

تاريخ استقبـال المقال: 2018/11/01 تاريخ قبول نشر المقال: 2018/11/15 تاريخ نشر المقال: 2018/12/01

Interethnic Marriage in the United Kingdom: the Phenomenon and its Leading Mechanisms

الزواج العرقي في المملكة المتحدة: الظاهرة و آلياتها المسيرة

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Abstract

There is a dearth of information on mixed race marriages in the UK. This is curious since it is often the area of "race relations" which excites the most public condemnation and personal hostility. It is an extremely controversial subject on which nearly everyone has an opinion. Early public opinion surveys often included a question "would you let your daughter marry someone from another race?" so as to provide an indication of the level of racial prejudice in the UK. Racial prejudice is roughly regarded by some experts to have decreased when intermarriage increases to a certain level.

The paper aims at discussing reasons leading to interethnic marriages and different ethnic groups to intermarry in the UK. Marriage, despite basically concerning only two persons in the agreement encompasses several individual and contextual constraints. Why one is more likely to choose a particular partner rather than one another? It lies in our effort to take every possible causal factor into consideration because marital decisions are often made on the basis of a range of related attributes.

Key words: interethnic marriage, United Kingdom, leading mechanisms.

ملخص

هناك ندرة في المعلومات حول الزواج العرقي في المملكة المتحدة. غالبا ما يكون مجال "العلاقات العرقية" مثيرا للجدل والعداء الشخصي. كثيرا ما تضمنت استطلاعات الرأي العام في السابق سؤالا "هل ستسمح لابنتك بالزواج من شخص ينتمي إلى عرق آخر؟" من أجل تقديم مؤشر لمستوى التحيز العنصري في المملكة المتحدة. يعتبر بعض الخبراء أن مستويات التحامل العنصري قد تنخفض مقارنة بتزايد نسبة التزاوج بين مختلف الأعراق.

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى مناقشة الأسباب التي تؤدي إلى الزواج بين مختلف المجموعات العرقية في المملكة المتحدة. الزواج، على الرغم من أنه مسألة تتعلق بشخصين فقط إلا أنه يشمل العديد من القيود الفردية والسياقية. لماذا من المرجح اختيار شريك معين بدلا من آخر؟ وهي تكمن في جهودنا الرامية إلى أخذ كل عامل سببي محتمل في الاعتبار لأن القرارات الزوجية غالبا ما تتخذ على أساس مجموعة من الصفات ذات الصلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الزواج بين الأعراق، المملكة المتحدة، العوامل الموجهة.

Introduction

There were various European groups that inhabited Britain including the Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman populations. As a consequence, different interethnic marriages occurred among those European groups. Inter-marriage with non European populations began in the late 15th century. Local British wives took the arriving Romani Nomads shaping a distinct community known as the Romanichal that seem today, due to inter-marriage, similar to the white British population.

In 1578, soon after the first Africans reached Britain, the first mixed marriages took place. For the next 200 years, black slaves were brought to England in increasing numbers. Most were concentrated in London, but they were numerous in the slave parts of Bristol and Liverpool and could be found throughout Britain. It is impossible to calculate with any accuracy the size of the black population, but most historians have accepted the estimate of between 14.000 and 15.000 slaves made in the judgment in the Somerset case of 1772, when Lord Mansfield ruled that slaves could not lawfully be shipped out of England against their will. To this figure must be added an unknown number of freed slaves.

Interethnic marriage occurred in Britain since the 17th century, when the British East India Company began bringing over many Indian scholars, lascars and workers usually Bengali and/or Muslim who took local white British wives, largely due to a lack of Indian women in Britain at the time. Although mixed marriages were not always accepted in British society, there were generally no legal restrictions against inter-marriage at the time.

Following World War I, there was a large surplus of females in Britain and there were increasing numbers of seamen from the Indian subcontinent, Arab world, Far East and Caribbean. Many of them inter-married and cohabited with local white females, which raised increasing concerns over miscegenation and led to several race riots at the time. During the 19th century, following the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, black immigration almost came to a halt, and the descendants of the freed slaves in Britain were absorbed in to the general population.

The paper is inclined to provide answers to the following questions: what is the ethnic composition of the British society? What are reasons leading to interethnic marriage? Which groups tend to inter-marry in the UK? And what are the socio-cultural consequences of such unions?

1. Origins of Distaste for Racial Mixing

The origins of this belief lie deep in theories about race which, while rejected by most contemporary scientists, still maintain their hold on the general public, and from the basis of racism. According to these theories, human beings are divided into distinct biological groups according to skin color, each with its distinct physical and psychological characteristics. Not surprisingly, since the originators of these theories were white, the white race was said to be superior to all others in intellectual achievement and morality, and the black race inferior, with other races coming in between.

The distaste for racial mixing was reflected in the names given by white people to those of mixed parentage, which have always had offensive connotations of animal breeding. "Mulatto", the Portuguese word for a young mule, was in use in the US and the West Indies from the 16th to the 20th century; "Métis", meaning a mongrel dog, was the French equivalent to "mixed breed", and "half breed" were used in the US and the UK; while in the 20th century "half-caste" became the commonest term. By World War II, any form of intimate relationship between a white woman and non white man was often considered offensive (Humayun 4). Concerns were repeatedly voiced regarding white adolescent girls forming relationships with colored men, including South Asian seamen in the 1920s (Jackson and Ainsley 154), Muslim immigrants in the 1920s to 1940s (Humayun 93), African American during World War II, Maltese and Cypriot cafe owners

in the 1940s to 1950s, Caribbean immigrants in the 1950s to 1960s, and South Asian immigrants in the 1960s.

1.2. Case of Seretse Khama

In 1948, an international incident was created when the British government took exception to the difficult problem¹ of the marriage of Seretse Khama, king of the Bamangwato people of what was then the British Bechuanaland Protectorate, to an English woman, Ruth Williams, whom he had met while studying law in London. The interracial marriage sparked a furor among both the tribal elders of the Bamangwato and the apartheid government of South Africa. The latter objected to the idea of an interracial couple ruling just across their northern border, and exerted pressure to have Khama removed from his chieftainship.

Britain's Labor government, then heavily in debt from World War II, could not afford to lose cheap South African gold and uranium supplies. They feared South Africa might take direct action against Bechuanaland, through economic sanctions or a military incursion (Rider and Clare 16). The British government began a parliamentary enquiry into Khama's fitness for the chieftainship. Although the investigation reported that he was eminently fit for the rule of Bechuanaland, for his unfortunate marriage the government ordered the report suppressed. It exiled Khama and his wife from Bechuanaland in 1951 (McFadden and Moore 261). It was many years before the couple was allowed to live in Africa, and more several years before Khama became president of what is now Botswana. Their son Ian Khama is the president of that country.

1.3. Whites versus Minorities Attitudes towards Interracial Marriage

In Britain after World War I a surplus of women and an influx of men from the colonies led to many mixed race couplings and increased concerns about miscegenation. By World War II any form of intimate relationship between a white woman and non white man was considered unacceptable. In 1958, 71% of Britons in a *Gallup* poll strongly disapproved of interracial mixing. By 1980, 27% of Britons still objected to mixed race marriage, even among close relatives. The pop band Madness's song "You're an Embarrassment" takes its theme from the saxophonist's sister's mixed race marriage. The lyrics describe the unfolding turmoil as uncles, aunts, mum and dad react:

Our uncle he don't wanna know he says,
We are a disgrace to the human race he says,
How can you show your face,
When you're a disgrace to the human race?
No commitment, you're an embarrassment
Yes, an embarrassment, a living endorsement. (qtd. in Cushman, Jr.)

During the 1991 Gulf war, Richard Littlejohn wrote in the *Sun* that British women married to Iraqis "should be left to rot in their adopted country, with their hideous husbands and their unattractive children."

The aim behind citing this quotation is to show the racist views and hostile of white British towards other racial and ethnic minority groups and therefore towards mixed unions.

Opinion questions in the Fourth National Survey suggested that South Asians were a good deal less likely to accept mixed marriages than Caribbean's were less likely than white people. Well over half of Indians and Pakistanis felt that most members of their group would mind if a close relative were to marry a white person.

It was not uncommon for respondents to claim that they themselves would not mind even though most members of their group would. Primary sources show that mixed marriages are much less common among South Asians than among Caribbean's. About one in five British born men of Indian or African Asian origin have a white wife; the equivalent figure for women is about one in ten. Very few Bangladeshis and Pakistanis have entered mixed relationships. It stands to reason that in communities where

arranged marriages are common, mixed marriages are rare (Berthoud 17). For some minority groups, though, there remains a suspicion that marrying into a white family is disloyal to one's ethnicity of origin, an opportunist move into white society.

1.4. Ethnic Composition of UK Population

British immigration policy has historically characterized by two priorities: first, the need to meet the demands of Britain's labor market by providing cheap unskilled labor and, second, the need to control the entry of dependents particularly from Commonwealth countries (Clare 36). The cumulative effect of the legislation has been to help foster a climate of option where people from Afro-Caribbean and Asian origin are seen as unwelcome outsiders.

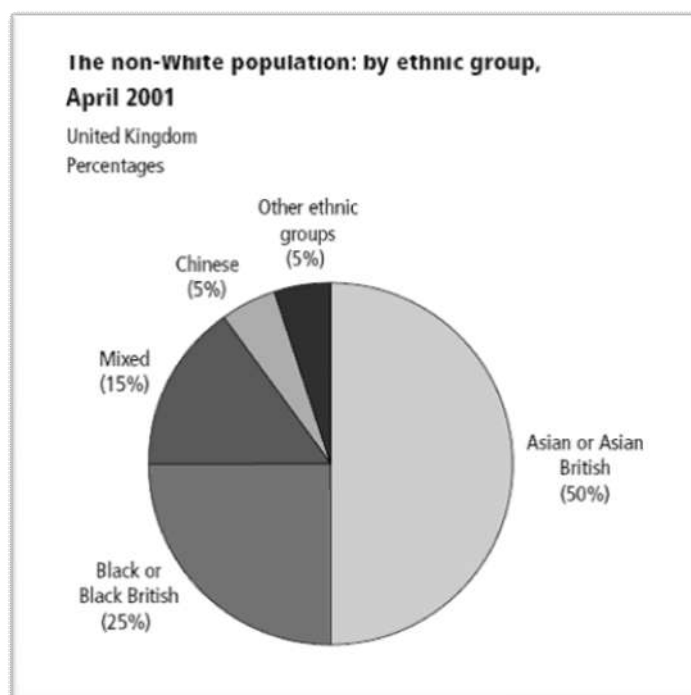
One of the most significant changes in Britain since the 1991 is the increase in the numbers of newcomers from different ethnic backgrounds and countries (Platt 4). Britain has traditionally been and remains a predominantly white nation. With more than 90% of its population in 2001 census declaring themselves white British, white Irish, or white other, individuals belonging to this category include people from old Commonwealth countries such as white South Africans, New Zealanders, Australians and Canadians and white Europeans. However, this picture is changing with a rapidly increasing diversity of ethnic groups and cultures.

According to census data, Britain's population grew by 4% in the 1990s. 73% of this growth was due to minority ethnic groups. The minority ethnic population has grown rapidly since the early 1950s; there has been fast expansion, initially started by the need for labor in manufacturing and service industries. The earliest arrivals to Britain were black Caribbean in the post-war period of expanded immigration. Caribbean immigration reached its climax in the mid 1950s to mid 1960s, and there has been little change in the overall size of the black Caribbean population since 1971.

A question on ethnicity was introduced for the first time in 1991, meaning that the 2001 Census offers the first chance to compare the geographical distribution of ethnic group, over time, all previous attempts having been based on estimation from questions about country of birth (Tizard and Phoenix 67). There are, nevertheless, some difficulties in making comparisons over time. One is the problem of the use of different ethnic categories in 1991 and 2001, principally the introduction of mixed race options in 2001. While in the 1991 Census, respondents could identify with one of the major ethnic groups or declare themselves "other".

In 2001 they could identify in mixed categories, such as "mixed white" and "black British". More than 1% of the population identified as "mixed race" in 2001, with mixed black/white accounting for a little more than half this number, and mixed white/Asian about one third. Consequently, this would have had an influence on numbers in all other categories. For instance, the number in the "black other" category decreased from 178,000 to 97,000 over the decade and the number of people identifying as "other" dropped from 290,000 in 1991 to 229,000 in 2001. It seems that at least some of this change was due to people reclassified as mixed race in 2001.

Figure 1



Source: Michael Rendall and Hayley Butcher "Focus on Ethnicity and Identity"
Office for National Statistics: March. 2005. <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>>.

According to the ONS, the majority of the UK population in 2001 was White 92%. The remaining 4.6 million or 7.9% people belonged to other ethnic groups. Indians were the largest of these groups, followed by Pakistanis, those of mixed ethnic backgrounds, black Caribbean, black Africans and Bangladeshis. The remaining minority ethnic groups each accounted for less than 0.5% of the UK population and together accounted for a further 1.4%.

Figure 1 demonstrates that around half of the non White population was Asians of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other Asian origin.

A further quarter was black that is black Caribbean, black African or other black. 15% of the non white population was from the mixed ethnic group. The "Mixed" population is now one of the fastest growing ethnic groups. One estimate is that the "Mixed" group is set to increase further by 30% between 2010 and 2020. About a third of this group was from white and black Caribbean backgrounds.

There were almost 691,000 White Irish people in Great Britain accounting for 1% of the Great Britain population. In Great Britain the number of people who came from an ethnic group other than white grew by 53% between 1991 and 2001, from 3.0 million in 1991 to 4.6 million in 2001. In 1991 ethnic group data were not collected on the Northern Ireland Census.

Yasmin Alibhai Brown makes a powerful case in a recent book, *Mixed Feelings*, for awareness and acknowledgement of a new kind of Briton. People of mixed race are now 11% of the ethnic minority population, which implicates a lot of people including their parents and grandparents. Alibhai Brown is wryly aware of the unreal and unhelpful tendency of people like herself, in interracial marriages, to become warriors for a cause (qtd. in Kymlicka 14). It is possible, she reflects, that Britain is good at certain types of diversity, such as food and sex; that does not mean that Britons have stamped out racism. Even so, the final impression left by her analysis is pretty positive. Identity undoubtedly derives from being part of social groupings. But we find and reinforce ourselves through

our individual interactions. Interracial relationships have shown, time and time again, that no amount of social construct can kill human attractions.

1.5. Reasons leading to Interethnic Marriage

Love may be the strongest reason which encourages people to enter in interracial marriages. In this concern, Diana Appleyard argued in her article in the *Daily Mail*, in August 2012, that love is considered as the most important factor leading to mixed marriage. She interviewed three couples who felt love was more important than any cultural divide ("The Heavy Price of Mixed-race Marriage"). Although the three couples faced rejection and resistance from their families, they manage to establish successful marital relationships.

Diana Appleyard, again, highlighted this concern with Clare Goldwin in their article in the *Daily Mail*, on August 14, 2012 by interviewing old as well as young mixed married couples who all managed to overcome challenges and agreed that love makes miracles ("Our Love was Color Blind..."). Diana Appleyard and Clare Goldwin wrote that "Deeply moving, and exposing tensions that still blight Britain today, mixed race couples from four generations tell their stories."

Intermarriage may occur because of economic reasons. In gender traditional societies, as women are associated with a wife and mother role and men are associated with a breadwinner, marriage is considered as the exchange of a man's economic attributes for a woman's social and domestic functions (Muttarak 3). Consequently, in the mate selection process women give priority to men's socioeconomic status whereas men would insist women's non-economic resources.

To illustrate this concept, Merton brings up the case of black white intermarriage in the United States in which the union between white females and black males is found to be more common than the other way around. He classifies patterns of intermarriage into two main types based on the female's marriage pattern. If a woman marries into a higher social stratum, this kind of marriage is called hypergamy whereas the term hypogamy applies for the marriage wherein a woman marries downwards. The partnership between white woman and black man usually falls in the category of caste² hypogamy and class hypergamy, i.e., lower class white woman exchanges her higher racial status with upper class black man who in turn seeks for upward mobility in the racial hierarchy.

Another reason which may lead to intermarriages is the demographic factor. The opportunity for members of various groups to form a partnership is determined by group size and sex ratios. Basically, group size affects chances for interaction. When a particular ethnic group is small, its members will not probably have the choice to interact within the group but rather outside it. The opportunities of intermarriage increase as the size of the group decrease.

In certain circumstances, differences in physical appearance in addition to stereotypical qualification connected with a certain group that can enhance attractiveness towards members of that group. Thus, the generalization one has towards members of particular group influences their choice to marry outside their own group. The generalization one holds towards members of certain groups, thus, affects their desirability as a potential partner.

Simple but true that spatial proximity evidently affects the opportunity for men and women of different backgrounds to become acquainted. The effects of physical distance on the density of social contact are proven to hold true in all aspects of social life as well as across time and cross-culturally. According to the law of distance interaction termed by Mayhew and Lvinger the likelihood of interaction or contact of any kind between two social elements is a multiplicatively decreasing function of the distance between them, or of the costs of overcoming that distance. With respect to marriage markets, it is evident that most people tend to meet potential mates within their neighborhood or a nearby community. It is, therefore, expected for a person who lives in a segregated

residential area with little chance to interact with outsiders to have a low propensity to intermarry.

It is not only physical distance that plays a role in determining the degree of social interactions; social distance also significantly influences intergroup relationships. Social distance is a subjective state of nearness constructed through a feeling of common identity, closeness and shared experiences varying by differences in socio-demographic characteristics (Shibutani and Kwan 271). Sociological literature finds homophily, social relations between individuals who resemble each other, applies across all age groups.

It is true that contacts between groups increase when members of the two groups share some common activities together. There are two main spheres that bring various groups of people together, namely, employment and education. When an economic unit is formed, this brings about interaction between males and females of different groups. An early example of work related propinquity³ can be dated back to the time of slavery in the United States. Though racial and occupational structure was stratified, interactions between white masters and black indentured labors were unavoidable. Golden finds a sizable group of the couples he studied had a first contact with their partners either by working for the same employer or engaging in some commercial transactions together.

A person's marital choice is not driven by his/her preference alone. The context in which one grows up or resides affects the opportunity to meet a potential spouse as well. For the ethnic minorities, the proportion of whites to the number of people in one's own ethnic group has a strong influence on one's propensity to have a white partner. The higher is the number of whites in the area, the more likely for an ethnic member to meet and mate with a white person.

Marital decisions are affected by an important factor which is age. Individuals in a younger age group are more tolerant towards exogamy. Consequently, the probability of intermarriage increase as age falls (Muttarak 10). Age becomes a complicated matter when dealing with ethnic minorities because their age structure varies considerably by immigration history and also the births of native born generation. The influence of age on the likelihood to intermarry differs from one ethnic group to another.

Whites in younger age groups are significantly more likely to intermarry but age seems to have a minor influence in case of the ethnic minorities. Where an individual was born affects the likelihood to intermarry differently for whites and members of minority ethnic groups. While being born in the UK facilitates the formation of interethnic relationships in case of the ethnic minorities, it is whites born abroad whose chance of intermarriage is higher.

Educational attainment in itself generally plays a significant role in the partner selection process. As schooling can have an effect on values, attitudes, knowledge and life styles of an individual, it is presumed that highly educated persons possess more universalistic attitude and this can partially counteract the influence of family origin in mate selection (Kalmijn 32). Those who remain in a higher level of education are self-selected to be more able and more advantaged and this may affect the social networks and friendships which continuously develop during time in school. Therefore, the level of educational attainment has an important effect in determining both preferences for an opportunity to meet a partner and for selecting a potential marriage spouse. Pertaining to the influence of educational attainment on intermarriage, literature finds that the strongest status boundary for marriage is commonly that between college graduates and lesser educated persons.

For both ethnic minorities and whites, socioeconomic characteristics measured by educational attainment and occupational class, exert strong influence on one's chance to engage in interethnic partnerships. As it is possible that ethnic affiliation is counterbalanced by achieved status and higher educational institutions and workplace provide a diversified meeting ground for prospective spouses, those with a degree

qualification and those classified in a managerial professional class unsurprisingly have a higher chance to intermarry.

Language is considered another important factor in marital relationships since it is the mean by which people communicate. The ability to speak English, hence, determines the capability to communicate with the natives and also with members of other ethnic groups (Stevens and Schoen 1988). The individuals who speak English better are considered as more acculturated and this should increase the propensity to intermarry.

Religious affiliation affects the choice to engage in interracial marriages. As religion is one fundamental element in the constitution of the cultural heritage of the ethnic group, it is possible to find correlation between ethnicity and religious denomination. Meng and Gregory find in their studies of immigrants' marriage patterns in Australia that strong religious belief is negatively correlated with the willingness to engage in interethnic partnerships.

Sex ratio is a crucial factor in heterosexual marriage market. Skewed sex ratios might drive a person to seek eligible partners outside of their ethnic group. Sex ratio is considered as a continuous variable and large proportion of men in a particular ethnic group is expected to lead to endogamy for women and exogamy for men of that group. Considering each ethnic group separately, the most assimilated group for example, Mixed, Chinese and black Caribbean, are the most sensitive to group size parameter.

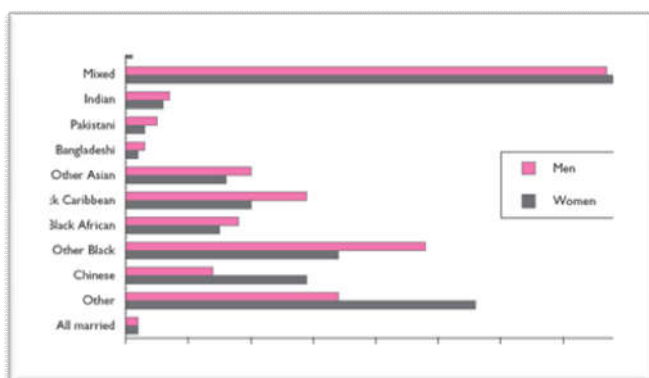
Further, male/female ratio of each ethnic group in each local area is believed to influence a marriage pattern. It appears that for both whites and ethnic minorities, skewed sex ratio has a significant effect on the chance to intermarry only in the case of men. Perhaps a more restricted social circle a woman is embedded in makes it difficult for her to seek a spouse outside her own group even though they encounter the shortage of eligible men. In brief, nativity and socioeconomic status are crucial individual characteristics that determine the chance to intermarry while group size and sex ratio are an important demographic context that shape one's opportunity to meet and marry with a partner from different ethnic groups.

2.3.2. Interethnic Marriages in the UK

One of the most striking social trends in Britain is the increasing number of interracial marriages and people of mixed parentage. Despite this trend, "mixed marriages" are still unusual in Britain. They currently make up just over 1% of all marriages (Berrington and Owen 132). This small over all percentage is not surprising since more than 94% of the British population is white. In Britain, the figures from the 1991 census indicate that interethnic unions account for 1.3% of all heterosexual partnerships. The rates of intermarriage differ from one ethnic group to another.

Considering each ethnic group separately, the rates of intermarriage are found to be high in some ethnic groups, for instance, 20% and 17% for the black Caribbean and the Chinese respectively and relatively low (1 to 4%) amongst the ethnic members from South Asia. There has been a very long history of race and ethnic mixing in the UK, and the past 50 years have seen the sharpest rise in mixed relationships and families in the UK. According to 1996 Census by Berrington, the rates of intermarriage among the Chinese, Other Asian and black Africans are moderate, with those of black Caribbean stand at the top while the South Asian show the lowest rates of unions with whites.

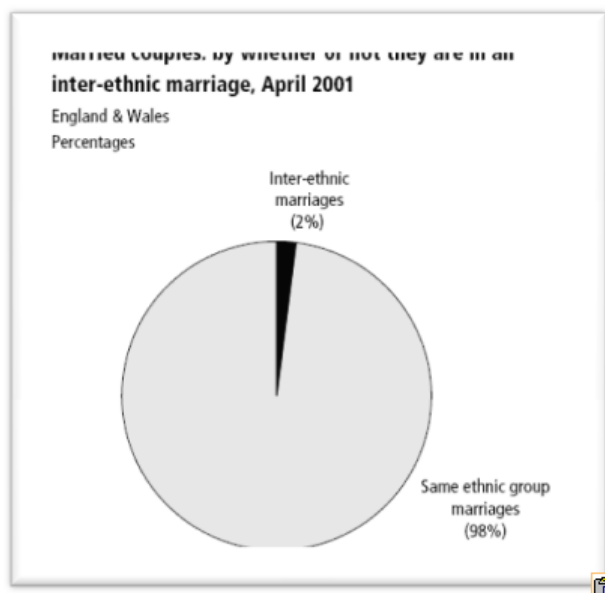
Figure 2



Source: Peter Goldblatt, Roma Chappell "Amendment Population Trends 120 and 121" National Statistics.17 October. 2005. <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>>.

According to ONS, Interethnic marriages ⁴ form a very small proportion of all marriages in England and Wales as a whole 2%. There were 10.3 million married couples in England and Wales on census day in 2001. The vast majority of these marriages, 98%, were between people from the same ethnic background, where ethnic background is defined as white, mixed, Asian, black, Chinese, or other ethnic group. Two percent of marriages were between people from different ethnic backgrounds. Of these inter-ethnic marriages; most included a White person. In the remaining interethnic marriages both partners were from different minority ethnic backgrounds.

Figure 3



Source: Michael, Rendall and Hayley Butcher "Focus on Ethnicity and Identity" Office for National Statistics: March. 2005. <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>>.

Figure 3 demonstrates that interethnic marriages ⁵ present only 2% of all marriages, whereas 98% is the proportion of same ethnic marriages. The most common interethnic marriages were between white and mixed race people, 26% of all interethnic marriages. Marriages between a white person and someone who described their ethnic group as

other were the next most common 15%, followed by white and black Caribbean marriages 12%, and white and Indian marriages 11%.

People from the mixed ethnic group were the most likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group 78%. The mixed ethnic group is relatively small and there are limited opportunities to marry someone from the same ethnic group. However, mixed race people are often married to someone from a related ethnic group. For example, among men who described their own ethnic group as mixed white and black Caribbean, 76% were married to white women, 8% to black Caribbean women and 11% to mixed white and black Caribbean women.

Men of West Indian origin were slightly less likely than men of African origin to marry white women, but they were three times more likely to do so than men from South Asia "Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis". A further analysis of the data from 1987 to 1989 surveys carried out by Charlie Owen for this study, shows that a marked change in the sex ratio of black white marriages is taking place in the younger generation, with equal proportions of young "West Indian" men and women having white partners.

Among people who described their ethnic group as other, 56% of women and 34% of men had married outside their ethnic group and most had married a white person. This other group includes people from the Philippine Islands, Malaysia, Japan, Vietnam and various Middle Eastern countries. People who described their ethnic group as other black, largely young black people born in Britain, were the next most likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group, followed by black Caribbean people. Almost five in ten other black men 48% and three in ten black Caribbean men 29% were married to women outside the black ethnic group, in most cases white women.

People from South Asian backgrounds were the least likely of the minority ethnic groups to be married to someone from a different ethnic group. Only 6% of Indians, 4% of Pakistanis, and 3% of Bangladeshis had married someone outside the Asian group. Like in cultural and racial differences, people from South Asian backgrounds generally have different religions to people from other ethnic groups which may explain their relatively low intermarriage rate. People who described their ethnicity as other Asian were more likely to have married a non Asian person 18%.

Although most interethnic marriages include a White person, White people are the least likely to be married to someone outside their ethnic group only 1% of White men or women had done so. White people present the majority population in England and Wales with 91% and consequently there are limited opportunities to marry people from a minority ethnic group. This is particularly true for people living outside London, where the minority ethnic population is often very small. Patterns of interethnic marriage were similar for men and women. Exceptions were that black women were less likely than black men to have married outside their ethnic group, and Chinese women were more likely than Chinese men to have done so.

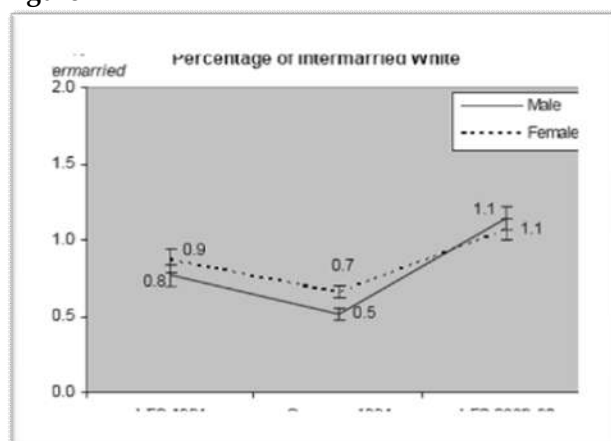
The concern of mixed relations was expressed by Geraldine Bedell in her article in the *Guardian* published in April 2003 when she wrote:

From Diana, Princess of Wales to Trevor McDonald, Michael Caine to Zeinab Badawi, countless celebrities have, or have had, lovers from different racial backgrounds. People of mixed race, from Zadie Smith to Halle Berry, Hanif Kureishi to Paul Boateng, are increasingly in the public eye; and in parts of our big cities, interracial relationships are so common that even to notice them is bad manners. When we set out to find couples for this article, some people thought that even taking an interest in the subject was racist. ("Between Two Worlds")

2.4. White Interethnic Marriage

It is important to look into white men and women who engage in interethnic partnerships. An interesting explanation of this point emanates from the graph below.

Figure 4



Source: Raya Muttarak "Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain" *12th Biennial*

Conference of the Australian Population Association, Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

15-17 September, 2004. <http://www.apa.org.au/upload/2004-2E_Muttarak.pdf>.

Figure 4 shows percentages of white men and women who engage in interethnic partnerships. The number of interethnic married whites is increasing for both men and women whereas the data of 1991 shows a lower rate of intermarried whites than the 1981 Labor Force Survey (LFS) data. The number of intermarried women exceeds that of intermarried men in 1981 and 1991 while the 2002 LFS data shows women and men have the same rate of intermarriage, i.e., almost 1.1% of all unions in the white population. Between 2004 and 2008, 3% of men and 2% of women from the majority white population in Britain formed relationships outside their ethnic group (Platt).

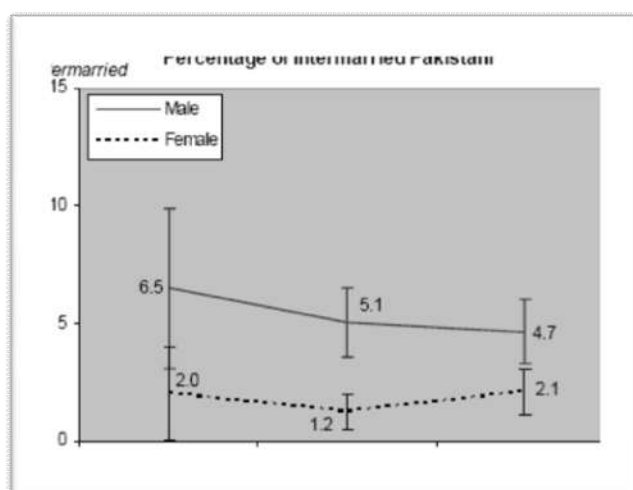
Whites appear to have the lowest percentage of intermarried individuals. This can be explained by group size. The highest level of homogamy concerning whites is explained by

the group size. Due to a relatively much smaller number of ethnic minorities in the British society, whites have lower opportunity to have marital relations with an ethnic member whereas members of other minority ethnic groups have more chance to choose a white partner.

2.5. South-Asian Interethnic Marriage

In the case of South-Asian (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian) interethnic marriage, it is equally manifest to detect its complexity because of the group's sticking to its religion and traditions. Its conservatism classifies it with those ethnic groups which hardly favour intermarriage. As a sample, the graph below underlines principally of Pakistani marital assimilation.

Figure 5



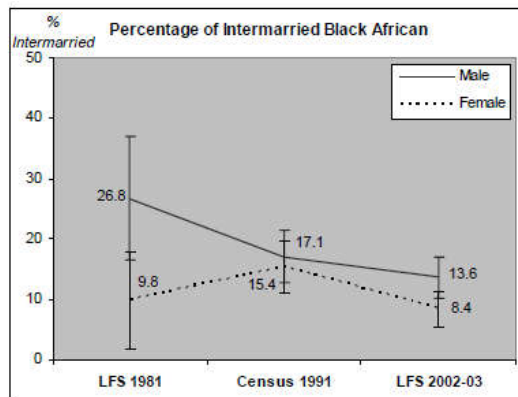
Source: Raya Muttarak " Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain" *12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. 15-17 September. 2004. <http://www.apa.org.au/upload/2004-2E_Muttarak.pdf>.

It seems that the number of Pakistani men who have a white partner is declining slightly across time but this might simply be a result of different data used for comparison. For Bangladeshi men, an unusual high rate of intermarriage 14% portrayed in the 1981 LFS data is probably attributed to sampling variation since there were only a very small number of them in the sample. The intermarriage trends of South Asian women show a more interpretable result in that it appears to be increasing moderately for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi and quite dramatically for the Indian. While the number of intermarried Indian women had always been lower, the 2002-2003 LFS data indicates that they achieve approximately the same intermarriage rates with that of their fellow men. Concerning Indians, there are slightly more women 7.2% than men 6.7% who are married a white partner. The analysis of the 1981 and 1983 by Coleman (1992) shows that more Indian men 5% are intermarried compared to 4% of Indian women.

2.6. Black African Interethnic Marriage

There appears to be no consistent pattern in the rate of intermarriage for the black African but one needs to be aware of the diversity of this group. As Peach remarks, black African is not a homogeneous group and it, in fact, comprises a great range of national and ethnic identities within it. The socioeconomic characteristics of this group may well have changed considerably over time. The high rate of intermarriage for African males in the 1981 LFS (see Figure 6) are probably due to the fact that the early immigrants from Africa were mostly students in UK higher educational institutions or political refugees from East Africa and Nigeria (Daley 1996).

Figure 6



Source: Raya Muttarak "Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain" 12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, Quarterly Labor Force Survey. 15-17 September. 2004. <<http://www.apa.org.au/upload/pdf>>.

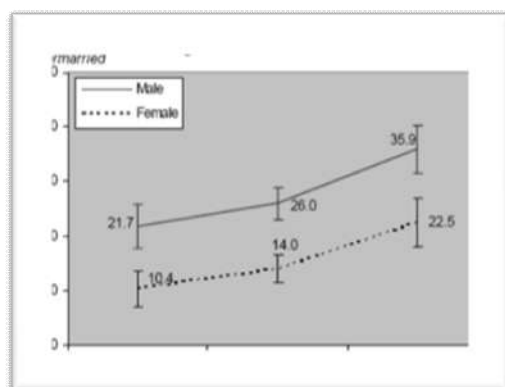
Their high socioeconomic status should not have made it difficult for them to marry a white partner. On the other hand, most African women migrated in order to join their husbands or partners in the UK so their lower rates of intermarriage are not surprising. The decline in the number of black Africans with a white partner in recent years might be subject to the change in population composition of the group.

Randall Kennedy, professor of law at Yale University and author of *Interracial Intimacies*, notes that African Americans take one of three views of such relationships: They see them as a positive good, decreasing segregation; they are agnostic, considering relationships a private matter thus fending off the common assumption that successful black people want nothing more than a white partner; or they repudiate mixed relationships on politicized black is beautiful grounds. There is an increase of a flow of poorly qualified refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia. The changing nature of the socioeconomic characteristics of the black African population might make their intermarriage rates vary accordingly.

2.7. Black Caribbean Interethnic Marriage

The presence of Caribbean people has resulted from two main phases in migration patterns since 1940s. The first phase began during World War II, when Britain recruited thousands of West Indians in support of war effort. These recruits were predominantly men but there were a smaller number of women. Many of these men were children of the professional classes in the Caribbean, who served in the armed forces in the Royal Air Force or worked as technicians in Britain's war industry, while most of these servicemen and servicewomen returned to their home countries after the war ended in 1945, some remained and because there were many more men than women, they tended to marry white British women. The second phase of migration was due partly to the response to labor shortages in Britain as a consequence of the post-war reconstruction program (Peach, Byron and Condon).

Figure 7



Source: Raya Muttarak “ Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain” *12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. 15-17 September. 2004. <http://www.apa.org.au/upload/2004-2E_Muttarak.pdf>.

As it is reflected in Figure 7, the rates of black Caribbean interethnic marriages are in a continuous increase for both males and females. There are gender differences in interethnic marriages where the rates of black Caribbean male interethnic marriage exceeds that of women. Goulbourne asserted that the Caribbean derived population in Britain is becoming mixed with members of other communities, primarily white, European, or with historically indigenous people namely Britons and Celts. He indicated that the 1991 census of the population and subsequent labor Force surveys suggest that about a third of these Caribbean households are of mixed backgrounds.

By 1997, half of black men and a third of black women had a white partner, according to a major study by the Policy Studies Institute. Model and Fisher contend that “It is not difficult to imagine that soon as many as half of native born black Caribbean males in Britain will have white partners” (qtd. in Sutherland 43). It has been suggested that such growth might be leading to a blurring of racial identities, especially among those of African Caribbean origin. As black Caribbean have settled in Britain longer than other groups after their massive migration since 1948, it is possible that they experience a higher degree of marital assimilation. Besides, by 1991 over a half of black Caribbean population is formed by those born in Britain so it may be the second generation that accelerate the overall intermarriage proportion of black Caribbean.

The percentage of black Caribbean intermarried men exceeds that of women. Bagley provides a broad explanation for the gender difference in intermarriage rates that it is a result of two main factors. The first one concerns an imbalanced sex distribution of immigrants as a result of the fact that men were more likely to pioneer migration, following by women and children at a later stage. Although this account might hold truth during the period of study, at present the sex ratio of immigrants has changed towards parity for those with black origins, with females’ slightly outnumbering males.

Another factor given by Bagley for black male predominance in interethnic partnerships is rather difficult to test empirically. He explains that in all cultures, traditionally men have more freedom than women to travel around and naturally experience more social interactions so this results in fewer intergroup relationships for women from several ethnic groups such as black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani. At best, it could be inferred that educational attainment affects intermarriage pattern as years in schooling imply more opportunities to interact with members from different ethnic groups. This, however, is still inadequate to explain the phenomenon.

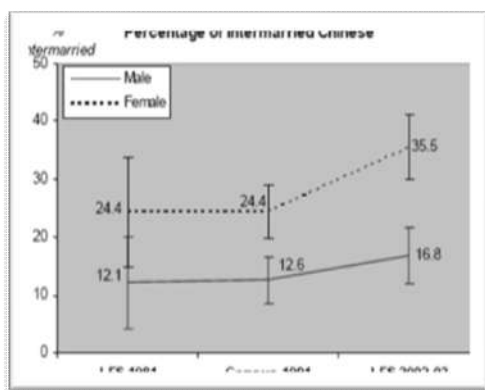
2.8. Chinese Interethnic Marriage

The intermarriage of the Chinese appears to be in a linear trend in accordance with the assimilation thesis. When examining the rates of intermarriage of those born in the UK

and outside separately, second generation Chinese intermarry at much higher rates than their fellow country first generation. It is difficult to find a reason for the very high propensity to have a white partner for Chinese women. Figure 8 clearly indicates that both

first and second generation female Chinese, have the highest rate of intermarriage of all ethnic groups and gender, only second to the mixed population.

Figure 8



Source: Raya Muttarak "Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain" 12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, Quarterly Labour Force Survey. 15-17 September. 2004. <http://www.apa.org.au/upload/2004-2E_Muttarak.pdf>.

Coleman has already pointed out the difficulty to find a sociological explanation for this, the plausible anecdotal reason is that oriental women appear to be more attractive candidates for white men. Focusing on interethnic marriage in the United States, Qian and Sung provide a speculative interpretation for the fact that Asian American women marry whites more often than their male counterparts because they are regarded as having an attractive physical appearance and also are generally associated with the tolerance of traditional power relationships in marriage. This argument, however, has not been empirically tested yet and it is way beyond the scope of the present study to do so.

Walter Fung explains in his article in *China Eye Magazine*, in 2008 when he wrote that mixed marriages between Chinese and others in the UK do occur but Chinese parents, whilst preferring their children to marry fellow Chinese, are generally tolerant ("The UK Chinese Community"). The Census of 1991 revealed that in the UK, 26% of Chinese women were married to non-Chinese partners, compared to 13% of Chinese men who had non-Chinese partners.

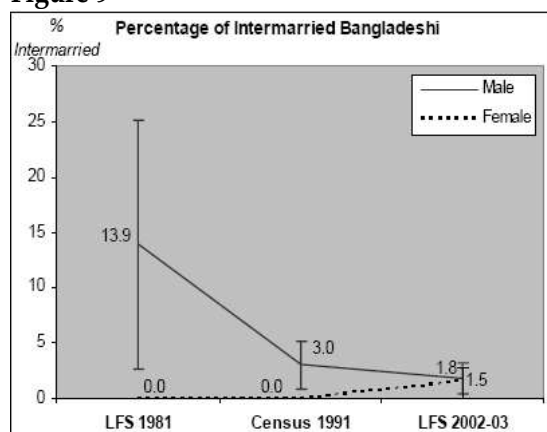
In the 2001 UK Census, British Chinese women 30% were twice as likely as their male counterparts 15% to marry someone from a different ethnic group. With the exception of Chinese, among British Asians South Asians, Pakistani and Bangladeshi males were twice as likely to have an interethnic marriage as their female counterparts, while Indian and other Asian males were more likely to have an inter-ethnic marriage than their female counterparts by a smaller percentage.

2.9. Bangladeshi Interethnic Marriage

It is recognized from figure 9 that Bangladeshis have low rates of interethnic marriages for both men and women. Concerning males, the proportion of interethnic marriage is decreasing from 13.9% in 1981 to 1.8% in 2003. There were no intermarried Bangladeshi women in 1981 and 1991, a slight increase occurred in 2003 to reach 1.5%. Bangladeshis have the lowest rate of intermarriage because their migration peaked only in 1980s and 1990s. Concerning this point, Coleman says, "Partner choice remains strictly controlled

by the preservation of such communities distinct as race, caste, religion and language in most Asian societies while this is not the case in black Caribbean society where such strictures are not imposed" (qtd. in Muttarak 30). Besides, Bangladeshi and Pakistani concentrate in one geographical area which led to the decrease of these groups to have a white partner.

Figure 9



Source: Raya Muttarak "Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain" *12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. 15-17 September. 2004. <http://www.apa.org.au/upload/2004-2E_Muttarak.pdf>.

Richard Berthoud explains in his article "Family formation in Multi-cultural Britain: Three Patterns of Diversity" that it is well known that young men and women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh commonly have their marriage partners chosen for them by their parents or other family elders, and that this practice continues, at least in part, among the communities that have migrated to Britain. Qualitative research which was done by Cochrane Smith suggests that the attitudes of young South Asians on "arranged" marriages have been moving away from those of their parents. Recent research showed that the majority of South Asians who came to Britain at the age of 25 or more most of whom are assumed to have been married before they came, reported that their parents had decided on their partner.

All four of the South Asian groups ⁶ identified the Fourth National Survey (FNS) had features of family life which were similar to each other, different from whites and even more different from Caribbean. Asians who were born in UK or arrived as young children who must have married some years after they arrived claimed that their partner had been chosen by the family, rather than by themselves. Interestingly, there was no apparent difference between men and women in the second generation.

Opinion questions in FNS suggested that South Asians were a good deal less likely to accept mixed marriages than Caribbean groups which were less likely than white people (Berthoud 17). Well over half of Indians and Pakistanis felt that most members of their group would mind if a close relative were to marry a white person. The rates of intermarriage have been increasing amongst white, black Caribbean, and Chinese men and women (Muttarak 37). For Indian and Bangladeshi men and Pakistani men and women, the overlapped confidence intervals imply the number of intermarried South Asians stay approximately the same over the three decades, except for Indian and Bangladeshi women whose intermarriage rate appears to be on the rise, especially at the turn of the century.

Conclusion

With the UK becoming a mixed race country, the debate about black, white and brown has changed considerably. The word "colored", so commonly used in the 60s and 70s, has not become just "politically incorrect" but profoundly offensive. People's attitudes towards inter ethnic marriages have become more liberal. Not long ago intermarriages viewed with contempt and stigmatized. The children of these couples were called 'bastards' or 'half-caste' and carried a burden of humiliation, shame and disgrace. But there has been a big growth in intermarriages in the last decade. By 2000, the UK had the highest number of interracial couples in the world and the following year the UK added 'mixed race' to the census 1.4% of the population respond. Birth records for the UK show that at least 3.5% of newborn babies are mixed race and today mixed race is the fastest growing demographic predicted to become Britain's largest ethnic group by 2020.

Interracial relationships and marriages still have the power to evoke strong reactions from large sections of white, black and Asian communities in the United Kingdom. What is interesting is that despite the concerns and negative attitudes of certain categories towards interracial marriage, it is no longer a novelty in Britain to see people from different racial and cultural backgrounds forming intimate relationships. Throughout society, especially in the major cities, there is growing visible evidence that some people are quite comfortable with the idea of forming relationships with partners who are of different racial backgrounds from themselves and they have no reservations about having children who would be of mixed parentage.

Aarathi Prasad notes out in his article in *The Telegraph* that "a report in January 2009 produced for the Equality and Human Rights Commission noted that this rise in interracial relationships can be "taken to be a thermometer of ethnic relations". If that is the case, then majority and minorities seem to be warming to each other at an unprecedented rate. But set against this backdrop are the voices that support BNP's ideal. They shout about not mixing races, not diluting culture, and not diluting genes about keeping races pure." ("It is a Wonderful, Mixed-up World"). Despite the increasing rates of interethnic marital relationships in the UK, racist views still exist among particular groups of whites, such as the BNP party claiming that white supremacy should be preserved from such interethnic unions.

Endnotes

¹ Memorandum to British Cabinet by Patrick Gordon Walker, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 19 July 1949.

<http://www.innertemple.org.uk/index.php?option=com_context&view=article&id=33&Itemid=30>.

² Aspinall, P. (2009) "Concepts, terminology, and classifications for the 'mixed' ethnic or racial group In *The United Kingdom*" *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. April 2010. <<http://jech.bmj.com/content/64/6/557.full.pdf>>.

³ Caste in this context refers to racial-caste structure where white is regarded as the most superior to all other races. Raya Muttarak, "Marital assimilation: Interethnic marriage in Britain." *Australian Population Association*, 15-17 September 2004. <http://www.apa.org.au/upload/2004-2E_Muttarak.pdf>.

⁴ Proximity : Proximity; nearness, Kinship, Similarity in nature. *Farlex Free Dictionary*, 12 Sep 2011 <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>>.

⁵ An interethnic marriage is defined as a marriage between people from different aggregate ethnic groups. For example, a white person married to someone from a non-white ethnic group or a Pakistani person married to someone from a non-Asian ethnic group. Source: Census, April 2001, *Office for National Statistics*. <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>>.

⁶ The Labor Force Survey, like the Census, identifies Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. The Fourth National Survey (FNS) introduced a fourth category, African Asians, defined as people of South Asian origin whose family had lived in Africa before

migrating to Britain. The majority of these were of Indian pre origin, so the LFS's 'Indian' category is roughly equivalent to the FNS's combination of Indians and African Asians. <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/iser_working_papers/2000-34.pdf>.

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