a crucial part in defining Leicester and providing the political space required to bring in the migrant community into the civic life of Leicester. The Imperial Typewriters strike, the Belgrave Bahenos (meaning sisters) and the Redstar Youth movement are all examples of these early encounters of political activism that have reshaped the political landscape. Socially and culturally, however, food and festivals have played an important part in Indianising public spaces; there has recently been a number of text that have explored the migrant experience through the 'food and festivals' approach.

Karen Chauhan³ who spoke at the opening of the Leicester workshop was a product of that entrepreneurial class but her experiences have been overlaid with the politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Representing The Peepul Centre, the venue for the Leicester workshop, Karen captured the essence of a politically energetic Leicester that was not afraid to challenge the status quo during that turbulent period. Karen started by explaining the origins of the centre which lay in the back-drop of the National Front activism and emergence of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. It was a period of unrest but also an opportunity to become politically active and so five local women started the Belgrave Girls Youth Movement in 1979 with its philosophy on Asian women and girls working together in sisterhood. The Belgrave Baheno's were the foundation of what became the Peepul Centre, whose board today comprises predominantly of Asian women. These women, as Karen pointed out, had a strong political ethic of not taking no for an answer. She went on to make parallels with the Ugandan Asians, who when warned off coming to Leicester become more determined, and so they pursued their ambitious plans to open the multi-million Peepul Centre. Karen encapsulated the Leicester 'model', she articulated the ambition and struggle of the East African Asians coming to run-down areas like Belgrave and though faced with opposition, the determinism ensured a transformation of the area. What was

³ Karen was selected by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, in May 2005, to be one of seven 'visionaries' with *ideas to change the world*.

striking about this was that compared with the other city workshops, the strength of women in cultural and political fabric of Leicester was much more pronounced. Using Bhachu's analysis, we can attribute some of this to the fact that the East African Asians were a highly urbanised community; their ability to re-establish institutions and social networks so rapidly can be attributed to the social capital they brought with them. Therefore, rather than remaining marginal, women have also been a key component in shaping the agenda.

This period of political activism certainly plays an important part in the development of the Asian community in Leicester. Starting from 1968 when Enoch Powell made his 'Rivers of Blood' speech in nearby Birmingham to the National Front winning their highest number of votes (10,000 votes) in local elections, Leicester was undergoing immense change leading to increasingly politicised community. The Imperial Typewriters dispute in 1974 was a testament to that political activism when the workers walked out; original walk-out of forty Asian workers then swelled to 500 workers. Rex and Tomlinson writing in 1979 reveal the unequal treatment meted out to the Asian workers, who were being denied an extra £4 a week in their pay packets (Rex and Tomlinson: 123-4). The strike at the Imperial Typewriters followed other disputes involving Asian workers at the Wolf plant in Southall, the Mansfield Hosiery Mills dispute in Loughborough and Coventry Art Castings in Nuneaton. These issues brought in focus disputes surrounding pay, conditions, and racism that was prevalent in the work place. It also highlighted the issue of the Unions failing to support its Asian members fully (Rex and Tomlinson: 123). Keith Thompson in *Under Siege: Racial Violence in Britain* (1988) is less reticent in exposing institutional racism The TGWU official George Bromley in response to the Imperial Typewriters strike is quoted as saying 'They've got to learn to fit in with our way, you know. We haven't got to learn to fit in with theirs...in a civilized society the majority view will prevail.' Bill Batstone, the chairman of the TGWU, went further in an interview with Radio Leicester and quote in *Race Today*, 'The Asians cannot come here and make their won rules' (Thompson, 1988:73).

At the time Imperial Typewriters was a big employer in the area and Sadru Sayani, a refugee from Uganda, highlighted the ease with which people managed to get work there (Belgrave Memories: 64). However, by 1974 Imperial Typewriters closed down but the industry which started in 1902 in Leicester is still part of the contemporary Leicester discourse. Interestingly the former Imperial Typewriter's building located in East Park Road (Coleman Ward) is today converted into a series of units specialising in fashion manufacturing and catering mostly to the 'ethnic economy'; though it still retains its previous identity and is know as the Imperial Typewriter Buildings. Nearby in Ashfordby Street and Atkinson Street, Imperial's canteen has been converted into Jame Mosque (Moore, 62) and caters to the largely Muslim population in this ward and the adjoining Spinny Hills.

Inner city disenchantment was clearly visible by now and 1981 is a year associated with, amongst other things, the Brixton riots; this violent expression was born out of the context of racism in declining cities. In Leicester, Red Star, a football team and youth movement, was born out of these disillusioned voices. An amalgam of voices seeking attention from the city leaders, Red Star was often involved in confrontational politics in an attempt to get the local leadership to address their problems. Avtar Brah's research with young Asian people in Leicester both expresses and analyses the ways in which racism and

unemployment are articulated in 1980s Britain with the consequences that the young people felt that their future was bleak (Brah, 1986:67). The Red Star project was itself an example of this political consciousness and the refusal of young black men of Asian and Afro-Caribbean descent to be cast as victims in the system. Instead a more positive approach was adopted in order to be active agents in shaping and determining the future of Leicester. Sallie Westwood notes that Leicester was, 'wary of the view of Leicester as a sleepy, peaceful, provincial city that has, through mutual tolerance, generated racial harmony, a harmony demonstrated by the election of an Asian mayor in 1987/8' (Westwood, 1991: 104).

In 'writing Leicester' Red Star is an intriguing blend of the disillusioned youth growing up with mixed-up identities; where your 'black' identity was challenged by your religious identity. For some young Muslim men, as Westwood noted, it provided a form of 'rebellion against a Muslim identity as their *only* identity. They wanted both because they recognised the need for both, and they lived with the contradictions, playing football but not drinking, going to the mosque but also being part of the occupations of the building, and taking on a black identity as a felt solidarity with other Red Star members' (Westwood, 1991: 110). At the Leicester workshop Tirathpal Naute spoke about his own personal experiences of being involved Red Star and Nirvana FC. For him the Red Star youth group was born of the experiences of a group of friends in the Highfields area, which was happening against the backdrop of racial incidents, police harassment and the summer riots in 1981. In the face of limited opportunities, Naute noted that the Asian and Afro-Caribbean youth became politically involved, joining the Labour movement and with the Red Star youth centre offering them an opportunity to get involved in sport, especially football. The team reformed under the name Nirvana FC in 1984 but retained the strong local community links with the poorer areas associated with migrants such as Highfields, Evington, St. Matthews and Belgrave. John Williams notes the positive contribution of Nirvana, 'It is a welcome home for the otherwise excluded and isolated – a true local melting pot around the integrative sport of football' (Asians Can Play Football, 2005:20).

There has of course been a transformation in the club's fortunes, with the early period capturing the anxiety of the youth movement and a form of rebellion for many, the club is now considered a model for developing grassroots activities. This transformation is apparent in the work by Jas Bains, former Chair of the National Asians in Football Forum, who in 1996 published 'Asians Can't Play Football' while in 2005 the title has been amended to 'Asians Can Play Football', reflecting the changes that have taken place during that period.⁴ However, one aspect which still remains is that space occupied by Red Star and football today, as before, is primarily masculine. When Sallie Westwood did her study of Red Star she found that it was never a place where young women and girls could go as it was considered inappropriate. 'Its members were 'youth', a category of young men, and this was turned into collectivism through the adoption of machismo styles of politics' (Westwood, 1991: 109). These early male orientated associations undoubtedly gave women, like the Belgrave Behenos, to seek alternative spaces in which their 'own' interests could be represented and developed; a forum for female voices.

⁴ Foxes Against Racism partnership in Leicester, <http://www.kickitout.org/227.php>

In 'writing' migrant histories the motif of food is to be found everywhere. Recently there have been a number of books, written in different genres, which have attempted to understand the migrant experience through the prism of food. Panayi, *Spicing Up Britain: The Multicultural History of British Food* (2008) approaches the subject historically; Buettner (2008) has explored the wider acceptance and authenticity of the "Indian"; and Kershen, *Food in the Migrant Experience* (2002) has approached the subject both historically and comparatively. More journalistic endeavours include Alibhai-Brown's *The Settlers Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration and Food* (2009) and Sardar's *Balti Britain* (2008) which both offer more personalised accounts. Though 'the Indian' has emerged as a success story of Asian restaurant business; in Leicester what is unique is the influence of the vegetarian Gujarati cuisine. This is distinct from other cities such as the Balti in Birmingham, the curry houses in Manchester and Bradford where the Miripuri influence is more prevalent and the dominance of the Bengali community in Tower Hamlets. The strength of regional South Asian communities therefore provides regional flavours to these cities, giving them their own distinct identities.

In Leicester the impact of the Asian community on the food industry only emerges in the late 60s and early 70s after the migration of East African Asians, with shops initially opening in the Highfields area. The needs of the Asians were often filled by the entrepreneurial-minded individuals who operated a door-to-door business (Panayi, 2002: 51 and Virdee, 2006) delivering specialist foodstuff and spices. Food has been an integral feature in the growth of the Asian community's confidence. The specialist shops not only provided the basic staples of Indian cuisine, they also filled another vital social function. Anwar in his study of the Muslim community in Rochdale notes that such shops 'acted as dissemination points for various types of information relating to the community... [they were] also used as meeting points and for spreading information about different activities in the community' (Hamlett et. al. 2008: 104). The specialist Indian shop could in many ways be compared to the village shop or post office in rural areas, connecting people and providing a sense of community.

Undoubtedly food has played an important feature in understanding the impact of migration in Britain, however, Joanna Herbert has written about the migrant community and their memories of food. She conducted interviews with South Asians from both the Indian subcontinent and East Africa who reminisced about their childhood and the associated memories of food. For those from East Africa, food evoked memories associated with Uganda, alluding to their distinct identity as East African Asians (Herbert, 2006). The influences of ingredients such as *ugali* (maize flour), cassava, yam, sweet potatoes, are distinctly East African and are present in food cooked by East African Asians. Conversely middle class East African Asians from cities were already familiar with British food and coming to Britain posed no great challenge. However as Herbert noted, it was also an expression of their former identity and lifestyle which was superior, this was evident in the cultural capital amassed in areas such as a British education, a status car (usually Mercedes), and language (Herbert, 2006: 136-7). Food memories were often an attempt to perhaps emphasise their former lifestyle, rather than the life they are now forced to live in.

Food as the migrant motif works on multiple levels, it allows forms of cultural expression and is an integral part of cultural identity, conversely it also offers a public space where cultural divides can be bridged and allow communities to mix

in a none intrusive space. Panayi in writing about the history of 'curry' in Leicester notes an intriguing booklet by two English women, *Indian Food in Leicester*, written in 1986 and published by Beaumont Leys School, it represents an early attempt by the white community to understand the different religious groups through food. A recipe on 'Indian-style baked beans' (Panayi, 2002: 59) highlights out the new fusion style cooking of the British Asian but perhaps picked up by Ferrar and Rogers because 'baked beans' are a way to connect and bridge cultural gaps. In 2001, Robin Cook, then foreign secretary, famously said in his speech, 'Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Massala sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy.' (The Guardian, 2001) This populist approach to multiculturalism is often employed by educationists and local governments⁵ to bridge the cultural gaps between community members; its long term contribution to community cohesion is an area that has not been explored fully.

Combined with food, festivals play an important function in allowing communities to express themselves publicly. In Leicester there are plenty of these, Diwali, Navratri, Belgrave Mela, Caribbean Carnival, and Pride Mardi Gras all feature prominently in the local calendar. Festivals, or perhaps more appropriately *mela* captures more of the essence because it is a great opportunity for people to come together but it could fall into the trap of what Cynthia Brown talks about as the 'food and festivals' approach (city report); merely a superficial encounter rather than a deeper appreciation of each other that binds the community together. Reading some of the literature produced to promote the city to potential students the theme of food and festivals is marketed fully:

The Belgrave Mela, an Asian carnival, runs over two days in June...Longer nights welcome lighting-up time in the city with fireworks in Abbey Park and magical illuminations along Belgrave's Golden Mile for the Hindu celebrations of Navratri and Diwali, the festival of light. The city's Diwali (Hindu Festival of Light) celebration in October is the country's largest and best and a must for every student to experience. You can be sure of an even warmer welcome than ever in the restaurants and shops of Belgrave and Melton Road, and the opportunity to see some wonderful performances of Indian dance. (<http://www.visitleicester.co.uk/england/leicester-student-city.php> accessed 15 May 2009)

Gurharpal Singh is more critical of this approach because he argues that the local authority has approached the issue of discrimination and community cohesion through the celebration of religious and cultural festivals such as Diwali, Eid and Vaisakhi. 'These narrow boundaries have remained the source of strength and weakness of the multicultural experiment in Leicester' (Singh, 2003:44). For the ethnic community it does provide the symbolic public recognition and 'ethnifies' their own local public space by assuming ownership. For example the Sikh community over the years in Leicester has organised annual *nagar kirtans* (a public parade of singing of hymns, often organised by their local gurdwara) to coincide with specific celebrations. Singh and Tatla highlight how these 'festivals

⁵ Cynthia Brown at the Leicester workshop was critical of the 'food and festival' approach taken by local oral histories. This in part is a result of the Heritage Lottery Fund which tends to support projects exploring and emphasising cohesion.

have become a regular feature of British urban life, providing new forms of pilgrimage and socialisation for the Sikh young. One of the consequences of this development is that a city like Leicester, which views itself as premier multicultural city in Europe, has been transformed into a 'city of festivals' (Singh and Tatla, 2006: 143). While Leicester city council is actively engaged in promoting 'festivals' as way of marketing Leicester as a 'multicultural' city to what extent do festivals become all-embracing? *Nagar Kirtans* are still predominately Sikh, Navratri which has become one of the biggest attractions in Leicester is still associated with the Hindu community and *eid* is largely celebrated by Muslims. Yet even that simplifies the complex make-up of the Asian community which is further segregated around caste and region.

A MODEL CITY?

Leicester is often heralded as a 'model' of multicultural cohesion and this was especially visible following the race riots in the northern cities of Bradford, Burnely and Oldham in 2001. In a sharp contrast to these cities, Leicester seems to have been able to negotiate a space for itself which exemplifies racial tolerance and harmony between its communities. In 2001 the Home Office set up a number reviews including an independent review led by Ted Cante in order identity ways of identify and promoting good practice, key policy issues and new and innovative thinking in the field of community cohesion. The Cante Report held up places like Leicester as offering a model for other cities, identifying areas of good practices. They identified:

In Southall and Leicester in particular it was clear to us that there was a pride in their community and this was evident amongst many of the residents. It was also notable that diversity was seen as a positive thing and this was shown in schools where for instance pupils learnt about different religions and cultures and on the streets where festivals of all faiths were celebrated. This positive approach to diversity was adopted by the political, civic and faith leaders who held regular meetings with each other to discuss issues affecting the community and this openness and honesty meant that rumours and misunderstandings were less likely to gain credence and ferment resentment or jealousy. (Cante p 15)

Even the Cante report highlighted how the celebration of different religious festivals enhanced the image of the community. The Cante report is seen to be beginning of the end of multiculturalism. It firmly laid responsibility on ethnic segregation and on the 'parallel lives' of whites and non-whites for the disturbances and suggested more "mixing" within communities to address some of these problems. Yet, Leicester is also segregated and clusters of groups exist within this otherwise multicultural space. The Muslim community is concentrated in the Spinney Hill and Stonegate wards, the Hindu community is principally located in Latimer, Belgrave and Rushey Mead wards, and the Sikh community is much scattered across the city without being concentrated in any particular area. (Bonney, p 1 2007) Singh also notes the segregated nature of Leicester, 'Whether voluntary or enforced, the pattern of ethnic minority settlement in Leicester remains highly segregated. (Singh, 2003:46) Seliga for his Master's research found that the Belgrave area was completely transformed:

In a relatively short period of time, Indian migrants, particularly those who arrived from East Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s, have used processes of residential segregation and social encapsulation to strive for economic success, recreate social networks and preserve religious and cultural life, in the process reinvigorating the inner-city neighbourhood of Belgrave. (Seliga, pp239-240)

He goes on to describe it as a 'Gujarati Hindu neighbourhood' yet, despite the segregated neighbourhoods, Leicester has managed to keep a lid on tensions.

The success of the Leicester model has been reinforced and critically examined by a number of different writing. Singh, a political scientist, has written extensively on the city and has attempted to investigate the underlying reasons for the Leicester model, while Richard Bonney⁶ (2003; 2007) approaches Leicester through the need for inter-faith and inter-cultural understandings. Paul Winstone⁷ (1996) usefully provided an insiders perspective of Leicester City Council. However, there are of course limitations to these genres. Much of the analysis focuses on the political narrative of Leicester and the role of institutions. Indeed, institutions are vital and Gurharpal Singh (2003) in his reflections on the 'Leicester Model' attempts to critically scrutinise the reasons behind this. One key factor is the patron-client relationship between the local authority and ethnic community groups; this 'allowed new ethnic minority leadership within the city to be co-opted into key structures of power' (Singh, 2003:44) which coincided and prospered under the patronage of the Labour Party in Leicester since 1979. As an example Leicester has had four Asian Lord Mayors and in 2008 Leicester had the first Asian woman Lord Mayor. This combined with the city's diverse and thriving economy, at a time when northern industrial towns were severely hampered by the downturn and unemployment, has helped Leicester maintain a strong position.

The postscript to the Leicester model is in the way it responds to the challenges of two inter-related themes. Firstly, how will Leicester deal with the becoming the first minority white or majority non-white city in Europe, and secondly, the associated issue of 'white flight'. Both are controversial and disputed issues. In a number of differing reports Leicester is cited as becoming the first white minority city by 2011, however Finney and Simpson (2009) suggest that this is something that may occur but more likely by 2019. Moreover, these figures tend to mask the general demographic spread of communities within the city. As mentioned earlier, it is better to speak of wards or *mohallas*, these more accurately represent ethnic profile of these localities. And it is these wards where there is greater variations and can mask the true make-up of the ethnic profile. But as was raised at the Leicester workshop, a rational approach does not detract from the public panic over English cities gradually becoming Asianised.

As cities like Leicester had gradually changed and adopted a new identity, the focus of much of the writing has focused on the minority communities coming into these cities. Less is said on the existing white communities. White communities are often represented through the issue of 'white flight', an inconvenient term which again masks a number of concerns. Decline in numbers may be due to low birth rates amongst that community, increase in other

⁶ Founder of the Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism at the University of Leicester

⁷ A senior policy officer in the Chief Executive's office of Leicester City Council

communities or then there maybe genuine social mobility in people choosing to move to the suburbs of Leicester but regardless of the reason the concerns by the White community are real. Hussian, Law and Haq in *The Intercultural State* also delve into these sensitive areas. The oral accounts provide a glimpse of how some people view Asian Leicester. For example, 'I cannot see any English or White people around Belgrave' (18-19) suggest that while people have enjoyed the Asianised spaces Cantle's fear of 'parallel lives' is also not too distant. Furthermore, speaking to the White residents and there is equal fear amongst them about the loss of their own traditions as increasingly some feel marginalised in their own neighbourhood, 'I would say we are actually in the minority in our street now' (Hussian, Law and Haq, 24). It is here the Joanna Herbert (2008) recent contribution may help in understanding both communities. Herbert, attempts to capture the views of both the local white community and people who have migrated to Leicester. While concerns and the fear of the unknown were certainly expressed, Herbert is keen to balance this with those who have had positive encounters between the communities.

CONCLUSION

The process of selecting any material is subjective but the hope was to provide a hint of Asian Leicester. It is city most associated with Gujarati Hindus from East Africa, yet it is much more than that. The text selected here hopefully show the variety and complexity of this city. The East African linkages obviously give Leicester a very different flavour from other cities, such as Bradford, Manchester or even Tower Hamlets, but they also have much in common with these multi-cultural and glocal cities. The different texts represented here also show a community which has increasingly become more confident and also one which is much more culturally expressive in claiming public spaces. The challenge for Leicester, a city which has experienced the impact of migration later than other cities in this study, is how to adapt to the new status of 'white minority city' which is looming nearby.

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