

Extending Democracy
**Participation, Consultation and Representation of
Ethnic Minority People in Public Life**

A report on the Bristol experience

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By Dr Hassan Bousetta
University of Bristol
Department of Sociology
Centre for the Study of Citizenship and Ethnicity
12, Woodland Road
Bristol BS 8 1 UQ
Tel. +44.117.928.77.90
H.Bousetta@bristol.ac.uk

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Preface and acknowledgements

This report presents the results of a research on the participation, consultation and representation of black and ethnic minority people in public life in Bristol. The project has a history which takes us back one year and a half ago when the municipality of Roubaix in the North of France approached Bristol City Council and Birmingham City Council with a proposal to take part in a joint initiative, called the *Meteore* project. Its objective was to exchange good practice in terms of political participation of Black and ethnic minorities and looked to the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship of Bristol University to provide a general comparative European report on the topic.

But the *Meteore* was not to be. This was mainly a result of the decision of Roubaix's municipal leadership to freeze any new project before the French municipal election of June 2000. Kamaljit Poonia, former coordinator of Bristol Scrutiny and Equalities Unit, together with Prof. Tariq Modood, Director of the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, were able to resurrect the project on a local basis and to offer me an appointment for preparing a research on the political participation, consultation and representation of ethnic minorities in public life in Bristol. Having myself been involved in cross-national comparative research into the political participation of Moroccan minorities in European cities, I have accepted this three month research position and took up my duties in October 2000. What was supposed to be a three month involvement turned out to become a year involvement with intermittent breaks.

This report is now due to be launched on the 12th and 13th of October at the Conference "Participation and Representation of Black and Ethnic Minority People in Public Life". I already wish to thank all those who contributed to it. Thanks to Prof. Tariq Modood and the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, to the team at the Scrutiny and Equalities Unit of BCC, and to Chamion Caballero. I also owe a special thank to all the respondents who have accepted to contribute to this project. This report would not have been possible without the knowledge and expertise that they have generously shared with me. Any error or misinterpretation is of course entirely mine.

Dr Hassan Bousetta
Bristol, October 2001

Executive Summary

The participation, consultation and representation of Black and other ethnic minority people in public life is a source of ongoing debates both in the political arena and the specialist literature. This report seeks to look at how these issues are played out in the context of the city of Bristol and aims to offer simultaneously some comparative insights into similar experiences in other European countries. The research leading to this report is based on interviews with 16 local actors. The respondents are not a sociologically representative sample of the population; it is more precisely a qualitative selection aimed at offering a broad coverage of the perspectives of various types of policy-actors on the political process. This selection includes Bristol City Council councillors (from now on BCC), BCC civil servants and people from the community and voluntary sector.

The report is divided into four core chapters. The first looks at the history of race relations in Bristol and analyses the role of race and ethnicity in shaping public life. It also looks at the demography and geography of Black and ethnic minority people in the city and points out that, while geographical concentration is usually perceived as a powerful leverage of political influence, this has not proved true in Bristol. Although significantly concentrated in a small number of wards, Black and other ethnic minority people have not had a distinctive influence on electoral outcomes in these wards. The report goes on to analyse, in the second chapter, the causes for the general disinterest in elections and its implications for Black and other ethnic minority people. On the basis of the respondents' interviews, five main causes are identified: poor registration rates and effective turnout on election days, a negative perception of the local authority, a lack of efficacy, the minor public and political profile of Black and other ethnic minority people's political interests, the problem of leadership, and the issue of racism. While it should seek to achieve greater electoral participation through non-Black specific reforms, it is argued that BCC should also be encouraged to thwart the participatory deficits affecting Black and other ethnic minority people through increased and appropriate consultation. BCC should also seek to target Black and ethnic minority communities through informative and educative programmes aimed at raising awareness about the value of participatory citizenship.

The third chapter of the report looks at the practice of consultation and analyses the pertinence for Black and other ethnic minority people of the various consultative mechanisms established by BCC. The report views consultation as the key for future strategies aimed at increasing the involvement of Black and other ethnic minority people in public life. But building an inclusive democratic agenda reflecting the needs and aspirations of Black and ethnic minorities will not avoid reconsidering the appropriateness of currently existing consultative procedures. A special attention is devoted in the report to the Race Forum. While there is far from unanimity among the respondents about the difficulties facing consultation through the Race Forum, five problematic areas are identified: the question of performance, the question of representativeness, the question of independence, the question of funding and the question of membership.

In response to these problems and difficulties, BCC should be encouraged to review the work of the Race Forum with the aim to enable it to work efficiently, autonomously, and with sufficient resources. Other consultative procedures based on

opinion survey should be encouraged and the citizens' panel upgraded. Future consultation through the citizens' panel should ensure that sufficient numbers of Black and other ethnic minority people are surveyed. Minimally, this means that BCC should invest additional resources into a booster sample in the citizens' panel in order to provide a higher statistical reliability of the views expressed by this population than has been the case until now.

The fourth chapter of the report analyses the question of representation. It shows that while the representation of Black and other ethnic minority people at Westminster and in local councils has been on the increase over the last decade, it was the opposite in Bristol. BCC and Avon County Council together had till five Black and ethnic minority councillors in the past, but this is not anymore a reality. Respondents analyse the problem of fair representation as being linked to a set of different factors. Among them are the small size and the diversity of the Black and ethnic minority population in Bristol, the passive role of political parties, the absence of positive action and positive discrimination within political parties, the drain of the Black and ethnic minority elites, the problem of tokenism, and the impact of the electoral system. Once again the respondents' views are not necessarily convergent. But there is a minimal agreement among all the respondents to say that the major challenge is in the side of political parties. This report concludes therefore that, in order to increase the political representation of Black and other ethnic minority people in Bristol, BCC should prioritise to focus on raising awareness among political parties in the first instance. Political parties have indeed an essential role to play in this area. BCC should encourage political parties to adopt pro-active targeted recruitment strategies, to provide training opportunities and to monitor the selection and representation of their Black and other ethnic minority members. Considering the increasing relevance of quangos (e.g. trusts, partnerships, agencies, school boards, etc.) in shaping public life in Bristol in areas as important as urban regeneration, education, health and community development, BCC should equally target these organisations. In practical terms, this could be achieved through a highly symbolic declaration or through the promotion of a good practice guide offering practical guidelines in terms of recruitment, training and monitoring.

The institutional barriers between departments (community development, scrutiny and equalities, housing, education, and social services), does not permit optimal visibility of BCC's service delivery on race equality. The conflation of multicultural race equality with questions of anti-discrimination, anti-poverty, or urban regeneration should be avoided as it lowers their public saliency and leads to decrease the interest from Black and ethnic minority people. Therefore, BCC should be encouraged to mainstream equalities *and* diversity and define clear, measurable, policy-objectives in a high profile and well publicised multicultural democracy plan.

Introduction

1.1. The intellectual and political context of the report

The challenges of diversity within the public sphere have never been as acute as they are today. Most Western democratic societies are currently confronting the rise of identity-driven claims to differentiated forms of citizenship. While it is not the only source of diversity, ethno-cultural diversity is a central and essential element of current political debates. In most West European countries and cities, the challenge of diversity is by and large raised in terms of post-immigration and post-colonial ethno-cultural diversity.

The question of the participation, consultation and representation of ethnic minorities in public and political life is among the most pressing question to be addressed in this context. It would be fair to say that since the tentative emergence of ethnic minority politicians in local politics in the early sixties, this question has enormously gained in maturity. The number of ethnic minorities at Westminster now stands at 12 after the general election of June 2001, and their presence in local councils is now estimated to be over the 600 mark. The increasing number of ethnic minority politicians and the confidence they have acquired in asserting their presence in the public and political life of a number of British cities means that no serious discussion on electoral dynamics and party competition in this country can ignore the importance of the race dimension in shaping public life.

In effect, there is no election in the UK where the political participation of ethnic minorities, their level of representation in democratically elected institutions, the real or perceived ethnic vote, is not passionately discussed in the national media. Academic research has also welcomed and acknowledged this phenomena as testified by the burgeoning of a specialist literature. In all these respects, the UK seems to be a frontrunner at European level. No other European country has indeed comparable records of political and intellectual engagement with the issue of ethnic minority presence in public and political life, despite the fact that countries like France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark are heading towards closing the gap.

There are several factors which account for this specific circumstance that we seek to analyse in this report. But it should be noted that there are broader implications to this debate on the presence of black and ethnic minority people in public life. In many ways, the claims formulated by ethnic minorities for increased participation, consultation and representation are part of a larger vision of the multicultural society. The doctrinal prescription most commonly inferred from the multicultural perspective is that this age of *identities* compel democratic institutions to revisit their traditional conceptions of participation, consultation and representation within the public sphere.

Whatever our sympathies or antipathies for multiculturalism as a vision of society, it seems that there is a fundamental paradox in this age of identity. While theorists of multiculturalism are, on the one hand, arguing the case of increased pressures on Nation-States to accommodate claims of cultural recognition, empirical studies on the other hand, mainly by political sociologists, consistently and persistently argue that ethnic and racial minorities remain to a significant extent politically marginal. It has been shown for instance that, in comparison to their white peers, black and ethnic minority people have lower registration rates on electoral register, lower effective turnout on election days,¹ lower levels of representation and lower levels of influence on public policy. The contrast offered by the overall low levels of participation of ethnic minorities in politics and the increasing resonance of multicultural claims among intellectuals and political circles is a startling paradox, though not necessarily a contradiction.

As it is often the case, there are elements of truth in both perspectives. These are driven by different theoretical and methodological concerns. While political sociologists illustrate the political marginality of black and ethnic minority people by analysing the reality *out there*, often through quantitative methods of measurement, multicultural theorists seek to generate principled solutions to real world multicultural tensions and crises. But the two perspectives would certainly converge in recognising that events such as those which have recently shaken the cities of Oldham and Bradford are the most pathological and worrying expressions of the inequal distribution of political power and economic prosperity. The outbreak of urban violence in Oldham and Bradford, like those which have taken place in Bristol in 1980 and 1986, reminds us that the current marginalisation of segments of the ethnic minority population in economic and public life entails potential threats to the stability and cohesion of Britain's multicultural cities.

For historical and structural reasons, black and ethnic minorities lack real opportunities for dialogue with political institutions both locally and nationally. Consequently, they are often less inclined to participate through classical political channels such as voting, standing as candidates, lobbying political parties, etc. It would be however a mistake to infer from their lower records of electoral participation that this is tantamount to a lack of interest or a rejection of politics as a whole. There is well-established evidence showing that ethnic minorities, often driven by an *enlightened* middle class elite, are very concerned with politics. It is for instance estimated that there are some 5,500 minority ethnic voluntary and community organisation operating in England and Wales which are providing a whole range of social, economic, and cultural services to their communities (McLeod, Owen, and Khamis, 2001). Imagining the country without their input and competence is imagining a country with greater socio-economic difficulties for the thousands of people they reach everyday. And that is probably sufficient to clearly demonstrate that the mobilisation of black and ethnic minority people through ethnic voluntary and community organisations has a profound political meaning, if politics is about improving the quality of our lives. To summarise an argument developed further in this report, if ethnic minorities have lower records of electoral political participation, they also have different strategies of collective mobilisation. In other words, they participate in politics in a different way and the main reason for that has to do with

¹ As explained in Chapter 2, there are significant variations between groups and the level of registration of Asians for instance is close to that of whites.

their subordination within this society.

1.2. Objectives of the report

The objective of this report is not to seek for definitive answer to these questions and paradoxes, but rather to look at how these issues are played out in the context of the city of Bristol. The report does not seek to produce new theoretical ideas, but aims to place the Bristol experience with regard to participation, consultation, representation of black and ethnic minority people in the context of existing knowledge. What the report aims to offer is a policy-relevant analysis meeting the challenge of both being empirically grounded and soundly anchored to existing knowledge.

1.3. Terminological clarifications

1.3.a. Public life: drawing the limits of the concept.

In commonsense language, the notion of public life is self-evident. It refers to the sphere of activity outside the private sphere. Such a broad definition while having the advantage of communicative simplicity, lacks specification. In the context of the present report, we have kept the notion of public life that emerged with the inception of the whole project. However, even though, we will not be able to do justice to the complexity of academic definitions, it is necessary at this stage to draw some limits to what we mean by public life in this report.

Public life as understood here comes closest to political life. Not political life strictly speaking however, but political life in a broad sense. What we are interested in this report is participation, consultation and representation of black and ethnic minorities in local elected institutions, in consultative procedures and institutions and in voluntary and community organisations. This definition of public life therefore excludes a focus on ethnic minorities in trade unions, in the media, and so on.

1.3.b. Black and Ethnic Minority People

Race and ethnicity are extremely difficult terms in the social science. In contradiction to our commonsense daily experience, these are concepts which are not amenable to simple unequivocal definitions. In its Race Equality Policy Statement, Bristol City Council (BCC) defined the target-group of its policies in terms of "*Black and Other Ethnic Minority People, including refugees, Gypsies and travellers (...)*" (BCC 1999: 14). BCC recognises that the construction of the category 'Black and Other Ethnic Minority People' is in a way quite problematic and recommends that "*terminology should not become a distraction from the disadvantage*". It recognises that "*there are many people from minority ethnic communities in Britain who do not identify themselves as Black*", but emphasises in the same time that "*there is no one word that embrace all members of minority ethnic groups in Britain*" (BCC 1999: 14).

While such definition may well be pragmatically defended for the purpose of policy-making, it is much less appropriate for a social science perspective. Tariq Modood for instance has voiced compelling arguments against the use of the notion of Black as

encompassing all ethnic minorities (Modood 1988, 1994). According to Modood, blackness does not do justice to the experience and self-asserted identities of the largest segment of British minority population, namely Asians. It is of particular importance to highlight the tensions and contradictions which often exist between the language of academic experts and that of the commonsense. The use of a particular kind of vocabulary is rarely neutral and always embedded in one way or another in social representations and in structures of power relations.

Another difficulty that can be identify in the definition of Black and ethnic minority people used by BCC is its ambition to cover groups as diverse as refugees, travellers and people with nomadic lifestyles. Such a broad definition contradicts mainstream categorisation of Black and ethnic minorities used in official statistics such as the census or election survey.

The nature of this policy-report does not allow us to go deeply into an analysis of terminology and its implications as a social science report would. Therefore, insofar as it addresses a policy-audience, this report will simply use a definition of “black and ethnic minority people” consistent with a social science tradition which views race and ethnicity as only covering post-immigration and post-colonial non-white communities. Beyond this, our definition remains in line with the vocabulary most commonly accepted by policy actors in the Bristol context.

Our justification for using the notion of black and ethnic minority people in this conventional sense is not based on the premise that it would be politically neutral for there is no absolutely neutral position in this respect. The argument for this option is as above with the notion of public life, communicative simplicity. In doing so, we fully adhere to the very wise position adopted by the recent report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain:

“The very language used to describe and define race relations in Britain is a source of considerable conceptual and political muddle. Such terms as ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ signify fixed blocs and obscure the fluidity and heterogeneity of real life. The term ‘ethnic group’ traps the group concerned into its ethnicity, and suppresses both its multiple identity and its freedom of self-determination. The term ‘integration’ is even more misleading, as it implies a one-way process in which ‘minorities’ are to be absorbed into the non-existent homogeneous cultural structure of the ‘majority’. (...) Inventing a wholly new vocabulary does not help, for such a language would be too abstract, artificial and unrelated to the idioms of everyday life to be intelligible, let alone provide a vehicle for meaningful dialogue” (CMEB, 2001:x)

1.4. The European dimension

There are two ways of analysing how Europe matters for the UK as a whole and for the UK’s ethnic minorities more in particular. There is firstly a topdown approach which seeks to identify the consequences of European integration in domestic politics. This perspective is very relevant as European integration brings about a great deal of changes which impact not only on legislation but more and more at the level of every day life. From the perspective of local actors involved with minority communities, Europe has been relevant for some time in terms of funding urban regeneration projects (cf. Objective 2, Urban, etc) and now is beginning to have

relevance for combating discrimination (cf. the much acclaimed Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty) and monitoring racism (cf. the establishment of a European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in Vienna).

But there is another sense in which Europe is pertinent for local actors and that is in terms of exchange of good practice experience from the bottom-up. Although, as a respondent to this report put it "*the common perception is that the UK has more to give Europe than Europe has to offer us*", there remain good reasons to believe that learning from the experiences of others is a good way of understanding better the strengths and limitations of what we do ourselves at home.

It is clear that there are limits to comparisons. "*Comparaison n'est pas raison*" as the French saying goes. The role, functions, competence and indeed citizen's interest in local government diverges significantly from a European country to another. British local authorities seems to enjoy much less political and financial autonomy than their counterparts on the continent. It is also true that issues raised by black and other ethnic minority people take on a different shape and a distinct terminology according to national context.

With full knowledge of the difficulty of the task of comparing cross-nationally in a reliable fashion, anyone could see that there are clear similarities in terms of the claims formulated by post-immigration and post-colonial minorities. Racism, discrimination, recognition of minority cultures and increased participation and representation in public life feature very prominently in the political agendas of minority ethnic communities everywhere in Europe. In other words, the struggle for political inclusion and increased representation in public life may not be similar in every respect for British Asians than for North Africans in France or for Turks in Germany, but it is obviously a central issue in the politics raised by these communities in all these societies. There is, we believe, a relevant European dimension to these policy-challenges which is worth exploring, even though cursorily.

At a very modest level and often in a quite impressionistic fashion, this report will seek to achieve this goal. It is not a systematic comparison which will be proposed here, but an attempt to place the spotlight on a number of specific European projects with regards participation, consultation and representation in the three countries most familiar to the author of the project, namely France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

1.5. The structure of the report

The first chapter of this report introduces the Bristol context of the research. After an introduction to the background characteristics of the city and to the role of race and ethnicity in local public life, an analysis of the demography and geography of black and ethnic minority people is offered. In the second chapter of this report, we will deal with the notion of participation and will shed light on its different facets. In the third chapter of the report, the notion of consultation is discussed and placed in the context of the Bristol experience. Then, the fourth chapter will concentrate on the issue of representation in public life. We conclude by an examination of the political challenge raised by multiculturalism to local democracy.

Chapter One - The Bristol context

1.1. The city

Bristol is a middle size city of 376,000 inhabitants situated 120 miles west of London, in the South West region. Politically speaking, Bristol is controlled by a Labour majority. Although Labour's majority in BCC had eroded continuously between 1998 and 2001, and was down to 2, the 2001 June local election saw a clear local victory of Labour and a recovery of a majority of 10 seats. The balance of power within the local council is now as follows: Labour (40 seats), Conservatives (9), Liberal Democrats (21).

Historically, the city played an important role as a hub in the slave trade, especially during the 18th century. Parts of this infamous history is now re-surfacing together with the whole discussion about reparations. Locally celebrated figures like the 18th century merchant and benefactor Edward Colston who is honoured by a statute and has a number of public venues in the town centre named after him are now being virulently contested by local Black activists who see in Colston a symbol of the enslavement and deportations of Africans.

The city has remained an economically vibrant and relatively affluent locality throughout the centuries that followed; also in large part as a result of the wealth accumulated in the transatlantic trade. Bristol took a modest share in the industrial revolution during the 19th century. Its level of industrialisation always remained lower than other cities in the Midlands. It specialised instead in trade (e.g. in tobacco and wine), manufacturing, finance and distribution. Trade, finance and international exchanges, facilitated by Bristol's harbour, maintained a relatively prosperous character to the city's economy throughout the recent decades.

This goes some way to explain why Bristol is among the cities which have so well absorbed the waweshock effects of deindustrialisation in the seventies and eighties. In comparison to other mid size UK and European cities which saw their status and prestige fading away with the end of the heavy industries, Bristol shows signs of continued economic vitality. From a European comparative perspective, Bristol comes close to resembling cities like Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Malmö in Sweden, Bordeaux in France or Antwerp in Belgium. Like these cities, Bristol's economy is a mix of industrial and service activities in sectors with potentials for economic growth like aerospace, new technologies, and manufacturing. These activities form the heart of the economic development of the city today.²

Judging on its citizens view, Bristol seems to be *the* place where to live. The citizens panel, which has surveyed the view of more than 2000 Bristolian in 1998-99 on the best and worse things about living in Bristol, came to the conclusion that its the size and location of the city which matter most to its residents. Respondents are reported as saying that the city is "not too big and not too small" while being well connected

² In addition to these traditional sectors, Bristol has recently gained international reputation through its cinema production. The city is not unproud to celebrate and publicise the world cinematographic success of Wallace and Gromit, who were recently nominated by the City Council as the two most famous Bristolians alive!

and close to the sea. Other yet see it as “a small place with a big atmosphere”. 11% of the respondents also mentioned that the cosmopolitan character of the city was a feature they liked.³

1.2. Race, ethnicity and public life in Bristol

The optimistic image of the city as a trendy and *cool* place reported in the citizens’ panel is far from reflecting the views of Black and ethnic minority people. By and large, these communities remain on the margins of the dynamics of urban development of affluent Bristol. To place the presence of black and ethnic minority community in context, we need to flashback on the situation four to five decades ago. The “discovery” of immigration in Bristol originates indeed in the fifties with the arrival of important numbers of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, essentially Jamaicans. Asian populations immigrated also in number during the sixties and seventies, but proportionally less as we will see in the next section. The gradual transformation of this immigrant presence into settled ethnic minorities has confronted episodes of serious tensions and confrontations. As reported in Pryce’s thorough analysis of Saint Paul’s in the early seventies, Bristol confronted for the first time the emergence in the public space of a political conflict round the issue race and racism in 1963 when a campaign was started against the Bristol Omnibus Company which was at that time refusing to appoint Black conductors (Pryce 1979: 179). Only a few years later, in 1967, the ancestor of today’s Bristol Racial Equality Council was established.

As many other UK and European cities were discovering at the same time, Bristol had discovered that the political consequences of the mass migration that had taken place in the post W.W.II era were to make themselves felt most acutely locally. In 1980-81, the plight of Bristol black and ethnic minority population hit again the headlines of the national and international media, but this time with a great deal more violence. The neighbourhood of Saint Paul’s which had been meticulously analysed a few years before by Ken Pryce in his *Endless Pressure* faced unprecedented violent urban unrests. And similar events took place again in 1986.

At the end of the nineties, these events are still there in the memories of the older generation of activists. Rightly or wrongly, many among those with whom we were able to speak consider that the unrest was the most efficient driver for getting local authorities out of their inaction. National and local authorities could indeed hardly remain passive, and their initial reaction was to put emphasis, energy and resources into urban regeneration and employment projects. A more elaborated policy-response to the needs and demands of black and ethnic minority people that the Bristol disturbances revealed so evidently was slower to take shape.

Analysing the genealogy of Bristol race equality policies is beyond the scope of the present report.⁴ For setting up the scene, it is nevertheless important to briefly describe the policy environment today. The main links for black and minority ethnic

³ Bristol City Council, *Initial Findings of the Citizens’ Panel*, 11th March 1999, p4.

⁴ A very detailed discussion of the historical development of BCC approach to race equality issues, including the impact of the dismantling of Avon County Council, is available in French in M.-F. Saettone, “*Gérer la présence immigrée: du national au local. Trois études de cas: Bristol (Grande Bretagne), Toulouse (France), Florence (Italie)*”, PhD dissertation, University of Toulouse, March 1999.

communities at BCC are the Community Development and the Equalities Unit, even though other departments such as housing and personnel also have developed a 'multicultural' expertise. While Community Development is in charge of implementing the Council strategy in terms of urban regeneration, the Scrutiny and Equalities Unit deals in a horizontal way with so-called equalities communities, essentially the groups who may potentially be the victims of discrimination on account of race, ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, and disability. Equalities is also connected to the Race Forum which is a consultative forum established by BCC and aims to bring the voice of black and ethnic minority people to the place where decisions are made. Equalities has also been involved in drafting BCC response to the Macpherson report into the death of Stephen Lawrence. The review of BCC policies in the aftermath of the Macpherson report led to a refinement of the objectives of BCC equality policy pleading among other things for an increased representation of Black and Ethnic Minority People in public life.⁵ It also led BCC and eight public service agencies to sign a very important public document: the Joint Declaration on Racial Equality (2 March 2000).

These positive steps towards greater awareness for race equality issues have to be welcomed. At the same time, Bristol gives the impression, firstly, of a city where race is not highly politicised and, secondly, where the notion of multiculturalism has not taken grip. This is not to say that race is not part of the democratic political debate. If only as a result of debates in the national media, there are enough occasions for local politicians and political parties to take issue on race. And that has obviously happened on more than one occasion in Bristol politics. Polemics round race issues can be traced through occasional prejudiced statements by local councillors or through the very politicised debates that the arrival of refugees has often triggered in the council and the local media.

However, Bristol is not witness to intense politicised debates on the role of religion in public life, on the rights of minority cultures, on the role of black representation, and so on. Race and ethnicity are played out in a minor mode and are part of the local political debate with a low intensity. It is also very important to note that multiculturalism is not an issue either. Most commonly, this takes the form of the conflation of race equality with urban development and regeneration. What seems to be missing from the Bristol political scene is a vision, or long-term strategy endorsed by the local political leadership. If all political parties have, for example, signed the code of conduct drafted by the CRE before the 2001 election, it is very telling to see that none of them have very articulate recommendations in terms of multiculturalism or race equality, other than general statements of principles against racism, discrimination and racial inequality. The words race, ethnicity and multiculturalism are, to very marginal exceptions, absent from the written and internet propaganda of the three major political forces in the city.⁶

⁵ See Bristol City Council, *Delivering on the Mac Pherson (Lawrence Inquiry). Bristol City Council's Medium Term Work Programme and Targets 1999-2001*, Bristol, October 1999.

⁶ An exception to this general trend was the General Election in Bristol East in June 2001, largely due to the fact that it is the constituency with the highest proportion of Black and ethnic minority voters in Bristol.

1.3. The demography and geography of black and ethnic minority people in Bristol

This section sets out to explore the size, composition and geographical distribution of Bristol's ethnic minority population. Looking at such key variables is not only a necessary empirical qualification of the local context, it is an essential part of the problem of the under-representation of ethnic minorities in public life. The demographic profile of these population groups, as well as their patterns of settlement, have a straightforward impact on their capacities to increase their influence within the public sphere. Indeed, there is a now well-established strand of research which indicates that concentration of ethnic minority population within certain urban electoral district offers a powerful leverage to political influence (Anwar 1994, 1998, Saggar 1998, 2000, Solomos and Back 1995).

Figures from the 1991 census show that Bristol has an ethnic minority population of 5.1%, which is slightly below the national average (5.5%). About 50% of this ethnic minority population are Black, 30% are Asians (Bangladeshi, Indians and Pakistani) and 20% are classified as Chinese and other. The composition of the ethnic minority population in Bristol diverges from that of other UK cities, especially in that contrary to most other regions African-Caribbeans outnumber Asians.

The comparison with other cities in the UK also show that the size of the Bristol ethnic minority population is relatively small. In Birmingham, ethnic minorities represent 21.5% of the total population. In Bradford, the figure is 15.6%; 28.5 % in Leicester and 44.8% in the London Borough of Brent which has according to the 1991 Census the largest proportion of non-white residents in the UK. If other European cities from the continent are taken as points of comparison, the picture of Bristol that emerge is one of very low ethnic minority presence. In Amsterdam, ethnic minorities represent 15.6%. Other Dutch cities such as The Hague (12.4%), Rotterdam (12.7%) and Utrecht (12%) are all between 10 and 15%. In Brussels, non-Belgian nationals represent one third of the total population of the city. Figures for the two other main Belgian urban centres, namely Liege and Antwerp, are 13.2% and 17.4% respectively. To conclude this European tour, French cities such as Lille (9.6%), Strasbourg (13.9%), and Lyon (9.8%) all have percentage of ethnic minorities higher or slightly inferior than 10%.

If Bristol as a whole does not have a very significant minority population, the analysis of their patterns of settlement at the intra-urban level indicates that they are strongly concentrated geographically. More than 50% of the ethnic minority population in Bristol reside in the four wards of Ashley, Lawrence Hill, Easton and Eastville. A further analysis of the ethnic make-up of Bristol's 34 wards reveal that some Bristol neighbourhoods feature percentages of ethnic minority population very significantly higher than the average of 5.5% observed at the city level. Ashley, for instance, has a total ethnic minority population reaching 29%. On the same indicator, Lawrence Hill is at 21.8%, Easton at 21.5%, and Eastville at 12.2%. All these indicators illustrates the point of the very uneven geographical distribution of Black and ethnic minority people in Bristol city.

Somewhat surprisingly, the four wards where ethnic minorities are most represented, and therefore where they should have the greatest likelihood to maximise electoral support, were all won by white politicians in the latest local elections. As we will indicate further in the report, there had been a Black representation in BCC in the early nineties, as well as in the now disbanded Avon County Council. But the point is that geographical concentration which is usually considered a powerful leverage of political influence, as recalled above, proves here that it is not a sufficient factor alone. If ethnic minorities are unable to achieve political progress in wards where they are significantly concentrated, this will unavoidably prove even more difficult in wards where they are not a significant demographic component. This observation should therefore lead us to seek to identify the obstacles which hamper a better participation and representation of ethnic minority people in the Bristol context. That is precisely the task of the next chapter.

Chapter 2 - Participation

1.1. Introduction

In this chapter, we are concerned with participation. Not with all forms of participation, but essentially with political participation. When mention is made of the notion of political participation in everyday life and in the media, we almost spontaneously tend to think to the act of voting. Voting is indeed one of the most fundamental dimensions of political involvement in a democratic country and a very consequential one as well. Studies of the political participation of ethnic minorities in the UK reinforce the view of the primacy of the act of voting insofar the bulk of this literature actually deals with electoral behaviours, party choices and strategies. While the importance of voting behaviours is not in question, it should be noted that political participation extends far beyond the ballot box.

The political involvement of ethnic minorities takes on several other forms, the most common alternative route being participation in community and voluntary organisations. Earlier literature used to consider that this form of social activity was not political participation and had to be classified under the heading of social participation. The classical, and most widely, quoted definition of political participation of this tradition is offered by Verba and Nye: *“Political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take.”* (Verba and Nye 1972:2). Political participation is, in this perspective, clearly discernible from the notion of social participation seen as citizen’s participation in groups outside the political arena and the workplace (Edwards and Both 1973).

These distinctions are not ideal conceptual instruments for understanding the modes of political participation of ethnic minorities. The key difficulty lies in that these distinctions rely on too rigid a delineation of the social and political arena. It has been demonstrated that the political activities of ethnic minorities are often taking place at the boundaries of the political and social fields. Very often indeed, ethnic minorities seek to achieve political objectives by mobilising from community and voluntary organisations. In yet other cases, groups like religious congregations seem to seek only occasional access to the political process to further specific claims (think for instance to the demands sometimes formulated by Muslims for building religious venues, schools, or libraries). This means that there is often an extension to their apparently social participation which is truly political. To give another example, when community organisations set out to organise media campaigns targeting the public opinion at large, they are not seeking to influence “the selection of governmental personnel or the action they take”, but is it for that matter less political than casting a vote in the ballot-box?

There are policy implications to this perspective. All too often, we tend to assume that the low levels of participation of ethnic minorities in elections are reflexive of their political alienation or more crudely as a lack of interest. This perspective misses the point that if ethnic minorities participate less proportionally than the white majority to elections, they also participate in politics differently. Therefore, BCC should be encouraged to increase electoral participation and simultaneously to pay specific

attention to the demands which are channelled through consultation, and in the first place through consultation with voluntary and community organisation.

1.2. The political participation of ethnic minority people

1.2.a. Electoral participation at national level

At national level, it is estimated that ethnic minorities represent 5% of the whole British electorate and that their vote has become essential in a large number of urban districts. It is indeed in large and medium size cities that ethnic minorities form a significant part of the electorate. One of the key question when discussing the electoral participation of ethnic minorities is their problematic levels of participation. There is a consensus among most observers to recognise that these are too weak. Talking about levels of participation is however too general as we need to make a distinction between the registration rate on the electoral registers and the effective turnout rate on election day.

As indicated in Table 1 hereunder, the registration rates of ethnic minorities is usually below that of the white population, but vary importantly between ethnic groups. Asians for instance have a registration nearly equal to whites (81%). Parallel to the inter-ethnic divergence in terms of registration on electoral register, there is also some variance internal to each ethnic groups. Some segments of the ethnic minority population show a higher propensity to participate than others. It is now clearly established that Asian men are more likely both to register and vote than say young men of African Caribbean origin.

Even when they are registered on electoral lists, it is not necessarily the case that this would automatically turn into effective voting. The difficulty in assessing this question is that there is no systematic and perfectly reliable data gathering on this question nationally. However, according to a survey by Anwar in six parliamentary constituencies, the effective turnout of Asian was comprised between 60-67%, while for non-Asian it was 42-63% (Anwar 2001: 537).

Table 1: Registration: four ethnic groups 1998 (%)

Ethnic group registered	Registered	Not registered
White	82	18
Black	74	26
Asian	81	19
Other	54	46
Total non-white	73	27

Source: Anwar, 2001, 536

The patterns of the vote (ideological orientation, party choice, etc.), as well as their shifts over time, are central concern for political scientists. As far as ethnic minorities in the UK are concerned, this is a not an issue worth very long discussions. Since the early seventies, ethnic minorities have shown a very stable electoral allegiance to the Labour Party. Table 2 hereunder illustrates very clearly the pervasiveness of the electoral dominance of the Labour among black and ethnic minority communities, despite the electoral attraction of the Conservative party for segments of the Asian

electorate. As indicated by the level of Indian, Pakistani, and to a lesser extent Bangladeshi, support for the Conservative party, there is growing disaffection from the Labour Party among Asians, which probably linked to a perception among this electorate that values such as individual merit and family are more convincingly promoted by the Conservatives.

Table 2: Voting patterns by ethnic groups: 1997 General Election Survey (%)

Ethnic group	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat	Other
White	61	27	7	5
Black Caribbean	94	2	4	0
Black African	96	1	3	0
Black Other	88	2	4	6
Indian	72	18	4	4
Pakistani	55	39	1	4
Bangladeshi	83	13	1	3
Other	67	24	3	4

Source: Anwar 2001, 539

1.2.b. Electoral political participation at local level in Bristol

In the lack of specific electoral data for the Bristol area, our analysis of the electoral participation of ethnic minorities can only rely on secondary sources. This also means that, unless otherwise indicated, we have to work on the assumption that the voting patterns of Bristol ethnic minorities are in line with national findings. It should however be reported that the patterns of participation and disinterest in politics observed nationally among Black and ethnic minority people could be accentuated locally as a consequence of a general lack of interest for local elections. Evidence of this is given by the turnout rate in the June 2001 local election which was at 33.21% among the whole population of Bristol.

Before asking the respondents their view about participation, consultation and representation, our questionnaire⁷ had a very general question about the respondent's view about the problems facing black and ethnic minorities and we also asked an evaluation of local race relation policies in Bristol. The tone of the responses to these questions, among Black and white respondents alike, was generally that Bristol is a city with more positive than negative records and that Bristol was delivering much better than many other local authorities on race relations.⁸

However, turning to the field of electoral participation and representation, the tone of the responses became fairly less optimistic. The impression that emerged was that this was a *terra incognita* for ethnic minorities. There had been some Black participation and representation in BCC and Avon County Council in the past, but that was not anymore a reality. On the first day of this research, a civil servant of BCC met randomly after a meeting at the City Council told the author of this report: "*Your research has no material object. Bristol has no ethnic minority political representation!*"

⁷See appendix for a description of the methodology.

⁸ This view is perfectly captured by the following title, and content, of an *Evening Post* article: "*Things have changed - but there is a lot that needs to be done*", *Evening Post* 24/02/2000.

Further research conducted with party members and community activists confirmed the impression that involvement in party politics among ethnic minorities is below average and almost non-existent. Not only is the Bristol ethnic minority population not represented in formal institutions such as local councils and national parliament, but their representation within the memberships of political parties is also quite negligible. In other words, we are not simply facing a conjunctural lack of human resources, but a structural problem leading to a *de facto* divorce between party politics and ethnic minorities.

This finding is quite at odds with development elsewhere in the UK. Party participation in other mid size and big cities has been increasing significantly during the last years. As reported by Solomos and Back, there are even boroughs in a city like Birmingham where Labour has organised subtle and discriminatory mechanisms to avoid new ethnic minority involvement in order to avoid instrumentalising the party through entryism. In Bristol, the situation is far from having reached this stage of development. Everything happens as if Bristol has remained immune from the resonance of these discussions and experiences in other parts of the country. In order to understand the causes of the present situation in Bristol, we rely on the interviews with local actors.

1.2.c. The respondent's view on the obstacles to the electoral political participation of ethnic minorities

1.2.c.1. Poor registration rates and effective turnout

The poor registration rates and effective turnout are identified as a major cause for concern by most respondents. This rejoins our analysis above. However, many respondents do not see any specific factor behind this observation. For a large number of respondents, the causes of the poor registration and turnout levels of Black and other ethnic minority people has similar causes than the disinterest of white people for politics in general and for local politics in particular. As the following community respondent put it:

“There is a general rejection of politics, not only among Black people, but among all the people. And especially the young people. It is not purely a race issue; there is a class dimension to it”

A BCC councillor analyse this problem from another vantage point. While also emphasising non-specific causes for this lack of interest, he looks simultaneously at the implication on political party strategies:

“The real problem here is that participation in political parties is very low across the whole population. There is a mistrust, even a loathing of politicians, so very few people come forward to participate in politics. Therefore political parties have to spend their scarce time recruiting. Rightly or wrongly, parties concentrate on the areas that are easiest for them to recruit (and win elections), rather than thinking about any bigger picture. Any party that didn't put its best efforts towards winning elections would loose them”

1.2.c.2. Perceptions of local authority

The question of the perception of the local authority, or its public image, is a very important element leading to the disenfranchisement and disinterest of Black and ethnic minority people. Whatever the reason for this, most respondents including BCC civil servants and councillors report the permanence of a very distorted negative perception of the local council among Black and ethnic minority.

“If you look at the work profile within the council, there has been some improvements. But there is not a positive reinforcement of the diversity of the city within the council. And the lack of visibility allows the council not to be over-active in promoting diversity.”

The following BCC councillor analyses the issue in these terms:

“I think one of the main difficulty is for Black and ethnic minority people to access council services and to have council services being responsive to their needs. And therefore as a result of that people don't see the council as being responsive to them and therefore don't see a lead to get involved in political organisations and in the council. (...). On top of that, a consultant report found that one of the major reason for Black people not applying to work for BCC, and this probably goes somewhere to explain the low level of participation in elections as well, is because the way they or their relatives have been treated as service users by the council.”

1.2.c.3. Lack of efficacy

Distorted perceptions of the local authority may reinforce the disinterest for local politics, but they also feed the low degree of political efficacy of the Black and ethnic minority population. There seems to be a vicious circle whereby the lack of representation of Black and ethnic minority people reinforce the low propensity to participate and vice versa. A BCC councillor makes the points that:

“The fact that we do not have Black senior officer and no Black councillor at all is not exactly a very good starting point for encouraging Black people to participate”

The same point is made by a representative of the Black voluntary sector:

“The fact that Bristol has no Black councillor is very detrimental to the relation of the council with the communities. It is something that is raised all the time in public meetings. If Bristol had Black councillors, it would change the image of the council among the communities and would increase their interest.”

1.2.c.4. Public and political profile of Black and ethnic minority interests

There has been in the specialist literature very deep divergence as to whether Black and ethnic minority share a similar set of political interests. This does not translate into the language of policy-actors who tend to share the view of the unity of the political agenda of Black and other ethnic minority people. For the following respondent, the problem confronting the Black and ethnic minority population are less severe than in other cities and therefore the external political pressure on the council to mainstream these questions is too low:

“The reality of Bristol is that it is a relatively well off city and that brings a lot of self-satisfaction with it. There are severe problems, but problems here are not as severe as in other parts of the country. And therefore, the push to absolutely address critical

problems is probably less. This is changing as a result of the Macpherson report. There is a push in the agenda, but in general the push for action is not that great.”

On top of the lack of political salience, there is equally an issue of transparency and accessibility to the council work. As the following BCC civil servant put it:

“In terms of how the Council is organised, we need to think about the sort of papers that are produced and about the processes. We need to have as a starting point how does it look like to the general public that is coming. If it is not understandable to them, we need to change it. What’s the point of having a public meeting if the language and the processes are so alien that people can’t understand what’s going on.”

For community activists, what matters in the first instance is the political packaging of Black and ethnic minority issues by political parties. The focus and language of the council work are also seen as not very attractive to that part of the population:

1.2.c.5. Where are our leaders?

The previous obstacle to participation, namely the public and political profile of Black and ethnic minority interests reveals the weakness of political leadership among those communities. According to a community respondent, what is missing in Bristol and in the UK more generally, is a leadership that would have the talent to bring policy issues into the language of Black and other minority ethnic people and to connect them to broader political issues.

“Leadership is the key. Good and sound leadership within our communities and in the establishment is the key to make a peaceful and prosperous society.”

A respondent see the absence of political leadership as a result of an over-involvement in community and voluntary organisations.

For those of us who are interested in politics or interested in getting involved in public life, we are already taking on too much. Very often, the people who have been councillor have also been very active in the community and voluntary sector. The people who have the interest or the calibre to do that type of work are the ones who are very pulled and very stretched in the work that they do. In terms of building the interest and expertise for the wider community to come forward, the political parties have not done a lot of work.”

1.2.c.6. Racism, institutional racism and discrimination

Although the low levels of participation of Black and other ethnic minority are generally seen as a correlate of general factors equally affecting the white population, racism, institutional racism and discrimination are not absent from our respondents’ reports. Quite astonishingly, a BCC Labour councillor declared:

“I can only speak for the Labour Party, but the main reason for the under-representation of Black is because the Labour party is institutionally racist. That is the most accurate description. The party does not recognise that it is a problem and that’s where it starts.”

Another respondent come to the same conclusion and emphasise the need to ensure

political support for Black politicians once elected:

“In terms of politics, Bristol has generally been very bad about involvement of Black and minority ethnic people. A lot of it has to do with the attitude of political parties in terms of how they approached, dealt with and treated Black people who have come forward and have been councillors in the past. Ten years ago, there was five councillors between the city and county councils. Now we have none. You also see that when people have been councillors, they have often been marginalised. So, racism in the political parties is a big issue.

1.2.c.7. Racial violence

Muhammad Anwar (2000) reports that registered Black voters in some localities have been intimidated leading them to avoid the polling station on election day. That was not reported to us in Bristol.

1.2.d. Socio-political participation through voluntary and community organisations.

The directory of organisations and contacts published by the Bristol Racial Equality Council list more around 180 community and service organisations for Black people. If we relate this number to the total ethnic minority population, as suggested by the method proposed by Fennema and Tillie, we find that the associational density of black and ethnic minority people reach the 107 mark (Fennema and Tillie 1999). In comparison to the findings of Fennema and Tillie in Amsterdam and to our own in four other European cities, this is a very dense network (Bousetta 2001).

Among these organisation, the Bristol Racial Equality Council, the Race Forum and the Black Development Agency play a crucial role in the local political process.⁹ They are the more active in seeking to instil the preoccupations and concerns of black and ethnic minorities in local policies. They are also the organisations most likely to represent the Black and race equality perspective into the various local trusts, partnerships and agencies, and more specifically into those focused on urban regeneration. It is not possible in this report to quantify in any way the political activity or membership of these organisations, but it is beyond dispute that they play a considerable role in articulating the political interests of Black and ethnic minority communities.

There has been some discussions among academics about the interpretation of the rise of the voluntary and community sector. For some, this phenomenon illustrates that Black and other ethnic minority people share a common set of political interests, while for other the very fact of the increasing number of such organisation is illustrative of a tendency to internal divisions (Messina 1998). In the lack of more systematic research, this remains an open question. But what is important to highlight from our perspective is the dual nature of the Black voluntary sector in Bristol. While the major local players in the Black voluntary sector in Bristol that were identified above have successfully, though not easily, managed to make their voice heard in the political process, the vast majority of Black community and voluntary organisations remain politically marginal and is, by and large, unable to connect to the dynamics of urban development and regeneration currently at work in Bristol. In order to avoid the

⁹ The role of the Race Forum is analysed distinctly in the chapter on consultation.

political marginalisation of grassroots Black and ethnic minority community and voluntary organisations, BCC should be encouraged to increase dialogue with grassroots Black and community organisations more effectively through regular consultation.

1.2.e. The respondents view on the obstacles to the political participation through voluntary and community organisations

1.2.e.1. Lack of material resources

Lack of material resources, insufficient and insecure funding are not new problems for the Black voluntary sector. One respondent put it in the following terms:

“The funding of Black voluntary and community organisation is inappropriate. If you talk to any of these organisations, they will give you a lot of information about the needs of their communities and what services their communities want or need. And in most cases, those organisations are not funded to provide that level of need. So, they whatever they get, it is often not enough. So they work under pressure and try to do always more with the money they are getting.”

1.2.e.2. Inadequacy of policy framework

The main link to the Black and ethnic minority voluntary sector within BCC is the Community Development department. This department has put a lot of emphasis in trying to ensure that the needs of Black and ethnic minority people are taken on board in regeneration work. As a BCC councillor put it:

“ A large amount of regeneration funding is going into areas like St Pauls and Easton, but Black voluntary and community organisations have not very much benefited from that. It is not an issue of the communities not having the capacity. There is an issue of communities not having the *support* to access the funding in the right way. The challenge is about adjusting the ways agencies operate rather than expecting communities to adjust to agencies.”

For representatives of the Black community and voluntary sector, the question raised is one of inadequacy of the community development policy framework:

“One of the key problem you see is that BCC has a community development strategy, but does not have a race and community development strategy. We would say that there is a need for that sort of work. We are currently involved in trying to have an equalities perspective to regeneration work. But it is very difficult because regeneration has been functioning for so long so why are we talking about it now.”

But the *malaise* with current institutional arrangements seems to be deeper. The problem which is here at stake is that race and ethnic issue are conflated with community development without allowing for a recognition of truly multicultural diversity perspective. This is evident in the following quote from a representative of the Black voluntary sector:

“Previously the Community Development Department had a specialist officer who dealt with Black and minority ethnic group. After BCC became reorganised and after the Avon County Council went, they got rid of that post. The City council community

development team said they want all community development officers, Black and white, to work with all groups. So it should not be Black officers working with Black groups. At the time, we said it will not work because you need people with a specialism, with an understanding and a perspective within the department. They responded that the recruitment would ensure that there would be both Black and white officers represented, but refused to have one specialist officer only dealing with Black group. When that post went, they recruited, but you can count the number of Black worker on one hand and since recently the number has gone down. Many among them have left. So on the one hand, you don't have Black people bringing that experience, that knowledge, and on the other hand you have a lot of generic community development officers who are going to work with Black groups who cannot deal with the issue."

1.2.e.3. The question of visibility

There is a criticism that is sometime heard among politicians and civil servants that Black and ethnic minority leaders and organisation are not enough visible. This is illustrated in the following statement by a BCC civil servant:

"Black and other ethnic minority people are not visible. Or they are visible only in certain parts of the city, but they are not an obvious influence across the city. They are not seen as part of the mainstream."

1.2.e.4. Reform of local government

Among most respondents, the outcome of the reform of the local government is not yet clear. Not any respondent could raise examples of a detrimental impact of the new system for the participation, consultation and representation of Black and ethnic minority people. But for many among our respondents, there is a fear that the new system might bring about less transparency and greater concentration of powers in the hands of the members of the Executive. Here is the view of a representative of a Black organisation:

"The city council has set up structures. Under the older system, it was better because there was the Equalities and Social Justice Committee and the Race advisory sub-committee. Each equalities Forum had a number of representatives within these committees. So we used to attend the meetings of the committees and sub-committees and made our views known. It was a way of evaluating and monitoring what was happening. The new system is not as clear."

1.4. The European dimension

The main difference between the three countries on which we focus in the European section (i.e. France, the Netherlands and Belgium) and the UK is that of political rights. While post colonial minorities enjoyed full citizenship at the point of entry, their counterparts in Europe were fairly less advantaged. As they were in their vast majority non-nationals, ethnic minorities in Europe were largely excluded from the right to vote. The only exception of this general rule was the Netherlands which opened the franchise to local elections to non-nationals in 1985.

Things are however quickly evolving. There has been indeed massive numbers of people from ethnic minority origin who have naturalised and who have therefore become full citizens. Nationality laws in France, the Netherlands and Belgium are

indeed all relatively open to post-immigration minorities, and especially to the second generation. As a consequence, there is more than a theoretical possibility for these communities to be heard through participation in local and national elections.

In France, the level of registration of nationals on electoral register is slightly below 90% which sharply contrast with the British situation. There are some indications available through surveys about the level of participation of ethnic minorities, more precisely of French naturalised citizens of foreign origin. These indicate that their registration rate approximates the 80% for men and 75% for women. (Tribalat 1996). But this indicator does not provide a measurement for the whole ethnic minority population in France but only for those who already made the step of acquiring French nationality and for whom the act of voting is perceived as a more important attribute of nationality than for those who retained their original nationality.

In the Netherlands, registration is not an issue as there is a method of direct enrolment through population registers. But it is interesting to note that the participation of ethnic minorities in the 1998 municipal elections was 39% (59.5% for the whole population), a decrease of 10% in comparison with 1994. In Amsterdam, the average turnout level was 60% (Tillie 2001).

The situation in Belgium is different because electoral participation is compulsory. It is estimated that this leads to participation rates above 97%. Although compulsory voting has more civic advantages than disadvantages, especially for powerless groups, a discussion on such fundamental choices is beyond the scope of this report and cannot go without a broader one on the political culture of each nation. Therefore, while it is important to look at all the variables influencing participation and representation, it would be naive to recommend compulsory voting for the UK from scratch.

Chapter 3 - Consultation

1.1. Introduction

Consultation is another form of participation that allow citizens to express their concerns in parallel to the established democratic channel of the vote. Although classical political theory rightly holds that consultation has less democratic legitimacy than the vote, consultation has become an essential element in modern policy-making. The increasing complexity of decision making processes make it necessary for elected representatives to turn to expert voices and to mobilised groups of citizens for assessing the implications of their decisions. Regular consultation is also an effective mean for elected representatives to keep in contact with their constituents' needs and aspirations.

The strengths of consultation largely outweigh its inconvenient, but it is nevertheless worth mentioning that they are a number of pre-conditions for consultation to be successful. Among these key factors is the necessity for consultees to see that their views are taken on board in decision-making. It is also crucial to adopt the appropriate technique of consultation in the light of the objective pursued. All these recommendations and others are formulated with sufficient clarity in the report commissioned by BCC to the Bristol Democracy Commission. They are also now well acknowledged at the level of BCC as shown by the adoption of a paper on "Public Consultation Strategy" aimed at facilitating the adoption of a corporate strategy and common methodology for consulting Bristol citizens.

All these initiatives are to be welcomed and encouraged. But for them to be successfully implemented with Black and ethnic minority communities, these need to be adjusted and further developed. Suffice it to recall here that beyond the positive commitment of BCC towards consultation, 71% of Black and ethnic minority people still consider that they are not well informed about decisions taken by the local authority.¹⁰ As far as ethnic minorities in Bristol are concerned, we believe that consultation is the key word. BCC should be encouraged to make consultation the touching stone of its policy towards black and ethnic minority. It is indeed through appropriate consultation that BCC should be encouraged to redress the participatory deficit of ethnic minorities. We believe that the combination of different methods of consultation is potentially fruitful, but prior to that existing consultative mechanisms available for Black and ethnic minorities should be reviewed and streamlined, especially the citizens' panel should be made more representative of Black and ethnic minority population and the Race Forum should be given the resources and support necessary to a better functioning.

¹⁰ Bristol City Council, *Initial Findings of the Citizens' Panel*, 11th March 1999, pg 7.

1.2. The Bristol approach to consultation

1.2.a. The Bristol consultation strategy

As mentioned in the introduction, BCC has recently proposed, in line with the recommendation of the Bristol Democracy Commission, to adopt a corporate consultation strategy due to be implemented across all the departments of the local authority. The "Public Consultation Strategy" mainly offers a number of principles and a methodology. These principles will have to be translated into specific mechanisms such as the referendum, the citizens panel, citizens' juries, focus groups, independent commissions such as the former Democracy Commission.

While important to identify the aspiration and needs of the whole population, these are not ideal for identifying the aspirations and needs of black and ethnic minority population specifically. The citizens' panel for example, while providing useful city-wide information, is not perfectly reliable as far as Black and ethnic minorities are concerned. In the first survey of the citizens' panel, the number of Black and ethnic minority people surveyed was about 100 persons and their level of response to the questionnaire was only 25%. In the second survey, the panel comprised about 120 Black and ethnic minority people and only 31% answered the questionnaire. The method of survey is obviously not appropriate for having an effective consultation of this segment of the population. In this context, and considering our overall positive evaluation of the citizens' panel as a method for surveying Bristol residents, BCC should be encouraged to develop the representativeness of the Black and Ethnic Minority representation either through the current citizens' panel or through a parallel survey. Such method would not only allow to identify more precisely the views of Black and ethnic minority people about issues of general concern to the whole population, but will allow to identify their views on issues which are specifically affecting them.

1.2.b. The Race Forum

In September 1997, BCC set up the Race Forum together with other equalities forums for disabled, lesbian and gays.¹¹ The objective of the Race Forum is to "ensure that Black and Other Minority Ethnic communities in Bristol are consulted and are able to participate in the reviewing, planning and development of Bristol City Council services"¹² The Race Forum is an open network with a membership of approximately 100 people. Among them, 18 are elected as race advisors on the basis of the following representation formulae: 3 advisors representing African Caribbean organisations, 3 from Asian organisations, 2 from Chinese organisations, 2 from refugee organisations, 3 from cross-community organisations and 5 advisors elected on an individual basis.

Under the former committee system, the Race Forum was connected to the

¹¹ A number of race advisors, especially the most active, were already involved as race advisors under the Avon County Council Race Forum.

¹² *Race Forum Constitution*, agreed by Bristol Race Equality Forum on 28 April 1998 and ratified by Equalities Co-ordination and Social Justice Committee on 16 June 1998.

Equalities Co-ordination and Social Justice Committee and to the now disbanded Race Advisory Sub-Committee. With the reform of the council structure pursuant to the implementation of the *Local Government Act 2000*, the main partner for the Race Forum becomes now in the first place the Deputy Leader of the Cabinet in charge of Social Equalities and Social Inclusion.

In the course of the last two years, the Race Forum has encountered serious functioning difficulties. It has been unable to hold regular meeting during the last year and a half. The poor outcomes achieved through this consultative mechanism have led to some discussion among community leaders and activists about its uncertain future. This question was also central to our interviews with local respondents. And it is to their analysis that we now turn.

1.3. The respondents' view on consultation

There is far from unanimity among our respondents about their perception of consultation. According to whether the respondent is a politician, a civil servant or a community leader, the responses vary significantly. In order to do justice to this diversity of opinions, we have classified them in five questions which leave us room to analyse the pros and cons in the argumentation of local actors. It should be recalled once again that the selection of respondents who were interviewed for this report do not constitute a representative sample. On the opposite, it is a selection of actors who have been chosen for their involvement in the policy process. In this sense the following analysis is not representative of the views of the communities on consultation, but is a reflection of the views of policy actors¹³.

1.3. a. The question of performance

The question of performance is certainly among the most divisive. According to a number of politicians and civil servants, the Race Forum has not delivered sufficient results. As an indication, the Race Forum has not managed to organise any meeting in 2000-2001. But the most common way of raising the underachievement of the Race Forum is often to compare it with other equalities fora. As the following respondent argues:

“If you make the comparison with the Gay and Lesbian, they have never received any money from the council and are relatively remote from the council. And yet they organised themselves, commissioned a survey, and now the survey is influencing how the council services are being offered to that community.”

For Race advisors, the analysis is not quite identical and these latter emphasise the lack of support and funding which the Forum is facing:

“The Race Forum was very vibrant in 1999 and part of the reason for that is that the officer identified to support the Race Forum and put a lot of time and energy to prioritise that work. But from the beginning, we have criticised the fact that when it was under the County council there was a lot of dedicated resources, in terms of officers and for the functioning of the Forum. When we passed to the city council, there was

¹³ See methodological appendix.

hardly anything in terms of resources. Currently, the city council is thinking about reviewing its consultative mechanisms. The Race Forum has been inactive for about a year and part of the reason why it has been inactive is not only because of the lack of people active within the Forum, but because we haven't been getting the proper support from the equalities unit in terms of officer support for the work that needs to be done. And that has created an image within the council that the Race Forum is not very good, lack effectiveness, and hasn't got people enough involved. So the communities are being blamed rather than the council looking at itself to see what hasn't it done"

1.3.b. The question of representativeness

For their critics, ethnic minority leaders and elites involved in voluntary sector are self appointed people without real representativeness. For their advocates, the legitimacy of those who take the lead in participation participate should be encouraged rather than undermined.

The following BCC councillor reports:

"The ethnic minority leadership are a sort of self-perpetuating oligarchy and they do very little for ethnic minority people. Year after year, you see the same faces and hear the same arguments."

The question of representativeness is also raised in connection to the issue of the Forum's membership (see further). The following BCC respondent argues:

"The Race Advisors make of the Race Forum what they make of it and we (BCC) can support if they make a case for resources or anything else we can respond to that. But we need to have a level of evidence that say the membership is increasing. They need to have some of the younger generation involved. If it is always the same two or three people showing up, it is very difficult for BCC to justify its support."

Ethnic minority leaders on the other hand convincingly argue that when the argument of representativeness is raised, it is often a way of deflecting more serious political claims.

1.3.c. The question of independence *versus* autonomy

The Race Forum is since its inception unclear as to what extent it is independent from the council. In its 1998 annual report, the former chair of the forum emphasised that: "Our ultimate aim is for an independent Race Forum working with the Local Authority."¹⁴ In practice however, the forum is caught in a difficult tension between its insufficient resources to act with full organisational independence from the council and its ambition to find a distinctive and autonomous political voice. The following interview will introduce us into this issue:

"There is a tension that has not been resolved about how far the Race Forum is linked or is independent from the council. And that tension is as much present within the city council as it is within the community. There was some resources available for the Race Forum and we had discussion to know whether we would resource the Race Forum so

¹⁴ "Chairman's Report", Race Forum Annual Report 1998, Bristol, 1998, pg1.

that they could employ an independent worker who would support them. At the end of the day, the Race Forum decided that they were not prepared to take a worker because it was putting too much responsibility on them and there was not enough money from the council. I think this is not a reasonable starting point. If we are engaging in a dialogue and a partnership, and if the money was on the table, even if it was insufficient, I would have thought that it was better to take up the challenge and move on.”

Another perspective is articulated from within the Race Forum, which emphasises the difficulty to work independently without sufficient resources. The following respondent raises simultaneously a very fundamental question about the role of BCC equalities officers:

“All equalities officer as part of their work have to support the Forum. But these officer have a very broad job description and have a big internal and external role within the council. And on top of that, they are expected to assist the Forum. We have said that we need a dedicated development officer to work with the Forum as we had under the county system who can work with increasing membership, with briefing advisor and supporting them, who can work with external agencies, and with the necessary admin support. So the major problem for the Forum is lack of support from the council and insufficient resources.”

1.3.d The question of funding

The question of funding is also seen as a major question for the development of the Forum. But, once again, the perspective voiced within BCC and within the Race Forum are quite divergent:

“ You hear the argument at time saying that ‘Our value and our status depends on how much money we receive from the Council. If we dont get any money from the council, then we are not being valued and therefore we are not important’. I think this is a wrong view. I dont think the value of group does not depend on how much money they receive (...) The Race Forum is caught in a history that is not longer relevant. Some of this argument about the funding has to do with the old Race Forum of Avon County Council. They got to recognise that they are responsible for themselves.”

For the following respondent, BCC has invested too much on other forms of consultation like the referendum and citizens’ juries and panels in comparison to the equalities fora:

“Sadly, the matter of consultation boils down to a question of money. When you have the Race Forum which has a budget of about £3,700 a year to do its meetings and all its business. And then you have the same council which is willing to spend £120,000 on one consultation mechanism which is the referendum and gets only 50% response, you can see there is something wrong. Either you have the money or you don’t. Obviously the money is there, but they (BCC) are very selective on who they give it to and how they are willing to spend it”

1.3.e. The question of membership

The Race Forum has a network of round 100 members. The least one can say is that not all are active members. As revealed by our respondents' views, one of the key issue at stake is the involvement of the younger generation. But as it is also clear, there is a real difficulty to increase the number of Black and ethnic minority people interested in the work of the Forum.

For the following BCC respondent:

"The Race Forum needs to increase its membership and actively seek to involve the younger generation. The older generation are clearly speaking first generation immigrants. The cultural views of that age band are quite different to second and third generation born here. It is a different world. We are still a bit tightened to the old generation and to their view of things. We need to listen to the reality of the younger generation."

The following community leader takes a more radical view on the question of membership:

"If the council wants to have a council with more people and with more young people represented into it, they need to put time and energy into it. The success of the functioning of an organisation like that should not be dependent upon the amount of time people are willing to invest on a voluntary capacity."

But it should also be mentioned that in many cases, the arguments formulated by Race Advisors for the low levels of active membership are practical ones. As the following Race advisor put it:

"The problem is that it is difficult to find committed people who would accept to sacrifice of their time and energy for volunteer work. It is also hard to have people willing to come to the town hall for meetings in the evening in the cold winter."

1.4. Consultation in Europe

In Europe the practice of consulting ethnic minorities is well established, but has a quite different history which can be traced back as early as the seventies. Following a recommendation by the Council of Europe, Belgium was the first European immigration country to implement so-called immigrant consultative councils. These were seen as a preparatory experience before full enfranchisement. The establishment of such councils was left to the free initiative of local authorities, but most immigrant receiving cities have established one at some point.

Most Belgian immigrant consultative councils have now disappeared. With the political emergence of a second generation less prone to accept the paternalism inherent in these councils, and with the increasing number of minority people acceding to Belgian citizenship and to being elected as local councillors, the pertinence of these councils has declined in the nineties. There is however recently a tendency to re-establish some platforms for consultation. Usually, these are no longer based on community representativeness, but on an organisational basis. The city of Antwerp for instance has recently turned its former immigrant consultative council into a voluntary and community organisation consultative platform. Contrary to the

kind of consultation practised by Race Advisors in Bristol, consultees in Belgium have no personal connection with the council. Their recommendations are transmitted to elected local councillors in written policy-statements, never through direct verbal intervention in committee meetings.

French cities have also established different formulae for consulting minority communities. However, considering the republican strong commitment to the unity of the political community, consultation is never done on a communitarian basis. Consultation is usually indirectly organised through involving community and voluntary organisations active in the field of urban regeneration and "integration".

But it is probably to the Netherlands that one has to turn to identify good practice in terms of consulting Black and ethnic minority populations. Both the cities of Amsterdam and Utrecht for instance have adopted group-centred strategies of consultation, with a significant administrative and financial back-up from the local authority. In practice, this means that Surinamese, Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans all have a specific consultative council and a dedicated development officer based at the city hall who ensure effective communication between the local executive and community advisors. Another interesting feature of the consultative process in Amsterdam and Utrecht is that some of these consultative councils, like the Moroccan Advisory Council of Amsterdam, are organised as legally independent organisations, with their budget being allocated by the municipality.

These three countries' approach to consultation exemplify different models in terms of who is entitled to membership (individuals vs organisations), on what is the criteria for membership (ethnicity vs nationality vs organisation's perspective) and there is also a difference in terms of style of consultation (joined up process with elected councillors vs separation). Finally, there is also a very important difference in terms of financial and political autonomy.

The Race Forum is in a way similar to the consultative institutions established in other parts of the European Union, but in other ways very different. In the first instance, the Race Forum is not merely a compensatory mechanism for disenfranchised minorities, but is a complementary means of expression besides the vote. In comparison to European counterparts, the structure of the Race Forum has interesting potentialities. It allows both individual and organisational membership, include members without distinction of ethnic or national origin, and is closely associated to the work of the councillors in the local council. However, the main limitations of the Bristol Race Forum concerns its lack of financial and political autonomy. It is therefore imperative for BCC, if this important consultative mechanism is to function properly, to invest additional resources.

Chapter 4 - Representation

1.1. Introduction

The study of representation is caught in a permanent tension. While some are concerned that the meaning of representation is about representing people's views and concerns in the political process, other tend to focus on the sociological characteristics of the representatives. In the first perspective, political representation is defined as '*acting in the interest of the represented in a way responsive to them*' (Pitkin 1972: 209). As far as Black representation is concerned, this perception is now being challenged by the second approach which turns its focus on the representatives. The key question in this perspective is on: Who represents whom? This is what Anne Phillips has called the tension between the politics of ideas and the politics of presence (Phillips 1995)

Far from being merely academic, these discussions have a very direct policy-relevance. Indeed, when it is argued that Black and ethnic minorities are under-represented, we do assume that Black representation should ideally mirror their demographic representation in society. By doing so, we are focused on one type of representation, namely what is generally called descriptive representation. While it is true that descriptive representation increases the likeliness that the political interest of Black and ethnic minority will be taken on board, is no absolute guarantee. It is not always clear that Black elected politicians would represent natural spokesperons of the political interests of their communities of origin. In other words, it is not clear that descriptive leads automatically to what is generally called substantive representation, that is the representation of political interests.

As some of our respondents put it, descriptive representation should remain high on the agenda as it is likely to have a positive knock-on effect on the perception of local politics by Black and ethnic minorities. Descriptive representation can indeed have an intrinsic symbolic value which is worth considering. In practice, descriptive and substantive representation are not necessarily contradictory and should be combined within a single policy agenda. It should also be recalled that representation is not only at stake in democratically elected assemblies such as local councils. It is also becoming a key issue in the range of local organisations and institutions empowered for dealing with health, education, urban development, etc, the so-called quangos.

1.2. Political representation

1.2.a. Political representation at national and local level in the UK

The political representation of Black and ethnic minority people at the local level was estimated to be 663 in 1997 or 2.9% of the total number of councillors in England and Wales.¹⁵ 82% among them are males and there is an over-representation of Asian males. This latter category represent 44% of the total number of Black and ethnic minority local councillors. A large majority among Black and ethnic minority representatives are councillors of the Labour Party.

Table 3: Councillors in England and Wales, by ethnic group and sex, 1997

	Male	Female
	Abs.	% of groupAbs. % of group
White	15,020	725,74128
Black Caribbean	66	683132
Black African	13	76424
Black Other	16	76524
Indian	149	94106
Pakistani	116	9822
Bangladeshi	30	9426
Chinese	1	000
Mixed	54	672733
Any other origin	98	723928
Total Ethnic Minority	543	8212018
Base	15,563	5,861

Source: LGMB 1998

1.2.b. Political representation at local level in Bristol

The political representation is composed of 70 councillors, with 2 representatives for each of the 35 electoral wards. There are in BCC 21 women, which is comparatively a good record. However, in terms of age, the political representation of Bristol does not very well mirror the composition of the whole population. Most councillors are indeed older than the average. Even though they are not obliged to report their date of birth in official documents, 35 Bristol councillors have done so and this gives an average age of 53 years old. If compared to the average age among the Black and ethnic minority population, the contrast with the local representation is all the more evident.

As already mentioned above, there is no political representation of Black and ethnic minority people in BCC. The state of political representation is not as good as ten years ago. Before the dismantling of Avon City Council, altogether BCC and ACC counted till five Black representatives (3 in City council and 2 in County council).¹⁶ For Bristol to have a perfect political representation of ethnic minorities in the descriptive sense, it should have 3 to 4 representatives in the local council.

¹⁵ Anwar reports the figure of 530 Black and ethnic minority local councillors in England and Wales in 2000 (Anwar 2000: 547).

¹⁶ Among these five former representatives, we were able to interview 3.

The absence of political representation of Black and ethnic minority people is not unrelated to the low levels of electoral participation of Black and ethnic minority people for one can anticipate that the vote of important numbers of Black and minority ethnic voters will be influenced by the race or ethnic origin of candidates. The last time a Black was elected as Bristol City councillor was in 1995, not surprisingly in the ward of Ashley. This Labour councillor lost the seat by a swing of 100 votes in 1998 in a by-election with a turnout of 26%. It is very telling to read how this Black politician analysed the defeat in the local media: *“The key thing was just a general apathy after Labour’s success in the general election. People were watching the World Cup and there was bad weather.”*¹⁷

1.3. The respondents’ view on the obstacles to a fair representation of ethnic minority people in public life

1.3.a. Size and diversity of the community

One of the most powerful argument explaining the low representation of Black and other ethnic minority people in Bristol is the size of the community. Here are some of the most representative opinions expressed by the respondents:

“The proportion of the community has an impact. If you got a relatively small Black community which is clearly divided into a number of cultures and the rest of it. In order to get Black representatives, you need this mass and communities making alliance and supporting each other. Also Black councillor need to have community support. Because we are talking of a variety of communities, it is quite difficult for any Black councillor to have the support of the whole of the Black community. But if each of the local Black community are relatively very small and with a lot of diversity, this makes it more difficult .“

The relatively small size of the Bristol Black and ethnic minority community has been perceived to result in the isolation of Black representatives once elected:

“There was a Black councillor earlier on in Bristol, but my view is that he was very isolated within the committee system and in the political group. Now as an individual, you can only sustain that for certain amount of time.”

1.3.b. The role of political parties

The role of political parties is essential for most of a majority of respondents. It is indeed within political parties that the selection of candidates is made before any election. The question of racism and institutional racism within political parties is also perceived as a major issue and one which explains their lack of pro-active engagement with the question of Black representation. For the following respondent:

“The political parties have renied some of their responsibilities, particularly the Labour group. They should have actively gone out and seek how to actively involve and support Black and ethnic minority people in this process.”

¹⁷ *Evening Post*, 20 June 1998.

1.3.c. The question of positive action and positive discrimination

Two respondents have raised in their interviews a parallel between positive action for women and positive action for ethnic minorities. Both these respondents shared the view that a fair representation of Black and ethnic minority people would only be achieved through strong institutional measures. The view of the following respondent summarises the point:

“It is a great great pity that the amount of emphasis that has gone into gender equality in politics and the positive action there has not been duplicated and used in terms of race equality. The Labour party has one view on positive action and women candidate and has a very different view on positive action and Black and minority ethnic candidates.”

1.3.d. Drain of Black and ethnic minority elites

Several respondents converge to argue that Bristol confronted a very specific phenomenon leading highly educated Black and ethnic minority elite to leave the city. This drain of this sort expertise which make it more difficult to reach parity in position of seniority for instance in the public service is explained in the following words by a BCC civil servants:

“The reason for the exodus of the Black expertise is that Black issues are more in the mainstream in London and other big cities, so it is easier in a way for a building up a career, although the issue there are more difficult.

While regretting the absence of Black and ethnic minority people in position of seniority within the council administration, the following community representative reach the same conclusion about the drain of the Black expertise:

“We havent got any senior officer who is from Black or ethnic minority origin. We did have one or two in the past, but they didn't stay in Bristol. They often think that staying in Bristol would not benefit their career. In terms of career development, they often see that the only chances to get promoted to very senior position is to move on to cities that have much larger Black and ethnic minority population, that have Black councillors, that have a higher profile of Black communities, etc. This is not only in the public sector, it is also the case in the voluntary sector”

In some departments, this has particularly detrimental consequences. The following BCC councillor reports that this is felt most acutely within the Community Development department:

“In the department of Community Development, what we are seeing is that Black and ethnic minority staff are leaving the council because they are getting better paid jobs eleswhere. And there is a shortage of Black and minority ethnic people with that sort of regeneration experience. We have a particular problem in Community Development because people are leaving to voluntary sector regeneration-funded organisations. And it is very difficult to recruit the other way round because people are better paid.”

1.3. e. Tokenism

If representation of Black and ethnic minority people in democratically elected councils is low, this tendency is even more accentuated within a number of institutions and public agencies such as Hospital Boards, School Boards, Education Authorities, Health Authorities, and so on, the so-called quangos. The question of tokenism affect quangos in a quite direct fashion. As a respondent put it:

"All these new public bodies have suddenly waken up and said we don't have any proper representation for Black and other ethnic minority people, so lets try to recruit. And they take people on board, but very often in a very tokenistic way, and also pick people who fit the mould. On a personal level, I congratulate Black people who stand up for becoming members of the boards of Hospital Trust or whatever, but very often not all Black people have an equality perspective. Sometimes these people can very much undermine the communities."

This latter quotes illustrate that Black and ethnic minority activists have a very specific view of representation. For them, what matters in the first instance, is not symbolic representation, but the substantive representation of a diversity and race equality perspective. This is illustrated by another respondent:

" Sometime people can be used in a very tokenistic way. I think it is always beter to have no representation than this sort of representation"

1.3.f. The electoral system

It s a point of note that very few respondents identify the electoral system as an obstacle to a fair representation of Black and minority ethnic people. A LibDem BCC councillor was the only respondent to raise the point. The points that is raised by this respondent is actually a plea for proportional representation which is actually a more general claim of the respondent's party:

1.4. The representation of ethnic minorities in political life in Europe.

There is in Europe a clear pattern of under-representation of ethnic minorities. But as in the UK, the situation is quickly evolving. There has been a significant progression of the political representation of ethnic minorities in public and political life on the continent in very recent years. In France, although there is no ethnic minority MP, it is estimated that there were some 150 local councillors elected at the 1995 municipal elections. Most French cities now have North African, Italian, Black African councillors, and both with the parties of the left (Socialist Party, Greens, Citizens' movement) and the right and centre-right (i.e. the Gaullist party Rally for the Republic 'RPR', and Christian-Democrat dominated Union for French Democracy 'UDF'). France has also 4 ethnic minority MEPs in Strasbourg. In the Netherlands, there are 9 Mps, no MEP and 75 local councillors. Finally in Belgium, there are 1 MEP, 4 MPs, 3 Mps in the second chamber, the Senate, 10 in the three Regional Parliaments

(Brussels-Capital, Flanders and Walloon) and 194 local councillors.¹⁸

Comparing these experience, one thing becomes clear and that is the influence of the electoral system. Countries implementing proportional representation (PR), like Belgium and the Netherlands, are those where it is easiest for ethnic minorities to be represented in public life, while countries with majority systems are more difficult. Particularly, the French two-majority system implemented for local and general elections is particularly detrimental to ethnic minorities. And it is no surprise to see, that ethnic minority have maximised their political representation in the two French elections held on the basis of the proportional system, namely the election to the European Parliament and the elections to regional councils.

¹⁸ The 19 local councils forming the Great Brussels now have a representation of people of non Belgian origin above mirror representation, and this despite the fact the non-naturalised non-Belgians remain disenfranchised.

Conclusion - The political challenge of multiculturalism

In front of the difficulties for Black and ethnic minorities to find a just place in local democracy, three kinds of policy scenarios are possible, but only two are likely. The first is offered by multiculturalism which advocates for increased recognition of diversity and minority ethnic identities in public life. The second view advocates for a refoundation of civic institutions in an inclusive manner. There is something of a French republican inspiration in this view which argue that race awareness in public institutions engenders racial division and prejudice. The third view is the less likely and the less optimistic as well. It considers the UK post-immigration multicultural character as a failure and pleads for strong assimilationism, alongside a return policy for recent immigrants. This third view, while politically marginal in the UK, has been on the increase throughout Europe since the early eighties and is propagated by anti-democratic far right parties.

Over the last decade, BCC has laid the foundation for a horizontal equalities perspective coupled with a community development approach. This approach could be categorised as being at the margin of both to the first and second policy-scenario. In order for Bristol to respond to the challenge discussed in this report concerning the the presence of Black and ethnic minorities in public life, elements of a diversity agenda are to be recommended. Without a proactive policy imposing structural changes, the disadvantage of black and ethnic minority people in terms of participation and representation in public life will remain blatant for yet a number of years to come. An equalities perspective alone will remain insufficient to remedy these patterns and should therefore be complemented by a diversity perspective.

Recommendations

1. Thwarting participatory deficits through appropriate consultation

Consultation is the key for future strategies aimed at increasing the involvement of Black and ethnic minority in public life. It is through appropriate consultation that BCC should be encouraged to redress the participatory deficit of ethnic minorities. Building an inclusive democratic agenda reflecting the needs and aspirations of Black and ethnic minorities will not avoid reconsidering the appropriateness of currently existing consultative procedures. BCC should be encouraged to increase electoral participation and simultaneously to pay specific attention to the demands which are channelled through consultation, and in the first place through consultation with voluntary and community organisation. BCC should also be encouraged to review the work of the Race Forum with the aim to enable it to work efficiently, autonomously, and with sufficient resources.

The Bristol citizens' panel indicated that more than two thirds Black and ethnic minority people reported higher levels of bad information than whites about BCC decisions and policies. This finding has a direct implication for the consultative process. BCC should be extremely concerned about the need to communicate on the decisions that are taken on the basis of consultation.

Other consultative procedures based on opinion survey should be encouraged and the citizens' panel upgraded. Future consultation through the citizens' panel should ensure that sufficient numbers of Black and ethnic minority people are surveyed. Minimally, this mean that a booster sample is included in the citizens' panel in order to provide a higher statistical reliability of the views expressed by Black and ethnic minority people than has been the case until now.

2. Increasing participation and representation through promoting active citizenship

As already indicated above, increasing the participation of Black and ethnic minority people will need to start by understanding the causes and the extent of the poor rates of registration and turnout. addressing the question of registration on electoral registers. The new system introduced in April 2001 allowing registration throughout the year may provide the start of an answer for Black and ethnic minority, even though it is too early to assess the real impact of the new system. Targeted communication and information are also seen as element that might contribute to increasing interest in elections.

In order to increase the political representation of Black and ethnic minorities in Bristol, BCC should prioritise to focus on raising awareness among political parties in the first instance and among quangos (e.g. trusts, partnerships, school boards, etc.) in the second instance. Political parties have an essential role to play to increase the political participation of BOME. There is broad agreement among the respondents to say that the major challenge is in the side of political parties. BCC should encourage

political parties to adopt pro-active recruitment strategies targeted at BOME people, to provide training opportunities to their BOME members.

In order to increase the political representation of Black and ethnic minorities in Bristol, BCC should also seek to target Black and ethnic minority communities through informative and educative programmes aimed at raising awareness about participatory citizenship.

3. Adopting a high profile and well publicised multicultural democracy plan defining clear and measurable policy-objectives.

The administrative division of responsibilities between community development, scrutiny and equalities, housing, education, and social services, does not permit optimal visibility, readability, and accountability of BCC's service delivery on multiculturalism and racial equality. The conflation of multicultural race equality with questions of anti-discrimination, anti-poverty, or urban regeneration should be avoided as it lower their public saliency and lead to decrease the interest from Black and ethnic minority people. Therefore, BCC should be encouraged to increase structural coordination between corporate units and define clear policy-objectives in a high profile and well publicised local multicultural democracy plan.

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Appendix - A note on the methodology

The research leading to this report was based on semi-structured qualitative interview with local actors. Fifteen respondents were selected among three distinct groups: local councillors, civil servants and people from the community and voluntary sector. The selection was drawn on the basis of contacts provided by the Equalities Unit of BCC. This selection was latter completed by a personal selection of respondents aimed at broadening our view on political and policy-developments in the city. It should be mentioned that the respondents offer a broad coverage of policy actors, but it is not a sociologically representative sample of Black and ethnic minority communities.

All the interviews were conducted face to face, except for one councillor who wished to contribute in print due to a busy agenda. Most of the interviews with local councillors and civil servants took place at the Council House. Nearly all respondents from community and voluntary organisations were interviewed in their organisation's venues. Other respondents were interviewed in two cases at the University of Bristol and in one case in a pub.

Being a newcomer to Bristol without any preconceived idea about the local political scene, I have contacted and proceeded with the councillors of all political parties evenhandedly. Unfortunately, the opposite was not true. After Kamaljit Poonia, then coordinator of Scrutiny and Equalities, had written a letter to a selection of councillors bringing their attention to this research, I myself contacted these councillors from all three parties by letter, email or telephone. While Labour and LibDem councillors gave a sufficient level of response for the purpose of this report, none of the Conservative councillors found it worth replying. This is why the selection of respondents among councillors is not balanced. The break-up is as follows: 3 Labour and 2 Lib Dem.

Break-up of selected respondents by type of organisation and gender

	F	M	T
Bristol City councillors	1	4	5
Bristol City Council civil servant	4	1	5
Community and voluntary organisations (Includ. Race Forum)	2	4	6
Total	7	9	16