Transnational Communities, Citizenship and African-Caribbeans in Birmingham

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There is considerable interest in and excitement about the idea of transnationalism and the phenomenon of transnational communities.[1] Transnational activities have been defined as those which take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and take up a relatively significant commitment in terms of time and other resources. They can be economic, political, cultural or social.[2] The popularity of transnationalism and such associated concepts as transnationals and transnational communities is largely because transnationalism is seen as a form of empowerment for individuals against the overweening strength and control of the nation-state. If people are able to function successfully in more than one state, hold more than one passport and exercise rights across national boundaries, then they may be able to control their own space and activities and to escape, to some extent, the control of national governments.

Transnationalism also acts as a positive antidote to much criticised concepts and processes such as acculturation, accommodation and assimilation.[3] International migrants are seen as being able to adjust to their new country of residence, to function effectively within it and to claim the rights and benefits it offers to its permanent residents and citizens. At the same time they do not have to give up the rights, benefits and loyalties emanating from their country of origin if they do not wish to do so. International migrants are no longer seen as powerless immigrants who have to accept passively a new language, a new culture and a new identity in exchange for work, physical security, better promotion prospects and a higher standard of living. Transnational migrants are thus seen as confident individuals able to make choices about which identity to hold, which language to use and which passport to hold, or whether to become dual nationals. Through transnational activities, migrants are able to maintain the links with their country of origin and to reinforce these links through frequent contact. They may even be able to play a significant role in both countries. They can certainly maintain their old national identity while acquiring a new one in their new country of residence.

These processes of transnationalism are closely associated with the processes of globalisation which many scholars also see as being a major challenge to the

sovereignty and ascendancy of the nation-state. Stephen Castles for example, argues that the rise of globalisation can be seen everywhere.[4] The nation-state is being supplanted by global and regional bodies. Global markets and transnational corporations are too powerful for all but the largest nation-states to control. The growing strength and authority of supra-national bodies and international agencies represents a new structure of political power a new world order not based on the nation-state.[5] The autonomy and sovereignty of nation-states is thus undermined by global markets, the massive volume of capital flows, by international treaties such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and by the creation of regional organisations such as the European Union and the North American Free Trade Association. The United Nations and its agencies and international non-governmental organisations can also be seen as part of this new world order that is no longer based on the nation-state.

Perhaps the most manifest example of globalisation and its challenge to the ascendancy of the nation-state is the crisis over international migration and refugee flows. States have long claimed the right to control who should enter their territory and be allowed to settle permanently. They carefully control who is admitted to citizenship. However, states are finding it more and more difficult to control international migration.[6] Even though states have a substantial array of implements at their disposal from visa regimes to the penalties they can impose under carriers' liability legislation and arbitrary rights to refuse entry at the border, states find in practise that their immigration control options are restricted. States have to compete in an international market for both skilled and unskilled labour. They compete for students and for tourists. Substantial checks at the border, to catch illegal entrants or even drug smugglers would be hugely disruptive and would jeopardise trade and business on a large scale. Increasingly, border controls consist of random spot checks to deter smuggling or illegal immigration. They are just token efforts in a situation where states are increasingly relaxing border controls. People detained at the border with forged papers or without visas or entry documents may immediately claim political asylum and so secure the right to remain while their claim is being adjudicated. This process often takes two years. The result is that the flow of people across borders is substantial and states have to accept large numbers of immigrants and the establishment on their territory of large communities of people with different

cultures, languages, religions and identities. These people are potentially member of transnational communities.

International migrants are no longer relatively isolated from their countries of origin as might often have been the case in the past. Modern methods of communication such as air travel, satellite television, the telephone and the internet mean that members of migrant communities can maintain relatively intense relations with people and institutions in their country of origin. They can communicate regularly, even on a daily basis, if their resources permit. They may be able to travel frequently. They can educate their children in either country or both countries. They may develop a business supplying the needs of customers in their home country or their fellow migrants in their country of residence.[7] This intense contact and continuing relations have become defining characteristics of a transnational community. Transnational communities thus link immigrant groups in the new country of residence with their relatives, friends and compatriots in their country of origin. Portes argues that this process must involve a significant proportion of the relevant immigrant community in sustained and vigorous two-country contacts and activities which take place over a long period, at least one generation and perhaps more.[8]

Members of transnational communities thus have strong links with both their new country of residence where they have chosen to live, work and bring up their families, and can also choose to maintain intense links with their countries of origin. Modern systems of communication mean that they can visit their homeland frequently to see relatives and friends, reaffirm their identity and loyalties and make concrete investments in savings, property or business. Their ties to their country of origin may be further reinforced by inheritance rights. They can educate their children in both countries and so ensure that their identity as transnationals is passed on from one generation to the next. Members of transnational communities can thus function effectively in two cultures and enjoy the greater opportunities and rights that this brings. This poses a dilemma for those states which still want to define themselves as nation-states and wish to assert the traditional view that citizenship should continue to be defined as being the exclusive membership of one state.

Transnationalism and citizenship

The establishment of transnational communities thus challenges the traditional or ideal typical model of nation-state citizenship in a number of ways.[9] Firstly, all nation-states expect their citizens to be completely loyal to the state of which they have citizenship. Dual nationality may be tolerated but the assumption is that all resident citizens (and even resident aliens)[10] are committed to the state and will defend it by service in the armed forces in times of national emergency. Dual nationality is often assumed to consist of one active citizenship where the citizen resides and one dormant nationality held purely for reasons of sentiment and nostalgia. Rights are exercised in the country of residence so that political participation, for example, occurs locally, regionally and nationally in the country of residence. Increasingly, however, states have conferred voting rights on their citizens resident abroad and many overseas citizens exercise these rights. This is an example of states encouraging transnationalism.

People who are truly transnational will not only hold dual nationality but will be active citizens in both their country of origin and their country of residence. Because they are frequently in both countries and gain status among both communities through active involvement in both, they will exercise citizenship rights in both, such as voting in elections and referendums. Nation-states assume that the acquisition of citizenship will naturally lead to integration and assimilation. However, for transnationals this means integrating into the economy and society of the new country without giving up their ties to the country of origin. Transnationals become well adjusted and integrated members of two societies. They are probably fluent in two languages, may own homes in both countries, may educate their children in both, for example schooling them in one country and sending them to university in the other. Transnational parents thus try to pass on their transnationalism to their children who have wider opportunities and choices as a result.

Transnational parents are well aware that, in a globalising world, knowledge of several languages and cultures will be a considerable advantage in the international labour market and in global society. There is a growing number of highly paid and prestigious regional and international occupations which require a degree of multi-lingualism and knowledge of more than one culture. Members of transnational communities are thus being perfectly rational in resisting pressures to integrate and

assimilate with their country of residence when they can enjoy greater benefits and opportunities by remaining transnationals. It is also rational to encourage their children to keep open the transnational option.

There is also growing evidence to suggest that more and more states are beginning to recognise transnationalism as a benefit rather than a cost. States are recognising that it is impossible to prevent citizens who emigrate from naturalising. Either they have to agree to share their citizens with other states and encourage transnationalism or they must lose them and the benefits that flow from continued contacts and loyalties. Overseas citizens, including dual nationals, can be mobilised for the support of the state even when it is very unlikely that they will ever return.[11] More and more countries are allowing dual nationality so that existing rights and loyalties can be maintained.[12] Encouraging dual nationality allows overseas citizens to retain their links with the country of origin and keeps open sources of remittances, investment, trade and political support.[13] Refusing to allow dual nationality is a sign that the state is demanding an 'all or nothing' commitment and that, if an individual naturalises, he or she must give up former loyalties and connections. Continuing these links is in the interests of both the state and the individual citizen who has emigrated.

The limits of transnationalism: African-Caribbeans in Britain

Does international migration always result in the creation of transnational communities? All international migrants are bound to develop ties with more than one society and so are, by definition, potential members of a transnational community. However, what are the conditions under which the links are intense enough to be defined as establishing migrants as members of a transnational community? Does it depend on the number of relatives and friends? On geographical proximity of the states of origin and new residence? On the resources available to the migrant to maintain intense contact? On the length of the period of migration? Or on the welcome or hostility that the migrants face in their new country of settlement? These issues will be considered in relation to post-war African-Caribbean migration to Britain.

The historical context

African-Caribbean migration was one of the first immigration movements to Britain in the aftermath of World War II. In a real sense the migration began during the war as Britain recruited Caribbean people to work in munitions factories, forestry and the Royal Air Force. Many of these voluntary workers and servicemen married English partners and settled in Britain. Many of those who returned to the Caribbean stayed only a short time, attracted back to Britain by the plentiful availability of work. In the period 1948-62 net immigration from the British Caribbean was around 275,000.[14] African-Caribbeans were attracted by the strong demand for labour in Britain caused by post-war reconstruction and the renewed expansion of all the West European economies partly generated by the Marshall plan. Also, access to the United States became more difficult after 1952 due to the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act. These settlers formed the basis of the thriving Caribbean communities that exist in Britain today, estimated at some 700,000 people.[15]

It is important to note that this was a migration of people with such strong links to Britain that it could almost be described as an internal rather than an international migration. It was a movement from peripheral economies of the Empire to the metropolitan centre. Jamaica and Barbados, the main sources of migrants, had been British colonies since the 17th century and were thoroughly anglicised. African-Caribbeans from the British West Indies were British subjects with a strong identification with Britain. Large numbers had volunteered for war service. They had unrestricted rights to travel to and settle in the UK, where they expected to be welcomed as British subjects. Despite the efforts by the British government to discourage migration from the Caribbean and despite the indifference, discrimination and racism that African-Caribbeans experienced in Britain, migration was substantial and continued until the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 and further immigration restrictions in 1965-6 ended large-scale immigration.

The situation of African-Caribbeans coming to Britain was anomalous. On the one hand they experienced considerable racial prejudice and discrimination in their search for accommodation and jobs.[16] On the other hand they did have full social, political and economic rights and a secure legal status on their arrival in Britain. As colonial

subjects they were British citizens with unrestricted rights of entry (until 1962) and with the right of permanent residence, voting rights and access to unemployment, health and other social benefits.

The role of the state

The attitude of the British state towards these economic migrants from the Caribbean, whose labour was desperately needed by a labour-hungry economy, was rather discouraging. Politicians and civil servants were concerned about the discrimination and racism that the migrants would face and potential problems of crime and of law and order.[17] The government's policy was nevertheless laissez-faire and reactive. It left the new settlers to fend for themselves and only intervened when it was pressed to do so by local authorities or publicity surrounding controversial events. The government did not actively encourage or discourage transnational activities. Close political ties were maintained with the Caribbean colonies and these continued after independence was achieved by the large majority of the English-speaking Caribbean in the 1960s. When anti-immigrant riots occurred in London and Nottingham in 1958, the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Mr Norman Manley and the Deputy Chief Minister of the ill-fated West Indian Federation, Mr Carl Lacorbinière, flew to London for consultations with British ministers and toured the riot areas.

The major impact of independence for the Caribbean colonies on African-Caribbean people in Britain was that those born in the newly-independent states were deemed to be citizens of these new states though they remained British subjects as citizens of a Commonwealth country. To retain a British passport, Caribbean-born people in Britain had to register as British citizens and pay a fee. As Commonwealth citizens and British subjects, they could not be refused citizenship, but the very fact of having to apply caused considerable resentment among people who had been born under the British flag and had often served in the British armed forces. Moreover, they were resident in Britain and not resident in the islands whose citizenship they were deemed to possess. There was a strong feeling among many African-Caribbean people that they should have been allowed to retain their British citizenship without having to go through the process of registration and being required to pay a fee.

The Birmingham sample

The core Birmingham sample consisted of 35 people, comprising 20 men and 15 women. All except 4 were in employment in a wide range of occupations such as legal practice manager, lorry driver, electrician, teacher, housing officer, social worker, nurse, sales assistant and catering worker. Twelve were born in the Caribbean, mainly Jamaica, and 23 were born in Britain, all but one in Birmingham or neighbouring towns. Ages ranged from 16 to 50 years. In addition to the core sample, a further 20 Caribbean men were interviewed in group discussions. These men were associated with a Pentecostal Church and included men from 30 to 75 years of age. Interviews were also held with 10 officers of Caribbean organisations based in the Birmingham area. The core sample was generated through snowballing techniques via contacts with a housing association and a counselling service. The interviews were qualitative and no claims can be made about the representativeness of the sample compared with the African-Caribbean population of Birmingham as a whole. The sample includes, for example, a high proportion of people in employment and people involved in voluntary work.[18]

Citizenship

Access to British citizenship was one of the distinguishing features of post-war migration to Britain. The large majority of immigrants who arrived in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s were from Ireland or Commonwealth countries, so they all had economic, political and social rights, either because of the historic connection between Britain and Ireland or because as Commonwealth or Colonial citizens they were British subjects. Moreover, Britain's tradition of *ius soli* meant that the British-born children of any immigrant would automatically qualify for British citizenship.[19]

African-Caribbean people, who had been warmly welcomed during the war, quickly found that post-war Britain was a much bleaker and less welcoming place. Despite the labour shortage caused by post-war reconstruction and economic regeneration, Caribbeans were discouraged from migrating to Britain.[20] This official frostiness had little effect and substantial migration took place. However, the enthusiasm for being a British subject in the Caribbean did not translate into an enthusiastic welcome or even

benign acceptance in the Metropolis. Caribbean settlers in Britain found it a hard struggle to find accommodation and gain the jobs which matched their skills and brought a decent wage. Most had to accept jobs for which they were over-qualified. Coping with racism and discrimination became a daily battle for African-Caribbean people in Britain and it was resented all the more because it was not expected.[21]

Bauböck distinguishes between formal and informal citizenship.[22] Formal citizenship is the legal attribution of citizenship, a person's formal membership of a state. This formal citizenship was held by virtually all African-Caribbean settlers coming to Britain. It is estimated that 95% of African-Caribbean people in Britain are British passport holders and that two-thirds are British-born. They formally have all the rights and obligations associated with British citizenship. Only 3% have dual nationality.[23]

Informal citizenship refers to the actual experiences a citizen has, particularly in the process of accessing his or her rights. This includes their treatment not only from dealing with officials, the police, local government and politicians, but also treatment in their dealings with shopkeepers, neighbours and in everyday life. While African-Caribbeans formally have citizenship, their daily experience as citizens is very different from the formal ideal. When asked 'Have you, or your family, experienced discrimination?', 29 out of the core sample of 35 (83%) answered 'Yes' and most answered 'Yes, of course.' A typical response was:

> 'Yes, we have numerous times. Verbally, physically and in terms of receiving unequal access to services.' (Male, 38)

Another respondent replied:

> 'Yes, my father in the 1960s as he was an immigrant to this country. My white British mother because she had four mixed-race children. She was and still is ostracised and stigmatised because of the colour of her partner and her children and grandchildren. I experience much negative attitudes from white people because (I guess) of my religion [Rastafarianism] and my locks I feel are a barrier to anyone having my political voice.' (Female, 35)

Sometimes respondents gave specific example of discrimination and racism which had been particularly upsetting. One such answer was:

> 'Of course I have. The worst was when I lived in a block of flats with my two children. One of the white tenants that lived below me used to be very racist and threatening. Once they urinated outside my front door and wrote slogans on the step that were very racist. (Female, 34)

Another was:

> 'Yes, we were called racist names. A number of my family have experienced discrimination in their place of work. I have been stopped by the police on a number of occasions for no legitimate reason.' (Male, 47)

Some respondents felt that discrimination was either not serious or that it was hard to identify. These respondents were in a small minority. They said, for example:

> 'I have as a black person faced discrimination all my life and so have my parents, but it's never been that serious and I can't recall what those experiences were.' (Female, 30)

> 'I have come to expect discrimination in all areas of my everyday life. It is a reality but sometimes the discrimination is very silent in its operation.' (Female, 40)

Most second-generation settlers felt that the discrimination faced by their parents was more direct and open. Also many felt that their children's experiences were different from their own or that they were too young to realise that they were being discriminated against. Examples of these feelings were:

> 'Yes, the experience is different. The underlying factors are the same: racism and unequal treatment. But the forms of discrimination change over the years. In the past, overt discrimination was more apparent, not it is likely to take subtler and less discernible forms. I think the situation was worse for my parents.' (Male, 38)

Given the widespread experience of discrimination among African-Caribbeans in our sample it is not surprising that most do not feel that they are treated as equals by other members of the community. In response to the question ‘Do you feel a full and equal member of British society?’, 25 (71%) said ‘No’ and 9 (26%) said ‘Yes’. Some respondents blamed capitalism and the class system for the inherently unequal nature of society but most agreed with the following respondent:

> ‘I think that black people will always be second-class citizens. I don’t think that our contributions to this society mean anything to anyone but us, therefore we will never be included because we are not important.’ (Female, 30)

or:

> ‘No. Since becoming an adult and realising the barriers and obstacles facing black people in Britain I have never felt a full and equal member of British society.’ (Male, 38)

Attitudes to British citizenship

Attitudes towards the meaning of British citizenship were a tremendous mixture of feelings, running from indifference to feelings of belonging and obligations to concerns about access to benefits and opportunities for children. Many respondents emphasised the value of a British passport in providing hassle-free travel, for example in response to the question ‘What does it mean to you to be a citizen?’, one respondent said.

> ‘The main advantage for me is that travelling to other countries is so much easier.’ (Male, 47)

Another respondent said:

> ‘That I hold a British passport and am able to travel out of the country when I like.’ (Female, 20)

Twelve people – that is, slightly over one-third (34%) of the sample – mentioned that value of a British passport in facilitating international travel. Thirteen ((37%) responded that citizenship gave them a felling of belonging to British society or the

wider community. Some mentioned the value of greater opportunities or an obligation to participate in society. One respondent said that:

> 'Being a British citizen to me means that I was born and live in Britain. Beyond that I feel I have some duties and responsibilities, for example to vote and pay my taxes. I also feel some moral obligation and sense of duty towards Britain.' (Male, 38)

Those who stressed access to benefits often mentioned the National Health Service or the benefits to their children. For example:

> 'If I'm sick I can have NHS treatment without having to worry about finding the money to pay for it.' (Female, 20)

or:

> 'Access to benefits, passport, housing, a fairly good education system for my children and some opportunities for good jobs with decent pay.' (Female, 34)

A small minority did not feel British because they felt rejected by British society. This response was given by 4 people (11%) from the core sample. A typical answer was:

> 'I don't feel like a British citizen. They don't treat me that way.' (Male, 31)

In spite of the mixed response to the question on the meaning of citizenship, respondents had clear ideas about how they contribute to society. They stressed the importance of bringing up their children to be law-abiding citizens, helping at the school their children attend and providing good role models for young people. This was mentioned by 18 of the 35 respondents in the core sample (51%). A typical response was:

> 'My best way of contributing to society is through my work, being involved in my community, being law-abiding and supporting my children through my participation in the school.' (Female, 47)

Another frequent response was

> ‘Being a good role model for the younger generation.’ (Male, 38)

Respondents also described how their work at home and in employment contributed to society, for example:

> ‘My primary contribution to British society is through my work in the legal field. I assist other British citizens with issues they have when confronting the British legal system. Other ways I contribute to society are through my taxes and other personal expenditure, which contributes towards the economy. Also at my children’s school, where I have regular contact with the schooling and education authorities.’ (Male, 38)

or:

> ‘I believe my main contribution lies within the workplace where I care for 18 mentally ill people.’ (Female, 40)

Quite a number of respondents emphasised the importance of the home, for example:

> ‘Personally I would argue the home, that then filters down into work, school, community, etc.’ (Male, 42)

Attitudes to politics

A number of questions were asked on politics and two of these will be considered here. The first was concerned with how well represented respondents felt by the political system and secondly whether it was important to be politically active.

In response to the question 'Do you feel well represented by the political system?' an overwhelming majority responded negatively, that is, 30 out of 35 or 86%. Typical answers included:

> ‘I do not feel represented by the political system. I am never consulted by the politicians and I do not feel that decisions are reflections of my views.’ (Male, 34)

or:

> 'No, my experience is that the system is still learning about the needs of black people and women. Hence it still makes many mistakes or treats people as inconsequential to the wider political system. Therefore I feel it is not representative of my needs. (Female, 35)

Sometimes there was a recognition that other people were also not well represented:

> 'No, I do not. As a black person I feel less represented than white people who I feel are also not well represented by the political system.' (Male, 38)

Occasionally the need for policies specifically targeted at the black community was emphasised, for example:

> 'No, not really. For example, the location of local authority housing stock for black people is often in deprived areas and the quality of the housing is often sub-standard, as are the amenities which are minimal. In other areas such as the needs of fostered black children there are not enough black foster parents. Black education is not multi-cultural. Not enough black representation in the political parties.' (Female, 30)

Sometimes there was frustration at the overlooking of the black community:

> 'No, I do not. No-one really voices our opinions or concerns. It needs something like the Stephen Lawrence case to be highlighted before anything is done.' (Male, 42)

Despite the frustrations and negative evaluation of the unrepresentative nature of the political system there was considerable agreement - 25 out of 35 (71%) - that it was important to be politically active. This was seen as important to give black Britons better representation. One respondent said:

> 'It is important to be involved in politics both locally and nationally. I think people should get involved with political parties and run for office both locally and nationally.' (Female, 44)

Another said:

> 'I think everyone should be involved in politics because politicians make the decisions that shape society.' (Female, 47)

And another:

> 'Yes, it is important to be politically active. This could be by joining the local council and encouraging friends and family to do the same.' (Female, 44)

There was a small but significant difference in the attitudes of men and women towards political participation. Thirteen of the fifteen women (87%) thought it was important to participate and only one was against. Among the men in the sample, 13 (65%) were in favour and 5 (25%) were against, while two were unsure. An articulate opponent said:

> 'No! I feel that black people cannot benefit from being formally politically active – the barriers are too great. However, they can benefit from other forms of political activity such as community organisation, public protests, civil disobedience and even rioting.' (Male, 38)

Most of those, however, who felt it was not important to be politically active held views similar to the man who said:

> 'No, politicians are all the same, Tories, Liberal or Labour.' (Male, 45)

It is often argued that the fact that African-Caribbean settlers in Britain had British subject status and were therefore full citizens was crucial in aiding their integration into British politics and society. This is partly true. The fact that Jamaicans, Barbadians and other people from the Caribbean had economic, political and social rights gave them formal equality and some resources to defend their interests. Politicians, for example, knew that some votes were at stake if they antagonised black Britons which is not the case, for example, with many refugee groups who do not have British or Commonwealth citizenship.

However, the formal possession of citizenship rights is not the full story. The ability to exercise these rights on the basis of equality with other citizens is crucially important to integration and identification with the country of settlement and this is

something most African-Caribbean people in our core sample did not feel they had. A large percentage (71%) felt that they were not treated as full and equal members of British society and an overwhelming majority (83%) claimed to have regular and even daily experiences of discrimination. This meant that equality of treatment, which is a key defining ingredient of citizenship, was not a reality for black Britons. This might be expected to cause British African-Caribbean people to retain strong feelings of identification with their countries of origin or their parents or grandparents' countries of origin in the Caribbean. It may be a factor encouraging transnationalism among African-Caribbean people.

Exploring transnationalism

In exploring whether African-Caribbean settlers in Birmingham can be described as members of a transnational community, it is important to discover the links that members of our core sample have with their countries of origin in the Caribbean and the intensity of these links.

The most obvious link that African-Caribbean people in Britain have is the existence of family and friends in the Caribbean. Almost all members of the core sample had close relatives or extended family members in the Caribbean with whom they kept in touch. This applied to 33 out of 35 (94%) of the sample. The two who had no family in the Caribbean had friends there. Most kept in touch on a regular basis through telephone calls and letters. However, this contact was limited on average to one telephone call or one letter a month. Moreover, very few send money back to their family the Caribbean. Five members of the sample mentioned doing this (14%), which was very similar to the number who said that they or their family owned property in the Caribbean (6 out of 35 or 17%).

In response to the question 'Is it important to you that you have links to the Caribbean and, if so, what are these links?', the overwhelming majority (29 our of 35, or 83%) stated that it was important for them to maintain their links to the Caribbean. One respondent said:

> 'Yes, it is important to me that I have links with the Caribbean.
> The links are with members of my extended family, for example

> aunts, uncles and cousins. Maintaining these links assists in maintaining my sense of identity and history.' (Male, 38)

Another respondent said:

> 'I was born in the Caribbean and family are still there. I feel it is important to be aware of your heritage and culture.' (Female, 44)

Sometimes the links were more aspirational than actual. One respondent said:

> 'It is important to have links as I have said before. They keep you informed of what's going on over there. Also, for holidays it's great. Even though I haven't been to the Caribbean, most of my family are over there. So I know when the time comes it will be easier to stay with family.' (Female, 30)

Another respondent said:

> 'I believe that it is important for me to maintain links with my homeland; it brings a sense of belonging while I am in Britain. However, on visiting the Caribbean I am quickly reminded that I no longer belong.' (Female, 34)

It was also important for members of the sample to stay informed about events occurring in the Caribbean. In response to the question 'Do you try to stay informed about events in the Caribbean?', 29 out of 35 (83%) responded positively. All of these kept informed by reading the Caribbean papers published in Britain, through news programmes and information from family and friends.

However, intensive links with the Caribbean, in terms of frequent travel to the Caribbean to see family, for business, or even for holidays, were noticeable by their absence. Ten members of the sample (29%) had never been to the Caribbean at all. In the previous year 5 people (14%) had visited the Caribbean, mainly for a two-week holiday. Most members of the sample had either never been, or admitted to visiting the Caribbean less than once a year (86%).

A few members of the sample were either Jamaican citizens (2 people) or dual nationals (4 people). For these people, having a Jamaican passport or keeping dual nationality was an important part of their identity. As one respondent said:

> ‘I hold both British and Jamaican passport. This gives me a sense of belonging to the Caribbean.’ (Female, 44)

But for most respondents, dual nationality was not important. In response to the question ‘Would it mean anything to you to hold another passport in addition to your British one?, one respondent said:

> ‘No, since merely holding another passport is meaningless. Concrete links through family and owned land are far more important.’ (Male, 48)

Another said:

> ‘I don’t think so. It’s not something I’ve really thought about.’ (Female, 20)

The limits of transnationalism

The literature on transnationalism would lead one to believe that international migration always leads to the creation of transnational communities.[24] In a common-sense way the answer is ‘yes.’ People who migrate from one country and settle in another retain links and interests in their homeland and develop new links and interests in their country of settlement, even if this settlement is perceived as a temporary sojourn. They thus can be said to have transnational interests and loyalties and at the very least to be potentially members of a transnational community.

However if we accept Portes’ definition of a transnational community as involving a large part of the immigrant community in sustained and vigorous two-country contacts and activities which take place over a long period of at least one or possibly two generations or more,[25] then the African-Caribbean people in Birmingham do not belong to a transnational community. It is clear from the evidence presented here that while African-Caribbean people in Birmingham have considerable interest in the Caribbean and like to keep in touch with family members and to be informed about events in the Caribbean, they do not function as members of two communities simultaneously. Contact with the Caribbean is sporadic and fleeting. In the core sample interviewed, a large minority (29%) had never been to the Caribbean at all and

86% had not been in the last year. Those 14% that had been had visited as part of their annual holiday and had combined this with seeing family and friends.

The sending of money back to family or the ownership of property can be seen as important links binding people in the country of origin and settlement, but again, although these links existed, they were engaged in by only a small proportion of the sample. Five members of the core sample (14%) sent money to family members in the Caribbean and six members (17%) said that they or members of the family owned property in the Caribbean. Even telephone calls and letters to family and friends were occasional rather than regular and sustained, being on average less than once a month. Officers of organisations established by settlers from Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and St Kitts claim that it is extremely difficult to generate interest in their homelands among the younger generation who prefer to go to discos or clubs rather than attend film shows on the Caribbean.[26] Organisations which have proudly called themselves Jamaican or Barbadian are under pressure to redesignate themselves as black British organisations.[27] Transnationalism is not being sustained across the generations and does not seem to have been strong and sustained even among first-generation Caribbeans in Britain. Why is this?

One reason often given for the strength of transnationalism among immigrant groups is exclusion by the host society. One might hypothesise that Turks in Germany would retain their Turkish identity more strongly and maintain links with Turkey more vigorously because until recently German citizenship was hard to obtain. African-Caribbeans coming to Britain had citizenship rights on their arrival and although they had to register as British citizens when the colonies from which they came were granted independence, access to British citizenship was automatic and not at the discretion of the Home Secretary, as is the case with applications from aliens.

Access to British citizenship, as a formal and legal status, was automatic, but as we have shown, the experience of citizenship as revealed in the welcome and treatment of African-Caribbean people by their fellow British citizens left a lot to be desired. African-Caribbean people were discouraged from coming to Britain, they were not welcomed as kith and kin or fellow citizens of the Empire. On arrival they were met with suspicion, discrimination and racism.

This half-hearted and frosty welcome did not prevent considerable migration and settlement. One result of discrimination could have been stronger identification with the Caribbean and a reinforcement of these links, for example by retaining Jamaican or Barbadian citizenship or insisting on dual nationality. This has not happened. Despite the hurtful denial of equal treatment and the continual experience of racism and discrimination so vividly portrayed in the treatment of Stephen Lawrence by the Metropolitan Police[28], the links with the Caribbean are emotional and sentimental rather than physical and actual. It cannot be argued that the transnational practices of African-Caribbean people in Britain match the activities and processes described by Portes and his colleagues for Colombians, Dominicans and Salvadorians in the United States.[29]

Transnationalism requires more than just the fact of international migration. It requires evidence of people leading dual lives, living in two cultures and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders.[30] Portes and his colleagues found this among the Latin-American labour migrants they studied in the USA. However, this sustained level of transnational activity is not replicated among African-Caribbean labour migrants in Britain. How can these differences be explained? Why is transnationalism strong and sustained in some contexts and not in others?

There are a number of reasons which can be proposed. These include geography, ease of travel, wealth and resources, and the role of governments. Geography is clearly important. For Mexicans and Central Americans and people in the Caribbean, the proximity of the United States, and the ease and cheapness of travel make the sustaining and profitability of transnational activities much more realistic than in other contexts. Travel between Britain and the Caribbean is relatively expensive and is time-consuming and often involves flight transfers. The African-Caribbean community in Britain is not a wealthy community, so trips to the Caribbean are restricted to special occasions such as honeymoons, holidays and trips to buy property for retirement.

Richard Black and his colleagues have argued that transnationalism may be fostered by the governments of the sending countries and gives the example of Eritrea.[31] The countries of the English-speaking Caribbean are happy to maintain links with African-Caribbean people in the UK. High Commission staff spend considerable time helping

African-Caribbean people with visas, passport problems and concerns about their property in the Caribbean. They are naturally concerned and involved in the problems and activities of African-Caribbeans in Britain and their organisations. However, they do not stimulate transnational activities in a systematic way. African-Caribbean organisation may be asked to help with particular problems such as when the Jamaican High Commission asked the Nurses Association of Jamaica (UK) to help provide a nurse to accompany a Jamaican citizen who was ill back to Jamaica. The Association was pleased to help. It also raises funds to help support health projects in Jamaica. However, most of the Association's work and fund-raising is focused on the UK.

African-Caribbean migration to Britain took place largely in the 1950s and 1960s. Most African-Caribbeans are British-born and the overwhelming majority marry British partners. There is no tradition, as with some Asian communities, of seeking partners from the country of origin. The high rate of growth of exogenous partnerships[32] is also an indication of the settlement and social integration of African-Caribbean people in the UK.

The absence of transnationalism among African-Caribbean people in the UK does not mean that they have been well integrated or even assimilated. The continuing existence of racism and discrimination suggests that an African-Caribbean or black British identity will remain strong for a considerable period of time. It does suggest, however, that there is more to transnationalism than merely the fact of international migration and globalisation.

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[2] Portes, A., Guarnizo, L.E., & Landolt, P., 'Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.22, no.2, March 1999, p.219.

[3] Kivisto, P, 'Theorising Transnational Immigration: a Critical Review of Current Efforts', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.24, no.4, July 2001.

[4] Castles, S., 'Globalisation and Citizenship: An Australian Dilemma', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol.35, no.1, 2000.

[5] ibid.

[6] Cornelius, W., Martin, P., & Hollifield, J., *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, Stanford University Press, 1994.

[7] Landolt, P., Autler, L., & Baires S., 'From *Hermano Lejano* to *Hermano Mayor*: the Dialectics of Salvadorean Transnationalism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.23, no.2., pp.290-315.

[8] Portes, A. et al., op.cit., p.219.

[9] An excellent definition of nation-state citizenship can be found in Brubaker, R., *Immigration and Citizenship in Europe and North America*, University Press of America, 1989.

[10] Many countries, for example the USA, maintain the right to conscript resident aliens in times of war.

[11] Al-Ali, N., Black, R. and Koser, K., The Limits to "Transnationalism"; Bosnian and Eritrean Refugees in Europe as Emerging Transnational Communities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* vol.24, no.4, July 2001.

[12] e.g. Mexico, Nigeria, the Council of Europe.

[13] Al-Ali et al., op.cit.

[14] Layton-Henry, Z., *The Politics of Race in Britain*, Allen & Unwin, 1984.

[15] Owen, D., 'A Profile of Caribbean Household and Families in Great Britain' in Goulbourne, H. and Chamberlain, M. (eds), *Caribbean Families in Britain and the Trans-Atlantic World*, London, Macmillan, 2001.

[16] Daniel, W., *Racial Discrimination in Englan*d, Penguin Books, 1968.

[17] Layton-Henry, Z., op.cit. pp.20-22.

[18] All members of the core sample were interviewed by African-Caribbean interviewers.

[19] Layton-Henry, Z., 'Patterns of Privilege: Citizenship Rights in Britain' in Kondo, A. (ed.), *Citizenship in a Global World*, Palgrave, 2001.

[20] Layton-Henry, Z., *The Politics of Race in Britain*, op.cit., pp.20-22.

[21] Hinds, D., *Journey to an Illusion*, London, Heinemann, 1966.

[22] Bauböck, R., *Transnational Citizenship: Membership and Rights in International Migration*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1994.

[23] Saggar, S., *Race and Representation: Electoral Politics and Ethnic Pluralism in Britain*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p.97.

[24] See for example the special issues on Transnational Communities in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.22, no.2, 1999.

[25] Portes, A. et al., op.cit., p.219.

[26] Interviews with officers of Caribbean associations in Birmingham.

[27] ibid.

[28] Norton-Taylor, R. (ed.), *The Colour of Justice: Based on the Transcripts of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, London, Oberon Books, 1999.

[29] Guarnizo, L.E., Sanchez, A.I. and Roach, E.M., 'Mistrust, fragmented solidarity and transnational migration: Colombians in New York City and Los Angeles', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.22, no.2., 1999, pp.367-96.

[30] Portes, A., op.cit., p.218.

[31] Al-Ali, N., Black, R., and Koser, K. op.cit.

[32] Goulbourne, H. & Chamberlain, M. (eds.), *Caribbean Families in Britain and the Trans-Atlantic World*, Macmillan Education Ltd, 2001, pp.234-42.