

Great Britain is one of the most important European immigration countries – as for number as well as diversity of newcomers who have come in the period after the end of the World War II. Imperial history of Britain, or more precisely, the existence of the Commonwealth (which in fact arose by transformation of empire) played a significant role in this process. Citizens of both old and new commonwealth countries were thanks to membership of their countries in Commonwealth logically a privileged group of applicants for living in Britain. They had very often good connections thanks to, for example, contacts with British colonial administration in their countries and also knowledge of English language was a great advantage for them in compare with other groups of migrants and facilitated them to integrate into the host society. However, it is important to mention that immigration of non-white non-European immigrants was since the beginning seen with suspicion and immigration policy was to a great extent influenced by pragmatism. British politicians had to solve a dilemma: either to implement strict immigration controls on all Commonwealth or accept immigration from new Commonwealth countries as accessory effect of old immigration. They accepted the transformation of United Kingdom into multicultural society not to lose attachment with old dominions.

British immigration policy, as well as integration policy, which is very closely connected with the first one and in fact has to be effectively formulated in compliance with it, developed meaningfully during the decades of the second half of the 20th century. While the first citizenship act which was passed in 1948 was very liberal, the citizenship act from 1981 created three categories of citizenship and only one of them was full-value and for immigrants without British roots almost impossible to achieve it. A possibility to settle in Britain was gradually limited, on the other hand, this limitation was accompanied by carefully formulated integration policy, known as race relations policy. British governments made a heavy effort to integrate ethnic minorities of immigration origin into the British society, to avoid any type of discrimination and to punish violations of these rules and at the same time to enable to minorities to exercise their cultural, ethnic and religious rights.

An important role concerning the raising their legitimate political claims played a self-identification of minority members reflecting their national, ethnic, religious, colour of skin or official status in a new country characteristics. State politics had very strong power in this respect and could effectively manipulated (by supporting one and refusing the other) particular identities of immigrants. British politicians in the frame of race relations policy

preferred and supported categories identifying broader groups of immigrants than these based only on their country of origin. Terms like “blacks” or “Asians” were commonly used and had no negative meaning, on the contrary, it served to fight against discrimination, which was the most visible in areas as employment, housing or education. Although there was almost no legislation on behalf of these people until the mid of 1960s, three important bills were passed in 1965, 1968 and 1976. It is possible to say that governments succeeded in their effort against direct discrimination and tried to fight against the indirect one as much as possible.

When we compare Britain with other significant European immigration country, which had proportionally very similar number of immigrants and their descendants, we can see crucial differences in both, forms of identity as well as policy claims of these groups of people. By the way, it is important to say that these two aspects are connected very closely and the first one has key influence on the second one. Immigrants in Britain identified themselves as blacks or Asians and very often made policy claims reflecting this identity, for example to improve their situation in British society. On the other hand, immigrants in Germany identified themselves primarily as citizens of their country of origin and therefore their policy claims were orientated above all on their “mother” countries. As regards identity based on religion, we can say that in Britain was stronger reflected in public affairs than in Germany, and again it was logic consequence of British quite liberal attitude and German effort to suppress it, especially the Muslim one. When we are thinking about religion identities and their projection into public affairs, we of course have to bear in mind that Islam has special position in this respect and is much more visible than other ones. Questions connected with life of Muslims not only in Britain but in fact in western civilization as a whole became still more frequented and gained new dimension after the September 11 and terrorist attacks against USA committed by Muslim extremists.