*Progress in Human Geography* 23,2 (1999) pp. 282–288

# Social geography

Ceri Peach

School of Geography, Oxford University, Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK

A recent review of social geography in these pages (Gregson, 1993) signalled the demise of the subject. The judgement was true, perhaps of that branch of the subject whose titles include playful parentheses to indicate a knowing deconstruction of their subject matter. However, in the area that is based more strongly on the empirical side, there has been a lively outpouring of material in the last three years. In the British context, the publication of the 1991 Census explains a great deal of this activity. The 1991 Census included, for the first time, a question on ethnic identity. The census also included for the first time samples of anonymized records (SARs) equivalent to the US public use micro samples (PUMS). These new sources provided a data fest for the aficionados and the extent to which geographers contributed to the national debate is particularly gratifying.

The Office of Populations, Censuses and Surveys (which mutated in 1996 into the Office for National Statistics) commissioned four volumes of analysis of the ethnic question data in which, remarkably, social geographers and former geographers contributed the majority of chapters and editors. Volume 1, edited by David Coleman and John Salt (1996), dealt with the demography of the minority ethnic populations. Essays by geographers in their volume included David Owen (1996a) on ‘Size, structure and growth of the ethnic minority population’, Paul Compton (1996) on ‘Indigenous and older minorities population’, John Salt (1996) on ‘Immigration and ethnic group population’ and Tony Warnes (1996) on ‘The age structure and ageing of the ethnic groups’. Volume 2, profiling the minority groups, was edited by Ceri Peach (1996a) and included a substantial number of chapters by geographers. Patricia Daley (1996) contributed the first recent research on Africans in Britain; David Owen (1996b; 1996c) deconstructed the enigmatic census categories of ‘Black Other’ and ‘Other Asian’. His analysis is important as the group has misleadingly been represented as the British-born children of the original Caribbean immigrants. Ceri Peach (1996b) wrote the chapter on the Caribbean population and was co-author with John Eade and Tim Vamplew (1996) on the Bangladeshi profile. Vaughan Robinson (1996a) contributed an important chapter on the Indian ethnic populations, making the first observation of the dramatic shift in the east African Asian population towards London. Judy Chance

© Arnold 1999 0309–1325(99)PH237PR

(1996) profiled the Irish-born population, indicating its bimodal distribution at the professional and the institutional ends of the social scale.

Paradoxically, Volume 3 in the series, which was entitled *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration*, was edited by a sociologist, Peter Ratcliffe (1996). It nevertheless included substantial contributions from social geographers. Philip Rees and Deborah Phillips (1996a) produced a massive and intricate backward projection of the ethnic population in 1981. They were thus able to compare this pattern with the 1991 hard data to measure intercensal change. They showed that while the white population grew by less than 1% in 1981–91, the minority ethnic populations grew by between 24 and 95%. However, despite substantial growth, there was little change in the geographical distribution of the minority populations. Minorities became marginally more concentrated in metropolitan areas in 1991 than in 1981, while the opposite was true of the white population. However, within the metropolitan regions, particularly London, there is evidence of the decentralization of minority populations. Rees and Phillips' analysis is fairly pessimistic about longer-term trends in ethnic segregation in Britain. The macro trends of white counterurbanization and ethnic metropolitanization, fed by higher growth rates, family reunification and chain migration, point to growing polarization of whites and minorities. Some problems with their reconstitution of 1981 data remain, however. For example, Rees and Phillips' back projection indicates a Caribbean growth rate of about 24% in 1981–91 while other sources, such as the Labour Force Surveys and the General Household Surveys, indicate a more stable population size.

The chapter by Peach and Rossiter (1996) in Volume 3 took a more optimistic view. They showed that the levels of ethnic minority segregation in British cities are (with the exception of the Bangladeshis) much lower than those for African Americans. Caribbean-born populations in London, for example, had indices of segregation at about half the level of blacks in major American cities. Caribbean indices of segregation in London had also shown a continuous decrease for every intercensal period since 1961. Other geographical contributions to Volume 3 included Tony Champion's (1996) study of internal migration and ethnicity, Vaughan Robinson's (1996b) analysis of intergenerational differences in ethnic settlement patterns and chapters by the ubiquitous David Owen plus Mark Johnson (1996) on ethnic minorities in the Midlands and Philip Rees and Deborah Phillips (1996b) on ethnic distributions in a cluster of Pennine cities. A chapter on London was contributed by Marian Storkey and Rob Lewis (1996) of the London Research Centre. Storkey (1994) had previously produced a copiously illustrated monograph overview of ethnic settlement pattern in London. Robinson deserves particular recognition for the early disaggregation of ethnicity from broader national origin designations (Robinson, 1986) and as a pioneer in the use of the Longitudinal Study census data (Robinson, 1991).

Volume 4, entitled *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain*, was edited by Valerie Karn (1997) who began her academic career as a geographer. Among the geographers contributing to the volume were David Owen (1997), Daniel Dorling (1997), Deborah Phillips (1997) and David Mullins (Howes and Mullins, 1997). Dorling (1995) had previously published the striking *New social atlas of Britain* with its innovative representations of ethnic distributions.

Ethnic minorities in the British census related only to non-European populations, who constituted 5.5% of the British population. The remaining 94.5% were compressed

rather like one of those limousines in a James Bond film, into a single 'white' category. Not even the Irish managed to maintain their identity in this process. Coleman and Salt (1996) did nevertheless include a chapter by Paul Compton (1996) on the older, white groups.

The categorization process has been a significant issue in social geography as well as in population and cultural geography, but these different strands exist as parallel nondebates rather than interaction. Paul White and Peter Jackson (1995) argued that uncritical acceptance of given categories blunts analytical perceptions and that insufficient attention has been paid to alternative, nonessentialist formulations. The underlying argument would seem to be that the study of 'race' is itself racist. It would be wrong to conclude that the empiricists are insensitive to the social construction of census categories. On the other hand, they do not equate imperfection with inutility. Substantial attention was devoted in the four census volumes, discussed above, to probing the meaning and suitability of the categories employed. Cultural geographers, on the other hand, seem uncomfortable with attributing differences between ethnically defined groups to 'cultural' factors (see, for example, the interchange on this point in *Transactions*: Mitchell, 1995; Cosgrove, 1996; Duncan and Duncan, 1996; Jackson, 1996). Yet the main thrust of the great outpouring on the social geography of ethnicity, outlined above, is to make precisely this attribution. The critical point to emerge from the 1991 Census was that ethnic groups are distinct and follow highly differentiated trajectories. Perhaps the same is true of social and cultural geographers.

Clearly the census categories are not perfect. Ethnic identity is defined dialectically rather than absolutely. I can be Welsh in England, British in Germany, European in Thailand, white in Africa. For many, religion is a more important marker than ethnicity. Among the topics for which there is pressure for inclusion in the 2001 Census is religion. Certain sections of the Muslim community are disaffected by their claims for state funding for their schools on the same basis that Church of England, Roman Catholic and Jewish schools are subsidized. There is a lively debate as to whether British Muslims number one million or three. Similar debates are common in Europe (Vertovec and Peach, 1997).

At the same time that the attack was being mounted on the essentialist nature of labelling, a counterattack was being mounted in an unexpected quarter. Loïc Wacquant (1997) started a brush fire in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* by denouncing the way in which the racial identity of the African American ghetto had been disguised by a fig leaf of class interpretation. The tinder for this conflagration came from Jargowski and Bane (1996: 239, 241) of the underclass school of American sociologists who defined the ghetto 'as an area in which the overall poverty rate in a census tract is greater than 40 percent. The ghetto poor are then those poor, of any race or ethnic group who live in such high-poverty census tracts . . .'. Wacquant pointed out that although this definition ostensibly 'deracialized' the ghetto, in fact it denoted only urban enclaves of coloured poverty. The great and the good poured into the debate.

Wacquant's rediscovery of race had been preceded in the sociospatial literature by the even more momentous rediscovery of racial segregation. In 1993, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton had published *American apartheid: segregation and the making of the underclass*. In the book, they argued that black segregation had disappeared from the American research agenda for the previous 25 years. Perhaps as a reproach to those who complain about essentializing, it should be pointed out that disappearance from

the agenda did not mean disappearance of the phenomenon itself. Massey and Denton demonstrated that African American segregation had not only remained, but had remained entrenched. They coined the term 'hypersegregation' to describe the situation in which segregation exceeded specified thresholds on five measures of segregation (ID, P*, centralization, concentration and clustering). Ghetto definition had another outing in a British journal. Peach (1996d), using a different definition from Massey and Denton (1993) and Wacquant (1997), argued that the critical point that distinguished the ghetto from other kinds of enclaves was its dual nature. Not only were all those in it of a given racialized type but also all those of that type were in it. On this basis, it was argued that ethnic minority populations in Britain were not ghettoized. In cities such as Chicago, over 80% of the African American population was living in areas that were 50% or more black. Although in terms of index of dissimilarity (ID) measurement the Bangladeshis approached African American levels of segregation, just over half of the Bangladeshis were living in areas where they formed just over half of the population. In fact, it is clear that Bangladeshis in London are hypersegregated, even if not ghettoized.

Interest in the spatial segregation of minority populations received a substantial publication boost in continental Europe. The Dutch and Belgians, in particular, were active. A special 1997 issue of *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, edited by Chris Kesteloot, Jan van Weesep and Paul White (1997), was devoted to the topic. It included colour maps of minority distributions in Brussels (Kesteloot and van der Hagen, 1997) (why cannot British journals do this?). Other articles included were Glebe (1997) on Düsseldorf, Musterd and Duerloo (1997) on Amsterdam, van Kempen and van Weesep (1997) on Dutch cities in general and Peach (1997) on pluralism versus assimilation in London. An even more ambitious survey of segregation in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Britain, Sweden, France and Canada was produced by three Dutch researchers (Musterd *et al.*, 1998) There was also a book on segregation in French cities by Brun and Rhein (1994).

Melanie Knights (1996) produced an arresting article on the settlement of Bangladeshis in Rome. The combination of the desire of those with the means to escape from Bangladesh, coupled with the passing of the Martelli laws in Italy, regularizing the position of undocumented immigrants, offered an opportunity for an opportunistic direction of migrants to this unlikely destination. The Bangladeshi population grew from two or three hundred to 10 000 in a few months between 1989 and 1990. The mechanism of the flow was provided by Bangladeshi travel agents, with the migrants becoming the clients of Bangladeshi 'godfathers' in Rome. The latter arranged not only the housing and jobs of the migrants, but also effectively managed to regularize their documentation.

The next wave of empirical literature on ethnic settlement in cities seems likely to come from Canada, where enormous changes have taken place in the flow of immigrants and where the 1996 Census containing variables on ancestry and language is now appearing. Geographers, notably David Ley (in press) and Daniel Hiebert (1997), have been to the fore in the Metropolis project sponsored by the Canadian government on the integration of minority ethnic populations. What is beginning to emerge is a totally new pattern of settlement in which we can observe parachuted plurality in the suburbs. Instead of the traditional brick-in-the-pond pattern of poor newcomers clustering in the inner city and making tentative outward movements over time, we have rich newcomers who achieve instant decentralization, without losing their

identity, recreating and maintaining their traditional lifestyles in plush suburbs. In my next report I hope to discuss these trends and how they connect the social and cultural fields of geography.

To sum up, social geography in the 1990s seems to divide into the Hamlet tendency of self-doubt (outlined by Gregson, 1993) and the Caliban school of brutish energy on which I have reported. In the last five years, the Caliban school seems to have been in the ascendant, fuelled by the adrenalin of census publication. There clearly is a need to bring the social and cultural strands of human geography into a common channel. At present, social geography seems to have more in common with the spatial side of sociology than with the cultural side of geography. However, there are some promising developments and these will be the subject of my next report.

## References


**Brun, J.** and **Rhein, C.** 1994: *La ségrégation dans les villes: concepts et mésures*. Paris: Edition Harmattan.

**Champion, T.** 1996: Internal migration and ethnicity in Britain. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 135–74.

**Chance, J.** 1996: The Irish: invisible settlers. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 222–39.

**Coleman, D.** and **Salt, J.,** editors, 1996: *Demographic characteristics of the ethnic minority populations. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 1*. London: OPCS, HMSO.

**Compton, P.** 1996: Indigenous and older minorities' population. In Coleman, D. and Salt, J., editors, *Demographic characteristics of the ethnic minority populations. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 1*, London: OPCS, HMSO, 243–82.

**Cosgrove, D.** 1996: ideas and culture: a response to Don Mitchell. Transactions, Institute of British Geographers NS 21, 574–75.

**Daley, P.** 1996: Black-Africans: students who stayed. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 44–65.

**Dorling, D.** 1995: *A new social atlas of Britain*. London: Wiley.

—— 1997: Regional and local differences in the housing tenure of ethnic minorities. In Karn, V., editor, *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 4*, London: Office for National Statistics, HMSO, 147–69.

**Duncan, J.** and **Duncan, N.** 1996: Reconstructing the idea of culture in geography: a reply to Don Mitchell. *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* NS 21, 576–79.

**Eade, J., Vamplew, T.** and **Peach, C.** 1996: The Bangladeshi; the encapsulated community. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 150–60.

**Glebe, G.** 1997: Urban economic restructuring and ethnic segregation in Düsseldorf. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 8, 147–57.

**Gregson, N.** 1993: 'The initiative': delimiting or deconstructing social geography? *Progress in Human Geography* 17, 525–30.

**Hiebert, D.** 1997: *The colour of work: labour market segmentation in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, 1991. Working paper* 97-02. Vancouver, BC: Centre of Excellence for Immigration Studies, University of British Columbia.

**Howes, E.** and **Mullins, D.** 1997: Finding a place – the impact of locality on the experience of tenants from ethnic minority groups. In Karn, V., editor, *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 4*, London: Office for National Statistics, HMSO, 189–220.

**Jackson, P.** 1996: The idea of culture: a response to Don Mitchell. *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* NS 21, 572–73.

**Jargowski, P.** and **Bane, M.-J.** 1996: Ghetto poverty in the United States, 1970–1980. In

Jencks, C. and Peterson, P.E., editors, *The urban underclass*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 235–73.

**Karn, V.,** editor, 1997: *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 4.* London: Office for National Statistics, HMSO.

**Kesteloot, C.** and **van der Hagen, H.** 1997: Foreigners in Brusssels, 1981–1991: spatial continuity and change. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 8, 105–19.

**Kesteloot, C., van Weesep, J.** and **White, P.** 1997: Minorities in western European cities. Introduction to the special edition of *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 8, 99–104.

**Knights, M.** 1996: Bangladeshi immigrants in Italy: from geopolitics to micropolitics. *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* NS 21, 105–23.

**Ley, D.** in press: Immigration in the Metropolis – the re-invention of Canada. *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien*.

**Massey, D.** and **Denton, N.** 1993: *American apartheid: segregation and the making of the underclass*. London: Harvard University Press.

**Mitchell, D.** 1995: There's no such thing as culture: towards a reconceptualization of the idea of culture in geography. *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* NS 20, 102–16.

**Musterd, S.** and **Deurloo, R.** 1997: Ethnic segregation and the role of public housing in Amsterdam. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 8, 158–68.

**Musterd, S., Ostendorf, W .** and **Breebaart, M.** 1998: *Multi-ethnic metropolis: patterns and policies*. London: Kluwer Academic.

**Owen, D.** 1996a: Size, structure, and growth of the ethnic minority population. In Coleman, D. and Salt, J., editors, *Demographic characteristics of the ethnic minority populations. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 1*, London: OPCS, HIMSO, 80–123.

—— 1996b: Black-Other: the melting pot. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 66–94.

—— 1996c: The Other-Asians: the salad bowl. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 181–205.

—— 1997: Labour force participation rates, self-employment and unemployment. In Karn, V., editor, *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 4*, London: Office for National Statistics, HMSO, 29–68.

**Owen, D.** and **Johnson, M.** 1996: Ethnic minorities in the Midlands. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 227–94.

**Özüekren, S.** and **van Kempen, R.,** editors, 1997: *Turks in European cities: housing and urban segregation*. Utrecht: European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations.

**Peach, C.,** editor, 1996a: *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics.

—— 1996b: Black-Caribbeans: class, gender and geography. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 25–43.

—— 1996c: Introduction. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 1–24.

—— 1996d: Does Britain have ghettos? *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers* 22, 216–35.

—— 1997: Pluralist and assimilationist models of ethnic settlement in London 1991. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 88, 120–34.

**Peach, C.** and **Rossiter, D.** 1996: Level and nature of spatial concentration of minority ethnic population in Great Britain, 1991. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 111–34.

**Phillips, D.** 1997: The housing position of ethnic minority group home owners. In Karn, V., editor, *Employment, education and housing among the ethnic minority populations of Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 4*, London: Office for National Statistics, HMSO, 170–88.

**Ratcliffe, P.,** editor, 1996: *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics.

**Rees, P.** and **Phillips, D.** 1996a: Geographical

spread: the national picture. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 23–110.

—— 1996b: Geographical patterns in a cluster of Pennine cities. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 271–94.

**Robinson, V.** 1986: *Transients, settlers and refugees: Asians in Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

—— 1991: Move on up: the mobility of Britain's ethnic population. In Stilwell, J., Rees, P. and Boden, B., editors, *Migration patterns and processes; population redistribution the 1980s*. London: Belhaven, 271–92.

—— 1996a: The Indians: onwards and upwards. In Peach, C., editor, *The ethnic minority population of Great Britain. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 2*, London: Office for National Statistics, 95–120.

—— 1996b: Intergenerational differences in ethnic settlement patterns in Britain. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 175–200.

**Salt, J.** 1996: Immigration and ethnic group population. In Coleman, D. and Salt, J., editors, *Demographic characteristics of the ethnic minority populations. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 1*, London: OPCS, HMSO, 124–50.

**Storkey, M.** 1994: *London's ethnic minorities: one city, many communities*. London: London Research Centre.

**Storkey, M.** and **Lewis, R.** 1996: London: a true cosmopolis. In Ratcliffe, P., editor, *Social geography and ethnicity in Britain: geographical spread, spatial concentration and internal migration. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 3*, London: Office for National Statistics, 201–26.

**van Kempen, R.** and **van Weesep, J.** 1997: Segregation, housing and ethnicity in Dutch cities. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 88, 188–95.

**Vertovec, S.** and **Peach, C.** 1997: *Islam in western Europe: the politics of religion and community*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

**Wacquant, L.** 1997: Three pernicious premises in the study of the American ghetto. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 21, 341–53.

**Warnes, T.** 1996: The age structure and ageing of the ethnic groups. In Coleman, D. and Salt, J., editors, *Demographic characteristics of the ethnic minority populations. Ethnicity in the 1991 Census. Volume 1*, London: OPCS, HMSO, 151–77.

**White, P.** and **Jackson, P.** 1995: (Re)theorising population geography. *International Journal of Population Geography* 1, 111–23.