

Introduction

On 25 May 1963, readers of *The Middlesex County Times (Southall Edition)* were taken aback by grisly news: the local Scout movement had recently lost as many as thirteen boys, all leaders of troops whose parents had fled to further suburban towns. W.J. Hubbard, the District Scout commissioner, acknowledged that “this was understandable”, because “they feared that their children’s education would be held back”. The explanation given was quite straightforward: “We are losing many Scouters who have been living in that part of the town occupied by our Indian friends”.

Since then, the demographic and ethnic development of places like Southall has sometimes been dubbed “White Flight”. Although the phrase is convenient to counterbalance the deep-seated suspicion of pathological self-segregation¹ among ethnic minorities (Muslims especially), I believe it to be misleading for three reasons. First, the white versus non-white binary explicit in it fails to make sense of those who were by far the largest immigrant group post-1945, the Irish, whose influx into Britain was about seven hundred thousand during the postwar decades of prosperity,² a figure which dwarfs all West Indian and Indian subcontinent arrivals. Second, “White Flight” invites disingenuous parallels between England and the United States where it has rightly been called “the largest exodus in American history”;³ though “White Flight” has been an important mutation in English urban dynamics, its extent simply pales into insignificance when compared with its American (non-)equivalent. Third, it is also misleading as it implies that the move to suburbia is motivated only by race, whereas in actual fact a vast array of reasons have lured middle-class families away from the inner-ring areas of English cities.⁴ For instance, some of this “White Flight” in areas at the heart of this book – Ealing in West London being one – was linked with the introducing of new schooling policies: after the conversion or closure of many grammar schools after 1965, more and more middle-class (white) families left London to move out to Slough, Maidenhead, Buckinghamshire, that is areas outside London which proved slower in implementing the move to comprehensive

schooling. The parents of the above Scouts may have been repulsed by the prospect of what they saw as bad schooling in Southall, just as much as they may have been attracted by promises of good grammar schools a few miles to the north or west. That these were almost wholly white unlike Southall schools is only one element in a complex combination of causes.

It was the white movement to suburbia and its connection to ethnic minority clustering in areas like Southall and the inner cities of Bradford, Birmingham, Blackburn, West Bromwich and so on which were at the root of bussing, the subject of this book. Bussing itself was a form of social engineering initiated in a dozen Local Education Authorities, whereby immigrant children from primary school age upwards were (forcefully) dispersed to predominantly white suburban schools. The aim was twofold. First, and originally, to placate white fears of an immigrant demographic takeover in areas such as Southall where the number of Asians had dramatically soared in a few years. Second – dispersal’s official *raison d’être* – to make sure that those mostly non-Anglophone Asians “integrated”, that is, that they efficiently addressed their English-language ‘handicap’ and internalised the British/English way of life at a time when, a few decades before devolution, almost everyone south of the border saw these two terms as synonyms.

With some exceptions, bussing proved a failure. One reason was that dispersed, marooned and unwelcome Asian youths faced racist bullying in schools from two to seven miles away from their neighbourhoods, even ten miles in some cases in the borough of Ealing.⁵ As a postcolonial after-taste, it also confirmed to many Asians that somehow they were lesser breeds without the law, since bussing white children to the multiracial inner cities was never an option. This is what Riaz Ahmed, a Bradfordian bussed for a few years in the late 1960s, bitterly recalls:

It was a failure primarily because it was a one-way traffic, not a two-way traffic, I remember it was a couple of lads like me going to white schools, there were ten or twelve of us, and I remember we got bullied, it was terrible, and these are your formative years, you see, very important for your mental development ... There should be bussing, but it has to be a two-way traffic, otherwise it will fail.⁶

The US analogy

Riaz Ahmed’s point finds illuminating echoes across the Atlantic. In localities where bussing⁷ was a one-way traffic, some African-Americans who were bussed to white suburban schools inveighed against the gross inequalities whereby in order to get a decent education, they had to be transferred to faraway schools and hurled into an often toxic school environment

where they were the butt of racism. In Norfolk (Virginia), one Clarence Garrett inquired: "Why are new schools always built in white sections in the city and Negro students bused?" Garrett's classmate Dwight Davis opined, "I feel that busing black students to a white community to attend school and not busing the white students to a black community is unjust".⁸ There were analogous views aplenty in nearby North Carolina, but also in New York or Detroit.⁹ This was the first problem with American bussing in the places where it was introduced.¹⁰ In his book *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, Jefferson Cowie states that "on bussing, policy makers continued to believe that moving people was a better and easier solution than moving money and resources".¹¹ Or, in the words of Genevieve Mitchell from the Black Women's Center in Cleveland (Ohio): "I have said time and again, 'bus the Money, honey!'".¹² With hindsight, these damning statements sound obliquely appropriate for England. In his report on "dispersal", professor of public policy Maurice Kogan found that the schools Southall Asians were bussed to were of much better quality than the Southall schools these youths had been bussed from. So much so that, as Kogan put it, "There was none of the receiving schools in which I would not gladly see my own children educated"¹³ – an encomium he would not have extended to Southall schools, to state the obvious.

The US analogy is inevitable when discussing English bussing. This is despite the fact that bussing in England was about immigration, integration or assimilation and deficiency in English, whereas in the United States it was about desegregation and the righting of a historical wrong for African-Americans who, to state the obvious again, were not immigrants: they were a submerged community for whom the federal state, states, school districts and school boards had for generations painstakingly preserved "a system of compulsory ignorance".¹⁴ Why this parallel is inevitable is because, for better and often for worse, "America" has provided for decades a convenient cognitive map to make sense of immigration and racial issues in Britain.

More importantly perhaps, the practice or the mere prospect of bussing in the United States filled countless headlines, and framed how the desegregation of schools, particularly in the northern states, was discussed: this was bound to have an international impact, not least in England, where "bussing" was introduced and debated. Across the Atlantic, bussing could make you (hope to) win elections or a Pulitzer Prize. Nixon, Ford and Reagan were three presidents who made negative statements about it to rally whites against what was often dubbed "forced bussing". J. Anthony Lukas's book on bussing, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*,¹⁵ won a Pulitzer prize, as well as Stanley Foreman's photo "The Soiling of Old Glory", displaying a white anti-bussing



Figure 1: Stanley Forman’s Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph “The Soiling of Old Glory”, Boston, 1976

activist using an American flag against a black man in Boston (1976, see Figure 1). Probably more than any other historical development, it was “bussing” which made “White Backlash” a mainstream phrase in public debate, a phrase feared by Johnson and then cunningly instrumentalised by Nixon. It was, for many Blacks, “a phony issue which obscured the causes of educational inequality, and that school buses had long been used to maintain segregated schools”. According to historian Matt Delmont, “With ‘busing’, northerners found a palatable way to oppose desegregation without appealing to the explicitly racist sentiments they preferred to associate with southerners”.¹⁶ Delmont finds “bussing” so potent a smoke-screen that in *Why “Busing” Failed* he uses the word hundreds of times always with quotation marks. These I also use in the title of this book, as “desegregation” is appropriate for the United States but not for England. Yet this is how bussing came to be legitimated by public authorities, in a bipartisan effort to stave off the proliferation of “ghetto” schools. However muddled they were, parallels with the US situation along the British corridors of power will have to be returned to.

At a remove from the national furore around bussing in America, bussing in England was a very low-key practice, affecting some twelve thousand pupils in a dozen or so LEAs. Circular 7/65 issued by the Department of Education and Science only *recommended* the implementation of dispersal in areas which had more than 33 per cent of immigrant children. Without compulsion, the four LEAs with the largest number of immigrant children – the Inner London Education Authority, Birmingham, Brent and Haringey – refrained from introducing dispersal altogether. Consequently, whereas a number of monographs by scholars on American bussing do exist, this is the very first book about bussing in England, despite the substantial number of essays on race and schooling, above all in the field of sociology. Unsurprisingly then, I found when carrying out this research that librarians and archivists contacted across England in areas which operated bussing were often unaware of the existence of this policy in their own communities. And, just as unsurprisingly, the only two places where I did not have to describe what English bussing was were Ealing (Southall) and Bradford, the two areas where it was fairly widespread.

Going where the archival silence is

The paucity of sources on bussing in England is a daunting challenge for the social scientist. In the early stages of the archive-collecting process, it oddly felt like a better idea to write a novel rather than a historical monograph about it. Soon enough though, it appeared that this dearth of archival material proved germane, and was an open invitation to “read against the grain”, or read against the grain when there is no grain.¹⁷ Unquestionably, a 1960s consensus prevailed that some race-relations policies ought to be kept outside the public gaze, both not to elicit critiques from ethnic minorities and, for the indigenous majority, not to convey the feeling that ethnic minorities and immigrants were themselves being given preferential treatment simply because they were treated differently. To give one example: Birmingham practised a policy of housing dispersal from 1969 to 1975. One Housing Committee member of the Birmingham Corporation confided to researcher Hazel Flett that “it was a fairly quiet policy – deliberately ... The Corporation believed, along with so many agencies in race relations, in doing good by stealth.”¹⁸ An analogous approach prevailed in education, as is shown by David Kirp in *Doing Good by Doing Little: Race and Schooling in Britain*.¹⁹

In the years when bussing was introduced in Ealing, Bradford and West Bromwich, a real reluctance still existed as to the collecting of racial information and to the differential treatment of social groups on the basis of racial identity, and it is also how this stealthy approach must

be understood. After all, by the late 1960s, it still seemed unnatural to introduce racial provisions in the British legal framework, which some still regarded as "the quintessence of colour-blindness"²⁰ despite the Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968. The general Welfare State philosophy was also underpinned by a broad universalism whereby social needs were to be addressed irrespective of group or individual characteristics,²¹ despite the discriminatory bias within welfare provision and the fact that its achievements fell short of its universalist claims.²²

Locally, such cautiousness was illustrated by the way authorities begrudged giving information on bussing to the race-relations busybodies interested in whether the system operated on the basis of immigrant children's deficiency in English, in which case bussing could hardly be called discriminatory according to the Race Relations Act (1968), or whether it rested on purely racial or colour criteria, which, on the contrary, could be declared illegal on the same grounds. Historian Brett Bebbler, in what appears to be the only article published on English bussing for decades, states: "The [Ealing] Council was notoriously secretive about its educational decisions, even denying the local Community Relations Council basic information about education decision-making and funding".²³ Ealing's secretiveness was then also due to its awareness that bussing was on the fringe of legality, not solely to its determination not to spark controversy among whites as well as Asians. Much the same comment could have been made about other local authorities (such as Walsall), whose secrecy was challenged by the Race Relations Board in 1975–76.²⁴ Similarly, at national level, the DES never really carried out a national inquiry into the bussing system. Pamela Fox, a DES civil servant, candidly confessed in 1976 that "We have never made a survey to find out how many districts were dispersing or how many children were involved".²⁵

The upshot of all this is clear. It is wellnigh impossible to tell with any degree of certainty how many LEAs dispersed, and when dispersal began and ended in LEAs which operated it. In Southall, bussing lasted from 1963 to 1981, in Bradford from 1964 to 1980. Beyond this it is all guesswork, since in LEAs where bussing was low-key local archives are very sparse and local newspapers quite often did not cover it. What's more, most studies of dispersal, which generally run to only a few pages, cagily baulk at venturing an exhaustive list of dispersing LEAs, often referring to the two notorious cases (Ealing, Bradford) next to convenient words or phrases like "including", "among others" or "to quote a few". An analysis of all the available sources looked into for this book suggests that, between 1964 and 1986, twelve LEAs opted for dispersal, mostly in order to "desegregate" some schools with a large intake of immigrant children (30 per cent quite often). These are, in alphabetical order: Blackburn, Bradford,

Bristol, Ealing (Southall), Halifax, Hounslow, Huddersfield, Leicester, Luton, Walsall, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton. There is uncertainty as to whether three other LEAs really operated dispersal: these are Croydon, Dewsbury and Smethwick. Dispersal took many different forms, especially in places like Bristol or Leicester, which are not, unlike Bradford and Ealing, at the heart of this study. It is also important to keep this in mind when reading the section below on terminology: a single word could easily cover different realities.

There is one last reason why there is such a paucity of sources on bussing or dispersal: the policy's introduction coincided with the move to comprehensive schools. It is understandable that for policy-makers interest in such a hoped-for wholesale reform trumped dispersal. A mere 569 schools out of a total of 26,000 accommodated more than one-third of immigrant children in 1971.²⁶ Small wonder then that, in educational archives from 1965–66, circular 10/65 which introduced comprehensive schooling largely overshadowed the soon infamous circular 7/65, whose paragraph eight promoted dispersal for immigrant children. To give one example among many: the Anthony Crosland personal papers held at the London School of Economics archives contain nothing at all about dispersal, despite the fact that Crosland was secretary of state for education and science from 1965 to 1967. On the other hand, there is a plethora of documents about comprehensive schools, which is understandable given the intended scope of the reform, and since Crosland privately confided that he was hell-bent on “the destruction of every fucking grammar school in the country”.²⁷ Similarly, the Sir Edward Boyle papers held at the University of Leeds archives have precious little about bussing, despite the fact that he, as a secretary of state for education before Crosland, actually put dispersal on the political agenda in October 1963 following a visit to a Southall school.²⁸

Positioning an academic project

This bussing project positions itself at the crossroads of various social sciences, whose disciplinary porosity and interconnectedness it serves to highlight: history, political science and sociology, borrowing methods and concepts from each of the three. Its object of study brings together the history of English public policies at micro- and macro-level, the history of education and immigration, the sociology of social movements and trans-disciplinary urban studies as well as the history of postcolonial England. It focuses on the negotiation and devising of top-down policies as well as the variegated ways in which people navigate through these policies, and by “people” I mean parents and children themselves, variously as agents, actors or subjects, to borrow from Michel Rolph-Trouillot’s useful triad.²⁹

It is a contribution to the history of immigrant and ethnic minority experience in the field of education, a sub-discipline within the history of education for which, until recently, there was a "paucity of material" which has constituted, according to Kevin Myers, "a puzzling and rather disturbing silence".³⁰ This is largely owing to a methodological nationalism among historians for whom, for a long time, the "general idea of migration" was deemed "exceptional, unimportant or somehow problematic".³¹

Despite the above-mentioned paucity of archival material, this project relies heavily on primary sources and interviews, and hopefully weaves a narrative of ethnic minority and immigrant experience which tackles head-on the complexity, ambivalence and multi-faceted lived realities of Asians and (to a lesser extent) West Indians in the field of education. As will be shown, this very ambivalence reaches beyond the well-known binary of the (mostly Asian) immigrant keeping a low profile versus collective resistance against institutional racism. This archaeology of the black box of bussing also tries to reach beyond inside and outside visions of "shared identities", both at meso-level (LEAs had different stories to tell) and at micro-level, since it will be seen that many individuals reacted differently to the demands made by the dispersal policies. Kevin Myers invokes sociologist Bob Carter's phrase "experiential empiricism" as well as Bill Schwarz's insistence on the need for a "'detailed, situated and historical story' that helps to make clear how immigrants encountered and responded to the logics of racial thought".³² It is one of the ambitions of this book to provide something resembling that.

The project finds its place in postcolonial and postwar history, and it is to be lamented that, as Jordanna Bailkin has argued, these two dimensions are too often perfunctorily juxtaposed without being brought together.³³ For one thing, the history of the British Welfare State was largely shaped by both postcolonial and postwar realities, and it is worth remembering that the concept of "parental choice", which was to be so crucial in how public actors engaged with "bussing", was reinforced *during* the war rather than after it, with the Education Act of 1944.

The national backcloth to the introduction of English bussing is also, or above all, a postcolonial one. This must be understood literally: the question of the education of immigrant children from the Indian subcontinent came *after* British colonial rule in India, and bore certain traces of past colonial domination. In the words of Geoffrey Bindman and Anthony Lester, "Post-war immigration from the new Commonwealth has transplanted to the old Mother Country prejudices and patterns of behaviour which could conveniently be ignored or righteously condemned so long as they flourished only within an Empire beyond our shores".³⁴ In top-down terms of public policy, the postcolonial dimension took the form of white

bureaucratic decision-making with little or no consultation of Asians,³⁵ or through cultural and linguistic normative policies to implement assimilation. In bottom-up terms of Asian appreciation of English schooling and of educational policies, postcoloniality was evidenced by a tendency to keep a low profile often brought directly from former colonies. To explain why her parents never thought about challenging bussing and racism in schools, one interviewee for this book, Anjuna Kalsi, an Asian originating from Kenya, states that “in Africa there was very high respect for teachers in general. So you naturally reproduced that in England. More generally, you came from that place where you generally accepted authority.”³⁶

So, despite the pragmatic way in which “postcolonial” is apprehended in the following pages – itself a way of keeping at arm’s lengths some cryptically theoretical debates about postcolonialism seldom rooted in experience – it is clear that the move from being parts of the empire to independence was no smooth path, both overseas and in the metropolis.³⁷ Beyond that, Anjuna Kalsi’s statement, echoed by other interviewees, validates the way researchers in the field of “new imperial history” have striven to transcend “home” and “overseas” into “a single conceptual category and insisted upon moving beyond a restricted, national-bound approach to modern Western Europe”.³⁸ Although these points will rarely be returned to, they provide a grid of intelligibility to make sense of the history of dispersal as it unfolded in England.

What’s in a word?

Clarifications about the words “dispersal” and “bussing” are needed. First of all, the two terms are not strictly synonymous for, technically, “bussing” is only one form of “dispersal”. In January 1964, West Bromwich introduced a measure of dispersal, “first for children walking to school and later by bus”.³⁹ In 1967, Denis Howell, Labour MP for Small Heath and joint parliamentary under-secretary for education and science, was scathing about Birmingham’s adamant refusal of dispersal and insisted that there were almost wholly white schools not far from the city’s northern segregated ethnic enclaves (Handsworth, Soho, Rotton Row) as well as from its southern ones (Small Heath, Sparkbrook, Balsall Heath).⁴⁰ Consequently, in order to “desegregate” schools in these places, a form of dispersal without resorting to bussing was possible and desirable according to Denis Howell and Roy Hattersley, who was then Labour MP for Sparkbrook.

For all these nuances, dispersal and bussing were mostly understood as synonyms in the 1960s and 1970s. But their connotations were different. “Dispersal” is a fairly abstract concept mobilised by local and national bureaucracies who endorse or actively promote a policy of encouraged or

forced assimilation. By using “dispersal”, policy-makers could always convey a feeling of protectiveness towards South Asian pupils deficient in English and cultural integration. After all, wasn’t the evacuation of British children from Blitz-torn London in the Second World War sometimes called “dispersal”?⁴¹ Such terminological associations, however indirect, did play a part among political authorities who in the 1960s had all been through the traumatic experience of war.

On the contrary, “bussing” is a concrete term which was used by critics of dispersal at grassroots level, that is multicultural or anti-racist associations, Asian parents, community relation activists, politicians and so on. Bussing refers directly to the experience of being herded away from a neighbourhood school where one feels one naturally belongs, it is about a quantity of human bodies being shovelled into seemingly or actually unwelcoming places. Whilst many Asians either had fun with their peers on the buses or were simply dozing, many experienced daily racist bullying in predominantly white schools, and this is what “bussing” encapsulates. Likewise, “bussing” seethed with controversy, particularly when one thinks of the (white) American struggle against it. Although it took a radically different form in Southall or Bradford, “bussing” was likewise made, by those who fought against it and by some media, into a red-button concept, a sort of boo word.

These lexical nuances were not lost on public actors. In a 1975 interview for the London Broadcasting Company, Usha Prashar, then conciliator for the RRB, was asked by anchorman Tony Tucker: “Where are they being bussed to? It’s an unfortunate expression that – bussed – I think because it conjures up so many other attitudes, but I mean where are they being taken?”⁴² In the same way, faced with mounting criticism of bussing, Ealing Council issued a press release on 4 December 1974 which ran: “After careful review of these changed circumstances, the Council accepts that the best interests of all children in the borough would now be met by bringing dispersal – as we prefer to call it – to an end as soon as is practicable.”⁴³ The local authorities in Bradford were likewise very averse to the use of “bussing”; “dispersal” was what they did.⁴⁴

These hesitations around a word seem to betray a degree of self-consciousness among authorities and in academia, which is why other words, phrases and metaphors were used in order to debate the parameters of the recommendations made in circular 7/65. Thus, the circular itself mentioned “spreading the children” besides “dispersal”, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) promoted “distribution schemes”, Nicholas Hawkes in his *Immigrant Children in British Schools* referred to “spreading” and “purposeful distribution”,⁴⁵ social anthropologist Sheila Patterson to a “benign quota” policy,⁴⁶ the Bow Group think-tank to “quota

system".⁴⁷ Maurice Kogan talked repeatedly of "coaching",⁴⁸ *The Daily Mail* of "a rationing policy"⁴⁹ and, in 1965, a Birmingham consultative document entitled "A First Report on the Educational and Social Problems of the Coloured Immigrants" upheld dispersal by calling it "unscrambling the omelette".⁵⁰

As opposed to these motley circumlocutions, Asians and whites who mobilised against dispersal in Bradford and Southall nearly always singled out one enemy which they generally called plain "bussing". This is important since in the 1970s immigrants and ethnic minorities tended to be objects rather than subjects of public discourse. Hence, the majority of words and concepts used in the debate on immigration and integration were often none of their choosing. Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, in line with the concept of "symbolical violence" by Pierre Bourdieu (with whom Sayad worked), insists on how immigrants are frequently tricked into using the very concepts which in public debate are exploited in order to question their citizenship, deny their integration, suggest their backwardness and so forth. If anything then, the choice of "bussing" is a telling sign of lexical agency from among the Asian minority, whose keeping of a low profile has too often been exaggerated in classic historiography. It is a telling sign that the subaltern, indeed, *can* sometimes speak.⁵¹

One last comment on this lexical ambivalence, for the more practical purposes of this book. Both "bussing" and "dispersal" will be used, depending in most cases on whether the focus is more top-down or bottom-up.

No panacea

One of the ironies about dispersal in schools is that most of those who defended it tooth and nail, often by importing frightening Jim Crow metaphors about "segregation", were themselves never convinced that dispersal would prove an efficient remedy to the schooling separation of immigrant children. The truth is that they had no better local solution than bussing to come up with.

Two apparently "commonsense" solutions were recommended to stave off over-concentration of immigrant children in schools: one was to close the door on further immigration, the effect of which would be dramatic although not immediate, the other was to spread the immigrants themselves, that is to implement housing rather than schooling dispersal. Regarding the former solution, it is of course no coincidence that the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) was implemented one and a half years before Edward Boyle's visit to Southall which was to inspire schooling dispersal.⁵² The "beat-the-ban effect" in the eighteen months that preceded the enactment of the law has been well researched by historians;⁵³

the mere threat that doors would soon be closed did cause a massive New Commonwealth rush to England, which had not been the case after the British Nationality Act (1948).⁵⁴ The demographic consequences in Southall, Bradford and all of the LEAs which were to introduce dispersal were immediate and profound. Just before and after the legislation was passed, the press in Southall and Bradford was full of wake-up calls to end immigration *now*, which evinced the frustration and powerlessness of local political authorities over policy choices which, by their nature, were national.

As for housing dispersal, its hoped-for efficacy rested on what psychology and sociology generally call the "contact hypothesis" or "bridging social capital", here summarised by a Birmingham Labour councillor: "If (coloured) people were dispersed they would go to different schools, use shops that Birmingham people used and go to the pubs".⁵⁵ This contact hypothesis was taken up again in the Cullingworth Report on housing (1969), and it was believed to lead naturally to an assimilation of immigrants. More concretely, housing dispersal was made possible by the fact that in the 1960s approximately one-third of the housing available was run by local authorities in the form of council housing.

The housing dispersal idea faced two stumbling blocks. One was the spatial concentration of specific immigrant groups next to large industrial employers: for instance, the many Pakistani immigrants employed in the gigantic textile mills of Bradford made up an army of labour that simply had to live in the vicinity, all the more so as almost none of them had cars and as many of them were on night-shift. The second stumbling block is as natural and is often disregarded by those, in the 1960s as today, who readily pathologise the tendency among minorities or immigrants to stick together: any human community is characterised by what sociologists call the "homophily principle", whereby individuals have a natural proclivity to "gravitate towards those that share a great deal in common".⁵⁶ This is all the more true for migrant groups established in a foreign land whose language they don't speak, where they may feel unwelcome, whose weather they regard as very inclement and so on.

To insist on housing dispersal is key in a book on schooling dispersal since, even in Ealing where bussing was to become a massive issue, most local press articles before and after Boyle's visit to Southall in October 1963 dealt not so much with schooling questions but rather with housing ones. The 1964 general elections locally were fought mostly on overcrowding, "Rachmanism",⁵⁷ quality-of-life issues and the ghettoisation of areas like Hambrough and Dormer Wells. Two and half months before Boyle's visit, a petition of some 140 local residents, from ten specific streets, urged the council to buy properties in the area "which were likely to be bought

by coloured people". In mid-August 1963, two months before Boyle's visit, the General Purposes Committee of the Town Council was presented with a petition by 625 residents claiming that the town must use "compulsory purchase powers to buy up vacant houses", in order to prevent these houses from being bought by immigrants.⁵⁸ The general feeling bought into conspiracy theories of some "peaceful penetration" of Indians aided by the "folly" of "liberal do-gooders". In late August 1963, Ealing councillors were mobbed by some Southall petitioners.irate residents from the Beaconsfield area cried out against councillors: "We want peace and quiet in our road – not Indians!"⁵⁹

In general terms, the debate on and policy of housing dispersal reveals some compelling commonalities with bussing. Three of them can be looked into here. First, they are connected with liberal attempts at "integrating" immigrants by desegregating a dilapidated, overcrowded urban space which itself comes to embody the immigrant presence, although this inner-city dilapidation largely preceded it historically. Such a mental construction is facilitated by what Charles Wade Mills in *The Racial Contract* has called a racial "circular indictment": "You are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself".⁶⁰ This liberal, integrationist framework is not incompatible with illiberal, "White Backlash" mobilisations at grassroots level. In Birmingham for instance, it was the threat of a white council tenants' rent strike in Botany Walk (Ladywood) against the arrival of West Indians which eventually enacted the stealthy housing dispersal locally, whereby not more than one in six council flats or houses in a given area could be allocated to a Black tenant. Five out of six property cards for council housing bore a cryptic "N/C" (not coloured) inscription by the Housing Department. Another troubling concomitance was that these housing dispersal plans to integrate immigrants efficiently were devised locally only one week after the: so-called "Rivers of Blood" speech by Enoch Powell (20 April 1968).⁶¹

A second parallel between bussing and housing dispersal is that in the few cases where minorities were either consulted or active in the process, or when this rested on a voluntary basis discussed with the minorities themselves, then the policy was understandably much more likely to be accepted and successful. In this respect, the opacity of Birmingham's housing dispersal is to be contrasted with that in Nottingham, where, by the mid-1970s, a fair-housing officer, originally funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation, worked with ethnic minorities who placed confidence in the local dispersal scheme in housing estates.⁶² An identical contrast could be drawn, in terms of schooling dispersal this time, between say Ealing and

Leicester, where local involvement by ethnic minorities in policy-making was substantial.

The last parallel to be made between housing and schooling dispersal is that, local disparities notwithstanding, both evidently failed to achieve their goals. In housing, one reason is that it was supported only half-heartedly. Even in Ealing, after Labour MP George Pargiter had suggested it in 1964, some retorted that housing dispersal was “quite alien to the British democratic set-up”.⁶³ One Indian Workers Association representative also pointed out that “it is highly undemocratic and against the Commonwealth’s spirit”.⁶⁴ Susan J. Smith summarises the situation thus: “Despite a broad commitment to interventionism in most areas of government, legislators were reluctant to introduce special programmes for migrant minorities, especially in housing”.⁶⁵ In a 1964 correspondence between the Southall General Purposes Committee and the Home Office, one reads that there was “no power to compel them [Commonwealth immigrants] to live and work in particular areas or to compel them not to settle in places where their compatriots were already living, and the Government would not think it right to seek such powers”.⁶⁶

There are two other powerful limits to housing dispersal. One is that the further one went into (white) suburbia the more council estates adopted strict suburban approaches to a form of self-conscious respectability which in effect was racially exclusive.⁶⁷ On top of this, immigrant and ethnic-minority groups either were unfamiliar with how council housing operated or they could not qualify (in Birmingham in the 1960s there was a five-year residence clause) or else they were simply not interested in council housing, like so many Asians who would rather buy more or less dilapidated property by borrowing from within their *biraderi* (extended family). Lastly and more importantly, the private market was (and is) totally uncontrolled, and the prejudices exposed by Elizabeth Burney’s seminal analysis are more likely to be exacerbated there.

Who cares about bussing anyway?

Here I want to make two points. First that bussing as a historical object of study does matter. Second that it does matter a lot today.

At a talk given at Huddersfield University in 2016, one of the participants in the debate, historian Paul Ward, remarked that the disturbing thing about bussing was its apparent normality. This view is important: many thousands of pupils have indeed been bussed up and down the country, in urban and rural areas, in the 1960s just as today. In the United States too, white anti-bussing militants rallied around the “tradition” of “neighbourhood schools” but in fact their slogans were largely spurious,

for by 1970 nearly half of all American public school students had to ride buses to school.⁶⁸

On top of all this, there is a “racial” form of “normality” involved. A 1988 CRE report entitled *Learning in Terror* insists on how shockingly routine racial bullying, racist violence and name-calling were in British playgrounds. “British” is in order here rather than “English”, for a study of the Scottish situation in the mid-1980s revealed that “Asian children face a daily barrage of abuse and physical attacks in Glasgow’s multi-racial schools”.⁶⁹ Therefore, some South Asian people from Tower Hamlets, Manchester or Sheffield who were never bussed could logically cry out that their own experience of being racially bullied was astonishingly identical to that of Southall, Bradford or Blackburn Asians who were bussed.

With all this background in mind, what is different – albeit seemingly “normal” – about bussing is that many thousands of Asian pupils were *forcefully* transported to faraway schools, especially in Ealing and Bradford, that their parents had little or no say in it, or did not know they could have a say, and that most of these children were of primary school age. In Ealing in particular, thousands were bussed from two to ten miles away from the age of four to the age of eleven. Bussing was an outright denial of “parental choice” as recognised by the Education Act of 1944 (section 76).⁷⁰ In a rare twist of historical irony, in order to become like others, in order to be integrated and learn some English, Asian pupils had to go through a long phase, in their crucially formative years, during which they were less equal than others, different, “the Pakis on the bus” as they were sometimes called.

That bussing does matter as a historical object also needs to be proved for demographic reasons. We already know that it was a minority practice targeting an ethnic minority deficient in English and “integration”, and that the suggestion to disperse cut no ice with the four LEAs having the largest number of immigrants in the 1960s. However, regardless of whether bussing was introduced in LEAs with a large intake of immigrant children, the concept of dispersal was passionately debated in many places and this sheds light on issues of integration, assimilation, ghettoisation and desegregation which were to shape multicultural politics in the decades that followed. Whether militants, academics or politicians, many of those who were pivotal race-relations actors in the 1960s and 1970s had something to say about bussing and often said it loud. They included E.J.B. Rose and Nicholas Deakin; sociologist John Rex; Labour party figures Maurice Foley, Roy Hattersley and Denis Howell; race-relations expert Anthony Lester (the co-founder of the Runnymede Trust); Maurice Kogan and West Indian militants such as Bernard Coard and Jeff Crawford; but also conservative headmaster Ray Honeyford, who was to become an English

national martyr in the eyes of the assimilationist right in the 1980s. Not to mention that it is also very likely that in his so-called "Rivers of Blood" speech, when saying that his constituents "found their wives unable to obtain hospital beds in childbirth, their children unable to obtain school places",⁷¹ Enoch Powell himself was actually referring to Birmingham and some of the major West Midlands towns where pressure had been mounting for a few years to introduce dispersal. Lastly, it was often the experience of being bussed that sharpened the political consciousness of some of the Asian youths in Southall and Bradford. And it is no coincidence that much of the 1970s–80s Asian militancy, from the "Bradford Twelve" case to the Southall Youth Movement, actually originated from these two places.⁷²

The policy of bussing in the 1960s and 1970s also illuminates some highly topical debates on class, ethnic and religious segregation in British schools. In Bradford, thirty years after the last nail had been hammered into dispersal's coffin, the city erupted into riots the like of which had not been seen since 1981 in London (Brixton). In the backwash of the 2001 disturbances, Muhamad Ajeeb, the former lord mayor of Bradford who had campaigned against bussing twenty-five years before, travelled to London and consulted with Lord Falconer, then minister of local government. He suggested that locally a 70 per cent limit to the number of Asians in schools should be set, and that a two-way-process type of bussing ought to be considered because, he claimed, "my argument has always been that we should make a mutual effort; if we want to understand each other, we should make those sacrifices, even if it's a very explosive issue. We should really think about the long-term consequences rather than the short-term benefits."⁷³

The point developed here is congruent with Elizabeth Anderson's in *The Imperative of Integration*: "Students who attend more racially integrated schools lead more racially integrated lives after graduation: they have more racially diverse co-workers, neighbours, and friends than do students who attend less diverse schools".⁷⁴ Yet, against this belief in "integrationism",⁷⁵ Veit Bader states that "whether the effects of interaction are beneficial depends partly on the voluntariness of interaction and on contextual variables such as (the absence of) threats, (patterns of) discrimination, socio-economic inequalities and negative-sum games".⁷⁶ This issue will be further developed in the Conclusion, but among the "sacrifices" evoked by Ajeeb, there was the looming threat of "white-bashing" (or "gore-bashing") by Asian youths in schools where they now made up a huge majority, a kind of historical revenge for the Bradford bussing years of their parents' generation.

Muhamad Ajeeb was aware that he was probably fighting a losing battle: on the English education market, "parental choice" was by 2001 an

unshakable guiding principle, and is now even more so as this book goes to press. In addition, the events of 9/11 and then 7/7 did generate a massive, knee-jerk type of Islamophobia. More importantly, which white middle-class parents from the outskirts of Bradford would want their children to be educated in ailing schools of run-down Manningham? In an English school system which has been more and more compartmentalised, on the basis of fierce competition reliant on league tables (introduced under John Major in 1993), and with even fiercer job competition in the offing, being sent to “ghetto schools” in Bradford or elsewhere would unleash a deterring storm of litigation.

Today, in the Holme Wood and Bierley estates around Bradford, a few double-decker buses drive daily to Tong High School. Most of those who ride these buses are Asian students who do not live in the vicinity of these predominantly white housing estates. On the face of it, the situation is evocative of 1960s–70s quotidian scenes, but in the present case those who take the bus do it on a *voluntary* basis, which changes just about everything. What this (and, to be sure, analogous situations around the country) highlights is that the provision of unequal education facilities will inevitably keep the bus going for many years, except that carbon emission now brings a further element of complexity to the debate.

In June 2016, the chairman of the Sutton Trust charity, philanthropist Sir Peter Lampl, suggested that children in run-down areas be bussed out to “good” schools in an effort to improve their education.⁷⁷ He was only echoing calls by some London headteachers who had promoted bussing since 2012 in order to challenge a social segregation which is blighting education.⁷⁸ Sometimes, it is also claimed that dispersal could prove a useful tool to address linguistic deficiency in areas like London, where unprecedented immigration since 2004 has made the British capital a veritable Tower of Babel. In an essay on “White Backlash” perceptions in Youngstown (Ohio) and Barking and Dagenham (East London), Justin Gest reproduces a very long letter sent to David Cameron by an angry white constituent, Nancy Pemberton. In the course of this four-page document, one reads: “In a class of 24 you have maybe one or two English children these days; how terrible is that. 67 languages spoken at our local primary school! One language should be spoken – English – this is still, just about, England.”⁷⁹ Whether or not this constitutes one unpalatable side of super-diversity, this testimony provides an amplified echo of comparable issues raised in Southall in the early 1960s, as we will shortly see.

Bussing has seemed like a solution to be contemplated not only to curb social inequalities or address linguistic deficiencies among immigrants but also to tackle self-ghettoised communities living parallel lives, generally meaning “Muslims”. Trevor Phillips, whose 2005 “sleepwalking to

segregation” speech at Manchester (rightly) came under fire from some sociologists,⁸⁰ suggested on Channel Four in April 2016 that in schools with more than 50 per cent of Muslims there ought to be bussing in order to bring about an enforced mixing.⁸¹ Needless to say, in the wake of the disastrous 2014 Trojan Horse affair, when the regulator OFSTED claimed to have found evidence of Islamist infiltration of some twenty-one schools in Birmingham, such recommendations had an air of muscular common sense about them, despite the disturbing complexity of the issues involved. It is fairly obvious that neither Lampl nor the former head of the CRE appears to be cognisant of the shady side of bussing’s history in England. This book, then, is also for them.

Notes

- 1 Shamim Miah, *Muslims, Schooling and the Question of Self-segregation*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- 2 Enda Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 4.
- 3 Ronald Formisano, *Boston against Busing: Race, Class and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, p. 11.
- 4 See Ludi Simpson and Nissa Finney, *Sleepwalking to Segregation: Challenging Myths about Race and Migration*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2009, pp. 128–9.
- 5 See *Middlesex County Times (Southall Edition)*, 30.7.1971.
- 6 Olivier Esteves, *De l’invisibilité à l’islamophobie : les musulmans britanniques (1945–2010)*, Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2011, p. 83.
- 7 In the United States, ‘bussing’ is spelt with one ‘s’, in Britain with two.
- 8 Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media and the National Resistance to School Desegregation*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2016, p. 177.
- 9 For a thorough list of American cities and towns which had one-way bussing, see *ibid.*, pp. 90–1.
- 10 Despite the national furore around it, bussing affected only between 2 and 5 per cent of American schoolgoers in the 1970s (see *ibid.*, p. 5, p. 214).
- 11 Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, New York: The New Press, 2010, p. 245.
- 12 United States Committee on the Judiciary, *Effectiveness of Mandatory Busing in Cleveland*, London: Forgotten Books, 2015, p. 65.
- 13 Maurice Kogan, *Dispersion in the Ealing Local Education Authority Schools’ System*, Report to Race Relations Board, 1976, p. 14.
- 14 Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: The History of Race and Education in the United States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 11.
- 15 J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families*, New York: Vintage Books, 1985.
- 16 See Delmont, *Why Busing Failed*, p. 171, p. 3.

- 17 On the appropriateness of this metaphor, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- 18 Hazel Flett, "The Politics of Dispersal in Birmingham", Working Papers on Ethnic Relations, no. 14, Birmingham, 1981, p. 14.
- 19 David Kirp, *Doing Good by Doing Little, Race and Schooling in Britain*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1979.
- 20 This is a phrase by E.J.B. Rose *et al.*, quoted in Erik Bleich, *Race Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policy-making since the 1960s*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 42.
- 21 On this point and its connection with the specific treatment of ethnic minorities, see Catherine Jones, *Immigration and Social Policy in Britain*, London: Tavistock, 1977, p. 39.
- 22 Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2012, p. 4.
- 23 Brett Bebber, "'We Were Just Unwanted', Bussing, Migrant Dispersal and South Asians in London", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 48 (3), 2015, p. 657.
- 24 On the Walsall/RRB controversy, see *Birmingham Post*, 1 December 1976.
- 25 See Lewis Killian, "School Bussing in Britain, Policies and Perceptions", *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 49 (2), 1979, p. 196.
- 26 National Archives (Kew), CK2/515, Race Relations Board *vs* Blackburn education authority (1972–1974), RRB general committee report, 2.5.1972.
- 27 Susan Crosland, *Tony Crosland*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1982, p. 148.
- 28 *West Middlesex Gazette*, 19.10.1963.
- 29 Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, pp. 23–4.
- 30 Kevin Myers, "Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in the History of Education", *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 45 (2009), p. 801.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 815.
- 32 Kevin Myers, *Struggles for a Past: Irish and Afro-Caribbean Histories in England, 1951–2000*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015, p. 2.
- 33 Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*, pp. 2–3.
- 34 Geoffrey Bindman and Anthony Lester, *Race and Law*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p. 13.
- 35 On this point, and the contrast with the United States, see Kirp, *Doing Good by Doing Little*, p. 26.
- 36 Interview (Southall), 19.10.2016. A place-name is given in parentheses for those interviews which were not telephone or Skype interviews. References are given at the first occurrence of interview excerpts.
- 37 Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe After Empire: Decolonization, Society and Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 4–5.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 39 *Birmingham Post*, undated newspaper cuttings, Birmingham City Library / Wolfson Centre, Indian Workers Association archives.
- 40 *Birmingham Post*, 23.1.1967.

- 41 See Carlton Jackson, *Who Will Take Our Children? The British Evacuation Programme of World War II*, Jefferson, N: McFarland Publishing, 2008, pp. 18, 149, 179.
- 42 “Immigrant School Children”, LBC, Radio scripts, Report RRB no. 429, Ahmed Iqbal Ullah race relations centre, Manchester Public Library.
- 43 Kogan, *Dispersal in the Ealing Local Education Authority*, appendix IV (unpagged).
- 44 See Brenda Mary Thomson, *Asian-named Minority Groups in the British Schools System: A Study of the education of children of immigrants of Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi origins from the Indian subcontinent or East Africa in the city of Bradford*, PhD dissertation, University of Bradford, 1991, p. 206.
- 45 Nicholas Hawkes, *Immigrant Children in British Schools*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1966, pp. 28–9.
- 46 Sheila Patterson, *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain 1960–1967*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 256.
- 47 Christopher Brocklebank-Fowler, Christopher Bland and Tim Farmer, *Commonwealth Immigration*, London: The Bow Group, 1965, pp. 16–21.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 7, p. 17, p. 22, p. 24.
- 49 *Daily Mail*, 16.6.1965.
- 50 On this last phrase, see Ian Grosvenor, *Assimilating Identities: Racism and Educational Policy in post 1945 Britain*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997, p. 118.
- 51 The reference here is to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, a foundational document of postcolonial studies, in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987, pp. 271–315.
- 52 The law came into effect on 1 July 1962, and Boyle’s visit to Southall was 15 October 1963.
- 53 For instance, Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain, The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 118–19.
- 54 The record 136,000 New Commonwealth rush to Britain in 1961 needs to be seen in proportion to the net population of England and Wales, 46,104,548 according to the census of the same year.
- 55 Flett, “The Politics of Dispersal”, p. 7.
- 56 Michael Merry, *Equality, Citizenship and Segregation: A Defence of Separation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 11.
- 57 After Peter Rachman (1919–62), a notorious Notting Hill slumlord. “Rachmanism” came to signify overpopulation in slums, terrible hygiene conditions, rent racketeering of immigrant and white working-class tenants, etc.
- 58 For both petitions, see *West Middlesex Gazette*, 17.8.1963.
- 59 *West Middlesex Gazette*, 24.9.1963.
- 60 Charles Wade Mills, *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997, pp. 41–2.
- 61 On all these points, see Flett, “The Politics of Dispersal”, pp. 10–13.

- 62 See the Race Relations Board's newsletter *Equals*, 3, August–September 1975, pp. 4–5.
- 63 *Middlesex County Times (Southall Edition)*, 18.1.1964.
- 64 *Middlesex County Times (Southall Edition)*, 15.2.1964.
- 65 Susan J. Smith, *The Politics of "Race" and Residence*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, p. 125.
- 66 Ealing archives, Southall borough minutes, Meeting of the General Purposes committee, 12.3.1964, p. 642.
- 67 See Elizabeth Burney, *Housing on Trial: A Study of Immigrants and Local Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 76.
- 68 Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, New York: Random House, 2010, p. 483.
- 69 Commission for Racial Equality, *Learning in Terror: A Survey of Racial Harassment in Schools and Colleges in England, Scotland and Wales*, London, 1988, p. 9.
- 70 This says: "So far as is compatible with the provision of efficient instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure, pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents".
- 71 The full script of the speech is available at: www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html (accessed 20.12.2017).
- 72 See Anandi Ramamurthy, *Black Star: Britain's Asian Youth Movements*, London: Pluto Press, 2013. The Bradford Twelve case was a high-profile case in the history of the anti-racist movement. The Bradford Twelve were members or supporters of the United Black Youth League who had marched in July 1981 through Manningham (Bradford) to defend themselves against the National Front. Having prepared petrol bombs which they had stocked in nearby buildings, they were put on trial on conspiracy charges. They were finally acquitted, having repeatedly used the slogan 'self-defence is no offence'.
- 73 Interview, 20.10.2015.
- 74 Merry, *Equality, Citizenship and Segregation*, p. 32.
- 75 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.
- 76 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 77 Sally Tomlinson, *A Sociology of Special and Inclusive Education: Exploring the Manufacture of Inability*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 145.
- 78 *Evening Standard*, 1.10.2012.
- 79 Justin Gest, *The New Minority: White Working-class Politics in an Era of Immigration and Inequality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 61.
- 80 See for instance, Simpson and Finney, *Sleepwalking to Segregation?*, pp. 94–5.
- 81 Channel Four, "What British Muslims Really Think" (Trevor Phillips), 20.4.2016.