Multicultural Britain
Issues and controversies

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Editorial

Living together - but how?

It is a highly relevant debate across Europe these days, but one that has existed for long in Britain: Upon what principles should people of multiple cultures and ethnicities live and organise a society together? Where should the borders be drawn between the responsibilities of the individual, the community and the society as a whole in this respect?

Beyond these questions lingers the role of the state: what responsibility should be vested in the state for defining British culture and identity and regulating the interplay between the parts that constitute the whole? And if too much acknowledgement of separateness is the main challenge - as is often claimed in the political debate - then what is the alternative?

This issue of British Politics Review provides an inlet to debates in Britain on multiculturalism. A social fact as well as a political creed, multiculturalism can be approached and analysed from a variety of angles. In Britain, the political case for multiculturalism has taken a beating under David Cameron’s coalition government. The previous Labour governments, it is claimed, were too lenient in accepting cultural practices breaching with fundamental principles (such as gender equality, freedom of speech and the rule of law) and did not do enough to defend ideas about who British citizens should be and what values they should subscribe to (such as liberal democracy, fairness and entrepreneurship).

From this perspective, acknowledging diversity became encouraging the undermining of Britain under Labour – an argument which, coincidentally, divides the government between “hardline Conservatives” and the traditionally “softer” touch on this issue taken by the Liberal Democrats. The debate concerns what values society should be built upon as well as what role the state should have in the process.

Our contributors offer a critical debate on the challenges to multiculturalism in Britain, with current political controversies as one dimension but also with a much broader canvas. Articles range from the longer history of immigration to Britain, via the significance of the educational sector to perceptions of the multicultural in British fiction.

Oivind Bratberg and Kristin M. Haugevik, Editors

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Two tales of cultural diversity

By Thomas Hylland Eriksen

Virtually any comparison between the UK and Norway has to begin with an assessment of difference. In few domains do the differences between our two countries appear to be more evident than in the area of cultural and ethnic diversity. Consider some historical facts.

Britain is not a nation-state, but an imperial state founded on four historical nations and, for the greater part of its modern history, the centre of a transnational empire. Networks of trade, conquest and communication extending across the planet formed the spine of the British identity and the key to its wealth. As a result, British subjects (who could, under certain conditions, become full citizens) have trickled into the country for centuries. Bristol, a main port of transit during the slave trade, had a substantial Afro-English community as early as the late 17th century.

Britain thus has a long history of cultural diversity, but also of oppression and subjugation, racism and discrimination. Norway, by contrast, was for centuries economically marginal, thinly populated and mostly ethnically homogeneous except in the far north. Only since around 1970 have substantial numbers of non-European migrants begun to arrive in the country in search of work, protection, love or a mixture of the three.

Considering the deep differences in history and demography between the two countries, it is a matter of some interest that policies and public debates relating to cultural diversity are in many ways similar in the UK and Norway.

During a conversation with a friend, who is also a scholar of cultural diversity, the term “super-diversity” was brought up. My friend, who worked in England at the time, described the recent changes in the ethnic composition of London. In the past, ethnic minorities tended to originate from former colonies, from India to Jamaica. They lived in particular, known parts of the city and were reasonably well established.

Recently, he pointed out, the ethnic composition of London had changed palpably: The largest new groups had no connection to the Empire and were in many cases not English-speaking. They were scattered across the city in apparently unsystematic ways. Moreover, many of them were transient and lived there under unclear circumstances: They might be tourists who had forgotten to return to their home country, students who had finished their studies but stayed on to work at Sainsbury’s, temporary workers who might just stay in Britain given a steady job, paperless refugees, and so on. The total number of languages spoken in London now, he concluded, was over 300.

Interestingly, a similar description would to a great extent hold true for Oslo. The influx of migrants, or temporary workers, has grown at an exceptional rate since the late 1990s. In one particularly diverse suburb of Oslo, Sandre Nordstrand, more than 140 languages are represented, which is quite impressive considering the isolated location, the harsh climate and small total population of Norway.

Several common themes recur in Norway and the UK. First, ethnic and cultural diversity is largely an urban phenomenon. The differences between the main cities and the rest of the country are growing. Even Surrey and Sussex remain predominantly white and Christian, as are Hedmark and Oppland. Cities have always been crossroads of complexity, and are so more today than perhaps ever before in history.

Second, concerns with Islam loom large. In Britain, the main anxiety may be with terrorism, while Norwegians are concerned with traditional gender roles as an affront to Norwegian women and gender equality. However, the notion that Islam is incompatible with democracy and modernity is the backbone of debate, with both supporters and detractors, in both countries.

Third, multiculturalism is a hot potato in both countries. Strictly speaking, multiculturalism is the view that complex societies consist of several bounded “cultures”, and that they are entitled to equal treatment by greater society notwithstanding their differences. Severely criticised on both sides of the North Sea, it has been argued that multiculturalism tends to place group rights before individual rights and to relativise values. On the other hand, certain forms of multiculturalism – such as teaching of vernacular languages in schools (Norway) or culturally adapted health services (UK) – are defended with reference to human rights and the view that equality should not be conflated with similarity. There are also, in both countries, those who point out that it is perfectly possible to be in favour of diversity without defending multiculturalism.

Fourth, there is a concern with the future of national identity, and both in the UK and – somewhat later – in Norway, the influx of immigrants has arguably stimulated domestic reflection on the nature of one’s national identity, as one has increasingly been confronted with foreigners.

All these themes, which concern social cohesion, integration and national character, are common to the UK and Norway, although emphases naturally differ. However, there are also some important differences.

In the UK, the economic aspect of immigration has been a main topic and remains so today, and there are concerns about the costs and benefits of immigration. Put bluntly: Does the country gain or lose economically by opening its borders to foreigners?

In Norway, this economic approach has been conspicuously absent from the agenda for nearly two decades. A main explanation is the immense oil wealth of Norway and the widely recognised need for foreign labour in many sectors of society.

Instead, the Norwegian debate about immigrants and their integration into Norwegian society has taken a stronger cultural turn than in Britain. Especially cultural practices and norms which may be seen as being opposed to gender equality are condemned in the media and by politicians who fund ambitious projects intended to end, for example, enforced marriages.

In sum, Norway and the UK, with hugely different histories and demographics, are confronted with similar challenges in the area of cultural diversity, and are dealing with them in similar, but not identical ways, attempting to strike a balance between inclusion and exclusion, between tolerance and bigotry, between difference and similarity.

Photo: Inge Knoff

Tøyen in inner-city Oslo, renown for its multi-ethnic population.
Multicultural Britain: a very brief history

By Pantikos Panayi

In some contemporary British political discourse, multiculturalism has come to symbolise the negative consequences of mass immigration. In such a situation hostile politicians believe ethnic minority communities develop lives of their own and separate themselves off from “mainstream” society with which they have no desire to integrate.

While multiculturalism may seem a new development in Britain to those whose knowledge of modern British history encompasses little other then the Victorians and the two World Wars, Britain’s relationship with immigration has demonstrated common patterns over the past two hundred years with both positive and negative reactions towards newcomers repeating themselves.

In the first place, if we take the period since c1800 we need to recognise that immigration has characterised Britain. During the last two centuries over 9 million people have made their way to the country, of whom about 2.4 million arrived before 1945. Until two centuries over 9 million people have made their way to the country, of whom about 2.4 million arrived before 1945. Until 1880s. Like anti-Catholicism, Judeophobia could draw upon centuries and, in this case, even millennia of negative stereotypes and images. Hostility towards Jewish immigrants constructed a community of an alien nature, which threatened jobs and housing, had unsanitary habits and counted large numbers of people, who would threaten British values. Jews also became racialized from the 1870s, following the European pattern, with calls for extermination surfacing in the most extreme circles. Antisemitism also focused upon Jews as traitors, with no allegiance to Britain, working for themselves, for a foreign power or a foreign ideology, especially during the First World War, but also in the Second.

Nevertheless, the group which has experienced the most intense hostility in Britain over the past two centuries has consisted of Germans during the First World War. This may seem surprising because they had become well integrated by 1914. But the outbreak of War made them instantly visible and essentially led to the ethnic cleansing of traces of Germany from British society through rioting, internment and deportation.

After the Second World War attention turned towards newcomers from the Empire and Commonwealth. Once again, the animosity which would emerge could draw upon centuries of negative images rooted in slavery and the ruling and middle class imperial encounter which had racialized black and Asian people. Much of the initial post-War hostility focused upon West Indian immigrants culminating in the Notting Hill riots in 1958 and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962. Anti-Black racism remained during the late 1980s and early 1990s a new threat emerged in Britain in the form of the asylum seeker, again reflecting European patterns. The source of the hostility towards this group essentially lay in the fact that they did not become subject to normal immigration controls because refugees could claim asylum due to the fact that Britain had signed up to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Turning them into asylum seekers denied such people refugee status before courts had adjudicated upon their cases.

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Port of call. The city centre of Liverpool, with St. George’s Hall on the left, portrayed in the 1890s. For centuries, Liverpool was a primary inlet for Irish migration to Britain.
Multicultural Britain: a very brief history (cont.)
By Panikos Panayi

In the past decade Muslims have become the main out group in British xenophobic discourse. The origins of their marginalisation lies in the Iranian Revolution which began to impact upon immigration discourse following the Rushdie Affair when British Muslims burnt copies of the Satanic Verses following the issue of a fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Pakistanis disappeared from public consciousness, replaced by Muslims. Wars against Afghanistan and Iraq increased their visibility further making their status similar to Roman Catholics, Germans and Jews as an enemy within.

However, while xenophobia has characterised Britain over the last two centuries, so has multiculturalism. Although this concept has become associated with post-1945 migrants in recent decades, multicultural Britain has existed since the early 19th century, as we can see by focusing upon a series of key themes.

First, although the legal basis of multiculturalism may appear to have emerged in the Race Relations Acts of the 1960s and 1970s, the incorporation of out groups in British society begins with Catholic Emancipation in 1829 whereby a minority campaigned for equal rights and achieved them. During the course of the nineteenth century, Jewish emancipation also followed.

Nationality laws play just as important a role in multicultural Britain. Despite changes at the end of the twentieth century, citizenship in Britain has essentially operated upon the concept of jus solis. Just as importantly, the migrants who moved from the Empire and Commonwealth in the early post-War decades already had British Citizenship as a result of the 1948 British Nationality Act. This has meant that, unlike in some other European states which have operated upon the basis of jus solis, Britain does not have a mass of disenfranchised ethnic minorities with little access to political power. In theory, they have equal political rights.

We also need to consider integration. The recent speeches by David Cameron simply reflect the concerns of previous British politicians about a mass of immigrants perceived as separate from mainstream society.

The same sentiments focused upon the Jewish immigrants of the late nineteenth century. This group actually offers the perfect example of an integrating minority. Concentrating overwhelming upon the clothing trades in the East End of London before the outbreak of the First World War, by the interwar years this group had begun to experience social mobility which meant a move towards the London suburbs and a change in occupational patterns so that by the 1960s Anglo-Jewry revealed socio-economic indicators in advance of mainstream society.

This group may have undergone a model integration, but it involved much exclusion and pain on the way. Similarly, the nineteenth century Irish had also integrated by the beginning of the twentieth. Although, in both cases, the formal establishment of Roman Catholicism and Judaism set them apart from the mainstream, both of these sets of newcomers made the concept of Britons with religions previously regarded as alien, acceptable.

Those migrants moving here after 1945, especially from the West Indies and South Asia have not had the same amount of time to integrate as Irish Roman Catholics and East European Jews. Employment patterns of those people of African Caribbean origin show that they remain towards the bottom end of the economic and social scale. On the other hand this group demonstrates significant rates of intermarriage, another clear indicator of integration. South Asians demonstrate a variety of patterns. On the one hand, they have some of the best levels of educational achievement, while also demonstrating higher unemployment rates than the norm.

Politicians focus upon the apparent distinct and foreign Muslim other, concentrated upon the inner city practicing an apparently non-European religion and dressed in a strange way, which simply takes us back to the Jewish East End before World War One.

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Although some mainstream politicians have turned multiculturalism into a term of abuse which apparently signifies the ills of mass immigration and results in the undermining of British norms, immigration has created Britain, particularly since 1945, but also over the last two centuries as a whole. The Catholic Relief Act of 1829 and the existence of nationality laws based primarily upon jus solis has guaranteed this. At the same time, a dissection of virtually any aspect of British life whether economy, music or food, reveals the importance of immigration and the de facto existence of multiculturalism with deep historical roots.
Multiculturalism under siege

By Andrew Pilkington

Sea change? The dominant discourse on race and ethnicity in Britain has undergone a significant shift in the last twelve years. The advent of a New Labour government in 1997 signalled a renewed concern with egalitarianism and for a short period promised to inaugurate a new era whereby Britain was at last prepared to take serious steps to combat racism and promote race equality.

In its first year of government, a New Labour Commission on official inquiry, chaired by a senior judge, Sir William Macpherson, into the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager, by five white youths in 1993. Although the primary focus of the inquiry was on the police, the report contended that major public institutions in Britain were infused by institutional racism.

The Macpherson report (1999) was at first widely accepted across the political spectrum and led, among other things, to a much more proactive approach to promoting race equality, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The same year saw the publication of the Parekh Report on the future of multi-ethnic Britain, chaired by Lord Parekh. The report highlighted the importance of creating a society which struck a balance between the need to treat people equally, the need to respect differences and the need to maintain social cohesion, and which did this within a human rights framework.

What I have called the radical hour did not last long. The backlash, already evident in the media reaction to the Parekh report, has steadily gained strength. The concept of institutional racism has been castigated rather than celebrated as concerns over Islamic terrorism and rising net migration have taken precedence over issues to do with racism. Fast forward to February 2011. Here is David Cameron, the Prime Minister, speaking in Munich:

"Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream…We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values. All this leaves some young Muslims feeling rootless. And the search for something to belong to and believe in can lead them to extremist ideology [which in turn can lead to terrorism]… When a white person holds objectionable views – racism for example- we rightly condemn them but when equally unacceptable views or practices have come from someone who isn’t white we’ve been too cautious, frankly too fearful, to stand up to them…This has led to the failure of some to confront the horrors of forced marriage."

This speech was heralded as a radical departure from the orthodoxy of previous post-war governments. This was reflected in the headlines of most British newspapers the day after his speech, suggesting that the “days of doing deals with Muslim extremists are over” (The Daily Telegraph) and that “it’s time for muscular liberalism” (The Times).

A number of themes were evident in the newspaper coverage of the Munich speech: the failure of multiculturalism; the danger of Islamic extremism; and the need to reassert Britishness. In most cases, a series of binary oppositions were repeated: us/them; British/Muslim; moderate/extremist. Most newspapers were in fact sympathetic to Cameron’s speech, with the only critical editorial and commentary being in the Guardian. The coverage drew largely upon old themes evident for example in the media reaction to the Parekh report, such as the repeated refrain of political correctness gone mad and the identification of British Muslims as a threat (in relation to terrorism) or a problem (in terms of differences in values) or both (Muslim extremism in general).

But how radical was Cameron’s speech on multiculturalism itself? And how valid are the arguments marshalled against multiculturalism?

The first point that needs to be made is that the two arguments used by Cameron were ones used regularly in the previous decade to disparage multiculturalism. Multiculturalism divides people and entails political correctness were the common refrains of critics. These arguments have, however, been effectively rebutted. Multiculturalism cannot be seen as causing segregation since segregation predates the heyday of multiculturalism and is in fact declining. And the purported dominance of political correctness, and accompanying moral relativism that inhibits criticism of practices such as forced marriage, is clearly contradicted by the fact that people do make moral judgements on such issues.

Cameron in short criticises a version of multiculturalism that advocates do not advance and indeed has not been institutionalised in policies. A useful distinction can be drawn here between a moderate and a radical conception of multiculturalism. A moderate conception sees policies that recognise and accommodate minority identities (for example being Muslim) as working in tandem with policies that promote a national identity that embraces these distinct identities (for example being British). A radical conception by contrast believes that it is unnecessary for policies that acknowledge different identities to be accompanied by others that seek to inculcate an overarching national identity. No country in the West has adopted radical multiculturalism. What is being attacked is thus a straw man.

The media may have presented Cameron’s speech as radical. But a discourse celebrating Britain’s multicultural society has been on the retreat since 2001 and in its stead a nationalist discourse (…) has been revived, highlighting community cohesion, emphasising Britishness and urging Muslims to integrate.

"A discourse celebrating Britain’s multicultural society has been on the retreat since 2001 and in its stead a nationalist discourse (…) has been revived, highlighting community cohesion, emphasising Britishness and urging Muslims to integrate."

This discourse is not unique to Britain and indeed Cameron’s speech bore an uncanny resemblance to an earlier speech by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel in October, 2010 and a later speech by the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy in February 2011. There seems little doubt that centre right politicians are trying to shore up support on the right at a time of declining popularity, increasing concern over immigration and the rising appeal of far right parties. Multiculturalism here is a helpful scapegoat. Attacking it resonates with an ill-defined unease with immigrants and Muslims.

In this short paper, I have been concerned to show how anxiety about Islamic terrorism (and increased net migration) has led to multiculturalism being attacked. The recent attacks epitomised by Cameron’s speech, however, are neither new nor reflective of the actual conditions in Britain today. The danger of these attacks is that we cease to value diversity, do not engage Muslims in dialogue and that Britain’s incorporation policies shift away from pluralism towards assimilationism and exclusion.
Teaching the multicultural in education: balancing and fine tuning

By Richard Race

Shared arenas. Multiculturalism as a concept is at the forefront of political attention today, as has been highlighted in much publicised political speeches across Europe. The Australian policy document: The People of Australia: Australia’s Multicultural Policy, published in February 2011, shows that this debate is present beyond Europe as well. What are the consequences for the way in which multicultural issues are addressed in the educational system?

Certainly, the need to address multicultural education within classrooms and lecture theatres is ever more crucial at a time of enhanced cultural diversity. This article attempts to highlight the complexity of the politics of difference debate. Part of the backdrop of this debate is what Stephen Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf have called "the [European] Multicultural Backlash".

I want to use comments made by political leaders in Europe to underline this backlash. Within these political contexts, I want to use empirical findings from my research which addressed issues concerning multiculturalism and education and flesh out some of the nuances in the way multicultural issues are perceived. I'm also going to limit the focus of this piece to England, which within a wider British context is appropriate when acknowledging the multicultural complexity and situational differences between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland systems of politics and education.

Since the early 2000s across Europe, the number of political views highlighting the condemnation of multiculturalism as a concept has increased. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's comments in November 2010, reversed her previous support for multiculturalism within Germany, a country which continues to experience increased immigration, especially but not exclusively from Eastern Europe and Turkey. Even acknowledging Merkel's desire to appeal to elements of the German electorate with her change in policy, what needs to be highlighted is this notion of the multicultural backlash.

In England, Prime Minister David Cameron provided more evidence of this trend, at a security conference speech in Munich (February 2011), when he suggested that the state must confront, and not consort with non-violent Muslim groups that are ambiguous about British values such as equality between sexes, democracy and integration. Claiming the previous Labour government had been the victim of fear and muddled thinking by backing a state-sponsored form of multiculturalism, Cameron talked about the need for less passive tolerance and the need for more active, muscular liberalism. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that the previous government in England were no supporters of multiculturalism as an idea, supporting for example, the notions of “integration and accountability” in the English Early Child Matters education policy of 2004.

Interestingly, Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, and Cameron's colleague within the Coalition Government in the United Kingdom gave a speech in Luton (March 2011) which opposed the notion of backlash by supporting and praising multiculturalism. Moreover for Clegg, multiculturalism is seen as a process by which people not only respect but communicate with each other. Clegg supports a multiculturalism which welcomes diversity but resists division. Furthermore for Clegg, respect and diversity are important conditions of an open, confident society.

Within the context of the politics of difference and the perceived European multiculturalism backlash, I want to highlight the findings from my book on Multiculturalism and Education. Firstly, my empirical data highlighted how debates on integration have impacted on education policy-making. Merkel, Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy (concerning France banning the hijab in public places in April 2011) have used the term integration when considering policy-making. Defining integration as a conditional two way relationship between the state and individual / community, the state is in a position to control the influence of its counterpart on the policy-making process.

If multiculturalism is the celebration, not recognition of difference, then what is lost within processes of integration? Firstly, there is a very thin line between integration and assimilation, a one-way conditional political and social relationship where the state almost totally controls what majority and minority are doing. Secondly, within the field of education, respondents who were questioned and interviewed raised the importance of awareness training and continuing professional development for practitioners in education. An inclusive, multicultural programme of lifelong learning has to continue to raise social and cultural issues that concern racism and discrimination. Learning has to involve sustained reflection on identity and collective values. Are practitioners in all professions continually trained to cope with changing cultural diversity?

The final issue which Multiculturalism and Education underlined is the importance of citizenship education and the possibilities and opportunities citizenship provides within its curricula to examine topical and contemporary issues relating to amongst many things, culture and society. In England, citizenship remains non-statutory within primary schools and is only compulsory delivered in state-maintained secondary schools. And with the promotion of Academy Schools in England who have the right to pick and choose their own curriculum, what will the future hold for citizenship in schools?

Interestingly, the final focused Multiculturalism and Education was on citizenship rather than multicultural education. My respondents gave me many examples of multicultural innovative practice in different subjects in both classrooms and lecture theatres. There is an interesting policy comparison with the work of James Banks and colleagues in the United States who have been promoting multicultural education for the last forty years and continue to shape local, federal and national education policy. This multicultural education policy focus has not been visible in England since 1985 and there is scope for improvement in the way English schools encourage their pupils to reflect upon the principles on which our multicultural society is based, or ought to be based.

In conclusion, when reflecting on multicultural education, we need to increase our understandings of political and conceptual processes which shape education and social policy-making. Integration and its influence on policy-making remained important within England in the 2000s, but multiculturalism is still practically relevant today when examining English education in nurseries, schools, colleges and universities.
Citizenship education, communities and multiculturalism

By Audrey Osler

Education and community

Since 2001, there have been various claims that multiculturalism has failed in Britain, from both the left and right.

Schooling has long played a key role in shaping attitudes towards the nation. By setting education policies alongside differing discourses on multiculturalism, we can better understand the meanings attached to citizenship and community in Conservative and Labour thinking and policymaking.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government attaches particular importance to the role of communities in guaranteeing the nation's well-being. It draws on Prime Minister Cameron's concept of the Big Society to encapsulate its key ideas. The Labour government defined community cohesion as the development of a common vision among all communities; valuing people's diverse backgrounds; making available similar life opportunities to all; and sustaining and developing strong and positive relationships in schools and communities. Special funds were made available to support projects bringing people together from different backgrounds. Official guidance advocated school-linking, nationally and internationally, so that students would develop a better understanding of other cultures. Despite these initiatives, cohesion policies existed without reference to on-going inequalities in educational outcomes, as reflected in systematic differences in school exclusion rates and examination results between ethnic groups. The focus was on celebrating diversity, not on exploring power relations or inequalities.

It was really only after the 2005 London bombings that political interest developed in teaching about ethnic diversity as part of citizenship education. The Ajebo report recommissioned, in direct response to official concerns about terrorism and a desire to promote Britishness, shared values and patriotism, through citizenship teaching. Ajebo's recommendation of a new strand on "identity and diversity; living together in the UK" was adopted in the revised 2009 curriculum, which linked citizenship education more closely to history and the promotion of a strong British national identity. Following long-established patterns, minorities were linked in this discourse to social instability, separation and, in the case of British Muslims, to the new threat of international terrorism. By focusing on citizenship as the vehicle by which race equality in schools might be promoted, the government avoided introducing concrete measures to address racial justice in educational outcomes across all ethnic groups.

In this respect the curriculum built on Crick, assuming minorities need to learn how "we" behave and understand "our" way of doing things. Integration was presented as a one-way process. Relativley weak messages about an inclusive British identity, promoted through the curriculum, contrast with negative portrayals of migrants from both media and government relating to immigration, naturalisation and asylum and with equally negative portrayal of British Muslim populations.

The 2009 curriculum builds on an approach advocated by Gordon Brown in 2006, emphasising Britishness, patriotism and British history. Brown referred to a loss of national confidence, coinciding with the end of empire, claiming:

"To address almost everyone of the major challenges facing our country – [including], of course, our community relations and multiculturalism and, since July 7th, the balance between diversity and integration ... even the shape of our public services - you must have a clear view of what being British means, what you value about being British and what gives us purpose as a nation."

Moreover, Brown expressed concerns about diversity and integration, linking these to terrorism and the July 2005 London bombings. His rhetoric called for unquestioning national loyalty and the teaching of British history as a grand march forward to liberty and democracy. In so doing, it overlooked the need for critical thinking in the history classroom.

Since 2010, with the formation a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, the school curriculum is under review, and it is not clear at the time of writing whether citizenship education will remain compulsory. This seems ironic, given Cameron's focus on the Big Society and his emphasis on community initiatives which are intended to replace cuts in local government services.

Vision. David Blunkett, Education Secretary in Tony Blair's first government, introduced Citizenship as a statutory subject in school. Copyright © The Home Office
Citizenship education, communities and multiculturalism (cont.)

By Audrey Osler

Cameron’s critique of multiculturalism seems directly related to the Conservative desire to reduce the role of the state and promote small government. First in 2008 and then again in 2011, Cameron attacked “state multiculturalism”, claiming it undermines community. He claimed that initiatives to promote multiculturalism divide people by ethnicity. He thus ignored the reality that Britain has never had extensive state-sponsored multicultural policies, such as exist in Canada, which require that society’s structures and institutions accommodate different groups on the basis of equality.

There is an interesting prelude for today’s debate from 2006, when, towards the end of his premiership, Blair reasserted the importance of multiculturalism in education after other leading Labour ministers claimed he had ignored the reality that Britain has never had extensive state-sponsored multicultural policies, such as exist in Canada, which require that society’s structures and institutions accommodate different groups on the basis of equality.

Today, the political initiative has changed hands to the other side of the political spectrum. Across Europe, there is a developing discourse that multiculturalism has failed. Chancellor Angela Merkel claimed that multiculturalism in Germany has “failed utterly” despite the lack of evidence that Germany has introduced significant multicultural policies. My response to Mrs Merkel and to Mr Cameron is that what hasn’t been tried cannot be said to have failed.

Education represents one area where multicultural policies are indeed assumed to have been applied. Schools in England have for several decades accommodated moderate adherence to a uniform in order to respond to students’ religious beliefs. The hijab, banned from French schools in 2004, has long been accommodated in schools in England as well as into the uniforms of the UK police and military. But allowing for restrictive religious practices is not conducive to a multicultural outlook. Moreover, comprehensive multicultural education policies addressing institutionalised inequality and exclusion have not been supported by any UK government. It was only in specific local authorities that multicultural curriculum policies were introduced and these were short-lived. The multicultural project was piecemeal and incomplete. Despite this, education remains an on-going site of struggle in shaping the future social and political nature of British society.

Existing inner-city regeneration projects depend on partnerships between government, voluntary organisations and community members, rather than leaving community members to go it alone. The rhetoric of the Conservative-dominated coalition government includes the central idea of fairness. Minimally, fairness necessarily acknowledges that each individual is entitled to equal dignity and equal rights. Yet Conservative rhetoric suggests that some are deserve, while others are not. Cuts in services hit poorer communities harder than more affluent ones.

The coalition government plans to introduce a series of measures which ignore the research evidence. These are: children will necessarily be extended to children. The most severe punishment a child can experience is to be excluded from school. There is a decades-old pattern of black students being over-represented amongst the excluded. Most permanently excluded children never return to full-time mainstream schools. Exclusion moves a child’s problems from the school into the community and sometimes, literally, onto the streets. It is too frequently the first step on a path leading to prison. Yet most excluded children are not dangerous, violent or abusive, as might be assumed, but are punished for “persistent disruptive behaviour”. This category is based on subjective judgements and covers a wide range of misdemeanours. The 2011 Education Bill proposes to retain the right of an excluded student to appeal against an unfair decision, but remove the right of reinstatement, regardless of any injustice which has occurred.

"Since we live in a multicultural society, it cannot be asserted that multiculturalism has failed. What is needed is an understanding of multiculturalism founded in policies which enable all to participate in and engage with society and its institution on the basis of equality."

There has been little official recognition that a sustainable and cohesive society is directly related to a sense of belonging predicated on equal access to educational goods. Efforts to promote the Big Society which ignore the material disadvantages of specific groups, deep institutional inequalities between learners, and a continuing attainment gap between different ethnic groups are, at best, compromised. At worst, they breed cynicism and disengagement. Failure across the political spectrum to discuss endemic racism and disadvantage within schooling compounds these problems.

The coalition’s curriculum proposals suggest what a rejection of “state multiculturalism” might mean in practice. Education Secretary Michael Gove has criticised the “passing political fads” of the school curriculum. We can only guess precisely what he means. However, it seems unlikely that the proposed slimmed-down national curriculum will include global understanding or the study of identity and diversity in a multicultural society. For Mr Gove, Black History Month and Holocaust Memorial Day may well be passing political fads. Such initiatives remain important, precisely because the areas they address are not yet fully embedded in the curriculum.

As I have argued elsewhere, citizenship education implies a critical understanding of the individual’s experience and position in society, in structures and processes of change. It implies empowering young people to engage in a wider struggle of realising human rights for all.

Since we live in a multicultural society, it cannot be asserted that multiculturalism has failed. What is needed is an understanding of multiculturalism founded in policies which enable all to participate in and engage with society and its institution on the basis of equality. Only when learners are equipped to transform society can it be asserted that citizenship education has the potential to support social cohesion. And only when this ambition is realised will it be evident that young people are fully prepared to participate in the Big Society.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, visiting Durand Academy with Education Secretary Michael Gove, 24 Nov 2010. Crown copyright © The Cabinet Office
Fictions of multiculturalism

By Eva Ulrike Pirker

Ambiguity and a broad horizon. Until David Cameron volunteered to create new opportunities for multiculturalists to close ranks, they seemed to be on the verge of throwing the baby out with the bath water. Debates about multiculturalism had begun to disintegrate, so much so that in March, the Guardian's scribe Gary Younge felt prompted to specify that it "has come to mean whatever its opponents want it to, so long as they don't like it. [...] Its contemporary critics keep telling multiculturalism's supporters to admit it has failed, without identifying what 'it' is and who ever supported the lampooned version they present."

We need to differentiate, Younge holds, between the "multiculturalism of fiction" and that of "fact". The latter is the multicultural situation, the social reality of many Britons. It is both a given and a process, described by Stuart Hall as the "multicultural drift" - not an objective in itself, but a fact of British life. A different story altogether is the multiculturalism that is a political end: an ideal projection of how this social reality might be governed adequately. Confusion and potential for conflict predictably arose when that political idea was turned into policy. State multiculturalism has evolved in Britain over the years, from local government initiatives and special funding practices to New Labour's attempts at mainstreaming diversity in national institutions. 'Actual' events have accelerated these efforts in some cases (for instance scandals of institutional racism) and slowed them down significantly in others (9/11 and 7/7).

There is an obvious dramatic potential in the discrepancy between multicultural reality, multiculturalist idea and institutional practice. This has been exploited by writers in several state-of-the-nation novels. Around the time when multiculturalism was translated into concrete initiatives in the late 1970s, the Indian migrant and clerk Haroon in Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) introduces a change in his life, swapping his plain English wife Margaret for the eccentric Eva who encourages him to indulge in his 'Indianness', and redirecting his professional focus towards a 'career' as an 'authentic' medium of Indian philosophy. His son Karim is bemused by his father's behaviour, overhearing the latter's remarks, "kissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He'd spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less visibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadefuls. Why?" (p.21)

Karim learns to use his inherited half-Indianness as 'exotic' capital in the city that sucks him in from the suburbs, but also experiences the limitations this imposes on him, and becomes aware of a frosty head-wind when he attempts to engage critically with his father's generation, re-enacting his father's mate Anwar for a theatre workshop production. "Your picture is what white people already think of us," is his black colleague Tracey's response to his performance. "That we're funny, with strange habits and weird customs." Karim's attempts to counter Tracey's claim that "we have to protect our culture at this time" by invoking the higher value of "truth" that might not be found within the boundaries of the 'us-and-them' framework remain unheard, and he has to rethink his character. (pp.180-181)

Acts of positive essentialism might nevertheless appear justified when one is confronted with such experiences as that of Abdulrazak Gurnah's nameless protagonist of Admiring Silence (1996), who is informed by his doctor that "Afro-Caribbean people have Dickey hearts" during a check-up. "Of course, after all this drama I did not have the heart to tell him that I was not Afro-Caribbean, or any kind of Caribbean [...]. I could see he approved of my respectful silence, because he smilingly issued his prohibitions and instructions, wagging his finger now and then to warn me off naughty temptations." (pp.9-10)

However, the East African migrant also feels an abundance of enthusiasm coming his way, being allowed so much room for his "alienness" that he can only fill it with invented stories, "at times adding a variation that added irony and a note of bitterness to what might otherwise have seemed banal. I found the opportunity to rewrite my history irresistible, [...] a history closer to my choice than the one I have been lumbered with." (p.62) Gurnah has created an unreliable character-narrator, whose stock responses to the treatment he receives as 'cultural Other' (silence and stories respectively, depending on the requirements of the situation) do not make him a carrier of sympathies in the end.

If Gurnah provides a sometimes cynical assessment of the effects of multiculturalism through the perspective of his protagonist, Zadie Smith's novel White Teeth (2000), which came at the right time to be hailed as a narrative that epitomised notions of a 'post-ethnic' Britain, could look back on the 1970s and 1980s multiculturalism in action with a tongue-in-cheek approach. We are taken back, for instance, to a school governors' meeting in 1984, at which the headmistress gets impatient when the engaged father Samad Iqbal, a migrant from Bangladesh, suggests clearing out the harvest festival from the school's calendar of festivities in favour of a more balanced representation of religious diversity. The school, she points out, already "recognizes a great variety of religious and secular events: among them, Christmas, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Diwali, Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, the birthday of Haile Selassie and the death of Martin Luther King." (p.129)

Samad's plea remains unsuccessful in the meeting, but is embraced by the young attractive music teacher Poppy Burt-Jones, who is "really interested in Indian culture" and its "so much more ... colourful" festivals that could be tied in with "art work, music. It could be really exciting." (p.133) She invites him to her music class where she feels prompted to teach her less-than-assiduous 12-year-olds a lesson in cultural sensitivity, presuming that they would not like it "if someone made fun of Queen" because "Freddy Mercury is from your culture." Samad is too smitten by the "lovely Poppy Burt-Jones" to "split hairs", although it occurs to him that "this Mercury character was in actual fact a very light-skin Persian called Farookhi", whom the head chef at his work place, an Indian restaurant, "remembered from school in Panchganí, near Bombay." (p.155)
Fictions of multiculturalism

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A mixture of witty comment and dialogue as well as attention to period detail contribute to the impression that past situations are captured here in a mock-realistic manner which allows readers to look at this recent past from a distance and as a stage that we have – by implication – moved beyond. As much as to its literary quality, the novel therefore owes its success to its timeliness and capacity to create a portrait of a nation which can look back on stages of conflict arising from cultural difference as ‘history’.

How quickly a stage of conflict could re-enter representational platforms has become abundantly clear in the aftermath of 9/11. Whereas in the novels mentioned above such aspects of the multicultural Britain as action committees or the rise of parallel communities serve to provide a rich foil for projections of character and plot, humour and irony have given way to a more solemn, sometimes analytical treatment of the matter in recent literature, partly in response to the new anxieties. Nadeem Aslam’s Maps for Lost Lovers (2004), for instance, expounds the tension between the political idea of equality, attempts at its implementation and a situation determined by social exclusion, community conflicts, religious extremism and race hate. Placed at the centre of these tensions is Shamas, a community relations officer in a town referred to as the ‘desert of loneliness’ by its Asian community. This labelling is, in fact, the only thing that the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh inhabitants who hail from different parts of the conflict-ridden subcontinent can seem to agree upon. The different groups and individuals rely on Shamas, particularly when they have to enter negotiations with a British institution or, more generally, white people. His work is not crowned with recognition, but he insists on continuing to fight what appears to be a lost battle for a better world.

Shamas’s role as mediator becomes all the more tangible when set against the character of Kaukab, his wife, who does not speak English and lets herself be guided exclusively by an ultra-orthodox understanding of Islam’s rules. While his wife is “too busy longing for the world and the time [her] grandparents came from [...] he was too busy daydreaming about the world and the time his grandchildren were to inherit”, their son assesses, and accuses them both: “What about your responsibilities to the people who were around you in the present?” (p.123)

Whereas Shamas sacrifices the needs of those closest to him for his work and vocation, Keith Gordon, the protagonist of Caryl Phillips’s In the Falling Snow (2011), a community officer for a London authority who has been promoted to the position of policy maker, comes to realise the paradoxes inherent in his professional environment, which is increasingly characterised by a struggle to meet the changing directives from ‘above’. The merger of his Race Equality unit with Disability and Women’s Affairs, which he is persuaded to head (“more money, a bigger office, and double the number of staff to manage”), threatens to become an “administrative nightmare” and involves an unmanageable workload. “Most evenings were taken up with his trying to digest the contents of thousands of pages of printed policy reports, and then adding to the rubbish”. (p.33)

The merger mirrors similar processes of institutional reorganisation during the New Labour administration, the most substantial one being that of the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2007, partly in response to EU and international trends to attend to multiple discrimination grounds. Critics have pointed out the dangers of a paralysing bureaucracy which can affect the radius of action of such organisations as the CRE, an important and unique stakeholder. Keith experiences such effects first-hand, along with a depressing hypocrisy displayed by careerists in the field. He resigns from his job, although he knows that in a climate characterised by “more racially polarised community monitoring” and with his “experience and complexion” (Keith is a black Briton with a Caribbean family background), finding a job in social work “that doesn’t place him in the firing line of the press on race issues” (p.247) will be difficult; he knows, too, that he will have to relinquish the comfort which the work as a policy maker offered him both in the sense that it enabled him to stay clear of the front-line and in financial terms. The novel’s ending is left open, and Keith’s undecidedness about his future mirrors, to some extent, the uncertainties enveloping the future of multicultural Britain.

Two years after the appearance of In the Falling Snow, the multiculturalist idea is habitually vilified by the conservative government and has effectively been relegated to the responsibilities of the political opposition. From this position, however, multiculturalism could once more appear as an end worth aspiring to.

In this context, literary engagements with the intricacies of multicultural politics are important, because they remind us that when political ideas are put to the test, conflict is not only inevitable, but has a direct impact on individuals and communities.”

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The literary is not a form of thought that “adds a second sense to a primary, constitutive reality of social relations”, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have argued. It is part and parcel of societal debates.

In these continuing efforts, the literary texts are contributions to societal debates. The literary is not a form of thought that “adds a second sense to a primary, constitutive reality of social relations", Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have argued. It is part and parcel of the space in which the social reality is formed.
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Norge og Storbritannia har historisk hatt svært nære bånd, ikke minst etter andre verdenskrig hvor Storbritannia var den kanskje viktigste veiviseren for norsk utenrikspolitikk. Dette seminaret setter søkelys på dagens bånd mellom Norge og Storbritannia. Hva er status for norsk-britiske relasjoner? Hvordan har de eventuelt endret seg?

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Kristin M. Haugevik, Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt [NUPI]

**Valgordning, demokrati og effektivitet: Den norske og den britiske modellen**
Dag Einar Thorsen & Øivind Bratberg, Institutt for statsvitenskap [ISV], UiO

**Mot skotsk selvstyre, med Norge som modell?**
Atle L. Wold, Institutt for litteratur og områdestudier og språk [ILOS], UiO

**Dickens i Norge, Ibsen i Storbritannia: Norsk-britisk lesning over Nordsjøen**
Tore Rem, Institutt for litteratur og områdestudier og språk [ILOS], UiO

**Blikket på Storbritannia: Det britiske samfunnet i norsk offentlighet**
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**Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review**

**Constitutional reform** is a controversial part of the agenda of the Liberal-Conservative coalition. This domain went through a chequered development under the Labour governments from 1997 to 2010, seeing fundamental reforms (devolution to Scotland and Wales, introduction of the Human Rights Act as well as stalemate (the House of Lords, the electoral system).

In the next issue of British Politics Review, we debate the current status of constitutional reform in Britain. Obvious points of contention include proposed changes to the House of Lords as well as to the electoral system for the House of Commons (lately in disarray following the 5 May referendum).

But constitutional issues also cover such topics as a proposed Bill of Rights, relations between the constituent nations of the UK and the possibility of a written constitution.

As always, the Review will draw upon articles both from political, academic and journalistic sources. Contributions from readers of British Politics Review are very welcome.

*The summer edition of British Politics Review is due to arrive in August 2011.*