



Labour Market Trajectories of Caribbean People in Britain and France

Multi-ethnic Societies, Multiculturalism, or Assimilation

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Western European countries suffered labour shortages in a number of economic sectors during the post-war reconstruction period. Immigrant labour made an essential contribution to the post-war reconstruction of Germany, Britain and France. Regardless of the receiving countries' original intentions, the migrants became settlers and the ethnic structure of many urban populations was consequently transformed.

This paper examines the labour market outcomes for Caribbean migrants and their descendants in British and French cities. Post-war France and Britain were similar in a number of ways, not least in having Caribbean colonies from which labour migrants eventually flowed to the metropolis. However, their national policies regarding the incorporation of the colonial populations differed significantly, and may have led to different experiences for the new citizens in the urban labour and housing markets.

Migration within a Colonial Relationship

While labour migration became well established as a strategy for the socio-economic improvement of people's circumstances throughout the Caribbean, the post-war migration to Europe was unusual in a number of ways. Prior to the war, destinations for labour migrants had been limited to circum-Caribbean and North America. Moving to Europe therefore introduced a new dimension of distance, expense and time into the migration, especially as people were far more likely to spend longer periods of time

in the destinations than had previously been the case. Settlement within the metropolis was arguably perceived as something less traumatic in that a shift across the Atlantic to Europe was a move within a particular geopolitical field, shared between source and destination and a result of the colonial process.

The years 1946 and 1948 were pivotal to the relationship between the Caribbean colonies and the metropolitan nations of France and Britain respectively. At these particular points, the departmentalisation of the French Caribbean colonies and the elevation of the population of the Island of Reunion from the status of French colonial subjects to that of citizens of the larger French state contributed to Caribbean peoples being incorporated into the metropolitan nations as citizens who had rights of entry and could settle and work without time restrictions. In addition, the British Nationality Act of 1948 provided all citizens of the UK, the British colonies and the Commonwealth (Holmes 1988; Solomos 1993) with unrestricted entry and the right to live and work in Britain.

The historical context is particularly important to this comparative study. Although Britain and France were experiencing labour shortages in the post-war development enterprise, a variety of discourses as to the 'desirability' of migrants from the Caribbean colonies as a solution to labour scarcity emerged (Freeman 1987; Miles 1990; Bovenkerk *et al.* 1991). The consequences of these legal changes in status for their Caribbean colonial populations were very different. Attitudes towards the Carib-

bean populations emerged from ideologies of inclusion and exclusion based on conceptions of what should or should not constitute the nation (Freeman 1987; Miles 1990; Hollifield 1992, 2000).

The legislation adopted by France and Britain in 1946 and 1948 respectively, created very similar statuses for those Caribbean peoples formerly under French and British colonial rule. However, as I will discuss in this essay, the apparent parallels in the nature and timing of this legislation belie the distinctly different discourses which had developed over time within these two European contexts. The organization of migration to France and Britain, and the integration of the migrants into the employment and housing structures of these two nations, reflect these contradictions.

The State, the Nation and Post-war Immigration in Britain and France

State priorities in Western Europe shifted after World War II. An increased suspicion of foreigners both during and immediately after the war had led to resources being directed into border security. Immigrants were a potential threat. Immigration policy changed, however, as states recognised that their depleted labour forces could not meet the needs of their expanding economies and post-war reconstruction agendas.

Legislation of 1946 and 1948 represented the extension of the national borders of France and Britain into the colonial hinterlands. In France it was felt that such moves would increase the solidarity and security of the larger nation, and the same was true in Britain with regard to the Empire/Commonwealth. In deciding to departmentalise its island colonies of the Caribbean and Reunion, France achieved two objectives: labour shortages in France were reduced via the organized admission of French acculturated colonial citizens, and the population and unemployment pressure in the small Caribbean islands was lessened (Anselin 1995; Condon & Ogden 1991a, 1991b). In other words, this source of labour was seen as satisfying the assimilation agenda.

The extension of British citizenship to the colonial subjects in the Caribbean through the British Nationality Act in 1948 was not in itself aimed at creating direct access to the metropolis for the population of the colonies. From 1948 the population of the United Kingdom and Colonies had a shared citizenship (Dummett & Nicol 1990) that, by natural extension, could both reside and work within this realm. However, unlike the explicit and active recruitment which was organised and eventually institutionalised by the French state, labour migration from the Caribbean to Britain was the result of coincidence in terms of the return of ex-service personnel and their contacts to Britain following the 1952 US immigration legislation which deflected labour streams from the US to Britain and thus created an 'available alternative' for potential migrants in the Caribbean.

The migration outcomes for these two groups are inextricably linked to the circumstances of their acquisition of citizenship and their incorporation by the European state. French Caribbean people became culturally integrated into the cities and the urban economies as French citizens, albeit into quite specific sectors which, at that time, were experiencing a labour deficit. In contrast, the 126,000 Caribbeans who by 1959 were living in Britain (Dummett & Nicol 1990:171) were together with a growing population from India and Pakistan referred to as 'coloured' and increasingly identified and indeed problematised as 'immigrants'. "Within popular and political discourse, an immigrant is, by definition, a 'coloured' or a 'black' person" (Miles 1990:527). This 'othering' of many individuals in Paris and London as a result of their skin colour followed traditional class distinctions and in many ways became rooted in an already existing social complexity. Being incorporated by the 1948 Act as integral elements of the British population had close parallels with the association of the terms 'immigrant' and 'Jew' during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Miles 1990). Despite the evident desire of the British state to retain its imperial status within the global sphere, the definition of the boundaries of the nation state, access to citizenship and the resource distribution

which would ensue, became a focal point for an exclusion that could readily be developed by demonising a particular immigrant group.

Despite the presence in Britain of ex-servicemen and women from British colonies who were culturally and linguistically closer to British society than most Europeans, the British state looked in preference to European workers to fill their labour needs.

Despite labour shortages, a significant immigration from Ireland and the recruitment of labour from displaced persons' camps in post-war Europe by the British state between 1948 and 1962, led to an increasingly vigorous debate at political level and in the media as to whether immigration from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan was desirable. These debates gave credence to the racism that was evident in the street. Instead of condemning such sentiments, representatives of the state and the media tended to direct the 'blame' for such attitudes to the growing presence of coloured immigrants, thus reinforcing these racist perceptions of cultural origin and the creation of barriers between the groups. The exclusion of Irish immigration from the restrictions imposed in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act institutionalised this racism. The 'good human stock' necessary for immigration (Royal Commission on Population 1949) did not include black or Asian people (regardless of their nationality and colonial experience). Instead the commission referred to Flemish and French protestant refugees who had settled in Britain in the past as groups that fulfilled these conditions. Incredibly, echoes of such sentiments are to be found in contemporary discussions of winning popular consensus on labour immigration policy. In an article published in the *Economist*, Cairncross (2002) proposed that, in Europe, the choice of culturally appropriate immigrants 'may mean giving preference to white, Christian, Central and Eastern Europeans over people from other religious groups and regions' (Cairncross 2002:15). This pre-imposes a very narrow, a-historical perspective on the current population of Europe. It is certainly not a 'multicultural' vision. It fails to consider how the population of countries such as Britain

and France view themselves and the rest of the world after five decades of post-war immigration and integration.

Caribbean Entry to British and French Labour Markets in the Post-war Years

Among the passengers travelling on board HMS Empire Windrush to Britain from Jamaica in 1948 (Lambeth Borough Council 1988) were several ex-members of the armed forces. The few hundred men and women who had previously served in the armed forces and military related occupations amounted to a small proportion of the nearly 300,000 migrants who subsequently travelled from the Caribbean to Britain. However, they constituted the critical pioneer group in what was largely a migration via social network contacts (Byron 1994). Spouses and other close relatives of the servicemen were soon to follow their wake in search of work in Britain. By 1951 a total of 9,456 males and 6,732 females born in the British Caribbean were living in Britain (OPCS Census of Great Britain, Nationality and Birthplaces Tables 1953). The decision by the British public and private sectors to recruit labour from the Caribbean naturally followed from these 'connections' that had facilitated post-war migration from the Caribbean.

Recruitment of Caribbean Workers by Employers in Britain and France

Recruitment of labour began on the Caribbean island of Barbados during the mid 1950s. In a rare and detailed account of recruitment of Caribbean migrants to Britain in the post-war period, Brooks (1975) highlighted the important role played by the colonial government in Barbados in sponsoring emigration due to the island's high population growth and increasing levels of unemployment. The 'safety valve' approach (Marshall 1987) involved the colonial state encouragement of emigration to reduce the pressure of 'overpopulation' and unemployment. Officials from Barbados went to Britain in 1955, documented employment

prospects and contacted several large employers – mainly within the public sector – including London Transport and the Health Service. The Barbados Migrants' Liaison Service was subsequently set up in London to seek out further employment possibilities, liaise with employers and monitor and assist with the welfare of Barbadian migrants in Britain. As a result, London Transport sent a recruitment team to Barbados which selected nearly 150 operative workers. It was decided that further selection and medical checks would be organized by the Barbados Labour Department. Brooks (1975) also notes that from 1959, candidates were required to attend preparatory evening classes prior to leaving the island. The Barbados government provided an interest free loan to cover the new recruits' fare to the place of employment, enabled many who would have otherwise been unable to do so to travel. In addition to London Transport, officials from the British Transport Commission, the British Hotels and Restaurant Association and the National Health Service visited Barbados with a view to recruiting labour forces. Some recruitment also subsequently occurred in Trinidad and Jamaica (Ramdin 1987). London Transport continued to recruit labour in the Caribbean until 1970. However, after the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, recruitment had to take place according to the voucher system introduced by that Act. That meant that every Commonwealth citizen with a passport issued outside the UK, and who wished to seek employment in Britain, had to obtain a work permit to secure entry.

Some obvious contradictions in colonial immigration policy emerged in the 1950s. The ambivalence of successive British governments and the at times open opposition to the migration of British citizens from the colonies during the post-war period has been well documented (Joshi & Carter 1984; Carter *et al.* 1987; Dean 1987; Paul 1997). It was claimed that colonial migrants could not be protected from the *public's* discrimination (Dummett & Nicol 1990; Kershaw & Pearsall 2000; Paul 1997). Such a claim meant that the state "avoided the challenge"... to use its influence "to ensure racially equal practices and to play upon people's sense of

fairness and dislike of a 'colour bar'" (Dummett & Nicol 1990:172). Meanwhile the colonial state, exemplified by the Barbados government, not only recognised the desperate economic conditions on the island, but actively approached a range of employers in Britain with the aim of finding employment for thousands of Barbadians. They saw this as mutually beneficial. Their perspective was shared to some extent by a limited range of employers. The very fact that London Transport continued to recruit workers in the Caribbean until 1970 (Brooks 1975) is evidence of the relative colour blindness prevalent in some ranks of British industry. While jobs were obtained by the colonial migrants, albeit in a restricted range of sectors, housing posed a different problem. Already a scarce commodity in British cities, housing became one of the greatest resource conflicts faced by colonial immigrants in Britain (Rex & Moore 1967; Smith 1989).

Recruitment of labour on the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique was initially organised directly by public sector services such as the Post Office, Customs and Excise and the Health Service. Military conscription also constituted a major recruitment of migrants in the French Caribbean. In 1960 and onwards, about half of those born on the islands would carry out military service in metropolitan France. Although presented by Caribbean parliamentarians as an opportunity to receive technical training and make contact with the metropolitan people, the state agenda was to maintain law and order on the islands following disturbances there, while at the same time opening up the possibility of a long term migration to France (Condon & Ogden 1991b). In terms of an emigration force, this period of informal recruitment was not insignificant. Condon and Ogden (1991b) estimate that some 40,000 migrants from the Caribbean were living in France at the time of the 1962 census.

While recruitment was a critical factor in generating this migration flow, the importance of chain migration once 'pioneer migrants' had established themselves in France is undisputed. With their citizenship spanning transatlantic space, and a state that was positively inclined

towards such migration, it is not surprising that many people in the French Caribbean chose to join relatives and friends seeking a higher income in the metropolis.

The period between 1955 and 1962 is one of considerable convergence in the patterns of Caribbean labour migration to Britain and France. In particular, there were significant parallels in the recruitment of labour from the Caribbean. In both cases, the public sector sent recruitment agents to the Caribbean territories. Both European countries experienced shortages of labour in these public sector industries, as local labour forces sought better paid jobs in the private sector (Peach 1968, 1991; Condon & Ogden 1991a). The ambivalence and contradictions in the British establishment's attitudes towards the migration of citizens from their Caribbean colonies contrasted with the French state's commitment to simultaneously reducing unemployment in the Caribbean while solving labour shortages in the metropolis. From 1962, as mentioned earlier, there was a very distinct divergence in state policy in the two cases. In that year Britain instituted legislation, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which effectively removed the right to live and work in Britain conferred on the residents of the colonies and other overseas territories by the 1948 British Nationality Act. Ironically, the French chose 1963 to instigate BUMIDON, the Bureau through which the institutional framework of organised migration was set up (Condon & Ogden 1991a, 1991b); migration being seen as the solution to overpopulation in the Caribbean and to job shortages in the metropolitan labour market. In short, France encouraged family migration, but Britain did not.

Labour Migrants in Britain and France: Post-war to the 1970s

Over one third of both Caribbean males and females were concentrated in semi- and unskilled jobs in the manual employment sector. At the end of the 1970s, most Caribbean men were either still employed in the shrinking manufacturing sector or the transport and distribution sectors; almost one half being skilled manual

workers or foremen. Socio-economic mobility was limited within this migrant generation, however, and few joined the ranks of professionals and employers. In the manufacturing sector they were directly involved in production and related activities, such as packing. There was a significant under-representation of black workers at the supervisory and management levels (Runnymede Trust and Radical Statistics Race Group, 1980). Night shift work was fast becoming increasingly unpopular with the white working class, and here black people's presence became disproportionately high (Smith 1976; Brown 1984; Fevre 1984), thus supporting Peach's (1968) assertion that immigrants from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan became a 'replacement labour force', filling sectors which were being shunned by the white working class due to the unattractive nature of the work. The occupation categories of Caribbean migrants were typical of these trends.

Caribbean women's ease of entry to the understaffed nursing and care sectors led to more than half of employed Caribbean women being classified as non-manual workers (Brown 1984). In addition, increasing numbers of British-raised daughters of Caribbean migrants were entering the labour market via the public administration sector. Nonetheless, over one third of Caribbean women were still in the semi- and unskilled manual sector at the time of this survey. Manufacturing industries employed many Caribbean women, and the contraction of this sector during economic restructuring thrust many such women into the lower levels of the service sector, where low paid jobs of caring for the elderly or as hospital auxiliaries were increasingly available.

It was noted that the low-skilled employment obtained by Caribbean migrants was, for many, essentially the outcome of a compromise decision to forgo the opportunity to undertake longer term skills training in order to obtain immediate low-skilled employment to meet their many obligations to young families in the UK and members of the extended family in the Caribbean (Ramdin 1987; Byron 1994). Nikolinakos (1975) and Harris (1987) posit that the post-war flow of migrants into European countries like

Britain was a contributory element to the process of capital accumulation. It was no accident that post-war Asian and Caribbean labour was channelled into those areas of British industry that were most vulnerable to future mechanisation and consequent large-scale redundancies. Their labour was cheap and expendable and, like most new immigrants, they were relatively less inclined to think of the long-term implications of employment decisions.

To summarise, Caribbean work experience in Britain from the 1950s to the mid 1970s was characterised by high levels of employment in the public service sectors and manufacturing industry. Subsequent developments in the British economy included the severe contraction of these sectors. For these migrants' descendants, who sought to enter the labour force from the mid 1970s onwards, the prospects were often grim.

Between 1962 and 1981, the Bureau set up to organise the departure of labour from the Caribbean to France, BUMIDOM, organised the migration to France of 160,300 people, of whom 85,863 were from Martinique and Guadeloupe (Condon and Ogden 1991b). Of these labour migrants from the Caribbean islands, 12,000 were in France as part of their national service postings, and chose to stay after their service to take up employment in France (Condon & Ogden 1991b). Migrants from the Caribbean were directed into the public sector, which had been hard hit by the movement of local white French workers into better-paid, private sector jobs. This sector was also particularly attractive to the Caribbean migrants due to the possibility of obtaining transfers back to the islands, the 'departments d'outre mer' after a period of work in France. Within the public sector, Caribbean workers were recruited into the Health Service and the Post Office in particular. Both of these large employers became heavily involved in organising the migration and training of workers from the Caribbean to France from the 1960s, and indeed were even engaged in recruitment prior to the formation of BUMIDOM in 1963.

Assimilation or a Multiplex Labour Force? Who Does What in France

In the booming post-war years of almost full employment in France, the state sought labour from southern Europe: Portugal, Spain, Italy, its colonies and ex-colonies in West and North Africa and its Caribbean appendages. In turn, these immigrants were fitted into specific sectors of the economy, and to a great extent, this initial employment allocation shaped their socio-economic futures.

The 1999 French census data reveals something of a hierarchy of workers in France, largely linked to country of origin (Borrel & Boldieu 2001) as had been the pattern in 1982 (Condon & Ogden 1991a). Those born in France with French nationality occupy the upper sections of the socio-economic groupings, with nearly 40 percent of the males in this group in the proprietor or professional classes. There is a gender division of labour, with just less than 30 percent of French women in this socio-economic category. This is most marked in the top professions, where the proportion of French males is twice as high as that of women. During the period 1982 and 1999 there is a significant increase in the proportion of those employed in this economic category. There are a higher proportion of females in the intermediate professional categories, although women seem to be concentrated in the health and social work category, while there is a higher incidence of men in the technical sector. There has been a reduction of the industrial labour category, which in turn reflects the reduction of the manufacturing sector and a corresponding rise in the proportion of the population employed in the (mainly) service sector. Less than 40 percent of French-born men and 12 percent of women are employed in the industrial labour sector. Twice as many men are in skilled jobs compared to those in unskilled jobs. Although there are relatively few women in this sector, the majority of them are in unskilled work.

In relation to the majority French population, the work trajectory of the French Caribbean population seems to 'shift down a gear', particularly in terms of status. Their relative

absence in the top two categories of proprietors and professionals/managers is noticeable. The proportion of French Caribbeans found in the intermediate professional category is half that of the wider French nationality group. Meanwhile, there is a high proportion of both men and women – especially women – in the public and private service sectors. Caribbean-born men are also concentrated in the industrial labour group – something of concern given the propensity of this industrial sector to decline over time. For example, a comparison of the 1982 and 1999 data reveals a decrease in Caribbean male employment of 24 percent in the service and labouring sectors. The small rise in the Caribbean presence in the top two sectors does not compensate for this loss, and it is clear that unemployment in the Caribbean-born population has increased between the two censuses. In a fairly discreet manner, the Caribbean French population has been assimilated compartmentally into the French labour market. The reduction of employment in the two major sectors in which this group is concentrated does not look promising for future job seekers.

The third sub-category of the migrant population under consideration consists of the large and complex group of foreign-born immigrants. While this group is under-represented in the professional categories compared to both the French-born population and the Caribbean-French group, there are signs of a growing class of proprietors from the main sending countries of Italy, Spain, Portugal, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Turkey – and to a lesser extent the rest of Africa. This group is under-represented in the professional categories and also to a lesser extent in the public and private service sectors. The high over-representation in the industrial labour categories (both skilled and unskilled) and the personal services sector completes the pattern for this group.

Conclusions

The ruins of Europe in 1945 provided, in many cases, the backdrop for a dramatic turn of social ideas, economy and work. Germany's big cities

had been almost totally razed by the efficient weapons of war of the time. With regard to city planning, the situation was therefore an entirely novel one: the task was to plan a new future for urban life avoiding the consequences of a mass-society which had been so dreadfully demonstrated by Nazism. Although not quite as dramatic, similar issues also faced the rest of Europe, and the focus for social planning was predominantly framed in urban terms.

As I have shown, the consequences were not always the result of planning. I have stressed the impact of immigration policies and the fact that workers were desperately needed in an expansive labour market at a time of economic boom. The idea of regulation lay at the heart of European immigration policies – although, as revealed, it did not necessarily work out like that. In most western European countries, state authorities organised the recruitment of workers abroad after 1945. It resulted in waves of immigration to Britain and France and, after 1956, also to Germany. In the latter case, the postponement of mass immigration depended on the initial 'Wiedereinbürgerung' of refugees displaced during the preceding decades.

Despite these common preoccupations, national traditions exerted themselves during this period and affected the settlement of immigrants in their new countries. The influence on housing policies and the labour market differed from country to country, and triggered perceptions of the precise form of 'cultural otherness'. Caribbeans in Britain and France were no exception to this pattern. Even when they were accepted on the labour market – at least in specific sectors – their 'otherness' was rooted in the definitions made by the people living in other parts of the cities. Workplace cultures moved fairly rapidly into a more distinct pattern of ethnic divisions of labour.

The varying legislation and regulation of immigration into France and Britain resulted in a situation where migrants from the colonies solved the labour shortage problems in the metropolitan nation. While labour migration was generally accepted as a strategy for socio-economic improvement, my argument is that the post-war migration from the Caribbean

to Europe contributed in numerous ways to changes in the view of urban areas. The city, or parts of it, became seen in increasingly ethnic terms. The result of the colonial process was, in many senses, the introduction of a global community to the city.

The problem has now become one of how to conceptualise the whole range of background factors in order to explain the links between city development, migration from new parts of the world, settlement and the labour market. Part of the problem is the variation in how migrants settled in different urban cultures, but also that the patterns of migration have changed so rapidly over the last fifty years. They have moved away from the classic patterns established in the late nineteenth and earlier parts of the twentieth century which formed the heart of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology. Due to guest worker regulations, immigrants had to live in quarters close to the factory gates in some countries of Central Europe. In general, while, migrants were attracted to cities due to the availability of employment and, over time, a concentration of members of their social networks, the city presented the migrants with numerous barriers to their spatial and socio-economic freedom. Factors which constituted obstacles included a severe shortage of housing in post-war Europe, the racial discrimination which influenced the allocation of this scarce resource, and their restriction to low level manual and public service employment in urban locations. Over the last four decades of the twentieth century these forces and their spatial and structural consequences gradually became embedded in the city itself. Ethnicity is now certainly an active force in the dynamic urban geography of Europe. Yet one has to avoid using ethnicity alone to explain the social geography of a city. People of common ethnicity and migration history often live in specific places creating niches for particular services, often supplied from within the group, which cater to the needs of the ethnic community. The 'ethnic space' evolves over time. Yet certainly among post-war labour migrants, their association with particularly localities was the outcome of negative housing forces and job proximity. Indeed the suburb-

anisation of many ethnic minority families in later years indicated a desire to escape the restriction of earlier times. There are different aspects to the discussion: the varying patterns of living in cities like Paris and London where otherness and cultural racism are either open or hidden; and the fact that Caribbean became a symbolic expression of being "immigrant" in Britain which, to some extent, related to skin and colour, as was the case for Algerians in France, Turks in Germany and Yugoslavs in Sweden. But a more precise analysis shows how the regulations and constraints of the labour market add a dimension of power and economy into the discussion which is often missing in more 'culturalist' approaches.

The oil crisis in 1973 marked a shift in attitudes towards migrant workers all over Europe. It has often been said, not at least by cultural scholars, that they use the past to explain the present. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that the past is a series of unforeseen events. Even when it seems that regulations and legislation represent a body of continuity, albeit with periods of change, the development of media discourses and city cultures are often interrelated. From the early 1970s, the image of migrants progressively turned into one of redundancy and unemployment. In a situation in which the labour market was being restructured, and the big corporations began to export production to other parts of the world, the otherness of the immigrants became charged with the perceptions of the majority of their alternative economies, and specific areas such as the back streets of London's East End and the suburbs of Paris. It might, however, be argued that in the longer term, those migrants from colonial areas such as the Caribbean, who had long-term familiarity with metropolitan culture and language, were better able to cope with the strains of change that have occurred in those societies in recent decades. An investigation of such hypotheses in relation to new migrants is therefore an important future assignment.

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