

Ghettos in the Sky

“Ghettos in English cities almost equal to Chicago” ran the headlines by the end of last week. ***“Sleepwalking to segregation”*** began an editorial in the Times. All this as a result of one speech made in Manchester, but made by the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Phillips. Mr Phillips had some interesting points to make on Thursday night. However, his central claim – that we are drifting toward racial segregation - is wrong. Residential racial segregation is not increasing as he claimed. There are no neighbourhood ghetto communities in Britain – and the “new” research he referenced, to try to support his claims, is neither new nor authoritative. The source for the central claim was a speech given a couple of weeks earlier by an academic based in Australia. The carefully considered conclusion of academics in Britain is that there are no ghettos here. In short Trevor Philips has been ill informed or has simply not understood what his organisation has been telling him. Racism is rife in Britain but it is not being expressed through rising levels of neighbourhood segregation. Nor are any ghettos likely to be formed in the near future. If ignorance of these trends extends as far as the Chair of the Commission then debate on segregation in Britain will be all the poorer for it and we will neglect the segregation that really is occurring: by poverty and wealth.

Had Trevor Philips read the work of the academic who has studied segregation in most detail in Britain over recent years he might have thought a little more carefully before making his claims. In fact if he had only read the first two sentences of Dr Ludi Simpson’s most recent paper he would have learnt that: ***“Racial self-segregation and increased racial segregation are myths for Britain. The repetition of these myths send unhelpful messages to policy makers”***. Dr Simpson, who works at the University of Manchester, also spoke on the BBC from that city on Thursday night, and explained why Trevor’s central message was wrong. But by the time he spoke the Friday papers were already being printed and Trevor’s message was spreading uncorrected.

The most up to date segregation indices for different ethnic and religious groups were published over a year ago. They were calculated from the latest census and are comparable with figures published a decade earlier. For all ethnic minority groups identified by the census the indices of segregation fell between 1991 and 2001. These are the indices to which Trevor Philips referred to in his speech – also called the indices of dissimilarity. They fell fastest for those of Black and “Other Asian” origin.

For no ethnic minority group have these indices risen. In contrast, segregation rose over the same period in Northern Ireland for many religious groups. The local pattern in particular cities will vary slightly, but nationally ethnic minority neighbourhood segregation in Britain is falling – and there are no ghettos, no neighbourhoods where a majority of residents belong to a particular minority group. Even if there were there is no reason to see that as a problem, but before proposing opinions, it is important to get the simple facts right.

What may have confused Trevor Philips is that work reported by an Australian based academic at a conference over the summer. That work referred to the

extent to which different groups in Britain may be becoming more isolated rather than more segregated. It is not hard to see why the indices that academics use to measure these things could so easily confuse. The segregation index is a measure of the proportion of people who would have to move home for a group to be evenly spread across the country. The higher that index for a particular group the more people from the particular group would have to move - were that group to be evenly distributed between neighbourhoods. It is falling for all minority groups. In contrast the isolation index is a measure of how often individuals from a particular group are likely to meet other individuals from their group. The two are related but do not measure the same thing. Most crucially, if disproportionate numbers of people in a particular group are of child bearing age, have children, and so the group grows in size (similarly in all neighbourhoods), the index of segregation remains the same while the so-called index of isolation rises.

The idea that a group becomes more isolated is farcical if the index rises simply because the group contains large numbers of young adults starting families. Most young adults have children, adults of ethnic or religious minority groups are no different. This normal demographic change accounts for much that concerns Trevor. In the cities that he lists as having particularly high concentrations there are simply more young adults of particular ethnic groups of child bearing age – and they are having children. They are having children in much the same numbers that young adults of their age of all other ethnic and religious groups are having children. Having children is not some decision to self segregate – it is normal. Where young adults are clustered the numbers of people in a particular minority group will tend to rise when they have children. Similarly in these neighbourhoods few people in these young groups are yet dying from old age (because they are not old). So the group size is not declining due to natural mortality. Again this is simple demographics – not segregation. The rise in the index of isolation mainly reflects demographic changes not any tendency to segregate by ethnicity in Britain.

The index of isolation is thus not necessarily a good measure to use, but it might be useful for the Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality to know that if he does refer to it, it is highest in Britain for people of Christian faiths and then for those who state they have no religion. These are the most geographically isolated groups in Britain. The most segregated religious groups in England and Wales are people of Jewish and Sikh faiths, not Muslims as is often supposed; while the levels of geographical isolation of people of Catholic faith in Scotland exceed those of any minority religious or ethnic group in England. All these facts are taken from just a couple of pages of a 2001 Census atlas of the UK that was published in 2004 [REFERENCES TABLES BELOW HERE IF YOU INCLUDE ANY], but by now there are many other sources of this data that can be called upon to see that no neighbourhood ghettos are being formed in Britain. Trevor simply failed to check his facts.

There are shocking statistics concerning segregation directly by the state that the Chair of the Commission does need to address. In some areas African-Caribbean boys are up to 15 times more likely to be excluded from school than are white boys, and when it was last measured, up to twelve times more likely to

be incarcerated in prison in Britain. Children and young people are being segregated out of classrooms and disproportionately into prisons by ethnicity in this country. The Commission has enough real work to do that it need not create fictitious evils to remedy. In terms of education Trevor is right to say that children are more segregated by school than by neighbourhood, but this is only slightly so and has only been measured at one point in time - so he is wrong to imply in his speech that schools are increasing the trend towards spatial racial segregation: a spatial trend that we know is decreasing and when we do not know how the intake of schools by ethnicity and religion is changing over time. Our schools and universities are becoming more unequal in their intake, but not necessarily by religion nor by ethnicity.

What is most unfortunate about this misunderstanding is that it detracts from the neighbourhood segregation that is most clearly occurring in Britain but which is about poverty and wealth not race nor religion. Neighbourhoods are becoming more segregated by rates of illness and premature mortality: Depending on when and to whom a baby is born inequalities in their chances of reaching their first birthday have widen since 1997. Neighbourhoods are rapidly becoming more segregated by wealth – most clearly by housing equity through which the best off tenth of children should already each expect to each inherit £80,000 simply because of where they were born, plus interest – a sum which makes baby bonds obsolete in future effect. Neighbourhoods are segregating by the availability of work, particularly good jobs. They are segregating in terms of educational opportunities as the majority of extra university place have been taken up by the children from the streets where most went to university to begin with. The fortunes of Britain's ethnic and religious minorities depend at least as much on where they live as on how they are perceived by the colour of their skins or the faiths they profess. There are independent ethnic penalties to gaining good employment (in lay terms - racism) and that can be proved with census data, but there is no increased neighbourhood racial segregation. That, though, is not to say that other racial concentrations cannot be found – especially of children.

The ghettos referred to in Trevor's speech do not exist. Britain has no neighbourhood ghettos that correspond to the situation in the United States. However, had his researchers looked at the census more carefully then they would begin to see much else that should concern them. Cut Britain up horizontally rather than by neighbourhood and you do find minority-majority areas. For example above the fifth floor of all housing in England and Wales only a minority of children are white. The majority of children growing up in the tower blocks of London and Birmingham - the majority of children "living in the sky" in Britain - are black. From the level of the street you cannot see the colour of the skin of the faces the children at the windows above the fifth floor. The Chair of the Commission needs the census to tell him what is happening as much as any of the rest of us do. Our gut feelings are not good enough, our own lives too isolated for us to extrapolate from experience. The evidence comes mainly from social statistics. Britain is increasingly segregated by inequality, poverty, wealth and opportunity, not by race by area. The only racial ghettos in Britain are ghettos in the sky in neighbourhoods which are, at ground level, amongst the most racially mixed in Britain, but where the children of the poorest are - more

often than not - black. We have not been sleepwalking into segregation by race, but towards ever greater segregation by wealth and poverty. That is what matters most to the life chances of people in Britain.

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Professor Dorling is one of the authors of *People and Places, a 2001 Census atlas of the UK* (Policy Press, 2004), *The Human Geography of Britain* textbook (Sage, 2005) and *Life in Britain: using millennial census data to understand poverty, inequality and place* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2005)

Background notes – all taken from pages 56 and 57 of Dorling, D. and Thomas, B., 2004, People and Places a 2001 Census atlas of the UK, Bristol: Policy Press

¹ The table below (AND ALL THE TABLES THAT FOLLOW) shows two indices of dispersal by district for each religious group in England and Wales. The first (1) is the index of segregation, the proportion who would have to move district to be evenly spread; the second is the index of isolation (2), the chance of a person of a particular religion meeting another person of their religion, at random by district. Religion in Britain was not asked before 2001 (except in 1851) and so religious segregation and isolation in Britain can only be measured for one point in time (it was asked in Northern Ireland prior to 2001):

Index	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	Other	None	Not stated
1 (2001)	4.8%	29.8%	56.2%	62.1%	54.2%	62.5%	19.5%	10.2%	4.7%
2 (2001)	72.9%	0.5%	6.4%	5.1%	10.3%	3.9%	0.4%	15.8%	7.8%

¹The two statistics of dispersal calculated for the English and Welsh religious groups can also be calculated for the six Northern Irish religious groups identified by the census and are shown in the table below, but for both 1991 and 2001 censuses:

	Catholic	Presbyterian	Church of Ireland	Methodist	Other	None	All Protestant
1 (2001)	20.75%	20.85%	14.01%	30.13%	16.90%	15.96%	10.49%
2 (2001)	50.20%	25.69%	17.03%	5.18%	7.40%	15.77%	30.09%
1 (1991)	21.37%	20.77%	13.43%	30.50%	15.60%	13.64%	9.93%
2 (1991)	48.61%	26.45%	19.71%	5.63%	8.90%	12.12%	31.70%

Note: The Protestant column at the end provides the results for the three main Protestant religions combined.

The most isolated group in 2001 were Catholics and that level of isolation has risen by 1.92%. However, at the district level, Catholics are becoming slightly less segregated and Protestants slightly less isolated.

¹ Outside of Northern Ireland the only area of the UK where Christian denomination was asked for was in Scotland. The table for Scotland below can thus be compared to that for the Province:

	Church of Scotland	Catholic	Other Chris'n	Buddhist	Hindu	Jewish	Muslim	Sikh	Other	None	Not stated
1 (2001)	6.56%	25.99%	17.01%	21.24%	40.34%	55.56%	43.78%	44.82%	18.38%	8.43%	8.78%
2 (2001)	49.68%	24.43%	9.21%	0.12%	0.16%	1.37%	1.40%	0.25%	0.47%	20.84%	4.28%

In 2001, by district, Catholics were more segregated in Scotland than in Northern Ireland, the Church of Scotland more isolated than the Church of Ireland, and other Christian religions more separated from the rest of the population than were Methodists in the Province. Hindus, religious Jews, Muslims and Sikhs are all more segregated in Scotland than are the Christian religions in Northern Ireland. They are even more segregated in England and Wales than in Scotland. Only those with no religion are more segregated in Northern Ireland than elsewhere and even they are less isolated.

¹ The table below shows two indices of dispersal by district for each group in England and Wales: the index of segregation (1), the index of isolation (2). Just over sixty percent of Caribbeans, Africans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis would have to move district to be evenly spread. The other groups are less segregated. The White group is by far the most isolated and is also more separated from the rest than is any other group, followed by Bangladeshis then Indians. Black Others, along with the Chinese, Asian Others and Other Others are the least separated of all the ethnic groups in England and Wales, having allowed for their sizes.

2001	White	Caribbean	African	Black Other	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Asian Other	Other Other
1	5%	62%	62%	42%	55%	61%	61%	32%	39%	39%
2	93%	5%	7%	2%	9%	6%	10%	1%	2%	2%

¹ The table below shows the changes in the two indices of dispersal for England and Wales by ethnic group between 1991 and 2001. The only groups which have become more segregated, ever so slightly are White and Other Other. However the White group is the only group to have become less isolated (isolation tends to increase as groups grow in size mainly where they were before).

change	White	Caribbean	African	Black Other	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Asian Other	Other Other
1	1%	0%	-4%	-6%	-2%	0%	0%	-1%	-11%	1%
2	-2%	0%	3%	0%	1%	2%	3%	0%	1%	0%

¹ The table below shows the 2001 levels of the three indices of dispersal for Scotland by ethnic group. The only change that has occurred since 1991, when decimal points are not shown, is that there has been a single percentage point drop in the degree of separation experience by Pakistani people in Scotland. We treat Scotland here separately from England and Wales because slightly different questions on ethnicity were asked in Scotland. Again the most isolated group is White, but their levels of isolation are now near the maximum of 100%. The most segregated group is Pakistani, followed by the other Asian groups, but lowest amongst these is the level for Chinese, lower again only for Caribbean and Other ethnic groups. In England and Wales, the Chinese are the least segregated after White. The smallest groups are not necessarily the most segregated.

2001	White	Caribbean	African	Black Other	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Asian Other	Other Other
1	0%	25%	38%	24%	41%	49%	47%	30%	34%	26%
2	99%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%