

## **Paper offered to EPC 2008 Barcelona**

### **The normality of plurality**

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#### **Abstract** 143 words

Growing ethnic diversity is a feature of developed countries, and will in time create 'plural cities' where no one group is a demographic majority.

However, the exaggeration of Black and Asian population change is nowhere more enthusiastically expressed than in the prediction of minority White cities in the near future.

This case study for the UK examines the persistence of myths of imminent plural cities, the complicity of authoritative organisations in their propagation, and the impact of those myths on political discourse related to integration, diversity and human rights.

Accumulated evidence of population trends with an ethnic group dimension has allowed forecasts of future diversity. The established effects of demographic momentum, decreasing fertility and suburbanisation are in contrast to the uncertainty of international migration, the ambiguity of terms including 'indigenous', 'native' and 'white', and the varied purposes to which such forecasts are put.

#### **Extended summary** 870 words

This paper examines the persistent concern with the year in which cities may become 'plural', where no one ethnic or racial group is a demographic majority.

International migration since 1945 has created new cultural and religious diversity in North America and Europe. Although some mainstream political concerns continue to focus on separation, ghettos and incomplete assimilation of 'new populations', research evidence shows clearly the increasing geographical integration of immigrant families through their net movement away from initial settlement in central cities towards suburban and other areas, both in the USA (Ellis and Goodwin-White 2006; Frey 2006) and in Europe (Musterd and de Vos; 2007 Simpson 2004, 2007). Many migrants tend to fill low-paid jobs and live in central city poor housing. Their initial establishment and integration in the receiving country is often within diverse communities including substantial numbers of others with similar origins.

Continued chain migration from similar origins, and the natural momentum of young populations, enlarges the immigrant-origin communities in settlement areas. Motivated by social mobility, limited housing stock, and further integration into the labour and housing markets, the balance of internal (within-country) movement is away from these settlement areas to areas of housing with previously few families with origin in immigration of the past 60 years. Some of the areas to which people of recent immigrant origin disperse from their settlement areas may themselves become new clusters of recent immigrant origin, varying in size.

The decreasing fertility of minority ethnic groups in developed countries is also well documented, following the often very high fertility of recent immigrants while family-making in their new homeland. Fertility of established minority ethnic groups is usually between that of the majority population and that of their home country, and falling (Coleman 1994, 2006).

However, the exaggeration of Black and Asian population change is commonplace and is nowhere more enthusiastically expressed than in the prediction of minority White cities in the near future. In the UK, for example, The Sunday Times reported a “warning” from the government racial equality organisation (the CRE) as “Leicester then Birmingham, Oldham and Bradford become plural cities where no one race holds a demographic majority... The CRE predicts [that Leicester] will become a plural city by 2011, with the others crossing the threshold by 2016” (March 19th 2006, David Leppard reporting). Similar claims have been repeated in numerous newspapers, by politicians, in independent and government reports, and have been repeated as truth when based on no evidence at all, exposing the leadership of government equalities bodies as complicit in the propagation of myths. For example, a government body has used nine earlier reports of the same or similar claims, none of which referred to specific evidence, to justify their claims of imminent plurality.

The clear effects of demographic momentum, decreasing fertility and internal suburbanisation are in contrast to the uncertainty of international migration, the ambiguity of terms including ‘indigenous’, ‘native’ and ‘white’, and the varied purposes to which population forecasts by ethnic group are put. In population projections the mixed group with partly non-White or non-indigenous parentage is usually taken to be part of the minority population, thus ensuring a built-in shrinkage to the White or indigenous population. The term indigenous is a difficult and sometimes misleading, involving a differentiation between post-1945 immigrant-origin families and others: most and perhaps all families have immigrant origin from further in the past.

The year in which cities become plural has been a focus of those concerned with the management of cities who see diversity as somewhat problematic, as well as providing opportunities for economic and cultural regeneration. From this perspective a focus on Whiteness, on the particular proportion of 50%, and on the city boundary, are irrelevant. The choice to claim imminent plurality is simply a device to emphasise messages about diversity and make them more urgent. However, others present the claim as a warning and a threat to democracy; these authors tend to be in the media or politicians of xenophobic or narrowly nationalist ideology, for whom 50% non-White suggests the overthrow of indigenous rights. Thus ‘minority white cities’ has taken on a threatening tone not only for the ‘White majority’ but also for the minorities whose existence is said to be both dangerous and of lesser value than others.

The paper is thus about demographic trends and methods, but also about the political context in which demographic work is undertaken and publicised. It is nonetheless considered important to foresee Britain’s changing population composition, in order to plan sensitively and accurately for future needs.

Accumulated evidence of population trends with an ethnic group dimension has allowed forecasts of future diversity. Sub-national population forecasts with an ethnic group dimension have a thirty year history in Britain led by local authority research, but have more recently been undertaken by academic institutions since two censuses have included question asking each person's ethnic group. The results from these forecasts will be used to review the previous claims of minority White cities, showing the extent of their exaggeration. Leicester and Birmingham are likely to become plural cities by the period 2021-2026, both maintaining a White population twice as large as any other group, while Bradford and Oldham are unlikely to become plural cities in the foreseeable future.

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