Robert Schuman Centre
for Advanced Studies

Ethnic Minorities, Cities, and Institutions:
A Comparison of the Models of Management
of Ethnic Diversity of a French and a British City

Romain Garbaye

RSC No. 2000/13

EUI WORKING PAPERS
Garbayer: *Ethnic Minorities, Cities, and Institutions: A Comparison of the Modes of Management of Ethnic Diversity of a French and a British City*
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Ethnic Minorities, Cities, and Institutions: A Comparison of the Modes of Management of Ethnic Diversity of a French and a British City

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Introduction

In this chapter, I will seek to provide the basis for a more extensive research project aiming at understanding how Western European cities manage ethnic diversity arising from post-war immigration within the limits and resources of the institutional framework in which they operate. It is an attempt to bring the institutional approaches of ethnic conflict explored by Nordlinger (1972), Horowitz (1985), Esman (1973), for instance, to the study of the politics of post-colonial minorities. The main thrust of these authors’ argument has been that the élites of states that are faced with cross-cutting ethnic conflicts are able to maintain the stability of the system by using institutional arrangements as instruments. I seek to transpose this type of model to the urban politics of ethnic minorities in order to provide new understandings of the political processes underlying the responses of cities to ethnic cleavages on their territories, ranging from urban regeneration programmes to anti-discrimination policies, institutionalisation and symbolic recognition of ethnic groups.

I accept that the government of cities in Western Europe are broadly autonomous, in that they have interests which are distinct from the interests of other actors, and particularly from those of local groups and local economic interests, on one side, and from those of the central state, on the other side. Furthermore, I accept that they are able to pursue these interests in relative independence from these actors: without being substantially constrained by local economic and social conditions, and without substantial interference by the national state (King and Gurr, 1987). This does not entail, however, that the central state plays no role in local affairs; on the contrary, much of the discussion below will focus on the patterns of interaction between central and local state. But urban elected governments are considered as independent political actors, their general interest is to stay in power, and, to this end, to maintain law and order and to sustain continued electoral support for themselves.

In this perspective, the presence of a large ethnic minority populations within the territorial boundaries of local government has become a challenge to these objectives. ethnic minorities of immigrant-worker origins have several

* This paper will be published in Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (eds.) (2000), The Challenge of Ethnic Relations Politics in Europe: Comparative and Transnational approaches, Oxford, Oxford University Press. The author is thankful for comments on this paper by David Goldey, Virginie Guiraudon, Randall Hansen, Desmond King, Rémi Lefebvre, Yves Mény, Alan Ware, and Vincent Wright, and gratefully acknowledges the support of the Centre de Recherches Administratives, Politiques, et Sociales of the Université de Lille 2, of the Department of European Studies of Aston University in Birmingham, and of the Philip Williams fund of the Pôle Européen de Sciences Po, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris.
distinctive characteristics. First, they have a very specific relation to space, because they have no claim to sovereignty on a part of the territory of the nation-state in which they live (contrarily to native minorities), and because they are overwhelmingly concentrated in specific areas of cities. Second, they belong most of the time to the working class and vote in majority for left-wing parties, when they vote (Le Lohé in Saggar, 1998, and Kelfaoui, 1996). The conflict is thus not just an ethnic conflict but a combination of class and ethnic conflicts. What is important is that the presence of these minorities, and the reaction of native populations to this presence, does entail fundamental and specific challenges for cities. First, it breeds public disorder, both from second generation immigrants who express frustration at racial discrimination coupled with economic disadvantage, and from violent anti-immigrant movements. Second, it is often correlated with the development of anti-immigrant political movements which directly undermine electoral support for the mainstream political establishment, such as the Front National in France or the strong anti-immigrant movement which developed in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain around Enoch Powell then the National Front. Third, ethnic groups often formulate specific policy demands: recognition of specific cultural needs, official policy against racial discrimination. These demands are often perceived by mainstream politicians, rightly or not, as potentially divisive for their electorate. All of these problems pose a serious threat to the goals of local authorities (and arguably not to those of the central state, (Le Gales, 1995).

I argue that, in order to confront these challenges, local authorities devise “strategies of management of ethnic conflict” (Esman, 1973, p. 52) understood as the processes and practices that the local elected governments of cities use to minimise this challenge. I seek to understand how the strategy of management exercised by cities is influenced and shaped by their institutional framework. The institutional framework is understood here as a set of “formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals and various units of the polity and economy” (Hall, 1986) (Following recent works that apply similar institutional approaches to the study of the politics of ethnic minorities, such as Kastoryano 1996, Brubaker 1992, Favell 1998, Guiraudon in Joppke 1998, and, specifically on cities, Ireland, 1992). I identify three elements that constitute the core of this framework for Western European cities: the relations between central and local government, the organisation of political parties and of the party systems, and the organisation of local government. This institutional framework plays an important role in shaping issues and the circumstances in which these issues appear on local political agendas. It also provides local authorities with a repertoire of instruments to operate different modes negotiation and conflict
resolution. Finally, it also operates as a set of constraints that orients and limits their possibilities for action.

In this chapter, I sketch the outline of an application of this framework to a comparison of the cities of Birmingham in England and Lille in France. Britain and France are both old and centralised nation-states, which are very comparable in terms of post-colonial migration and in terms of social characteristics of ethnic minorities (Lapeyronnie, 1993). Both cities are also similar in many respects. They are both old industrial cities that lie at the heart of large industrial urban areas, the West Midlands and the Nord-Pas de Calais. In both cases, post-colonial ethnic minorities (predominantly Pakistanis, Indians, and West-Indians in Birmingham, and Moroccans and Algerians in Lille) make up around 20% of the total population of the city (21.5% in Birmingham, 15% in Lille). These populations are overwhelmingly working-class populations with very high unemployment rates, especially among the young, with however some variations between groups. In both cities, there is also ample evidence of "ethnic conflict" as defined above. In both cases, ethnic minorities are concentrated in particular areas of the city: the inner city areas in Birmingham, and the southern and peripheral parts of Lille. Within given neighbourhoods in these areas, they often make around half of the population. In both cities, there is clear evidence of widespread racial discrimination against minorities, and widespread awareness of this by the minorities. Both cities have suffered from important disturbances and riots in ethnic neighbourhoods. In both cities, immigrants are a significant electoral force, and are considered as such by the council and the Municipality, though much more so in the former than in the latter. Finally, both cities have been controlled by the mainstream left for a long time (the Labour Party in Birmingham since 1983, and the Socialist Party in Lille, where the Mayor since 1973 has been Pierre Mauroy, who was also François Mitterrand's Prime Minister between 1981 and 1984). In a nutshell, the two cities are interesting for this comparison because they are both controlled by the moderate left and because they have comparable ratios of immigrant/native populations (following the criteria used by Browning, Marshall, and Tabb, 1990).

1 They are less important in Lille mainly because in France, first-generation immigrants as a rule were not granted nationality nor citizenship upon arrival, as was the case in Britain. There are no precise data on the question but one can probably estimate that around half of the North African ethnic minorities (who constitute the overwhelming majority of ethnic minorities in Lille) are legally foreigners, while the other half have French nationality and citizenship because of naturalisation, dual nationality, or, as is most often the case, because they are second-generation individuals born in France.

2 It must also be noted that both cities are in many ways typical of both countries, but that they also have many specific features, especially the long-standing domination of the Socialist Party in Lille.
There are, however, two major differences which have to be taken into account. First, some social and cultural characteristics of the groups considered vary between the two cities: the Pakistanis in Birmingham have a much more traditional and institutionalised blend of Islam than the North Africans in Lille (Joly, 1987, which leads them to formulate more policy demands and to keep a tighter control on their second generation than the North Africans. The socio-economic stratification of the groups in both cities is also different, because there are influential groups of Indian and Pakistani entrepreneurs in Birmingham, who provide material resources for their community, while there are only a few successful Maghrebi entrepreneurs in the Lille area.  

Second, there is a time-period difference: post-war immigration started a decade earlier in Birmingham than in Lille (from the 1950s onwards in Birmingham, and in the 1960s and 1970s in Lille) and the riots in Birmingham occurred suddenly and violently in the mid-1980s (three deaths during the Handsworth riots in 1985), while they took the form of numerous disturbances from the early 1990s onwards in Lille. While this time-lag probably plays a role in explaining the differences exposed below, it is necessary to look for additional factors, because political events related to ethnic minorities in Lille have not emulated those of Birmingham, even allowing for a gap of a decade.

Ethnic Alliance and “Race-relations” in Birmingham, Political Exclusion and Republican Universalism in Lille

What are the strategies for managing ethnic conflict of these two local authorities? There is a broadly similar pattern of management in each city, characterised by a tension between conflicting aims. Both cities are confronted with claims by ethnic groups, consisting in policy demands (funding of specific welfare and cultural needs), and demands for increased representation understood as an increase of the number of ethnic minority individuals serving as local councillors. Both wish to accede to these demands in order to maintain public order and satisfy the ethnic electorate; and both feel that the extent to which they can do this is limited because of the potential negative reactions from the wider electorate. Thus, both situations are characterised by an unstable and permanently renegotiated modus vivendi between the local power and ethnic interests. Both local authorities are also involved in the management of broadly comparable urban regeneration programmes funded by the central government.
designed to fund groups that promote economic development or perform various welfare tasks and services for urban communities (which are in practice very often minority groups, or, as is more commonly the case in France, groups whose members are predominantly from an ethnic minority).

Within this common mode of government, however, a fundamental divergence has been emerging over the last 20 years. During that period, the *modus vivendi* of the Birmingham City Council has been evolving towards a carefully considered alliance between the dominant Labour group and representatives of ethnic minorities. This alliance can be summarised as the following implicit deal: (i) a relative inclusion of ethnic groups in the political process, and (ii) significant concessions to their interests, in exchange for (i) electoral support, or absence of electoral challenge, and (ii) co-operation in maintaining law and order. The Labour group won control of the council in 1983, and it has remained in power since then, presently with a very comfortable majority. Since then, it has increasingly included ethnic minority councillors, including in prominent responsibility posts. The number of councillors who are from an ethnic minority background has jumped from just one to twenty-one, making the Asian population well represented (13.7% of the councillors for 13.5% of the population, and the Black population still under-represented (3.4% of the councillors for 5.9% of the population) (Le Lohé, 1998). They are all members of the ruling Labour group. In parallel to this, the council has continuously defended a pro-active policy in defence of specific ethnic minority interests in terms of racial discrimination and recognition of cultural difference. In 1984, the council created a department devoted to the fight against racial discrimination. After various changes of name and status over the years, it is at present an "Equalities Unit", and also deals with women's rights and handicapped persons. One of the main roles of this structure is to encourage other services of the council (notably education, housing, and personnel) to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination in their sector. This type of anti-discrimination policy is not specific to Birmingham: it is carried out by most Labour authorities throughout Britain. And, compared to many other Labour local authorities, Birmingham is seen as moderate on the issue. Moreover, this policy is advocated to local authorities, though not imposed upon them as an obligation, by the third Race Relations Act passed by a Labour government in 1976. As a direct response to the 1985 Handsworth riots, there has also been a strong tendency to institutionalise ethnic groups and to incorporate them, to some extent, in the policy-making process of the City Council, through the creation of the Standing Consultative Forum, an umbrella organisation that acts as a link between over 300 hundred organisations, grouped in nine ethnic sub-umbrella groups, and the departments of the council. According to most of the representatives of the ethnic groups involved, this
structure has enabled them to obtain some demands, such as sponsoring by the council of the independence days of Pakistan and India or the construction of a community centre for the Bangladeshi community. The city has known only minor disturbances since 1985.

Because of these proactive policies, the Labour majority which controls the council has had to defend its commitment to ethnic minorities during electoral contests against a clearly opposed Conservative local press and against the local Liberal-Democrat and Conservative opposition. Both of these parties propose to abolish the Equalities Unit if they obtain power. The City Council's policy has also greatly encouraged the formulation of specific ethnic demands in terms of racial discrimination and cultural specificity from the part of all ethnic groups in the city, including the Irish, to the point that it now seems to view some of these demands as excessive and tries to play them down.

In Lille, on the contrary, there has been no evolution towards any kind of alliance comparable to the one in Birmingham, but, rather, a continued effort on the part of the Municipality to (i) keep the issue out of the spotlights of electoral politics and (ii) divide and weaken, or fund and control, ethnic groups, in order to neutralise potential electoral competition from them. Neither the ruling Socialist party headed by Mauroy, nor the local mainstream right-wing opposition is keen to push the issue to the forefront of electoral competition. The only ones to do so are the Front National, which reaches its highest scores in the southern part of the city where the population suffers from high unemployment and is ethnically mixed. In the 1989 and 1995 municipal elections, respectively one and two councillors of North African origin were elected, but they have remained powerless and have become unpopular with the North African community of the city. At the time of the 1995 election, the Municipality manipulated leaders of young, second generation immigrant groups to disrupt their plan to challenge electorally the Mayor, who was re-elected. It also puts forward a strong republican-assimilationist discourse, de facto refusing to recognise groups that are explicitly "ethnic" or Muslim. Hence, there is only one oriental-style mosque tolerated by the Municipality in the city and the issue of racial discrimination is completely absent of the political agenda, to the extent that local groups of North-African youths, who feel extremely concerned by the issue, do not bother to mention as one of their demands.

How can one account for these differences between the two cities in terms of institutional variables? There is first a fundamental and obvious factor, which is the difference in citizenship regimes. It is that ethnic minorities have enjoyed automatic voting rights upon entry into Britain and have used it to significant
effect since the mid-1970s, especially at the local level. They have been for two decades now an important electoral support for the Labour party, and have managed to elect several hundred councillors of ethnic minority background on local councils throughout the country. In France, first generation immigrants do not as a rule have the vote and have traditionally played little role in French electoral politics.

However, the explanatory power of this variable must not be overestimated because, since the early 1980s, the second generation in France has displayed some capacity for electoral mobilisation. According to what data is available, it seems that they have quite high registration and turn-out rates, and on the whole vote for the socialists, although this is not an absolute rule and is subject to local exceptions. This second generation electorate, combined with those first generation immigrants who do have a vote (through naturalisation or dual nationality), is considered as an important marginal electoral group for closely contested elections by the socialists in Lille.

Explanations for the variation therefore need to be found with other institutional variables as well. In the rest of this chapter, I will focus on the relations between central and local government, the organisation of political parties, the party systems, and the organisation of local government in the two cities. The argument runs along the following lines: the issue of ethnic minorities has been politicised in a different way in each city. In Birmingham, it is a conventional political issue, which runs along the Labour/Conservative cleavage. In Lille, it de facto opposes both the conventional left and the conventional right to the Front National. Thus, it has been relatively easy for the Birmingham City Council to have an openly pro-minorities attitude. It has needed to have this attitude for two reasons: because the local institutional context has facilitated the emergence of a strong minorities lobby in Birmingham, and because of encouragements coming form the central polity and national political trends. The interest of Lille, on the contrary, has been to play down the issue to avoid confrontation with the Front National, which holds a quasi-monopoly over the issue. In order to effectively play down the issue, the

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4 In Britain, all persons from a post-colonial immigrant background have the vote, and they play an increasingly significant role in elections, especially at the local level, in spite of under-registration and of a lower turn-out rate than Britons of a native, European descent (for a history of the British citizenship regime since 1948, see Layton-Henry, 1992).

5 Though some sections of the “Asian” electorate (i.e. Indians and Pakistanis, mainly), vote Conservative. There are also local exceptions to the rule.

6 For details, see Kelfaoui, 1996.

7 According to reports by members of the local North African community in Lille-Sud who are courted by members of Socialist lists during electoral campaigns; it is very difficult to obtain data on this from the town hall.
Municipality has kept immigrants out of politics. It has been able to do so because the institutional context plays against the mobilisation of ethnic minorities.

I will seek to show in the first section how the difference between the relations between central and local government is a powerful explanatory factor for the difference between the way the issue is shaped in the two cities. In the second section, I examine how political parties also contribute to shaping the issue, importantly by acting as a gateway into the system for minorities in Britain, and thus forcing the local authorities to be responsive to their demands. Finally, the third section proposes directions for exploring the role of the institutional structure of local government in acting both as a set of resources and constraints for local authorities in their efforts to control local communities and as a window of opportunity for immigrants.

I. The Central-local Relation

Both countries are similar in that they have highly centralised systems of government. However, the modes of centralisation are very different. Here, I will focus mainly on two aspects of the central-local relation: the territorial organisation of the welfare state, and the articulation of local and electoral competition. I will argue that these differences are the first step to understanding why the issue of minorities is high on local agendas on Britain, while it is not so prominent in French local arenas. In Birmingham, the ultimate outcome of this agenda-setting process has been the development of the issue of "racial discrimination" and of the issue of the representation of ethnic minorities at the City Council. In Lille, it has been a persistent reluctance on the part of local élites to put any issue related to ethnic minorities on the political agenda.

1. The territorial organisation of the welfare-state

In Britain, local authorities are traditionally seen as service deliverers (as well as institutions of local democracy). In addition, the policy remits of the national and local levels of elected government are tightly separated, very much in a "two layer cake" organisation (Webman, 1981), in spite of the trend of the last 15 years which have seen an increasing number of attributions transferred to unelected bodies, both at national and local levels (the so-called "quangos", Stoker, 1988, p. 52) Local authorities are in charge of public housing (council housing), social services which include many health services, and of the education system (in spite of the 1988 Education Act which nationalised the curriculums: much of the decisions are still taken by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), which in the
case of Birmingham is the City Council). These policy sectors are precisely the ones in which the issue of ethnic minorities is salient. First, because they are of concern to immigrant themselves, because many live in Council Housing (although this is very contrasted: the West-Indians in Birmingham live in Council Housing, but the Asians in Birmingham are mainly home-owners), are often strongly disadvantaged in the system of attribution of housing (Rex et al., 1967, 1979) and often have demands regarding the school curriculums. In Birmingham, there was a long and successful negotiation round in 1983 between the Education Department of the Council and a Muslim Liaison Committee, representing the main Muslim organisations of the city, on the issue of religious education. Second, because ethnic minorities are often perceived by local populations as the cause of the deterioration of these services. Finally, all of these issues appear particularly easily on the agendas of local authorities because post-colonial minorities are very concentrated in specific urban areas (Johnson, 1990).

Because of this, the local arena in Britain has often been the arena where the issue arose first, well before it became a national issue. In fact, groups and institutions in Birmingham were sending signals to the central government as early as the late 1950s (Messina 1989, Hill and Issacharoff, 1971), pointing to the strain put by immigration on the local housing availabilities. The fact that the areas concerned were services also created a climate favourable to the formulation of the issue in terms of improvement of service delivery for minorities.

In France, on the contrary, the Municipality is less a service deliverer to the local community than a means of representation of the local community in front of the central government. In addition, the distribution of competencies between central and local government is more along the lines of a “marble cake” (Webman, 1981). Of the aforementioned policy areas which are of direct interest to migrant workers, only the social services lie within the remit of an elected local authority, the Conseil Général, whose chief executive was the prefect until the decentralisation laws of the early 1980s. The French equivalent of Council Housing is run by semi-public bodies, the Offices des HLM, which are often controlled by the municipalities but which nonetheless maintain some autonomy over the allocation of homes. Thus, in Lille, there is one very large HLM, the SLE, which houses a third of the population of the city and most of its ethnic minorities, and takes all decisions single-handedly. When problems arise between groups of tenants and the HLM, it is dealt with between those two actors, and elected officials intervene in an individual, discreet, and very often clientelist manner. In addition, the central state was directly in charge of the housing of guest workers during the large immigration wave of the 1960s.
through its own organisations, notably the foyers SONACOTRA. Finally, the education system is extremely centralised: local authorities deal almost exclusively with the construction and maintenance of buildings. When an “Affaire du Foulard” (Headscarf Affair) arose in 1995 in a high school in Lille-Sud (a few Muslim female students refused to remove their headscarves, against the rules of the school, Le Monde, 15-4-95), the conflict took place between the Rectorat (the local branch of the Ministry of Education) and Muslim groups.

Thus, municipalities do play an important role for certain issues, but more as brokers between individuals and administrations than as policy-makers. First, local elected officials can play an important role as intermediaries between their constituents and administrations in the resolution of individual pleas and conflicts. This often the case for problems related to housing conditions, employment, and regularisation of residence permits for those who are legally foreigners. Second, the Municipality play a central role in the attribution of urban regeneration grants. In theory, it is jointly managed by the Region, the State via the “sous-préfet à la ville” (sub prefect in charge of urban policy), and the City. But in practice it is the Municipality, which has a real knowledge of the local community, which is able to push its favoured candidates. In addition, mayors deliver construction permits, and they have long resisted the construction of outwardly oriental mosques, and, in all cases, they have to be courted by Muslim groups who wish to build religious centres.

Hence, the dominant picture in France is that of a blurred division of policy remits, with the issue of ethnic minorities cutting across different arenas. The main service providers, the education system and the social housing services, are out of the realm of representational politics. At the same time, elected officials may play a role on an individual basis as brokers between individual and administration. As a result, the French municipalities are not regarded as major arenas for political mobilisation from minorities. In Britain, on the contrary, it is clear that the main local political actor, the local council, plays a major role as a provider of services that are of central interests to ethnic minorities, and thus is the focus of much attention and collective mobilisation from ethnic minorities.

2. The articulation of local and national electoral competition

The different organisation of local and national electoral competition is also a basic factor, along with the differences in the distribution of policy remits which I have just dealt with. In Britain, the political élites of each level of government are tightly separated from each other. Local politicians seldom attempt national careers. Conversely, local politics are less important preoccupations for national
politicians than in the case of France. This is due to the fact that the most important prerequisite to get elected as member of parliament is to be selected by a local branch of one’s party. In Birmingham, several constituencies have had prominent MPs, such as Roy Hattersley. Although he was concerned with issues of interest to his constituents (which included the race and immigration issue), he has never had to manage it as a local politicians.

On the contrary, in France, affiliation to a party is indeed an important factor for the success of a national career, but at least as important is the local notoriety and popularity of a candidate, which can typically be attained through the exercise of local mandates, such as a seat at the conseil général or, most importantly, as mayor of a large commune (Mabileau, 1994). In fact, a candidate will often receive the support of both the local and national party, if they perceive him as popular in the constituency. Thus, French politics are mainly about building a local power base by controlling or being prominent in a Municipality or a conseil général, (second lowest tier of elected government after the Municipality, corresponding to the territory of the département) in order to be able to compete for national parliamentary elections. Much of a politician’s support is often derived from his ability to lobby for his constituents at the national level. This is made possible by the cumul des mandats, whereby the same person can cumulate local and national mandates. As a result, local politicians are often national politicians, and it is certainly the case of Lille’s mayor Pierre Mauroy, who is a historic figure of the Mitterrand era.

3. The Issue of Ethnic Minorities as it is Shaped by the Relation between the Two Levels of Government

The two sets of differences outlined above have two consequences. First, the issue of ethnic minorities has been more salient in British local political arenas than in French ones from the start (the late 1950s in Britain, the 1960s in France), and it was always more likely to be understood as a problem of local and material allocation of resources in Britain. Second, when it became a national issue in Britain, national élites were able to depoliticise it nationally by making it predominantly a local issue.

The elements mentioned above make it very easy for national élites to get rid of an issue by “sending it down to the local level”, that is, by making it a policy issue for local authorities, who then have to deal with it, while Westminster can ignore it. This is precisely what British national élites have done with the issue of immigration and ethnic minorities since the mid-1960s, at times more than others, but always with great success. This has had two consequences. First, the issue has become even more salient at the local level,
while it became much less so at the national level, with however some variations
in time. Second, this shift of level has precipitated a shift from a formulation in
terms of immigration to a formulation in terms of racial discrimination and of
relations between communities.

Racial riots in 1958 and anti-immigrant tendencies in the electorate in the
early 1960s prompted the two main party élites in London to agree tacitly on a
common policy line in order to remove the issue out of electoral competition,
and thus limit the potential damage to their domination of the political system.
This consensual policy consisted in combining a gradual restriction of
immigration from former colonies with policies designed to facilitate
"harmonious relations between communities" and a legislative framework to
fight against racial discrimination (researched in detail by Katznelson, 1973,
inspiration for this policy was a group of liberal lawyers and black activists who
sought to draw lessons from American policies (Bleich, 1997). It also triggered
the first of the various urban regeneration programmes funded by the central
government that have taken place since then (summarised by Le Gales, 1993).

A major aspect of these policies have been to devolve the responsibility
for the development of the "harmonious relations between communities" to local
un-elected bodies, the Community Relations Councils. The second Wilson
government passed a provision ("section 11", as it has been known since then)
in the 1966 Local Government Act to make extra funds available for Local
Authorities with a certain percentage of ethnic minorities within their
boundaries. Then, in 1976, the third Race Relations Act (the two first ones
dating back to 1965 and 1968), passed again by a Labour government with no
real opposition from the Conservative opposition, explicitly gave to local
councils the responsibility for "equality of opportunities" and "good relations
between people of different races". Because of this, it has been argued
convincingly that a major aspect of this continued consensual policy has been to
send the issue down to "low politics" in order to protect the national level from
its destabilising effects (see Saggar, 1991, Messina, 1989, but especially Bulpitt,
1986). According to Bulpitt, this has continued unchanged during the 1980s, as
an exception to the Thatcher governments' policies of reduction of the remit of
local government, because it had proved an efficient strategy on that particular
issue of immigration and race. This is one of the reasons why the Thatcher
governments did little to prevent radical Labour local authorities from
sponsoring ethnic groups and starting aggressive anti-racist and anti-
discrimination policies. Another reason why the issue remained high on the
agenda of local authorities is that the Labour/Conservative cleavage coincided
with the local/central cleavage during the 1980s and until the 1997 general
election, making local authorities the stronghold of race activists in front of a passive Conservative government. The Birmingham City Council was directly inspired by the example of radical cities such as the Greater London Council when it set up its first Committee on Racial discrimination in 1983.

This policy of liberal consensus coupled with the devolution of the issue to the local level has had another far reaching consequence: it has proved to be very efficient in wiping out extreme anti-immigrant votes, both nationally and electorally. On the whole, the Conservatives steered away from Enoch Powell (He was expelled from the shadow cabinet after his rivers of blood speech in 1968).

In France, there have also been attempts by the state to localise the implementation of national policies in the early 1980s (Weil’s Le Local Tous Azimuths, 1991), and to engage in contractual policies with regions and cities to revitalise marginalised neighbourhoods which in effect contain a high proportion of immigrants and to prevent violence from erupting again, as it did in suburbs of Lyon and Paris in 1981. In the 1970s, several communist municipalities outside Paris had overtly expressed concern about problems entailed by immigrant populations on their territory, and sometimes surfed on anti-immigrant feeling among their electorate (Schain, 1993). However, since the 1983-1984 period, and spite of these elements, the two levels of debate, local and national, have clearly been interlocked, and the formulation of the issue at the local level has followed the formulation of the issue in the national polity. The French national élite, confronted problem from the 1980s on with a similar as the British élite in the 1960s (rising anti-immigrant vote), also depoliticised the issue in the sense that they perpetuated a tacit agreement over what policy should be implemented (attribution of a unique Carte de Sejour of 10 years for all immigrants in 1984 coupled with the closing of the borders) which had slowly emerged from policy experimentations and errors in the 1970s. However, the issue was not depoliticised in the sense that it was removed from the electoral debate, as has been the case in Britain (Weil, 1991, chap 7, pp. 287-314). Both the Socialists and the Right-wing parties attempted to play down the issue (for instance, it was not one of the main issues of the 1986 parliamentary elections), but it kept on re-appearing in a prominent place on the national political agenda, because of the rapid rise of the Front National’s electoral might from 1983 onwards. (Schain, 1993). Indeed, the issue has mostly been shaped by the Front National since then. Significantly, the Socialist Party has since then completely dropped its earlier plans to grant voting rights for all foreigners in local elections. This influenced the way the issue was constructed at the local level in three ways. First, the central élite never really managed to avoid the issue, and thus did not try to send it down to another level of
government. Second, because of the inter-relatedness of the two levels of government, the continued politicisation of the issue at the national level entailed a continued politicisation in electoral elections. Third, the issue at the local level has been formulated in the same way that it has been formulated at the national level, namely in terms of immigration flows, and capacity of the country to absorb and incorporate extra-European immigrants. As at the national level, the agenda has been heavily influenced by the *Front National*, which reaches very high scores in all local elections, as it does in national elections. Thus, in contrast to what happened in Britain, the debate at both levels of French politics has considered immigrants as objects of policy (are there too many? Is it possible to assimilate them and how should one go about assimilating them?), instead of citizens/consumers of policy (anti-discrimination policy, relations between communities) (Crowley, 1993, pp. 627-628). As a result, there has been a continuing tendency in France to keep the immigrants out of politics.

II. Political Parties and the Local Politics of Minorities

The attitude of the parties towards the issue of post-colonial minorities, and the extent to which the parties can impose their attitude on the local authorities that they control, plays an important role in setting the agenda of the latter. In this respect they play an important part in the construction of the issue at the local level which I have dealt with above. They are an especially relevant factor in the case of the issue of ethnic minorities because they can be a crucial springboard for the demand of increased representation on the part of the minorities.

1. Party Organisation and Penetration by Minorities

Both the Labour Party in Britain and the Socialist Party in France have been deeply ambivalent regarding the issue of minorities, and particularly regarding their willingness to incorporate them. But, on the whole, they are also the ones which have been the most open in each country to the demands of ethnic movements.

However, the Labour party has been much more persistently so than the *Socialist Party*, mostly for reasons related to the differences in the modes of organisation of the two parties. This can be linked to the fact that, although the Labour Party is by no means a mass party with high membership and a strong organisation (Ware, 1996 p. 116-9), it has incorporated ethnic minorities demands at the grass-roots level for the last twenty years. Black and Asian activist movements have worked with the Labour party since the mid-1970s. From the early 1980s onwards, they have joined the Labour party in large
numbers, especially in cities like Birmingham. Within the party, they have been confronted with important racial discrimination on the part of established circles of white local élites. The latter have often sponsored emerging local black figures in order to obtain the support of their community, arguably reproducing patterns of colonial rule; manoeuvring to give them as little responsibilities as possible in exchange for their support. In particular, they have done this through the manipulation of the complex procedures of designation of the party candidates for local and national elections (for instance, the episode in the Birmingham constituency of Sparkbrook observed by Back and Solomos, 1995). However, what I wish to argue here is that it is precisely the existence of these formal procedures that has ultimately enabled minorities to get a foot in the door, to get elected in increasing numbers, and to play significant role in local party politics. Most visibly, the Pakistani communities have been able to take control of several inner city party organisations during the 1990s because the procedures for the designation of candidates for local elections boil down to giving the choice to the members of the ward party, and because there are procedures of appeal to higher levels of the party in case of conflict over the choice of candidates (such conflicts are frequent in wards which have minorities activists). More generally, there have been possibilities for discussion of the issue in the Labour party.

First, ethnic minorities started mobilising intensively at a time, the late 1970s and early 1980s, when leaders of the local right wing of the Labour party such as Roy Jenkins and Roy Hattersley sought to build strong support among local Black community leaders because they were facing increasing competition from the left of the party. (Back and Solomos, 1995). At the beginning, this only brought support to “community leaders” chosen for their capacity to supply electoral support without demanding changes in policy. However, this situation evolved rapidly during the 1980s with the emergence of a more ideological generation of black and sympathetic white, left-wing activists who managed to seize control of many ward party organisations from the right wing. This was helped by the fact that many Black and Asian activists had a strong left-wing culture, very often inspired by the political culture of their home countries or of their diasporas (Marxist Unionism with the influential Indian Workers’ Association, the American politics of Black emancipation among African-Caribbean activists, Shukra, 1998) which gave them an ideological proximity with the Labour party. This, together with the liberality of the citizenship regime, whereby all immigrants all had full voting rights upon entry in Britain, enabled minority populations at the local level to become a constituency with real electoral leverage and specific policy demands focused on racial discrimination and cultural recognition.
This close association between the Labour party and ethnic minorities' activists and politicians is predominantly a local phenomenon. In addition, it contrasts with the situation in the Conservative party, where there are few representatives of minorities. This is correlated with the left/right polarisation of the issue at the city level.

By contrast, French political parties, and this is especially true of the Socialist Party, have traditionally had low level of organisation and institutionalisation; with the possible exception of the Communist Party, they were all originally federations of local electoral groups rather than strong centralised and tightly organised structures seeking to build support among the population (Ware, 112-114). Hence, in the Socialist Party, the procedure for the choice of candidates at local elections is hardly formalised, gives little power to the grass-roots membership, and the choice is usually consensually made in favour of the local notable or incumbent (Sawicki, 1992, pp. 6-11). This is typically the case in Mauroy’s Lille. This absence of institutionalised procedures for the designation of candidates acts as a resource for established, white native members who are often hostile to the presence of ethnic minorities or to their election to any post of responsibility within the party. Occasionally, there will be an outcry and a secrétaire de section (branch secretary) has to expel one or two members of the section who have made racist comments to a new North African member. But, most of the time, North African potential members are discouraged at the outset.

This defiance is also strongly inspired by sorry memories of earlier cooperation of North African activists with the party that ended badly. There was a very strong wave of second generation North African mobilisation in the early 1980s in France, which culminated in a demonstration of about 100 000 people in Paris in the autumn of 1983, protesting against racist violence by the police and demanding alternative modes of citizenship for immigrants. At that stage, the movement came under the influence of the Socialist Party, and in particular by supporters of the then president Mitterrand, who hoped to tap in on the electoral support of the young second generation immigrants. This led to the creation of SOS Racisme in 1985, followed a little later by France Plus, a rival organisation sponsored by other groups within the party. By the end of the decade, however, the decision was made by those same supporters of Mitterrand to withdraw support, and the whole movement collapsed (Bouamama, 1994). This was an illustration of the difficulty for new social movements to make

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8 The major difference between the two was that SOS Racisme advocated the Droit à la Différence, a French version of cultural pluralism, while France Plus focused on campaigning for the participation of second generation immigrants in electoral politics.
themselves heard in the French political system without the support of one of the major parties (Duyvendak, 1995).

In addition, both of these movements had been mainly a national, media-driven movement, and dramatically failed to build permanent local support among urban North African communities (Poinsot, 1993). In Lille, local North African and left-wing activists who were part of this movement are now hostile to the Municipality and are toying with the idea of forming an ethnic list for the next elections.

2. Relation between Party and Local Authority

In Britain, local politics have been increasingly politicised since the 1950s, with the political parties within the Councils becoming the main arenas for decision making. In the case of labour-held authorities such as Birmingham, this is reinforced by the traditional mode of relation between the party and councils, inherited from the Fabian conception of social reform. In this model, local councils are seen as instruments in the hands of the party to implement policy goals, notably to develop public services and welfare (Gyford and James, 1983). This is still made possible by the fact that party groups are the effective holders of power within councils. Thus, in Birmingham, the local party has been markedly more influential on the attitude of the Council than in Lille. And, because the party was influenced by the presence of ethnic minorities members within its ranks, it pushed for the council to start anti-discrimination policies. In 1983, under the influence of mounting black mobilisation, the District party organisation produced a policy document entitled “Birmingham Labour Party and Ethnic Minorities in Birmingham: Labour Party Politics and Multi-Ethnic Society in Modern Birmingham” (Back/Solomos, 1995, p. 177). The then moderate Labour leadership of the Council had little choice but to follow these recommendations, although it was initially very reluctant to, because of a perceived hostility of the traditional white and blue collar working class vote. The local party has thus been an important factor in ensuring the development of anti-discrimination policy in Birmingham.

In the North of France, there has also been a long history of attempts by the Socialist Party to influence municipal policies (the Socialisme Municipal), of which Lille is an example. However, the party has not been able to influence the municipalities; on the contrary, it is the power structure of councils that have in the end shaped the local organisation of the parties (Lefebvre, 1999). In Lille, there is a structure, called the Comité de Ville, which is made of representatives of local sections, and is theoretically in charge of defining the party’s policy recommendations for the city, and of selecting the leader of the list for the
municipal election. In short, it has one fundamental role, which is of choosing the next mayor of the city. But, the mayor Pierre Mauroy has been so dominant since his first election to the job in 1973 that this choice is mainly formal. Moreover, because of the way in which the issue of minorities is constructed, the party’s main preoccupation regarding ethnic conflict is mainly to try and avoid mentioning any issue connected with immigration. This would probably highlight popular resentment against national economic and immigration policies in general (which the socialist party is largely viewed as responsible for), and comfort the position of total opposition and exclusion of immigrants of the Front National. Significantly, the Comité de Ville has a policy workshop on “how to fight against the Front National”, and none about immigration or ethnic minorities. This inertia on the part of the socialist party has a profound impact on the politics of the city; in the neighbouring town of Roubaix, where all political parties are weak, local ethnic groups manage to achieve high visibility in city politics⁹.

To sum up the difference, one could say that the Labour party regards the Birmingham City Council more as a means to implement policy change than does the Socialist Party in Lille. Conversely, the latter sees the Municipality more as a power-base than does the Labour party. This difference, combined with the might of the Front National in French local politics, helps explain why the Birmingham City Council is more prone to undertake policies in favour of ethnic minorities.

III. National Styles of Local Government and the Inclusion or Exclusion of Minorities in City Politics

The basic characteristics of the organisation of local government in each country have a very different impact on the strategies of the councils on two ways. Directly, because it gives them more or fewer instruments to reach their goals. Indirectly, because it gives immigrant groups more or fewer resources to push their demands and to get some of their representatives elected or accepted as legitimate interlocutors, who can then efficiently raise issues on the council’s agenda. In Birmingham, the overall result is that the organisation of local government adds to the pressure on the Council to have a favourable attitude towards minorities. In Lille, it gives the Council instruments to pursue its policy of playing down the issue, by enabling it to keep minorities out of the arena of electoral politics.

⁹ Though this is also due to the fact that the proportion of north africans in Roubaix is exceptionally high for a city of that size (100 000), with an estimated 50%, which is around three times that of Lille and around two and a half time that of Birmingham.
The basic unit of French elected government concentrates all the most intense ingredients of majoritarian democracy, marginalising minorities (Mabileau, 1994, pp. 119-34); this is much less the case in Britain. Second, the modes of local organisation of national urban policy programmes tend to institutionalise local community groups in Birmingham, while they ignore them in Lille. This encourages the formulation of collective claims around cultural and discrimination issues in Birmingham, while it encourages the perpetuation of clientelism as the only mode of relation between ethnic minorities and the council in Lille.

1. Local Representative Government and the Inclusion or Exclusion of Ethnic Minorities

A fundamental difference between the two cities is that the elected government of Birmingham, the Birmingham City Council, covers a much larger area and population than that of the Municipality of Lille. There are nearly 1 million inhabitants in Birmingham, against only 170,000 in Lille, although the latter lies at the centre of a metropolitan area of 1.2 million people. This is due to the extreme politico-institutional fragmentation of local authorities in France, which is especially strong in the Lille metropolitan area. The latter is divided into more than 80 communes, with only the three largest ones, Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, topping 100,000 people. This has a profound impact on the difference between the two styles of local politics because it creates a multitude of small political arenas in France, and a single large one in Birmingham. In the Lille area, the issue of ethnic minorities is diluted among the several political arenas. For instance, because of the very high percentage of North Africans and the weakness of traditional parties in Roubaix, issues related to the North African minority are very salient there and North African leaders of neighbourhood associations manage to exert leverage on city politics there and to have some substantial representation. But, because of the political fragmentation of the area, this does not have any impact on the politics of Lille. In fact, minority organisations in Roubaix perceive themselves as eminently "Roubaisiennes", in the same way that the minority organisations in Lille perceive themselves as "Lilloises", and there no communication between the two. There is also some degree of identification of minority groups to their ward or to their area in Birmingham, but this does not result in a tight separation of issues as it does in the Lille area, because the Birmingham City Council is the only elected assembly that deals with all these wards or areas.

This difference also entails size effects. The Birmingham City Council has a very large bureaucratic organisation which delivers services on a large scale. This in itself acts in favour of the rationalisation of service delivery, of which
setting targets in terms of racial equality is a part. In addition, the difference in the size of the political arenas also entails a difference in the size of local groups, which tend to be larger in Birmingham than in Lille, and reach the critical mass to be credible in front of the council or the European Social Fund (ESF) to run by themselves training and employment programmes.

The way electoral territories are organised also have far-reaching consequences. In Birmingham, the city is divided into 39 wards of around 20,000 inhabitants on average, which each elect one councillor every year, except every fourth year which remains “fallow”. Because of this the inner city wards, where there are high concentrations of populations of ethnic minority background, often manage to elect ethnic minority councillors, especially those with high concentrations of Pakistani voters, such as Small Heath, Nechells, or Sparkhill. In Lille, the whole territory of the city acts as one single constituency for the municipal elections, thereby diluting the potential electoral power of North Africans. These reach concentrations of around 40% in neighbourhoods in the south of the city such as Lille-Sud Nouveau and Faubourg de Béthune and could therefore exert very significant leverage in a different system.

The structure of local government itself also plays a role. In France, the Municipality is by far the most important level of local government, and the idea of representation of the local community lies at its very heart. It is closely linked with the notion that the municipalities constitute the fundamental unit of the French representational system. Indeed, it is the only institution that has survived virtually unchanged since the revolution. It is seen as making local democracy possible, and as a very efficient way to stabilise the whole French political system, in the face of persistent disorder at the centre (Ashford, 1982, Mabileau, 1994). It has been able to play this role because of the ease with which local élites can access the central, governmental decision making processes, particularly because of the cumul des mandats system, mentioned above. Because of this, the electoral politics of the municipalities are considered by voters and politicians alike as the place of representation, and power, par excellence (Cordeiro, 1996). For the insider, it is a gateway to considerable influence; equally important, it leaves outsiders with few resources. A closer look at its organisation reveals that it concentrates power in the hands of a few leaders, essentially the mayor and his aides, and leaves out many actors, especially minority groups. It is also a symbolic stake for outsider groups, as getting elected as a conseiller municipal means entering the world of representational politics, as opposed to community and associational politics, in which ethnic minorities are usually confined (Cordeiro, 1996).
The concentration of power in the hands of the mayor is so intense that the system has sometimes been dubbed a "presidential system" (Mény, 1995; Dion, 1986). Elections take place every 6 years, with traditionally a relatively high turnout, on a single-constituency, proportional list basis. The Conseil Municipal, roughly the equivalent of the legislative branch of the Municipality, is always made up of at least 50% of members from the majority list (the rest of the seat being attributed proportionally). The mayor, usually the leader of the leading list, is elected on the first meeting of the newly elected council. Once elected, he becomes both the representative of the state in the city and the executive branch of the Municipality for the next 6 years. Important decisions and the budget are voted by the council, but in practice the latter has only a role of approbation of the mayor's decisions, thanks to the solid and stable majorities provided by the electoral system. He usually runs the city with the help of a cabinet of advisors, in the case of large cities. Mayors also delegate responsibilities to Adjoints, (i.e. prominent members of the Conseil Municipal who were elected on his list; but, precisely, these powers are only délégations and can be withdrawn at will by the Mayor in case of political disagreement, who thus keeps a very tight political control on the city. The administration is run by a secrétaire général (the equivalent of a chief executive in Britain), who usually works closely with the mayor and is associated with political decisions.

These basic characteristics have several far reaching consequences. First, the long intervals between elections mean that, for the first three years, the Mayor has little interest in courting any interests other than those of his main constituency (in Lille, the white left-wing middle class and working class). Second, because there is virtually only one person with palpable power in the whole system, it is completely impossible, and unnecessary, to give some power to a representative of a group or minority of any kind. This is particularly problematic for minorities, because, as I have mentioned, one of their main goals is precisely political and institutional representation. It is extremely difficult to give a key role to a conseiller from a minority background (or to any outsider, for that matter), supposing one wants to. The few délégations go to senior politicians which are very close to the mayor, and among which are usually the candidates for his succession. Thus, the three conseillers municipaux of Maghrebi origin in Lille (out of 56) are held by everyone, including themselves, to be "tokens" given by the Mayor to the Maghrebi electorate when he assembled his list. Consequently, they are of little use at the Mairie (as indeed are most other conseillers), and are seen as "traitors" by many young members of their community. As a result they lose all political influence. This also tended to be often the case in Birmingham when the first minority councillors started getting elected, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it has
largely changed since then, and their full incorporation in the decision making processes of the City Council is now widely acknowledged.

By contrast, the organisation of local political institutions in Britain offer many more opportunities for minorities attempting to participate and to formulate policy demands. First, local elections take place every year (except every fourth year) which provides quantity of opportunities for outsiders to run for election. In addition, the local elections work with a first past the post system, which gives a decisive advantage to the majority group within one given ward, which in the inner city wards happen to be the ethnic “minorities”.

In addition, the organisation of the council itself makes it comparatively accessible for small outsider groups of councillors to participate fully in the decision-making process once they are elected. It can be broadly likened to a small “parliamentary system”: decisions are taken by various committees, organised around policy sectors (housing, personnel, education, etc) and made up of a mix of councillors reflecting the overall proportion of the different parties in the council. In Birmingham, the Labour group has a clear majority and thus controls all the committees. Within the party, however, there are cleavages along policy issues. In contrast to the French system, the leading councillors do not dominate the council single-handedly; it is more often than not the ruling party as a whole that takes important decisions (Stoker, 1988, p. 89). The policy of the council is thus determined by a game of fluid alliances between the leadership (elected by the group) and sub-groups. As a result, all councillors within a group have to be taken into account, and, even if a certain number of backbenchers will never mount significant opposition to the leadership, there are certain individual or groups which manage to impact on the leadership. In Birmingham, one of the longest serving Labour African Caribbean councillors has co-operated with the leadership for the past 15 years while always pushing for more radical and more extensive anti-discriminatory policies. In this way, he has been instrumental in shaping the council’s policy. A young Asian councillor has recently been elected president of the Committee of the NEC (National Exhibition Centre), a highly important showcase for the economic development of the city. The twenty-one councillors of ethnic background (out of a total of 117) are always unanimous in supporting the anti-discriminatory policies, although they often have diverging positions on other issues.
2. The Control of the Local Community

In both cities, clientelism and patronage are prominent modes of relation between the council and the local ethnic minority groups, but this is especially the case in Lille, while there has been some recognition of ethnic groups has taken place in Birmingham. I argue that this is due to the traditional importance of municipal clientelism in Lille and to the different organisation and content of French and British urban regeneration programmes.

Local political actors in France who are not part of the representational system are particularly deprived of access to political power, while being increasingly dependent on elected bodies, and especially the Municipality for funding (Mabileau, 1994, pp. 135-48). The local community in France is organised overwhelmingly along the lines of a specific legal framework, the association as defined by the 1901 law on associations. This is broadly comparable to a charity in Britain: a non-profit organisation dedicated to activities of general interest. For the last twenty years, there has been a trend towards the strengthening of the control of associations by the municipalities, by controlling their source of funding. This is especially true in Lille, because of the long tradition of control of neighbourhood associations (or sports clubs, brass bands, etc.) and clientelism between individual inhabitants of the city and adjoints of the mayor which characterises the socialist Municipality; other French cities often exercise less control. This is particularly visible in deprived areas of the city, where the concentration of populations of North African background is the highest. This mode of government has been able to perpetuate itself in the poor neighbourhoods of Lille in spite of a clear decline since the 1970s which was due for a large part to the sociological transformations of the population of the city chiefly characterised by the decline of the working class population, which used to be the privileged clientèle of the Municipality. What enabled to city to face these transformations was the apparition around the same period, the late 1970s, of nationally funded urban regeneration programmes, the Politique de la Ville (Lojkine et al, 1978). The way these are organised in France reinforce the capacity of the Municipality for local control because it institutionalises the Municipality as the distributor of grants for the local groups. The city of Lille has been particularly efficient in exploiting these programmes because it has integrated them to an internal reorganisation scheme started in 1977 which divides the city in neighbourhoods and attributes a permanent team of city officers and adjoints (close to the mayor), the commissions de quartier; for each of these neighbourhoods, in charge of monitoring the allocation of grants on their territory.
Most ethnic groups in Lille are associations, be it cultural or neighbourhood associations, tenant groups, or sports clubs, for the younger, second generation. Many of these are funded jointly by the FAS (Fonds d'Action Sociale) and by the Municipality. Moreover, the groups of young, second generation immigrants are very often extremely dependent on the town hall, because, as mentioned earlier, it is the latter which in effect control the attribution of urban programmes, and second generation groups often within the remit of urban regeneration. In addition, the Municipality has considerable leverage against young community leaders because it deals with local sporting equipments, which are a hot issue in Lille-Sud, and because it can occasionally provide jobs at the council or other institutions to a mostly unemployed second generation immigrant population.

The Politique de la Ville thus acts as a convenient instrument reinforcing other instruments of control. It helps to ensure that local North African leaders, who are very influential among their peers in their respective neighbourhoods, contribute to maintaining law and order in the city. The Achilles heel of this form of patronage is that funding sports and providing occasional jobs is all the Municipality can give. In addition, it only caters to bottom-line and short-term demands. As a result, the Municipality is caught in a perverse cycle whereby it entices clientelist demands that can only be addressed by giving more. Attempts to decrease funds by the council are usually met with the burning down of sporting equipments and of the offices of social workers by local youths, which has happened several times in the last decade, and which is precisely the opposite of the intended goal. In spite of this, there has been some scaling down of the funds allocated since the beginning of the decade, with much apprehension of possible violent reactions.

It is also an asset to divide and rule over groups which break out of the clientelist cycle and try to oppose to the council. When a group of young leaders, disgruntled because they had obtained less funding for their associations than previously, decided to join forces with controversial, older North African leaders who had been disappointed by the Socialist Party in the 1980s to form a 100% North-African list for the 1995 municipal elections, the Municipality perceived this as a threat to the re-election of the mayor, who was also being challenged by a serious candidate from the Right (Alex Turk). In this context ethnic minorities are perceived as an important marginal electorate in the context of a closely contested election. One of the leaders of the list was then offered a place, in eligible position, on the socialist list, together with a job at Euralille, the new business centre which was then being built on the site of the new Eurostar station.
The present relationship between the Municipality and local groups is thus a combination of clientelism and division and exclusion of groups of young North Africans from local politics. The Municipality is therefore able to officially ignore the issue of ethnic minorities, and to put forward a republican-assimilationist discourse which presents ethnic issues as illegitimate, which fits well with its traditional socialist culture.

In Birmingham, traditional patterns of patronage have been functioning in similar ways (Back and Solomos, 1995). However, other modes of relation between the council and local groups have also appeared since the mid-1980s. First, the Handsworth riots of 1985, which were widely pictured in the national media as expressions of racial hatred against whites or between blacks and Asians (although their real motives had probably more to do with frustration in the face of cumulative economic and social disadvantage) shocked the city-council and prompted a strong policy reaction in the form of the creation of a Standing Consultative Forum (SCF), an umbrella organisation representatives of ethnic groups. This has allowed these groups to gain some recognition and some access to the decision-makers of the council.

Second, the various urban regeneration programmes that have followed each other since the early 1980s have less acted as instrument of control of the community in the hands of the council than in French cities. As stated by Le Gales, it has not been a fundamental interest of the British state, nor of the French state, to ensure that these programmes are efficient in reaching their goals. In the British case, however, the Thatcher governments have striven to reduce the role of local councils during the 1980s. They have done so by increasingly fragmenting the local British system, by transferring competencies from elected authorities to quasi-administrative bodies (“quangos”). In the field of urban regeneration, the attacks by central government on local authorities since the early 1980s have considerably limited the ability of the latter to control urban regeneration programmes. Since 1981, “it has been a pre-requisite of inner-city programme approval that local authorities should have consulted the private sector.” (Stoker, 1988, p. 114). In addition, many programmes are increasingly managed by non-elected institutions. In this way, power is dispersed among many different players. There is therefore a complex game for the control of financial resources by different local institutions trying to push their own interest. Elected local governments are only one type of actor among others, even if they do remain the most prominent ones. This attitude has softened since the launch of City Challenges programmes in 1991, which came back to a more traditional approach, but the latest developments have confirmed that the margin for action of local authorities remains clearly reduced. Since most of the governmental urban regeneration grants have been regrouped into
the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) in 1994, funds have been attributed to local authorities on a competitive basis, forcing councils who apply to present programmes that fit as much as possible with the government’s criteria of efficiency (though once the money has been attributed, it is still managed by the councils).

These developments have made the Birmingham City Council an important provider of funds, while relatively limiting its range for action. First, it has to work increasingly in partnerships with other institutions, such as the Solihull and Birmingham Technology and Enterprise Board (TEC), which represents business interests, and the Health Authority. Second, in order to meet the SRB criteria, the Council has increasingly co-operated with groups from the voluntary sector which are often of ethnic minority background. For instance, one of the major policies of the Economic Development Department (EDD) is the creation of a network of 25 “Employment Resources Centres” scattered around the city, based in the premises of community organisations which can often be ethnic organisations such as the Islamic Resource Centre in Balsall Heath, or a Sikh temple in Handsworth. Through the institutionalisation of these structured, long-lasting groups, the council delegates the management of the problem of youth to the community itself, while the Municipality in Lille places itself on the frontline.

Finally, the emergence of the European Social Fund (ESF) as a major source of funding for local community groups is very visible, with the creation of URBAN regeneration programmes. In order to maintain its ability to bid successfully for these European grants which it perceives as probably diminishing in the near future, the Council has adopted a “Community Economic Development Framework” which proposes to rationalise its criteria of attribution of grants and encourage the participation of local groups in the elaboration of these criteria. It is hard to foresee the effects of this but it does place new constraints on the use of funds by city officers and councillors. In Lille, the ESF is not involved directly, though it is in neighbouring areas (Roubaix and Tourcoing).

3. The Effect of the Councils’ Policies on the Formulation of Claims by Local Ethnic Groups

The combination of clientelism, opposition to the emergence of strong local groups, and assimilationist discourse practised by the Municipality in Lille prevents specifically ethnic demands from emerging. It encourages the formulation of individual and limited demands about housing and employment, which the few existing youth organisations do proficiently, while strongly
discouraging the generalisation of such claims in terms of a collective problem, which would then lead to putting the issue of racial discrimination or recognition of racial difference on the agenda. Hence, although the perception of racial disadvantage is widely spread across the members of local community groups, the demand is never formulated, except in punctual negotiations with an elected official for the employment of one youth or another at the Mairie or at the Communauté Urbaine. In addition, the only custom built mosque of the city, in Lille-Sud, is only tolerated by the City Council, which does not grant it any funds nor include it in any urban regeneration programme. This is in spite of the fact that it is the largest mosque in the Lille area (2000 places) and that it is clearly the largest and most institutionalised organisation in this part of the city. This encourages the tendency to isolation of the Imam, who has a mixed discourse about his relation with the council and French institutions in general, and who views the meetings of the commision de quartier as useless.

In Birmingham, the creation of the Standing Consultative Forum (SCF) after the 1985 riots has clearly legitimised claims for the recognition of ethnic difference. As a result, an increasing number of groups have demanded to be recognised as ethnic minorities, like for instance Chinese (around 3000 people, only 0.3% of the total population of the city), and most lately the Irish and the Yemeni. However, what was originally a strategy to appease claims is now perceived as a problem by the council because it has created inter-ethnic competition (the African-Carribean Community and the Pakistanis accuse each other of getting more favourable treatment by the Council) and accusations of corruption on all sides. As a result it is now disbanding the SCF and trying to promote a new discourse centred on the notion of trans-community issues (better health, employment and housing policies for everyone, regardless of communities). The other fundamental concession made by the council to minority interests, anti-discrimination policies, has on the contrary gained widespread currency and is commonly advocated in all local institutions.

Variables intrinsic to the communities also play a role in shaping claims. In Britain, ethnic groups are more likely to be recognised as interlocutors than their French counterparts, because they have more financial and organisational resources from within their community, while the Muslim community in France has chronic organisational problems at both national and local levels (Boyer, 1998). This is especially clear with the Muslim (predominantly of Pakistani origin) community, which has dense religious networks and receives funding from religious organisations and governments. Birmingham, especially, has a very active Muslim community (Joly, 1987). In addition, the traditional brand of Islam of the Pakistanis in Britain entails some degree of control of the second generation by the first generation through religious teaching and strong family
structure, whereas North African Communities in France have been increasingly secularised, and the trend towards re-islamisation currently observed emanates from the younger members of the community alone. As a result, Muslim groups in Birmingham can more easily engage in constructive dialogues with the authorities and formulate claims related to cultural issues than their North African counterparts in France.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to provide the bases of an explanation of the strategies of management of post-colonial ethnic conflict of the City Council of Birmingham (England) and the Municipality of Lille (France). Each city has reacted very differently to the problems posed by electoral challenge by anti-immigrant forces and civil unrest. In Birmingham, since the early 1980s, there has been a de facto alliance between the ruling Labour group of the council and some ethnic minorities groups since the early 1980. In addition, the council has implemented pro-active policies against racial discrimination and in favour of the participation of ethnic groups in the decision-making process of the council. In Lille (dominated by the socialist mayor Pierre Mauroy since 1974), by contrast, there is no alliance with ethnic groups, which are kept out of the realm of conventional local politics, and there are only limited efforts to implement policies addressing the issue of minorities.

I have argued that the differences between the two strategies stem from differences between the institutional frameworks in which the two cities operate. I have focused first on the relation between the cities and the central polity, which is characterised by a tight separation of “low” and high politics in Britain, and a strong inter-penetration of the two levels of government in France. This has made immigrant political mobilisation at grassroot level easier in Britain than in France. It has also facilitated a strategy of devolution of the issue of race and immigration to the local level by British central élites in the 1960s, while it has encouraged the salience of the national issue of immigration control and nationality law at all levels of electoral competition in France, which has encouraged the success of the Front National and kept immigrant groups out of the realm of conventional political participation.

Second, I have dealt with the structure of the party-system and the internal organisation of the parties. In Birmingham, there is a strategic openness towards minority groups on the part of the Labour party, because its local organisation has made it more penetrable by ethnic minorities members at the local level. This in turn compels the council to take the demands of minorities (racial
discrimination, under-representation) into account. In Lille, the pervasive influence of the *Front National* on French politics, which discourages the *Socialist Party* to strike an alliance with minorities, coupled with the failure of attempts made to co-operate with ethnic minorities’ political movements during the 1980s by the party, encourage the *Socialist Party* to avoid the issue.

Finally, I have argued that the organisation of local government in the two countries (a more open “parliamentary” style of government in British councils than in the French “presidential” mode of government by the mayors) facilitates the incorporation of ethnic minorities in the decision-making processes of the council in Birmingham, while it is unfavourable to outsider groups in France. This in turn makes it more difficult for the dominant political groups in the Birmingham City Council to ignore the demands of minorities, while it makes it relatively easier for the mayor of Lille. This has greatly encouraged ethnic groups to put issues of racial discrimination and cultural recognition on their agenda, while it has entailed a continued self-limitation of claims by North Africans in Lille.

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