

RACE AND IDENTITY

Bhavesh Singh Comments on Yvonne Craig

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I found Yvonne Craig's 'Plural Identity Theory' in *Self and Society* November 1990 very interesting. Readers of *Self and Society* may like to know that there are many 'multi-group' theories - Rupert Brown's book *Group Process* published in 1988 for example. I do not want to discuss these theories myself but I would like to offer, from my own experience, some reflections on what Yvonne Craig has written.

There are many groups of people who have their own norms and identity within the bigger framework of society. The Gujerati community in Britain, for example, consider themselves first and foremost Gujerati and then Indian even if they were born in the UK and speak no other language than English. Language seems to be an important part of identity. Actually most of the Asians of my generation - I am in my twenties - speak a native dialect fluently. This is particularly true of the Sikh community in Southall UK who speak Punjabi and can usually understand some Hindi as well.

Yvonne Craig's discussion of Muslims is interesting. Rejection by the 'in-group', including white and black non-muslims seem to have enhanced 'out-group' identity and contributed to the writing of works such as the Muslim Manifesto. As for geographical 'zones of transition' they seem to be largely inevitable. Given that integration and equality of opportunity were not features of life enjoyed by blacks when they came to the UK in the 1950's the geographical and social 'zones of transition' were places for them to stay together away from the whites who had departed for the suburbs. I see the 1981 riots as a culmination of the problems of poor housing and lack of integration in those areas. ... assimilation has led to degeneracy...

Degeneracy

I do not agree, however, with everything that Yvonne Craig says. The Asian sector, and especially those who were born here - I was three years old when I came here - have made a concerted effort to integrate. To some extent that has succeeded due to 'contact' from childhood but I feel that assimilation or attempted assimilation has led to degeneracy. This is because the mechanism of integration can cause problems - if the 'in-group' want gratitude, for example, in return for allowing 'privi-

leges'. I have met white people who are coarse enough to say "well we let you in so you must..." or the more ubiquitous "they come here, take our jobs, shops and now our women..." This sort of thing heightens the desire for 'out-groups' to affiliate with one another and assert the value of the minority group. Sometimes the values of the 'in-group' are taken on, at least to some extent, by a minority.

In my case I went to Roman Catholic schools and was surrounded by white children. I had the common reaction of wanting to be like them. My awareness of my own group heritage came from my parents who reinforced the idea that I was different. And so I have a 'plural identity'. In a few generations time people with my background may well begin to see themselves as British first and then Sikh, Gujarati etc. just as many people in the USA are firstly American and then Irish or Italian and so on.



...in-group or out-group?

Schools sometimes credit 'in-group' membership to children who are then accorded 'out-group' status when they are not in school. This can involve the type of physical assault that Yvonne Craig mentions. Feelings of group supremacy lead to conflict especially where there is competition for resources. Avoidance of contact and separation rather than integration is a defence against this. The *Oraku* of Japan and the *Harajans* of India are rejected by their respective 'in-groups' who promote their own interests. Anything which disturbs this separation, through greater contact or pressure to integrate, may lead to a change in perception but it can lead to violence. The *Oraku* have responded by setting up trade amongst themselves and marrying their own kind - an example of in-group cohesion.

The emergence of a 'larger-than-life' figure, such as Nelson Mandela, who enables identities to merge always looks promising but can often involve scapegoating. In India in the 1940's various factions tended to merge and scapegoat the British as the blame for every problem.

Now that Mrs Thatcher is no longer Prime Minister, who will take her place for those people who scapegoated her as the cause of many of Britain's social and economic difficulties? And now that there is no communist block...?