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Super-diversity and its implications

Steven Vertovec

Abstract

Diversity in Britain is not what it used to be. Some thirty years of government policies, social service practices and public perceptions have been framed by a particular understanding of immigration and multicultural diversity. That is, Britain's immigrant and ethnic minority population has conventionally been characterized by large, well-organized African-Caribbean and South Asian communities of citizens originally from Commonwealth countries or formerly colonial territories. Policy frameworks and public understanding – and, indeed, many areas of social science – have not caught up with recently emergent demographic and social patterns. Britain can now be characterized by 'super-diversity,' a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced. Such a condition is distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade. Outlined here, new patterns of super-diversity pose significant challenges for both policy and research.

Keywords: Diversity; multiculturalism; immigration; United Kingdom; London.

At a Trafalgar Square vigil for the victims of the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks – in which victims included migrants from more than twenty countries and alleged perpetrators from a further six – Mayor Ken Livingstone stated that in London 'you see the world gathered in one city, living in harmony, as an example to all' (in Freedland 2005). The 'world in one city' idea was also the title of a special section in the *Guardian* newspaper celebrating 'the most cosmopolitan place on earth' where 'Never have so many different kinds of people tried living together in the same place before' (Benedictus and Godwin 2005, p. 2). The 'world in one city' was the title of the Greater London Authority's analysis of the 2001 Census (GLA 2005a), too, which examined the presence of people from 179 nations within the capital. The successful

London bid to host the 2012 Olympics also used the 'world in one city' slogan, suggesting that 'In 2012, our multicultural diversity will mean every competing nation in the Games will find local supporters as enthusiastic as back home' (www.london2012.org/en/city/onecity).

To be sure, the ethnic and country of origin diversity of London is remarkable. Such diversity is manifesting in other parts of the country as well. However, observing ethnicity or country of origin (the two often, and confusingly, being used interchangeably) provides a misleading, one-dimensional appreciation of contemporary diversity. Over the past ten years, the nature of immigration to Britain has brought with it a transformative 'diversification of diversity' (cf. Hollinger 1995, Martiniello 2004) not just in terms of bringing more ethnicities and countries of origin, but also with respect to a multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live.

In the last decade the proliferation and mutually conditioning effects of additional variables shows that it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere. Such additional variables include differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents. Rarely are these factors described side by side. The interplay of these factors is what is meant here, in summary fashion, by the notion of 'super-diversity'.

By invoking 'super-diversity' I wish, firstly, to underscore the fact that in addition to more people now migrating from more places, significant new conjunctions and interactions of variables have arisen through patterns of immigration to the UK over the past decade; their outcomes surpass the ways – in public discourse, policy debates and academic literature – that we usually understand diversity in Britain. Secondly, then, the article serves as a call, or at least reminder, to social scientists and policy-makers to take more sufficient account of the conjunction of ethnicity with a range of other variables when considering the nature of various 'communities', their composition, trajectories, interactions and public service needs.

Much of the material and data in this article are certainly not new or unknown to specialists in the field; what is hopefully of value, however, is its assemblage and juxtaposition by way of re-assessing how diversity is conventionally conceived. My view draws upon several previous approaches to diversity, particularly concerning: multi-ethnic arenas of interaction (importantly Lamphere 1992 and Sanjek 1998), hypersegregation or the simultaneous impact of numerous dimensions of ethnic residential concentration (Massey and Denton 1989), minorities' 'multilayered experience' within unequal power structures

and social locations (Harzig and Juteau 2003), and notions of pluralism that take into account differential rights and modes of incorporation among ethnic groups (Kuper and Smith 1969). I have also been particularly influenced by ideas around cultural complexity as considered by Fredrik Barth (1989, 1993) and Ulf Hannerz (1992), particularly their thinking about modes of cultural confluence, the coexistence of multiple historical streams and the ways individuals in complex settings relate to each other from different vantage points.

Again, the variables of super-diversity themselves are not new, nor are many of their correlations. But, as described in this article, it is the emergence of their scale, historical and policy-produced multiple configuration and mutual conditioning that now calls for conceptual distinction. 'Super-diversity' is proposed as a summary term. Whatever we choose to call it, there is much to be gained by a multi-dimensional perspective on diversity, both in terms of moving beyond 'the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study' (Glick Schiller *et al.* 2006, p. 613) and by appreciating the coalescence of factors which condition people's lives.

Noting similar changes concerning urban social, geographic and economic conditions in North American cities and patterns of diversification among ethnic groups themselves, Eric Fong and Kumiko Shibuya (2005, p. 286) suggest that 'theories developed in the past may have only limited application in the study of multigroup relations today'. The present article follows a similar line. In the first part a variety of data is presented indicating the emergence of super-diversity (especially pointing to developments in London, but emphasizing that these variables, dimensions and dynamics hold proportionately in many other parts of the UK too); this is followed by sections suggesting some implications that super-diversity may have for social scientific theory and method alongside challenges it poses for particular areas of public policy formation and delivery.

Diversity in Britain

Diversity is endemic to Britain, of course. Peter Ackroyd's (2000) monumental *London: The Biography* describes the long history of a city of assorted immigrants. Roman Londinium was full of administrators, traders, soldiers and slaves from Gaul, Greece, Germany, Italy and North Africa. 'By the tenth century,' Ackroyd (*Ibid.*, p. 702) writes, 'the city was populated by Cymric Brythons and Belgae, by remnants of the Gaulish legions, by East Saxons and Mercians, by Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, by Franks and Jutes and Angles, all mingled and mingling together to form a distinct tribe of "Londoners".'

In the late twelfth century locals throughout Britain complained that all sorts of foreigners were practising their own customs, and by

the early sixteenth century such intolerance saw riots in which shops and homes of foreigners were burnt. In the middle of the eighteenth century diversity fuelled a struggle between people with 'culturally cosmopolitan' outlooks and those with populist xenophobic attitudes (Statt 1995). Nineteenth-century poets like Wordsworth described London's heterogeneity of peoples, while in an 1880 book *The Huguenots*, Samuel Smiles called London 'one of the most composite populations to be found in the world' (in Holmes 1997, p. 10). Indeed, as Michael Keith (2005, pp. 49–50) notes, 'There is not a point in the history of London when cultural differences have not played a significant role in shaping the life of the city.'

Irish in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Jews from throughout eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries comprised significant immigrant influxes. Yet it was the post-war large-scale immigration of African-Caribbean and South Asian (i.e. non-White) peoples which particularly prompted a set of changes in public policy. British policy-makers responded with various strategies for a kind of diversity management strategy that came to be called multiculturalism.

In this way most of the discourse, policy and public understanding of migration and multiculturalism evident in Britain over the past thirty years has been based on the experience of people who arrived between the 1950s and 1970s from Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and other places in the West Indies alongside those from India, Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh. These were major inflows from former British colonies, with people subject to initial rights of entry that were gradually restricted during the 1960s and early 1970s until only families of settled migrants could enter. Citizenship and all the civil, political and social rights associated with it were gained by most under post-colonial arrangements (Hansen and Weil 2001). Large and eventually well-organized communities were formed, particularly through the establishment of community associations and places of worship.

Multicultural policies have had as their overall goal the promotion of tolerance and respect for collective identities. This has been undertaken through supporting community associations and their cultural activities, monitoring diversity in the workplace, encouraging positive images in the media and other public spaces, and modifying public services (including education, health, policing and courts) in order to accommodate culture-based differences of value, language and social practice. While developed from the 1960s onwards, most of these policies and goals still obtain today. Meanwhile, multiculturalism continues to be conceived of mainly in terms of the African-Caribbean and South Asian communities of British citizens.

New, smaller, less organized, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups have hardly gained attention or a place on the public

agenda (cf. Kofman 1998). Yet it is the growth of exactly these sorts of groups that has in recent years radically transformed the social landscape in Britain. The time has come to re-evaluate – in social scientific study as well as policy – the nature of diversity in Britain today.

New immigrants and the emergence of super-diversity

Over the past ten to fifteen years, immigration, and consequently the nature of diversity, in the UK has changed dramatically. Since the early 1990s there has been a marked rise in net immigration and a diversification of countries of origin. This shift has coincided with no less than six Parliamentary measures: the Asylum and Immigration Acts of 1993, 1996, 1999, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 and the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill 2005. Throughout this time there has been a proliferation of migration channels and immigrant legal statuses. In addition, this decade was a time when numerous conflicts were taking place around the world leading to a significant expansion in the numbers of those seeking asylum. The various flows and channels have been characterized as ‘the new migration’ and the people involved as ‘the new immigrants’ (see Berkeley *et al.* 2005; Kyambi 2005; Robinson and Reeve 2005). Multiple dimensions of differentiation characterize the emergent social patterns and conditions.

Net inflows

Prior to the early 1990s, the UK was characterized by net outflows of people; since 1994 it has been marked by net inflows. Annual net inflows of immigrants to Britain peaked at 171,000 in 2000, declined to 151,000 by 2003 then rose markedly to 222,600 in 2004 (Office for National Statistics, www.statistics.gov.uk). In 2004 there were an estimated 2,857,000 foreigners (foreign-born and without UK citizenship) living in the UK, comprising some 4.9 per cent of the total population of 58,233,000 (Salt 2004). This number represented an increase of some 857,000 or over 40 per cent since 1993. There have been substantial further increases since eight new states acceded to the European Union in 2004 (see below).

There are many simultaneous reasons for the increased net inflows. One set of reasons surrounds Britain’s high economic performance (including low unemployment and job shortages in some sectors) coupled with growing inequalities in many developing and middle-income countries (Hatton 2003). Much of the increase during the 1990s was within the category of asylum-seekers: while there have been many accusations that a high proportion of these are ‘bogus’ or ‘really economic migrants’, the increase in asylum-seekers over the past ten

years has been demonstrated to be directly linked with forced migration factors and conflict situations in source countries during this time (Castles *et al.* 2003). Even before EU accession, migration flows from Eastern Europe also increased since the opening of borders following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (see Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2005).

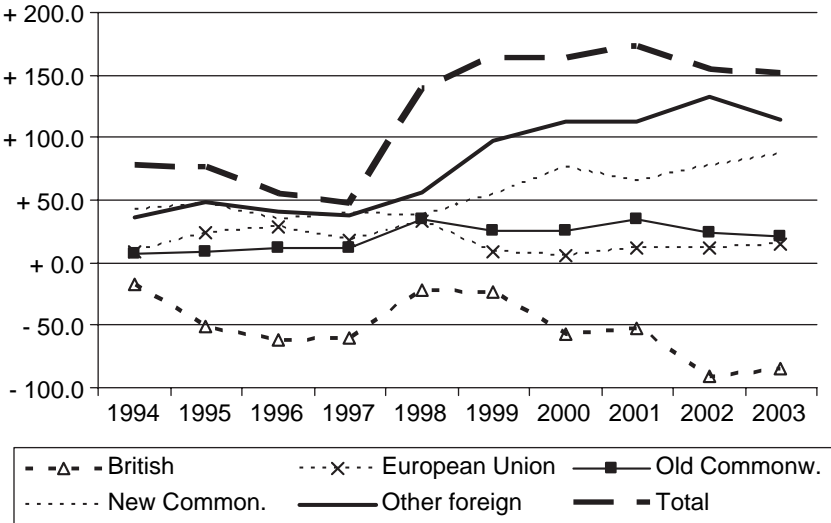
Countries of origin

One of the most noteworthy features of ‘the new migration’ is the multiplicity of immigrants’ countries of origin. Moreover, most of this new and diverse range of origins relates to places which have no specific historical – particularly, colonial – links with Britain.

In the 1950s and 1960s almost all immigrants came from colonies or Commonwealth countries (again, mostly in the Caribbean and South Asia). By the early 1970s most newcomers were arriving as dependants of the newly settled migrants. The decades since then have seen fairly dramatic change. Alongside relatively constant inflows of returning British people, in 1971 people from ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Commonwealth countries accounted for 30 per cent and 32 per cent of inflow; by 2002 these proportions were 17 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. EU citizens represented 10 per cent of newcomers in 1971, rising to 17 per cent in 2002; however, those in a broad ‘Middle East and Other’ category have gone from 16 per cent in 1971 to 40 per cent in 2002 (National Statistics Online). Since the beginning of the 1990s alone, the diversity of immigrants’ places of origin has been growing considerably (see Figure 1).

Britain is now home – temporary, permanent or one among many – to people from practically every country in the world. As Table 1 suggests, various waves of immigrants from rich, middle income and poor countries have accumulated. All the groups, as well as many individuals within these, have diverse migration experiences in the UK – some over the last decade, others over generations, still others over more than a century. With regard to this dimension of super-diversity, we should consider how the assorted origins and experiences of migrants condition social relations with non-migrant Britons and with each other.

In London alone there are people from some 179 countries. Many represent just a handful of people, but there are populations numbering over 10,000 respectively from each of no less than forty-two countries; there are populations of over 5,000 from a further twelve countries (GLA 2005a). Reflecting trends in Britain as a whole, 23 per cent of foreign-born people came to London before 1970, 32 per cent between 1970–1990 and 45 per cent since 1990. The 25 largest such populations reflect a wide range of countries, from rich to poor, peaceful to conflict-ridden, European to African and Asian (Table 2).

Figure 1. Net international migration to Britain by citizenship

Source: statistics.gov.uk

Overall 30 per cent of London's migrants are from high income countries and 70 per cent are from developing countries (GLA 2005b).

Once more, the above figures for both the UK and London will by now have changed considerably, not least due to the influx of eastern Europeans both before and after EU accession in May 2004.

Foreign-origin populations in London are widespread and unevenly distributed (see Kyambi 2005). The borough of Brent has the highest percentage of its 2001 population born outside the EU, with 38.2 per cent (100,543 people), followed by Newham with 35.6 per cent (86,858 people), Westminster with 32.4 per cent (58,770 people) and Ealing with 31 per cent (93,169 people) (see www.statistics.gov.uk). Within each such area, the diversity of origins is staggering, as depicted by way of example in Figure 2 with reference to Newham.

Such a relatively new and high proportion of immigrants characterizes many places in the UK, but London most. Of the local authorities with the highest percentage of population who are non-UK born, the top twenty-two are all London boroughs, from the first, Brent with 46.5 per cent of its 263,463 population, to the twenty-second, Redbridge with 24.2 per cent of its 238,634 population.

However, high proportions of foreign-born – with all the accompanying dimensions of diversity that go with them – are found throughout the UK (see especially Kyambi 2005). In these terms, outside of London it is Slough that has the highest proportion, nationally ranked as twenty-third among local authorities, with 22.3 per cent of its 119,072 population counted as foreign-born. Leicester

Table 1. *Foreign nationals living in the UK, largest twenty-five groups, 2004*

Rank	Nationality	Number in UK	Per cent
1	Ireland	368000	12.9
2	India	171000	6.0
3	USA	133000	4.7
4	Italy	121000	4.2
5	Germany	96000	3.4
6	France	95000	3.3
7	South Africa	92000	3.2
8	Pakistan	86000	3.0
9	Portugal	83000	2.9
10	Australia	80000	2.8
11	Zimbabwe	73000	2.5
12	Bangladesh	69000	2.4
13	Somalia	60000	2.1
14	Former Yugoslavia	54000	1.9
15	Philippines	52000	1.8
16	Turkey	51000	1.8
17	Netherlands	48000	1.7
18	Poland	48000	1.7
19	Jamaica	45000	1.6
20	Former USSR	44000	1.5
21	Nigeria	43000	1.5
22	Spain	40000	1.4
23	Greece	37000	1.3
24	Canada	37000	1.3
25	Iran	36000	1.3
	All foreign nationals	2,857,000	100

Source: Salt 2004

and Forest Heath are ranked twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth (each with 23 per cent of their respective populations of 279,925 and 55,523), Luton twenty-seventh (19.6 per cent of 184,369) and Oxford twenty-ninth (19.3 per cent of 134,250); intervening ranks are again London local authorities (2001 Census). Among the foreign-born, regions of origin are quite varyingly distributed. By way of example, Figure 3 indicates such differential patterns of distribution in four cities of Britain.

While pointing to important indicators of diversity, country of origin data itself, however, may mask more significant forms of differentiation than it reveals. Within any particular population from a given country, there will be important distinctions with reference to ethnicity, religious affiliation and practice, regional and local identities in places of origin, kinship, clan or tribal affiliation, political parties and movements, and other criteria of collective belonging. Linguistic

Table 2. *Number of People living in London by Country of Birth outside the UK, largest twenty-five groups, 2001*

Rank	Country of Birth	Number
1	India	172,162
2	Republic of Ireland	157,285
3	Bangladesh	84,565
4	Jamaica	80,319
5	Nigeria	68,907
6	Pakistan	66,658
7	Kenya	66,311
8	Sri Lanka	49,932
9	Ghana	46,513
10	Cyprus	45,888
11	South Africa	45,506
12	U.S.A.	44,622
13	Australia	41,488
14	Germany	39,818
15	Turkey	39,128
16	Italy	38,694
17	France	38,130
18	Somalia	33,831
19	Uganda	32,082
20	New Zealand	27,494
21	Hong Kong	23,328
22	Spain	22,473
23	Poland	22,224
24	Portugal	21,720
25	Iran	20,398

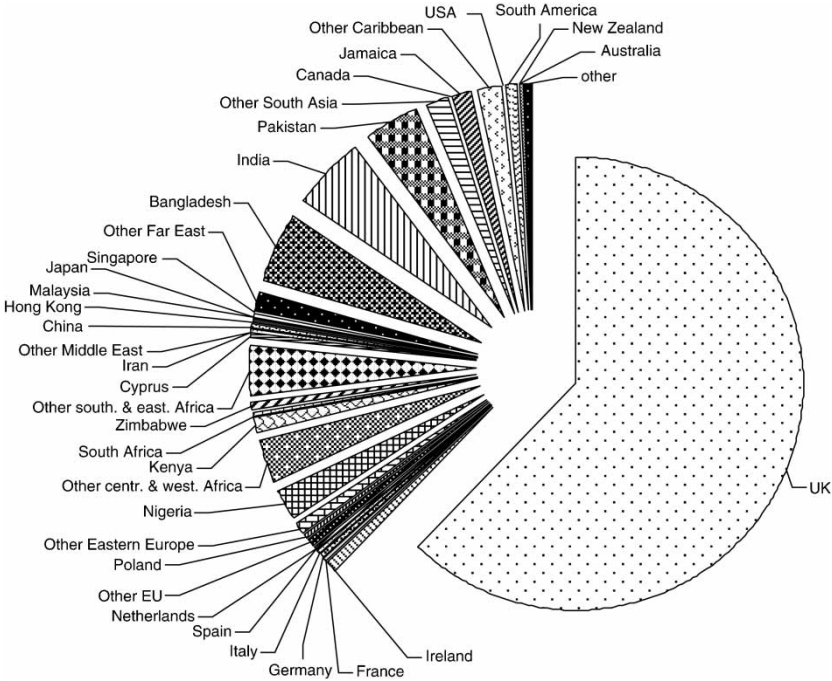
Source: GLA 2005a

differentiation, for instance, represents one such important social marker which may lie within one or more country of origin categories.

Languages

The growth of multilingualism has been recognized and engaged in various ways by both social scientists and policy-makers, although the latter have often arguably failed to respond in positive or adequate ways (Rampton *et al.* 1997). Still, it is now often proclaimed with pride (for instance in the city's successful 2012 Olympic bid) that 300 languages are spoken in London. This figure is based on a survey of no less than 896,743 London schoolchildren concerning which language(s) they speak at home (Baker and Mohieldeen 2000). Despite some methodological flaws, this remarkable data source provides an important look into a much under-studied field of diversity in the UK. The study does not take account of languages among groups with few children in schools (for instance because of a high number of young, single migrants

Figure 2. *Newham (total; population 243,898) by country/region of birth*



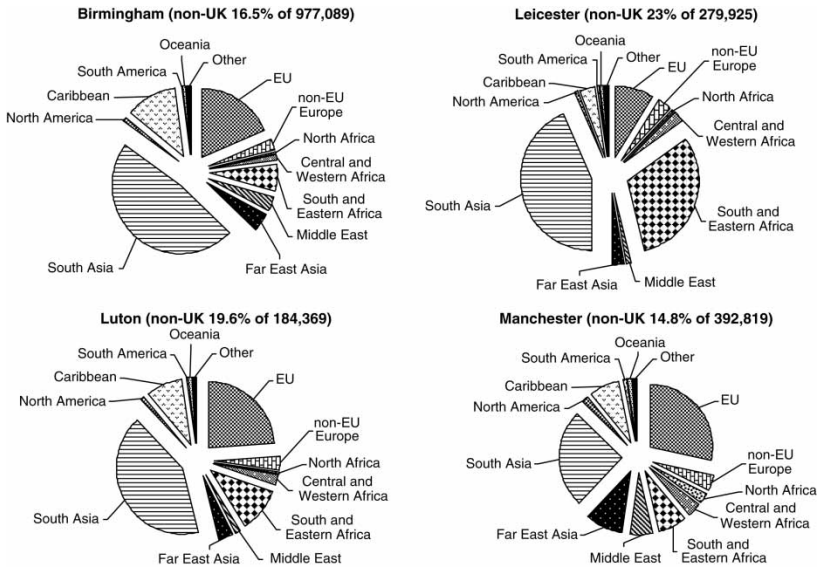
Source: 2001 Census

in a particular group), which would represent ones like Polish, Czech, Hungarian and other east European languages. Nevertheless, findings like those in Table 3 indicate sometimes surprisingly sizeable numbers speaking particular languages within a divergent range.

The data also show some interesting local configurations. There are predictable groupings of South Asian languages in places of renowned Asian settlement like Harrow, where the top three non-English languages are Gujarati, Hindi/Urdu and Punjabi. Other places show fascinating conjunctions, such as in Haringey where Turkish is commonly spoken alongside Akan and Somali, in Lambeth where Yoruba speakers mingle with speakers of Portuguese and Spanish, and in Merton where English Creole is common next to Cantonese and French (Baker and Mohieldeen 2000). In Tower Hamlets, where British Bangladeshis are highly concentrated, ‘the demand for Eastern European language services collectively now exceeds that for Sylheti translation’ (Keith 2005, p. 177).

School districts, health services and local authorities are among those institutions which have to meet the challenges of growing linguistic complexity. Many new initiatives have arisen for this purpose. For example, the Language Shop provides a comprehensive

Figure 3. *Local authorities by non-UK region of birth (with total foreign-born percent of local population)*



Source: 2001 Census

translation and interpretation service in more than 100 languages to Newham Council and its partners, such as community groups and neighbouring councils, while Language Line provides telephone or in-person translations in 150 languages to health authorities and other public sector clients.

Religions

The religious diversity that migrants have brought to Britain is well documented and is not possible to detail here (see, for instance, Parsons 1994, Peach 2005 as well as National Statistics Online). On the whole we can say that among immigrants to Britain, Christianity is the main religion for people born in all continents except Asia; Asia-born people in the UK are more likely to be Muslim than any other religion, although of course Indians include a majority of Hindus and a significant number of Sikhs. For many, religions tend to be broadly equated with countries of origin – Irish and Jamaicans are mostly Christian, Bangladeshis mostly Muslim and so forth – but even so these categories often miss important variations in devotional traditions within each of the world religions.

Taking Islam as example, it is often pointed out that there are several traditions within the faith as practised by South Asians in the

Table 3. Estimated number of speakers of top 20 languages in London, 2000

Rank	Language name	Number
1	English	5636500
2	Panjabi	155700
3	Gujarati	149600
4	Hindi/Urdu	136500
5	Bengali & Sylheti	136300
6	Turkish	73900
7	Arabic	53900
8	English Creole	50700
9	Cantonese	47900
10	Yoruba	47600
11	Greek	31100
12	Portuguese	29400
13	French	27600
14	Akan (Twi & Fante)	27500
15	Spanish	26700
16	Somali	22343
17	Tamil	19200
18	Vietnamese	16800
19	Farsi	16200
20	Italian	12300

Source: Storkey 2000

UK (Deobandi, Tablighi, Bareilvi, Sufi orders and more; see Lewis 2002). Such variations are multiplied many times when we consider the breadth of origins among Muslims from around the world who now live in Britain (such as Nigerians, Somalis, Bosnians, Afghans, Iraqis and Malaysians). In London Muslims are the most heterogeneous body of believers in terms of ethnicity and country of origin, with the largest group (Bangladeshis) making up only 23.5 per cent. 'London's Muslim population of 607,083 people is probably the most diverse anywhere in the world, besides Mecca' (*Guardian* 21 January 2005).

Socio-cultural axes of differentiation such as country of origin, ethnicity, language and religion are of course significant in conditioning immigrants' identities, patterns of interaction and – often through social networks determined by such axes – their access to jobs, housing, services and more. However, immigrants' channels of migration and the myriad legal statuses which arise from them are often just as, or even more, crucial to: how people group themselves and where people live, how long they can stay, how much autonomy they have (versus control by an employer, for instance), whether their families can join them, what kind of livelihood they can undertake and maintain, and to what extent they can make use of public services and resources (including schools, health, training, benefits and other 'recourse to public funds'). Therefore such channels and statuses,

along with the rights and restrictions attached to them (Morris 2002), comprise an additional, indeed, fundamental, dimension of today's patterns and dynamics of super-diversity.

Migration channels and immigration statuses

Coinciding with the increasing influx of immigrants to the UK in the 1990s, there has been an expansion in the number and kind of migration channels and immigration statuses. Each carries quite specific and legally enforceable entitlements, controls, conditions and limitations (see JCWI 2004). The following section outlines many of the key channels and statuses, particularly with regard to how they have shaped current patterns of super-diversity in the UK.

Workers. Between 1993 and 2003 the number of foreign workers in the UK rose no less than 62 per cent to 1,396,000 (Sriskandarajah *et al.* 2004). This large-scale increase in workers includes people who have come under numerous categories and quota systems (see Clarke and Salt 2003, Salt 2004, Kofman *et al.* 2005). These have included: foreign nationals who do not need a visa or permit to work in the UK (mainly members of the European Economic Area, including members of the eight new EU accession states who can travel to the UK freely, but should register with government offices if they find employment; by mid-2006 there were some 427,000 applications under this Worker Registration Scheme); work permit holders (whose employers obtained the permits); workers on special schemes (especially the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Scheme and the Sector Based Scheme directed mainly at hotels, catering and food processing industries); highly skilled migrants (from over 50 countries, working in finance, business management, information technology and medical services); working holidaymakers (from more than 90 per cent of 'Old Commonwealth' countries such as New Zealand and Australia); and special visa holders (importantly including domestic workers, au pairs, volunteers and religious instructors).

Students. The number of foreign students entering the UK recently peaked at 369,000 in 2002 before reducing to 319,000 in 2003. Non-EU students accounted for some 38 per cent of all full-time higher degree students in 2003 (Kofman *et al.* 2005, p. 20); they numbered over 210,000 in 2004. In this year 47,700 Chinese students came to Britain, marking a seventeen-fold increase from the 2,800 Chinese students in the UK in 1998. The number of Indian students has grown from under 3,000 in 1998 to nearly 15,000 in 2004. The third largest sender is the USA with over 13,000 students in 2004.

Spouses and family members. This is an extremely important immigration category, not least since 'family migration has emerged as the single most enduring, though also restricted, basis for entry of

migrants to the UK' (Kofman *et al.* 2005, p. 22). The number of migrating spouses and family members coming to the UK more than doubled between 1993–2003. Furthermore this is a particularly feminised channel of migration compared with others; for instance, of the 95,000 grants of settlement to spouses and dependants in 2004, 20.6 per cent were made for husbands, 40 per cent for wives and 28.8 per cent children. Their geographical provenance varied significantly, however: the Indian sub-continent was origin to 36 per cent of husbands, 28 per cent of wives and 15 per cent of children; the rest of Asia brought 8 per cent of husbands, 21 per cent of wives and 18 per cent of children, while from Africa there came 24 per cent of husbands, 17 per cent of wives and 42 per cent of children (Salt 2004). Not all have come under the same conditions: within the spouses and family migrant category Kofman (2004) distinguishes a number of types, including family reunification migration (bringing members of immediate family), family formation migration (bringing marriage partners from country of origin), marriage migration (bringing partners met while abroad) and family migration (when all members migrate simultaneously).

Asylum-seekers and refugees. Throughout the 1990s the number of asylum applications rose considerably in the UK and indeed throughout Europe. Applications (including dependants) in Britain rose from 28,000 in 1993 to a peak of 103,100 in 2002; these amounted respectively to 15.6 per cent and 26.5 per cent of all non-British immigration (179,200 in 1993 and 418,200 in 2002). Applications have since declined significantly: in 2003 the number of asylum applications declined to 60,045 (which is 14.7 per cent of 406,800 total non-British immigrants; Salt 2004, p. 71). This too is a highly gendered channel of migration: in 2003 some 69 per cent were male. The provenance of asylum-seekers represents a broad range: again in 2003 applications were received from persons spanning over fifty nationalities, including 10 per cent Somali, 8 per cent Iraqi, 7 per cent Chinese, 7 per cent Zimbabwean, and 6 per cent Iranian. However, numbers of asylum-seekers from various countries have fluctuated much over the years (see Table 4).

Many asylum-seekers wait long periods for decisions, many are rejected and leave the country, others are rejected and stay as irregular migrants. It is estimated that some 28 per cent of asylum applicants are granted asylum, extended leave to remain, humanitarian protection or some other category allowing them to stay in the UK (Salt 2004). Cumulatively there were some 289,100 refugees in UK by the end of 2004 (UNHCR 2005).

Irregular, illegal or undocumented migrants. This category, variously termed, pertains to people whose presence is marked by clandestine entry, entry by deceit, overstaying or breaking the terms of a visa. It is not a black-and-white classification, however: Anderson and Ruhs

Table 4. *Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom 1994–2003, selected nationalities*

Nationality	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Serbia-Montenegro	n/a	n/a	400	1865	7395	11465	6070	3230	2265	815
Turkey	2045	1820	1495	1445	2015	2850	3990	3695	2835	2390
Nigeria	4340	5825	2900	1480	1380	945	835	810	1125	1010
Somalia	1840	3465	1780	2730	4685	7495	5020	6420	6540	5090
Zimbabwe	55	105	130	60	80	230	1010	2140	7655	3295
Iran	520	615	585	585	745	1320	5610	3420	2630	2875
Iraq	550	930	965	1075	1295	1800	7475	6680	14570	4015
Afghanistan	325	580	675	1085	2395	3975	5555	8920	7205	2280
Sri Lanka	2350	2070	1340	1830	3505	5130	6395	5510	3130	705
All nationalities	32830	43965	29640	32500	46015	71160	80315	71025	84130	49405

Source: Salt 2004

(2005) discuss grey areas of 'semi-compliance' under which only some, sometimes minor, conditions are violated.

As Pinkerton *et al.* (2004) describe, it is very difficult to reliably estimate numbers within this category. In 2005 the Home Office offered a 'best guess' number between 310,000 and 570,000 irregular migrants in the UK. Without a regularisation exercise, learning the breadth of undocumented migrants places of origin would be even more difficult. In any case, their social and legal position is one of almost total exclusion from rights and entitlements.

New citizens. A great many migrants become full citizens. During the 1990s around 40,000 people became citizens each year. This number has risen dramatically since 2000, with 2004 seeing a record number of 140,795 granted British citizenship (*Guardian* 18 May 2005). According to Home Office estimates, 59 per cent of the foreign-born population who have been in the UK more than five years – the minimal stay to become eligible – have indeed become citizens.

In attempting to understand the nature and dynamics of diversity in Britain, close attention must be paid to the stratified system of rights, opportunities, constraints and partial-to-full memberships that coincide with these and other immigrant categories (Morris 2002, 2004). And as pointed out by Lisa Arai (2006, p. 10),

There is a complex range of different entitlements, even within one migrant status category (e.g. overseas students), and a lack of coherence or rationale to a system developed *ad hoc* over many years, and which reflects competing pressures, such as whether to provide access to a service because the individual needs it, or because it is good for society (e.g. public health). Or whether to deny a service in order to protect public funds, ensure that access does not prove an attraction for unwanted migrants or to appease public opinion. This means that neither service providers, advice-givers nor migrants themselves are clear as to what services they might be entitled.

Moreover, – denoting a key feature of super-diversity – there may be widely differing statuses *within* groups of the same ethnic or national origin. For example, among Somalis in the UK – and in any single locality – we will find British citizens, refugees, asylum-seekers, persons granted exceptional leave to remain, undocumented migrants, and people granted refugee status in another European country but who subsequently moved to Britain. This fact underscores the point that simple ethnicity-focused approaches to understanding and engaging various minority 'communities' in Britain, as taken in many models and policies within conventional multiculturalism, is inadequate and often inappropriate for dealing with individual immigrants' needs or understanding their dynamics of inclusion or exclusion.

Immigration status is not just a crucial factor in determining an individual's relation to the state, its resources and legal system, the labour market and other structures. It is an important catalyst in the formation of social capital and a potential barrier to the formation of cross-cutting socio-economic and ethnic ties.

Many immigration statuses set specific time limits on people's stay in Britain. Most integration policies and programmes, in turn, do not apply to people with temporary status. Temporary workers, undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers often only spend short periods of time in given locations, either due to the search for work or relocation by employers or authorities such as the National Asylum Support Service. Short periods of duration may pose difficulties not just for them, but for local institutions, such as schools (Ofsted 2003), to provide services.

In order to understand the nature and complexity of contemporary super-diversity, we must examine how such a system of stratified rights and conditions created by immigration channels and legal statuses cross-cuts socio-cultural and socio-economic dimensions.

Gender

Over the past thirty years, more females than males migrated to the UK; since about 1998, males have come to predominate in new flows. The reason for this, Kyambi (2005) suggests, may be due to a general shift away from more female oriented family migration to more male dominated work-based migration schemes since 1995. It is likely also related to the inflow of asylum-seekers, most of whom have been male.

There is considerable variation of gender structures among different groups, and this mostly relates to channels of migration and the evolution of migration systems from particular countries of origin. For instance, 80 per cent of Slovaks, 72 per cent of Czechs, 71 per cent of Filipinos, 70 per cent of Slovenes, 68 per cent of Thais and 67 per cent of Madagascars are women (GLA 2005a, p. 89). They are mostly to be found in domestic or health services. Meanwhile, 71 per cent of Algerians, 63 per cent of Nepalese, 61 per cent of Kosovars, 61 per cent of Afghans, 60 per cent of Yemenis and 60 per cent of Albanians are males, almost all of whom are asylum-seekers (Ibid., p. 90).

Among migrants in London generally, women migrants have a far lower employment rate (56 per cent) than men (75 per cent). Employment rates are especially low for women born in South Asia (37 per cent) and the Middle East and North Africa (39 per cent) (GLA 2005b, p. 2). Indeed many basic features of super-diversity – especially the inter-related patterns surrounding immigrants' country of origin, channels of migration, employment, legal status and rights – tend to have highly gendered patterns (cf. Kofman *et al.* 2005).

Age

The new immigrant population has a higher concentration of 25–44 year olds and a lower proportion of under-16s than a decade ago, also perhaps reflecting a shift away from family migration (Kyambi 2005). Variance in age structure among various ethnic groups reflects different patterns of fertility and mortality as well as migration (GLA 2005a, p. 6). The mean age of new immigrants is 28 – averaging eleven years younger than the mean age of 39 for the British Isles born population.

There is a considerable amount of diversity in the proportion of the new immigrant population being in the age group 25–44, which we have considered to be a primary working age. While Cyprus (31.03%), Hong Kong (32.65%), Somalia (37.26%), Germany (37.85%), Norway (38.18%) and Albania (38.56%) have the smallest fraction of their population falling within this age group, they are counterbalanced by Algeria (78.24%), Philippines (74.49%), New Zealand (73.92%), and Italy (70.24%) with the greatest proportions being 25–44 years old (Kyambi 2005, p. 133).

Space/place

New immigrants often settle in areas with established immigrant communities from the same country of birth. Pointing to this fact, and by way of recognizing the boom in migrant-derived diversity, in 2005 the *Guardian* newspaper published a special section called ‘London: the world in one city’ which described and mapped one hundred places and specific groups within ‘the most diverse city ever’ (Benedictus and Godwin 2005). Another was published in January 2006 called ‘The world in one country’, repeating the exercise on a national scale. These special sections were revealing and celebratory, but were in many ways misleading.

The Greater London Authority’s analysis of the 2001 Census shows that there are only a few common country of origin populations that are highly concentrated in the capital – namely Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets (where 42 per cent of the capital’s 35,820 Bangladeshis live), people from Sierra Leone living in Southwark (26 per cent of 3,647), Cypriots in Enfield (26 per cent of 11,802), Afghanis in Ealing (23 per cent of 2,459) and Turks in Haringey (22 per cent of 8,589). The report points out that ‘although there are areas which have come to be associated with particular migrants, nearly all migrant groups tend to live in a number of different boroughs’ (GLA 2005a, p. 88).

Therefore, while the *Guardian* wished to highlight the cosmopolitan nature of contemporary London and Britain, it made a mistake in

suggesting certain groups are fixed to certain places. Instead, as implied by the GLA analysis and stressed by Geraldine Pratt (1998, p. 27),

there is deep suspicion about mapping cultures onto places, because multiple cultures and identities inevitably inhabit a single place (think of multiple identities performed under the roof of a family house) and a single cultural identity is often situated in multiple, interconnected spaces.

London is the predominant locus of immigration and it is where super-diversity is at its most marked. But, following Kyambi (2005), we should note that increased diversification (of countries of origin, immigrant categories, etc.) are not a matter of increased numbers but relative change in a given locality. A city or neighbourhood may have small numbers of new migrants but relatively high indices of diversity (cf. Allen and Turner 1989). In terms of numbers of new migrants London still shows the highest degree of relative change, but significant trends are also to be found in the South East, West Midlands, East of England, North West, and Yorkshire and Humberside (Kyambi 2005). A 'diversity index' recently created by the Office for National Statistics – based on the probability of two persons selected at random belonging to different ethnic groups – also shows a high ethnic mix outside as well as within London (Large and Ghosh 2006).

One major avenue by which newcomers have come to places of previously low immigrant density has been through government dispersal. In order to relieve pressure on councils in London and the south-east of England, since 2000 the National Asylum Support Service [NASS] has made considerable effort to disperse people seeking asylum. By its peak in 2003 the dispersal system had spread 54,000 asylum-seekers to seventy-seven local authorities across Britain, including several in Yorkshire (18 per cent), the West Midlands (18 per cent), the north-west (18 per cent) and Scotland (11 per cent).

New immigrants with less established networks and patterns of settlement are currently being drawn to locations with a wider range of employment opportunities – principally to London but also to small towns and mid-sized cities (for instance to work in construction), coastal and other leisure-centred localities (where they might engage in hospitality and catering services) and rural areas (usually for short-term jobs in agriculture and food processing).

Transnationalism

Perhaps throughout history, and certainly over the last hundred years or more, immigrants have stayed in contact with families, organizations and communities in their places of origin and elsewhere in the diaspora

(Foner 1997; Glick-Schiller 1999; Morawska 1999). In recent years, the extent and degree of transnational engagement has intensified due in large part to changing technologies and reduced telecommunication and travel costs. Enhanced transnationalism is substantially transforming several social, political and economic structures and practices among migrant communities worldwide (Vertovec 2004a).

The 'new immigrants' who have come to live in Britain over the past ten years have done so during a period of increasingly normative transnationalism (cf. Portes *et al.* 1999). Today in Britain, cross-border or indeed global patterns of sustained communication, institutional linkage and exchange of resources among migrants, homelands and wider diasporas are commonplace (see for example Anderson 2001, Al-Ali *et al.* 2001, Spellman 2004, Zontini 2004). This can be observed in the increasing value of remittances sent from Britain (now estimated at up to £3.5 billion per year; Blackwell and Seddon 2004), the growing volume of international phone calls between the UK and various places of migrant origin (Vertovec 2004b), the frequency of transnational marriage practices and the extent of engagement by various UK-based diasporas in the development of their respective homelands (Van Hear *et al.* 2004).

The degrees to and ways in which today's migrants maintain identities, activities and connections linking them with communities outside Britain are unprecedented. Of course, not all migrants maintain the same level of kinds of transnational engagement: much of this will be largely conditioned by a range of factors including migration channel and legal status (e.g. refugees or undocumented persons may find it harder to maintain certain ties abroad), migration and settlement history, community structure and gendered patterns of contact, political circumstances in the homeland, economic means and more. That is, transnational practices among immigrants in Britain are highly diverse between and within groups (whether defined by country of origin, ethnicity, immigration category or any other criteria), adding yet another significant layer of complexity to all those outlined above.

The 'new immigration' and its outcomes in Britain have entailed the arrival and interplay of multifaceted characteristics and conditions among migrants. This has resulted in a contemporary situation of 'super-diversity'. Compared to the large-scale immigration of the 1950s-early 1970s, the 1990s-early 2000s have seen more migrants from more places entailing more socio-cultural differences going through more migration channels leading to more, as well as more significantly stratified, legal categories (which themselves have acted to internally diversify various groups), and who maintain more intensely an array of links with places of origin and diasporas elsewhere. Super-diversity is now all around the UK, and particularly in London. It has not brought

with its particular problems or conflicts, but it certainly presents some challenges to policy-makers and social scientists alike.

Super-diversity: Social scientific challenges

The theories and methods that social scientists use to study immigrants still owe much to the Chicago school of urban studies set out in the early and mid-part of the last century (Waters and Jiménez 2005). This primarily entails looking comparatively at processes of assimilation among particular, ethnically-defined groups measured in terms of changing socio-economic status, spatial concentration/segregation, linguistic change and intermarriage.

In many places and times, specific immigrant or ethnic minorities have largely shared such sets of traits, so that analysing a group at large has indeed demonstrated many significant trends. Elsewhere, however, the array of traits akin to super-diversity has obfuscated attempts to discern a clear comparison or relation between groups. For instance, Janet Abu-Lughod (1999, p. 417) describes how,

In New York, a city long accustomed to an ethnic ‘poker game’ in which no single group commands most of the chips and where the politically federated system provides numerous entry points, albeit not equally advantageous, the sheer diversity of subgroups – both old-timers and new immigrants, and the criss-crossing of pigmentation, immigrant/citizen status, and religious identities by class and residence – has tended to mute the polarities found along language-descent lines in Los Angeles and along the colour line in Chicago.

John Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells (1991, p. 402), too, have highlighted in New York City the existence of social dynamics marked by ‘an articulate core and a disarticulated plurality of peripheries’ differentiated by variable conglomerations of race, immigration status, gender, economic activity and neighbourhood. Such observations point towards the need to go beyond studies of socio-economic mobility, segregation and such based on ethnic or immigrant classification alone.

There have indeed been inquiries into how best to gauge diversity in ethnic terms, but also with respect to variables such as age, income and occupational types (e.g., Allen and Turner 1989) or how adequately to derive and evaluate measures of multi-group segregation (e.g., Reardon and Firebaugh 2002). The development of quantitative techniques for multivariate analysis surely have much to offer the study of super-diversity, particularly by way of understanding the interaction of variables such as country of origin, ethnicity, language, immigration status (and its concomitant rights, benefits and restrictions), age, gender, education, occupation and locality.

Yet there is also much need for more and better qualitative studies of super-diversity. Not least, such a need arises from the Cantle Report into the 2001 riots in Oldham (Home Office 2001; also see Home Office 2004). The Report painted a now infamous picture of groups living 'parallel lives' that do not touch or overlap by way of meaningful interchanges. But social scientists, to say nothing of civil servants, have few accounts of what meaningful interchanges look like, how they are formed, maintained or broken, and how the state or other agencies might promote them.

'There are plenty of neighbourhoods,' writes Ash Amin (2002, p. 960), 'in which multi-ethnicity has not resulted in social breakdown, so ethnic mixture itself does not offer a compelling explanation for failure.' In order to foster a better understanding of dynamics and potentials, Amin calls for an anthropology of 'local micropolitics of everyday interaction' akin to what Leonie Sandercock (2003, p. 89) sees as 'daily habits of perhaps quite banal intercultural interaction'. Such interaction, again, should be looked at in terms of the multiple variables mentioned above, not just in basic ethnic categories.

Social scientific investigation of the conditions and challenges of super-diversity will throw up a wide variety of material and insights with theoretical bearing. For example, these could include contributions towards a better understanding of some of the following areas.

New patterns of inequality and prejudice. The 'new immigration' since the early 1990s has brought with it emergent forms of racism: (a) among resident British targeted against newcomers – who may be specifically seen as East Europeans, Gypsies, Somalis, Kosovans, 'bogus asylum-seekers', or other constructed categories of otherness; (b) among longstanding ethnic minorities against immigrants; and (c) among newcomers themselves, directed against British ethnic minorities. The new immigration and super-diversity have also stimulated new definitions of 'whiteness' surrounding certain groups of newcomers (cf. Keith 2005, p. 177).

New patterns of segregation. Several new immigrants have, as in waves before them, clustered in specific urban areas; others are far more dispersed by choice, by employers or by the NASS dispersal system. While some statistical mapping of new immigrant distribution and concentration has been done (e.g. Kyambi 2005), much remains to be studied in terms of detailed patterns of segregation, housing experiences and residential opportunities.

New experiences of space and 'contact'. There is a school of thought in social psychology that suggests regular contact between groups may mutually reduce prejudice and increase respect (cf. Hewstone and Brown 1986). Yet 'Habitual contact in itself is no guarantor of cultural exchange' (Amin 2002, p. 969). Indeed, regular contact can entrench group animosities, fears and competition. More research is needed

here to test these hypotheses and to identify key forms of space and contact that might yield positive benefits. Further, as Jane Jacobs and Ruth Fincher (1998) advocate, in many cases we need to consider the local development of 'a complex entanglement between identity, power and place' which they call a 'located politics of difference'. This entails examining how people define their differences in relationship to uneven material and spatial conditions.

New forms of cosmopolitanism and creolisation. The enlarged presence and everyday interaction of people from all over the world provides opportunities for the development of research and theory surrounding multiple cultural competences (Vertovec and Rogers 1995), new cosmopolitan orientations and attitudes (Vertovec and Cohen 2003), creole languages (Harris and Rampton 2002), practices of 'crossing' or code-switching, particularly among young people (Rampton 2005) and the emergence of new ethnicities characterised by multi-lingualism (Harris 2003).

New 'bridgeheads' of migration. As noted earlier, many of the groups which have come to Britain in the past decade originate from places with few prior links to this country. For example, how did French-speaking Algerians or Congolese start coming to the UK (Collyer 2003)? We could learn much about contemporary global migration processes by looking at how migration channels and networks have been newly formed and developed.

Secondary migration patterns. It is now commonplace for migrants to arrive in the UK after spending periods in other, usually EU, countries; this is particularly the case with people granted refugee status such as Somalis from the Netherlands or Denmark. Again, research on such migration systems can tell us much about the current transformation of migration systems.

Transnationalism and integration. While much academic work has been devoted to these two topics over the past decade, there has been much less attention on their relationship. Many policy-makers and members of the public assume a zero-sum game: that is, it is presumed the 'more transnational' migrants are, the 'less integrated' they must be. Such an assumption is likely false, but needs to be contested with more research evidence (akin to Snel *et al.* 2006) as well as theoretical reflection (like that undertaken by Kivisto 2005).

Methodological innovation. Research on super-diversity could encourage new techniques in quantitatively testing the relation between multiple variables and in qualitatively undertaking ethnographic exercises that are multi-sited (considering different localities and spaces within a given locality) and multi-group (defined in terms of the variable convergence of ethnicity, status, gender and other criteria of super-diversity). Much value would also doubtless come from the application of a revitalized situational approach – pioneered by Max

Gluckman (1958) and J. Clyde Mitchell (1956) – in which a set of interactions are observed and an analysis ‘works outward’ to take account of not only the meaning of interactions to participants themselves, but also the encompassing criteria and structures impacting upon the positions, perceptions and practices of these actors (cf. Rogers and Vertovec 1995).

Research-policy nexus. Social scientists are not very good at translating data and analysis of complexities into forms that can have an impact on policies and public practices. Research on super-diversity will provide this opportunity, especially at a time when policy-makers are eager to gain a better understanding of ‘integration’ and ‘social cohesion’. Indeed, as outlined below, there is a range of policy issues raised or addressed by conditions of super-diversity.

Super-diversity: Policy challenges

At both national and local levels, policy-makers and public service practitioners continuously face the task of refashioning their tools in the order to be most effective in the light of changing circumstances (whether these are socio-economic, budgetary, or set by government strategy). This is equally the case surrounding policies for community cohesion, integration, managed migration and ‘managed settlement’ (Home Office 2004). The following section points to just a handful of possible issues in which super-diversity impacts on the current development of public policies and practices.

Community organizations. Structures and modes of government support for, and liaison with, ethnic minority organizations have for decades formed the backbone of the British model of multiculturalism. Especially on local levels, these have indeed often provided important forums for sharing experiences and needs, establishing good practices and providing access to services. However, in the light of the numerous dimensions of super-diversity, such structures and modes are inadequate for effective representation. Most local authorities have been used to liaising with a limited number of large and well-organized associations; now there are far more numbers in smaller, less (or not at all) organized groups. In any case, just how many groups could such structures support? And how should local authorities account for the internal diversity of various groups, not least in terms of legal status? Already, existing minority ethnic agencies often cannot respond to the needs of the various newcomers.

It can take years to develop effective community organizations which can deliver services and impact on local decision-making. ‘Meanwhile, new immigrant populations are effectively “squeezed out” of local representative structures and consequently wield little power or influence’ (Robinson and Reeve 2005, p. 35). Also, as Roger Zetter

and colleagues (2005, p. 14) point out, 'In the present climate of immigration policy, there are good reasons why minorities may wish to remain invisible to outsiders and resist forming themselves into explicit organisational structures.' None of this is to say that community organizations no longer have a place in bridging migrant groups and local authorities or service providers. Such bodies remain crucial to the process, but should be recognized as only partially relevant with regard to their representativeness and scope.

Public service delivery. The growing size and complexity of the immigrant population carries with it a range of significant public service implications. Executives in local authorities around Britain have voiced concerns about the ability of transport systems, schools and health services to manage new needs (Johnston 2006), while a leaked Home Office document reveals that government departments have been ordered to draw up emergency plans to deal with potential increased demands on public services (Tempest 2006). Such concerns flag up a substantial shift in strategies across a range of service sectors concerning the assessment of needs, planning, budgeting, commissioning of services, identification of partners for collaboration and gaining a broader appreciation of diverse experiences in order generally to inform debate.

Such a shift must begin with gathering basic information on the new diversity, since 'being able to identify new minority ethnic groups is a key factor in distributing resources' (Mennell 2000, p. 82). Existing measures are inadequate and may even impair service delivery. As one health expert puts it, 'the ten census categories for ethnicity do not reflect the diversity of communities in this country, and mask the differences of their health needs' (Pui-Ling 2000, p. 83).

A comprehensive examination of super-diversity's impacts on public services is well beyond the scope of this article and capability of this author. It seems evident, however, that most areas of service provision have not caught up with the transformations brought about by the new immigration of the last decade. In one well-informed overview of current institutions, for instance, Anja Rudiger (2006, p. 8) concludes that 'Despite statutory provisions, there is little evidence to date that local authorities are in a position to identify how targets relating to service delivery and economic development intersect with the dynamics of diverse community relationships and networks.'

In order to avoid the conventional trap of addressing newcomers just in terms of some presumably fixed ethnic identity, an awareness of the new super-diversity suggests that policy-makers and practitioners should take account of new immigrants' 'plurality of affiliations' (recognizing multiple identifications and axes of differentiation, only some of which concern ethnicity), 'the coexistence of cohesion and separateness' (especially when one bears in mind a stratification of rights and benefits around immigrant categories), and – in the light of

enhanced transnational practices – the fact that ‘migrant communities, just as the settled population, can “cohere” to different social worlds and communities simultaneously’ (Zetter *et al.* 2005, pp. 14, 19).

Conclusion

Described here as ‘super-diversity’, features of Britain’s contemporary social condition arise from the differential convergence of factors surrounding patterns of immigration since the early 1990s. The experiences, opportunities, constraints and trajectories facing newcomers – and the wider set of social and economic relations within the places where they reside – are shaped by complex interplays.

To recap, these factors include: *country of origin* (comprising a variety of possible subset traits such as ethnicity, language[s], religious tradition, regional and local identities, cultural values and practices), *migration channel* (often related to highly gendered flows and specific social networks), *legal status* (determining entitlement to rights), *migrants’ human capital* (particularly educational background), *access to employment* (which may or may not be in immigrants’ hands), *locality* (related especially to material conditions, but also the nature and extent of other immigrant and ethnic minority presence), *transnationalism* (emphasizing how migrants’ lives are lived with significant reference to places and peoples elsewhere) and the usually chequered *responses by local authorities, services providers and local residents* (which often tend to function by way of assumptions based on previous experiences with migrants and ethnic minorities). Fresh and novel ways of understanding and responding to such complex interplays must be fashioned if we are to move beyond the frameworks derived from an earlier, significantly different, social formation.

A range of existing frameworks, including those which focus on ethnicity as the predominant or even sole criterion marking social processes, should be reshaped and extended. The conventional focus on ethnicity shapes, and may obscure, understanding of ‘the diversity of migrants’ relationships to their place of settlement and to other localities around the world’ (Glick Schiller *et al.* 2006, p. 613). A similar conclusion was recently made by Fong and Shibuya (2005, p. 299), who stress that contemporary configurations ‘require social scientists to go beyond existing theoretical frameworks and methodology to explore the complexity of the multiethnic (sic) group context.’ Methodologically addressing and theoretically analysing processes and effects of super-diversity should stimulate social scientists to creatively consider the interaction of multiple axes of differentiation. This will also help us, thereby, to answer the critical questions posed by Jacobs and Fincher (1998, p. 9), namely: ‘How does one speak (and write) about such multiply constituted and locationally contingent notions of difference?’

What are the pertinent dimensions along which different identities are expressed or represented?’

For policy-makers and practitioners in local government, NGOs and social service departments, appreciating dimensions and dynamics of super-diversity has profound implications for how they might understand and deal with modes of difference and their interactions within the socio-economic and legal circumstances affecting members of the population. Discovering and acknowledging the nature and extent of diversity is a crucial first step in the development of adequate policies on both national and local levels. Here social scientific research and analysis can provide many of the key points of information and insight.

Ultimately, however, policy responses to diversification rest on political will and vision. As Leonie Sandercock (2003, p. 104) suggests, ‘the good society does not commit itself to a particular vision of the good life and then ask how much diversity it can tolerate within the limits set by this vision. To do so would be to foreclose future societal development.’ The future, immediate and long-term, will inherently be typified by diversity issues: indeed, Keith (2005, p. 1) emphasizes, ‘the cities of the 21st century will increasingly be characterized by the challenges of multiculturalism.’ It is here further suggested that such challenges will be marked and conditioned by the kind of factors and issues encapsulated in this article by the notion of ‘super-diversity’.

Although perhaps rather glib, the concept of super-diversity points to the necessity of considering multi-dimensional conditions and processes affecting immigrants in contemporary society. Its recognition will hopefully lead to public policies better suited to the needs and conditions of immigrants, ethnic minorities and the wider population of which they are inherently part.

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