

On the Measurement and Meaning of Residential Segregation: A Reply to Johnston, Poulsen and Forrest

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Racial self-segregation and increased racial segregation are myths for Britain. The repetition of these myths sends unhelpful messages to policy-makers. In this reply, I reaffirm four themes that support these conclusions. I emphasise process over pattern; I characterise this process as the growth of Black and Asian populations in Britain and their migration away from original centres of immigration; I question the negative labelling of areas that have a majority of residents other than White; and I appeal to urban geographers to move beyond analyses of segregation indices to a study of population dynamics.

First, I wholeheartedly accept Ron Johnston, Michael Poulsen and James Forrest's observation that I have focused on change over time, on the process that produces the pattern. My starting-point was the accusation against Muslim communities in official reports, after the riots of 2001 in three northern British cities, of 'self-segregation' and 'isolationism'. These words describe movement towards one's own and away from others; they describe a process. Irrespective of the starting-point of my article, I believe that if we are to be of use to individuals' actions to achieve change, then we must understand and describe the process rather than simply the current pattern.

The process in Britain has been significant immigration in the past half-century and

before which has shaped human geography. Initial immigration to areas of demand for cheap labour created clusters of new residents whose experience enabled them to support further immigrants. This clustering of immigrants has been followed by natural growth as the young immigrants have families but are not yet old enough to suffer many deaths. This deficit of deaths is responsible for more than half of each of the Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations' growth in the 1990s, rather than immigration. At the same time, there has been movement out from those clusters by individuals and families. The movers are those who can afford something other than the inadequate housing associated with low income; they have avoided the unemployment endemic where once-welcoming industries have failed.

This demographic process of natural growth and geographical dispersal is my second point. It is the same process as seen earlier with Jewish and Irish immigration a century ago. It is a process limited and modified by racial barriers in housing and employment markets, but the basic shape of natural growth and dispersal is evident.

We are in agreement that this growing number of residents with family origins in relatively recent immigration has led to more areas having a majority whose ethnic group is not White. Johnston, Poulsen and Forrest

label these high proportions as ‘concentrations’ and ‘areas of high exposure to one’s own group’. Their repetition of my figure of hypothetical areas is helpful in emphasising that these concentrations arise from the natural growth of a population. On the other hand, migration—which reveals people’s choice of residence outside the traditional areas—is not shown in their figures of segregation, concentration and exposure.

Social policy does respond to neighbourhoods with new majorities. There may be many fewer pubs and bars. There may be different approaches to care of the elderly. There will certainly be support for young people to understand and join the labour market and educational system; many young people have no adult in their household who can pass on a range of experiences of successfully seeking jobs and qualifications in Britain.

Thirdly, and here we do not agree, I see no reason to assume that high local proportions of an ethnic group constitute a negative phenomenon. Johnston, Poulsen and Forrest state that empirical research exemplifies

negative effects [of concentrations of minority populations] on feelings of self-esteem and identity among the minority population—for example, on conflict between them and the ‘others’ who live elsewhere, and on educational and other opportunities’ (p. 1226).

They do not quote the empirical research, as I quoted research to show the positive support which such concentrations give to disadvantaged communities and the threat to cultural continuity and identity created by pressure to disperse.

Undoubtedly there are statistical associations between concentrations of minority populations and poor housing, education and employment, and this is one of the reasons that many young people wish to move from those areas when they can afford to. But

I would not blame minority concentrations as a *cause* of these things.

Labelling Muslim areas as problematic is partly a xenophobic response (highly White areas are not seen as a problem), partly a response consistent with global power relations, partly a diversion from real social issues affecting all groups including millions of White families and partly a response to the changing local power relations where old balances are no longer stable.

I do not think that Ron Johnston or Michael Poulsen or James Forrest is motivated in any of these ways. But their judgement that population growth is segregation and negative is made within those existing contexts.

Instead and this is my fourth and final point, I urge studies of racial geography to direct attention to migration and therefore to the diversification of racial groups. That diversification has reached a point where racialised analysis often wrongly characterises whole groups. Johnston, Poulsen and Forrest contribute to a well-established industry of constructors and users of racial segregation indices. Segregation indices have proved useful to describe relatively demographically stable populations such as the Black vs White composition of the US. I hope to turn some of the energy of this industry towards studies of the process of change in other areas, where there is rapid population growth and dispersal of immigrant groups. Here, the segregation indices are not very helpful since they hide those population dynamics. More useful are studies of local labour markets and housing markets, which can reveal the ideals, intentions and experiences of each group.

I predict a trajectory of growing Asian communities in Bradford and similar cities for many years to come, as well as dispersal to other areas. We should reject any evaluation of this scenario as optimistic or pessimistic and instead focus on how to achieve improved housing and employment opportunities for all populations.