The Crisis of Multiculturalism in the UK
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Abstract
Widespread discourse on the crisis of multiculturalism in the UK since the 2005 London bombings has led to a search for alternative ways of managing diversity. This chapter charts the evolution of multiculturalism in the UK from the 1960s to 2010, noting the adoption by various governments of pluralist liberal, culturalist, and community cohesion approaches. It argues that the condemnation of the anti-discrimination version of multiculturalism which had been widely accepted in the 1960s, and its replacement with "community cohesion" in the 2000s have placed the onus on individuals to fight inequalities based on "racial" and ethnic differences, while exempting the state from responsibility and depoliticising collective action aimed at fighting structural disadvantage.
Over the past decade, multiculturalism as a concept and practice has been condemned by governments across Europe as they grapple with the reality of increasingly diverse European societies in terms of the ethno-cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds of long-established ethnic minorities and of newly arrived populations. In Britain, the chorus of condemnation of multiculturalism as a means of managing such diversity has reached such a pitch since the July 7, 2005 London bombings, carried out by four young British born and bred Muslims, that the main parliamentary parties are united in their opposition to it and their desire to replace it with an alternative "race"/ethnic relations framework. Intellectuals, journalists, politicians, and other public figures have variously engaged in a rhetoric of the crisis or retreat of multiculturalism, whether in debating immigration, the disintegration or construction of "Britishness," urban deprivation, Muslim youth, Islamic terrorism, or the incompatibility of Islam and western liberal democracy. The last 10 years have thus seen the emergence of a substantial literature which either backs or challenges the notion of the crisis of multiculturalism (see Hasan, 2010; McGhee, 2008; Modood, 2007; Phillips, 2007; Silj, 2010; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010; West, 2005, among others).

Multiculturalism as a concept, practice, and lived reality is not fixed. As a lived reality and description of society it has undergone a continuous process of evolution during the post-war period in Britain; in practice it has encompassed a variety of policies and institutional processes designed to manage diversity in Britain and conceptually, it is underpinned by different political philosophies.

Using a chronological approach and starting from the premise that there exist various multiculturalisms depending on the political conjuncture at a given time, this chapter has three aims. It provides a definitional framework which explains the conceptual basis of the different approaches to multiculturalism in Britain; it examines the evolution of multiculturalism in Britain from the 1960s to the 2000s while explaining the reasons behind this evolution; finally, it argues that the condemnation and rejection of multiculturalism as defined and accepted in the 1960s and the substitution of a societal anti-discrimination approach with one which promotes "community cohesion" as a means of attaining an "equal and diverse" society has placed an unprecedented onus on individuals to fight inequalities and disadvantage based on "racial" and ethnic differences while exempting the state from certain responsibilities and also by neutralising or depoliticising anti-discrimination collective action which previously sought to challenge structural inequalities and disadvantage based on such differences.

1. DEFINITIONAL FRAMEWORK

Multiculturalism is a contested concept. Definitions vary greatly but for the sake of convenience may be placed into one of two broad categories. The first comprises definitions which use culture to explain inequalities between different racial/ethnic groups as well as the solution to eradicate these inequalities. Two approaches may be distinguished within this category. What we refer to as the conservative approach sees multiculturalism as a description of British society where minority cultures exist alongside a majority culture based on Judeo-Christian values and rules. According to this approach social stability is only achievable if minority cultures accept the beliefs and practices of the majority culture. In this situation, the state may advocate tolerance of different migrant and ethnic groups, their culture, and lifestyles, but has little responsibility beyond this. One may argue that an outcome of this approach is the de-legitimisation and assimilation of minority cultures. In 1964, for example, the Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council argued that "a national system cannot be expected to perpetuate the different values of immigrant groups" (CIAC, 1964, p. 7). This approach prevailed in the UK until the mid-1960s.

The second approach in this category of definitions accepts the idea of peaceful and equal coexistence of different ethno-cultural groups but reserves an important role for the state in identifying a common set of values and rules to be adopted by these groups. It also backs the state's role in promoting tolerance, in resolving conflict which may arise from differences, and/or in eradicating inequalities based on "race"/ethnicity/religion. This "liberal" approach ranges from the minimalist position of favouring the construction of a consensus around common cultural values and principles to one which also emphasises "difference in unity" and a role for the state in eradicating inequalities and discrimination.

In Britain, the more minimal liberal approach was explicated, for example, in a report on citizenship education in state schools (QCA, 1998), commissioned by the first New Labour government in 1997. In this report, Bernard Crick (appointed Chair of the Committee on Teaching Citizenship in Schools) recognised the fact of a multi-ethnic, multicultural Britain. He advocated tolerance and respect between the different populations in British society and put forward a programme of citizenship and participation in British liberal democracy as a means of attaining social consensus and cohesion. The report also emphasised the importance of the nation-state and a secure national identity which was not explicitly named but which was taken up in subsequent debates by politicians and media commentators in terms of "Britishness." Thus, according to the report: "Cultural diversity raises the
question of national identity. Responding to these worries, a main aim for the whole community should be to find or restore a sense of common citizenship, including a national identity” (QCA, 1998, p. 17).

Many of the ideas contained in this report on citizenship education, including that of a secure national identity or Britishness, were reprised by Crick in a second report, The New and the Old published in 2003. The latter’s remit was the development of proposals for language and citizenship tests capable of assessing the capacity of immigrants, wishing to acquire British nationality, to integrate and contribute to a particular vision of multicultural society defined as:

One made up of a diverse range of cultures and identities, […] one that emphasises the need for […] mutual engagement and learning about each other with respect, understanding and tolerance – whether in social, cultural, educational, professional, political or legal spheres. Such societies, under a framework of common civic values and common legal and political institutions, not only understand and tolerate diversities of identity but should also respect and take pride in them (Crick, 2003, section 2.6).

Further, the framework of common values, or “Britishness,” entailed respect for “the laws, the elected parliamentary and democratic political structures, traditional values of mutual tolerance […] equal rights and mutual concern.” It required one to admire and accept “those over-arching specific institutions, values, beliefs and traditions that bind us all, the different nations and cultures, together in peace and in a legal order” (idem, section 2.7).

Crick’s definition of multiculturalism and its reference to a common “Britishness” thus demanded the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities into British society. But it glossed over some important discussion. It failed to discuss the barriers to integration constituted by socio-economic inequalities and “race”/ethnicity-based discrimination. It failed to acknowledge the struggle of immigrants and ethnic minorities to overcome these barriers. It also assumed that British democracy was “a completed project” (Osler, 2009, p. 2) to be accepted by citizens rather than an ongoing process in which inequalities of “race”/ethnicity among others (gender, class, etc.) endured and in which the state had a role to play in eliminating racism and discrimination as an important means of promoting integration.

Aspects of Crick’s approach to multiculturalism and integration (relating to English language learning, citizenship tests and ceremonies) were taken up by New Labour which commissioned the report. Its emphasis on a common national identity, exemplified in “Britishness,” was seized upon by the Blair government, particularly in the aftermath of major urban disorders which took place in 2001 (discussed below).

Crick’s minimalist liberal approach is described by some scholars as tending towards an assimilationist form of multiculturalism (Osler, 2009; Osler and Starkey, 2001) as it implicitly promotes a one-way integration process placing almost all responsibility for integration on immigrants and ethnic minorities. Crick’s approach may be set apart from that of Bhikhu Parekh,1 which may be termed “pluralist liberal multiculturalism.”

Arguably, Parekh’s approach is situated at the opposite end of the continuum of liberal multiculturalist thinking to that of Crick. Like Crick, he advocates that human values (e.g. tolerance, mutual respect, individual liberty, peaceful resolution of differences) should be held in common in a multicultural society. However, a sympathetic but critical reading of liberalism leads him to a different position in two respects. First, in his report for the Runnymede Trust (2000) he acknowledged explicitly the existence, in British society, of social inequalities and discrimination which undermine the two-way integration processes demanded by a just multicultural society. Thus, equality of human worth and socio-economic equality based on “race”/ethnicity, gender and so on were additional, important principles to be upheld. Second, Parekh questioned “Britishness” as a national identity on the grounds that it encapsulated a “monolithic,” nationalistic majority culture. He argued instead:

there’s no doubt that Britain should be a nation – a cohesive community with a collective identity and purpose. But given its diversity, what kind of national community can we hope to create? We need to balance the demands of the national community with those of communities within it. […] If Britishness equals acceptance of national culture, you’re saying, “think of this country exactly the way we do.” It’s a nationalistic argument that has no space for diversity of understanding and interpretation (cited by Jaggi, 2000).

For Parekh, Britain had to become a community of citizens as well as a community of communities in order to manage ethno-cultural and religious diversity successfully. Parekh’s report caused a media and political storm and was, within days, censured by various government ministers for its stance on Britishness and lack of patriotism. However, Parekh’s conception of multiculturalism was welcomed by a significant number of voluntary sector organisations and local authority agencies.

The second broad category of definitions includes those which may be labelled “critical multiculturalism” (McLaren, 1995), which take a radical approach in advocating a transformative political and social agenda as a means of accommodating difference. Critical multiculturalists argue that progressive

multiculturalist agendas in the UK have resulted from long struggles against racism and discrimination waged by immigrants from the New Commonwealth, in the 1950s and 1960s, with support from the working class movement and the Left. The making of multiculturalism should therefore be a bottom-up process rather than state-imposed. Sivanandan explains the establishment of British multiculturalism in the following terms:

Multicultural Britain did not come out of the much-vaunted British traditions of fair play, equality and social justice […] it was created out of decades of struggles against racism by black communities – struggles for equal pay and against discrimination on the shop floor, struggles to make the police protect communities from racial attack, struggles for children not to be streamed or bussed out of schools, struggles to include other histories in educational curricula. And because most Black and Asian people who came to Britain after the Second World War had citizenship, unlike their counterparts in other European countries, they had the security from which to mount militant fights for racial justice (Sivanandan, 2005).

While critical multiculturalists accept that cultural differences may explain inequalities, they insist that such differences must be seen in the context of a wider contestation of dominant ideology which often imparts essentialist meanings to "race" and ethnicity, class, gender, etc. (McLaren, 1997). They argue, therefore, that the failure to contest dominant ideology and to provide transformative alternatives, leading to the integration in society of immigrants and ethnic minorities on an equal basis with majority society members, will result simply in "another form of accommodation to the larger social order" (McLaren, 1995, p. 42).

In Britain, critical multiculturalism was adopted by sections of the non-parliamentary, radical Left, particularly between the late 1960s and 1970s when multiculturalism was seen as a framework for the ideological and real-life struggle of a diverse ("black and white") but unified working class against racism and discrimination. For the radical Left this struggle influenced government policy (anti-discrimination legislation – the Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1976) in the short term but it also had a long-term, socially transformative agenda.

The above definitional framework helps our understanding of the development of multiculturalist agendas and policies in response to a growing reality of lived multiculturalism which follows in the next section. It also helps explain how such agendas and policies have been shaped by various influences within the state and civil society.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF A LIBERAL CONSENSUS: 1964–1979

It is possible to chart British government policy responses to growing "racial"/ethnic diversity along a course marked by three important turning points between the mid-1960s and 2010.

The first of these occurred between 1964 and 1966 when public hostility against New Commonwealth immigrants increased, fuelled by "race riots" in 1958. Immigration had become a controversial issue before and during the closely fought 1964 general election. While the Labour Party won narrowly, Conservative candidates who had campaigned on an anti-immigration ticket, in areas with large immigrant populations, performed very well. The newly elected Labour government therefore came under pressure to abandon its more progressive manifesto promises and to propose, instead, stricter immigration controls and watered-down race relations measures in order to appease anti-immigrant opinion. These included the 1965 Government White Paper proposing strict curbs on immigration from the Commonwealth and the establishment of the Race Relations Board in 1965 which was responsible for enforcing the Race Relations Act of the same year. Both the Race Relations Act and Board proved to be weak instruments.

Following an upsurge in popularity two years later, Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, called an early General Election in 1966 and won with a secure majority. This victory, coupled with the publication of independent research reporting high levels of racial discrimination in the UK (Chater, 1966), gave Labour MPs and ministers, among them the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, the confidence to call for strengthened race relations legislation. Political pressure for stronger anti-discrimination measures resulted eventually in a new Race Relations Act (1968), where the accommodation of difference was expressed for the first time in liberal multiculturalist terms, in Jenkins's now well-known 1966 statement:

Integration is perhaps a rather loose word. I do not regard it as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture. I do not think we need in this country a "melting pot," which will turn everybody out into a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman […] It would deprive us of most of the benefits of immigration that I believe to be very great indeed. I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation, but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance […] If we are to maintain any sort of world reputation for civilised living and social cohesion, we must get far nearer to its achievement than is the case today (Jenkins, cited by Favell, 1998, p. 104).
Jenkins's approach to multiculturalism may be termed broadly pluralist liberal. It suggested strongly that integration was a two-way process where exchanges between immigrant and ethnic minority groups and majority society involved equal commitment. It also explicitly linked cultural diversity and integration with equality of opportunity, although not equality of outcome. In common with other definitions of multiculturalism in this category, Jenkins's definition does not emphasise the negative impact of structural inequalities and unequal social relations in British society, but it does contain the notion that socio-economic and cultural equality is attainable through existing political opportunity structures, gradual legislative reform around equal opportunities, and change in public attitudes. Jenkins's multiculturalism approach gained a certain consensus across parliamentary benches and civil society organisations dealing with issues of immigration and ethnic relations.

The Race Relations Act of 1968 made it a legal offence to discriminate on the basis of "race," ethnicity and overseas nationality. The job of ensuring that the strengthened laws were implemented was given to a reconfigured Race Relations Board while a Community Relations Council was set up with the rather vague purpose of encouraging peaceful community relations through locally based Community Relations Officers (CROs). In addition to legal measures, central government funding was made available through Section 11 of the Local Authority Act of 1966 and was aimed at tackling social disadvantage and creating opportunities, especially in educational services, within new Commonwealth immigrant communities. Yet, the tensions which existed within government, between government and opposition, and in majority society generally over toughened race relations laws and the granting of special funds to non-white populations were laid bare in ongoing debates over the number of immigrants in Britain, in the adoption, during the same period, of stricter immigration controls and, symbolically, in the removal of Roy Jenkins (seen to be overly committed to race relations laws) from the Home Office.

Nevertheless, a liberal approach to multiculturalism within a race relations paradigm which accepted resisting racial discrimination as a means of integration but which also emphasised control of immigration was established and endured throughout the 1970s. This decade saw the rise of the extreme right National Front on the one hand and an active anti-racist movement on the other hand. In the 1970s, the children of immigrants who had arrived in the 1950s and 1960s became less prepared to accept racism and more readily challenged injustices and bigoted attitudes. They formed or joined anti-racist organisations alongside their white counterparts. Amongst African Caribbeans, an existing network of self-help projects (dealing with racial discrimination and the lack of opportunities in housing, education, and immigration) which had emerged in the 1960s expanded and became politically radicalised in the 1970s as it experienced an influx of younger activists and as the threat of the extreme Right grew. Young South Asians, including growing numbers of women, also became involved in anti-racist activity through long-established organisations such as the Indian Workers Association. In addition African Caribbean and South Asians militated with white workers and activists. The anti-racist movement of the 1970s also included black and white musicians, artists, and writers.

For a large number if not all of these organisations multiculturalism meant countering racist politics and the idea that Britain should remain an ethnically uniform country. They worked therefore towards ending discrimination through challenging dominant ideas about "race" and influencing policy makers into introducing stronger anti-racist (and anti-sexist) legislation. It would be fair to say that the liberal multiculturalist agenda established in the mid-1960s was pushed towards progressive policies and measures by the activism of grassroots organisations for whom multiculturalism was part and parcel of the struggle for social change.

3. MULTICULTURALISM AS "CULTURALISM?": 1979–1997

The second turning point in terms of policy responses to the management of "racial"/ethnic diversity in the UK came with the return to power, in 1979, of Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher and the end of the so-called "consensus era" of British politics (Kavanagh, 1987). As opposition leader, Margaret Thatcher had flagged up immigration as a key issue on which her party would fight any general election. In January 1978, she talked about the threat posed to race relations by immigration: if we went on as we are, then by the end of the century there would be four million people of the New Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in (Thatcher, Granada Television, 1978).

Thatcher's comments suggested that as well as limiting immigration to the UK from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan (suspended from the Commonwealth between 1972 and 1989), it was important to preserve a "British character" and culture. According to the new Thatcher government of 1979, post-war Britain had reached not only a crisis point in terms of the Keynesian economic model (correctable only by uncompromising neo-liberal policies), but also a crisis of public authority and moral values for which the
only redress was a strong nation based on values of self-reliance, responsibility for family, and enterprise as opposed to reliance on the state. Recovery of the nation also presupposed the sharing of a common history, traditions, beliefs, and attitudes. The only way in which immigrants and their descendants could become part of the nation was through direct lineage and residency, contribution to individual enterprise, and assimilation into the British "way of life" or culture.

Conservative policies amply reflected this approach in the 1980s. For example, the 1981 Nationality Act did away with the centuries-long principle of granting citizenship automatically to British-born children of non-British parents. The idea of recovering the British nation was also embedded within education reform in the late 1980s, namely the 1988 Education Act which introduced a national curriculum in state schools. The national curriculum, with its focus on British history, Christianity within religious education, and standard English, has been condemned variously as assimilationist and nationalist rather than national (see, for example, Gillborn, 1990, p. 198). The focus of the 1979 Conservative government on an unvariegated Britishness to be accepted by all meant that the term and concept "multiculturalism" was barely referred to in political circles.

The government's thinking was challenged, however, during the early to mid-1980s, when civil unrest erupted on a number of occasions in inner-city areas with large immigrant and ethnic minority populations. These disturbances reflected the deep social divisions and disadvantage in British society and intense resentment within immigrant and ethnic minority communities over the racially discriminatory attitudes of public authorities, especially the police. They revealed two other facts: the unstable relationship between the Thatcherite ideal of a strong nation built on self-reliance and free enterprise and the real-life barriers (based on divisions of "race"/ethnicity, class, gender, and so on) faced by many individuals, particularly in a period of economic recession; the tensions within Margaret Thatcher's government between the "one-nation" wing and among more socially liberal ministers that a doctrinaire position was ill advised in the context of renewed urban disturbances.

The government was compelled to address the issue of social disadvantage among immigrant and ethnic minority communities and of their place in British society. The early to mid-1980s saw the launch of numerous initiatives designed to combat racial disadvantage in the labour market, housing, education, culture, and welfare. The education of ethnic minority and immigrant children especially concerned government for two reasons. Following the urban unrest, the teachability of these children became the subject of media debates and fuelled further public hostility towards minorities and the potential for more conflict. Furthermore, growing voices within minority communities expressed the view that inequalities based on "race"/ethnicity, class, and gender were so entrenched within the school system that their negative impact on children in adult life and on generations to come was too powerful to ignore. In 1985, the Department of Education commissioned an inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Swann Report, Education for All, was published in March 1985 amidst considerable public debate. As a result of its positive emphasis on the themes of "diversity within unity," the plurality of values and lifestyles, anti-racism, and because it questioned the narrowness of prevailing notions of "Britishness," the report and its recommendations were ignored by central government and accused by some ministers of reintroducing multiculturalism by the back door. However, the fact that the Swann Report was welcomed by significant numbers of educators, politicians, and ethnic minority parents' groups at the local level meant that the government was placed in a predicament. Ideologically, Margaret Thatcher and her closest "strong-nation" allies remained unambiguously opposed to the concept and practice of liberal multiculturalism. However, there existed unease within the "one-nation" wing and among more socially liberal ministers that a doctrinaire position was ill advised in the context of renewed urban disturbances in the summer of 1985. The compromise over multiculturalism, in terms of policy making, was its delegation to local government. This allowed Thatcherite hard-liners to continue with "strong-nation" rhetoric and ignore multiculturalism at the central level while agreeing to release relatively bigger amounts of development funds for inner-city areas with large immigrant and ethnic-minority populations.

In the wake of the disturbances and the Scarman Report (1981) which focused on Brixton, the government was compelled to address the issue of racial disadvantage among immigrant and ethnic minority communities and of their place in British society. The early to mid-1980s saw the launch of numerous initiatives designed to combat racial disadvantage in the labour market, housing, education, culture, and welfare. The education of ethnic minority and immigrant children especially concerned government for two reasons. Following the urban unrest, the teachability of these children became the subject of media debates and fuelled further public hostility towards minorities and the potential for more conflict. Furthermore, growing voices within minority communities expressed the view that inequalities based on "race"/ethnicity, class, and gender were so entrenched within the school system that their negative impact on children in adult life and on generations to come was too powerful to ignore. In 1985, the Department of Education commissioned an inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The Swann Report, Education for All, was published in March 1985 amidst considerable public debate. As a result of its positive emphasis on the themes of "diversity within unity," the plurality of values and lifestyles, anti-racism, and because it questioned the narrowness of prevailing notions of "Britishness," the report and its recommendations were ignored by central government and accused by some ministers of reintroducing multiculturalism by the back door. However, the fact that the Swann Report was welcomed by significant numbers of educators, politicians, and ethnic minority parents' groups at the local level meant that the government was placed in a predicament. Ideologically, Margaret Thatcher and her closest "strong-nation" allies remained unambiguously opposed to the concept and practice of liberal multiculturalism. However, there existed unease within the "one-nation" wing and among more socially liberal ministers that a doctrinaire position was ill advised in the context of renewed urban disturbances in the summer of 1985. The compromise over multiculturalism, in terms of policy making, was its delegation to local government. This allowed Thatcherite hard-liners to continue with "strong-nation" rhetoric and ignore multiculturalism at the central level while agreeing to release relatively bigger amounts of development funds for inner-city areas with large immigrant and ethnic-minority populations.

2. Civil unrest occurred in the socio-economically disadvantaged districts of several British cities, for example Toxteth in Liverpool (1981 and 1985); Brixton in London (1981 and 1985); Tottenham in London (1985); and the Handsworth-Lozells areas of Birmingham.

3. Racism remained low on the policy agenda after the Scarman report concluded it was racial disadvantage and the "unwitting" racist attitudes of individual officials in public bodies rather than institutional racism (particularly within police forces) which had contributed to anger in the streets.

4. The total amount of Section 11 grants to local councils increased from £63.4 million in 1985/6 to £102.2 million in 1986/7, and to £131.2 million in 1992/3 (Home Office Electronic Records Online, 1998).
The Swann Report may indeed be seen as the trigger for many measures taken at local authority level to promote multiculturalism – for instance, the acceptance in schools of different dress codes and rules relating to the preparation of food, the celebration of minority cultures and religions, the recognition that multilingual teachers should be recruited, and so on. The delegation of multiculturalism policy to the local level meant that local authorities came under strong lobbying from growing numbers of immigrant and ethnic minority community associations, parents’ groups, and residents’ committees to address problems of concern to them. Some of these associations had formed after the urban disturbances of 1981 and were, by the very nature of their emergence, highly political. They also had direct experience of their communities’ needs. Others were long-established associations whose leaders exercised considerable influence within their communities and who therefore gained positions within local political parties, quangos, and councils from which they could make demands.

For local authorities, particularly those not under Conservative Party control, the devolution of multiculturalism policy to the town halls served any or all of three purposes. First, for the majority of authorities in metropolitan areas which were home to significant ethnic-minority and immigrant populations, it was a way of attracting special funds for tackling deprivation and discrimination. Second, for other local councils, including some under Conservative control, introducing multiculturalist measures helped to create or strengthen ties between local elected representatives and ethnic minority community leaders and ultimately to increase or consolidate support among voters from minority communities. Third, it enabled the opposition parties to distance themselves ideologically from Thatcherite positions on race relations and immigration. In a number of areas, multiculturalism became a bone of contention in battles between local authorities run by Labour and the government and particularly between high-profile, left-wing Labour council leaders and Margaret Thatcher. The accession of Conservative rule in 1979 marked the end of a pluralist liberal multicultural consensus in mainstream politics. Under the Conservatives, liberal multiculturalism was emptied of its more progressive parts. From a pluralist liberal perspective, multiculturalism, as it was conceived and acted on after 1979, lost its capacity to unify people more progressive parts. From a pluralist liberal perspective, multiculturalism, barriers to integration based on “race’/‘ethnicity.

The allocation of funding according to ethnic groups also led many immigrant and ethnic-minority communities to think in terms of their ethnicity alone to the detriment of problems and issues which affected all groups.

It may be tempting to defend the 1980s variant of multiculturalism on the basis that its showcasing and celebration of different cultures and lifestyles represented progress compared with the open expressions of racial hatred in previous decades. There is little doubt, however, that this kind of multiculturalism was ill equipped to withstand the fall-out from the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) and those of July 7, 2005, in Britain. Blair’s New Labour government of May 1997 inherited a multicultural arrangement that many felt was in crisis.


When New Labour came to power in May 1997 a huge reservoir of hope and expectation had built up among various population groups (e.g. the long-term unemployed, single-parent families, poor pensioners) which felt that 18 years of Conservative rule had left them without a stake in society. Economic deprivation and hopelessness were also felt acutely in immigrant and ethnic-minority communities, particularly those located in some of the poorest residential districts of Britain’s towns and cities and whose already poor quality of life was worsened by the effects of racial/ethnic discrimination. New Labour’s 1997 manifesto appeared to propose a multiculturalism underpinned by a clear antiracist approach: “Britain is a multiracial and multicultural society. All its members must have the protection of the law. We will create a new offence of racial harassment and a new crime of racially motivated violence to protect ethnic minorities from intimidation” (Political Stuff, 2001).

During the first four years, anti-racist campaigners and organisations were encouraged by the number of progressive measures taken by the new government. In 1997, in accordance with a manifesto promise, it did away with the “Primary Purpose” rule – a harsh law barring entry to overseas nationals marrying British citizens unless they could prove that the primary purpose of their marriage was not to obtain residence in Britain. This was
followed in 1998 by the introduction of the *Human Rights Act* giving further effect in British law to rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights; and in 1999 by the Macpherson Report to the murder of black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, which found that the Metropolitan Police were not only incompetent in their handling of the case but also "institutionally racist." A definition of institutional racism was established for the first time and subsequently incorporated in the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act* 2000 which placed a duty on all public authorities to prevent unlawful discrimination and to make the promotion of racial equality, equality of opportunity, and good race relations a central part of their work.

Also, in support of New Labour's progressive race relations measures, Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's so-called "chicken tikka masala" speech contained an impassioned defence of pluralist liberal multiculturalism and a refutation of narrow understandings of Britishness which had been part of Conservative thinking in the eighties and nineties. He argued:

The British are not a race, but a gathering of countless different races and communities, the vast majority of which were not indigenous to these islands [...] The modern notion of national identity cannot be based on race and ethnicity, but must be based on shared ideals and aspirations (Cook, 2001).

If Robin Cook's position at all reflected that of New Labour, it was not maintained for long and a marked departure from the more progressive, liberal-plural multiculturalist statements and measures of the first four years began to occur from the autumn of 2001.

A number of factors explain this change in direction. First, between May and July 2001, urban rebellions against government and police authority erupted in the northern towns of Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford. In the worst flare-ups of social unrest since the early and mid-1980s, young men from decaying inner city areas, mainly of Pakistani descent, expressed anger over conditions of chronic social deprivation, an alienating political system which afforded them little if any representation, and the racism, both institutional and individual, they faced on a daily basis (see Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). Second, the events of 9/11, followed by growing racist attacks on Muslim ethnic minorities in Britain and what was seen as further self-separatism on the part of these populations, reinforced New Labour's changed view that multiculturalism, by encouraging ethno-cultural separation, was at least in part to blame for social instability and conflict. Third, Blair's government began to align itself with an ever-escalating political backlash against multiculturalism in Europe which had emerged in the new millennium as European governments chose to conflate issues of rising immigration, the integration of new populations into destination societies, social stability, and national security. In the wake of the civil unrest in northern England, the government commissioned reviews of the situation and four reports (Cantle, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Ouseley, 2001, Ritchie 2001) examining the causes of the disturbances were published. Only the so-called "Cantle Report," however, gained political and public prominence. Seemingly in support of some of the knee-jerk reactions of government ministers to the urban disorders, the Cantle Report laid blame for the social conflict at the door of ethnic minority communities who were reported to be living "parallel lives" to those in majority society (Cantle, 2001, p. 9). While the report acknowledged the negative effects of racism, it suggested that racism was the result rather than the cause of the self-separatism of certain communities anxious to preserve their culture and religion and this argument was largely accepted by the government. The Cantle Report laid the foundations for a community cohesion approach to race relations which was to be adopted by the government and cascaded down to local authorities. In December 2001, John Denham (then Home Office Minister) announced the development of a community cohesion agenda from January 2002.


Community cohesion has been defined by Cantle in the following terms:

Community cohesion reflects divisions based on identifiable communities, generally on the basis of faith or ethnic distinctions, which may reflect socioeconomic differences. It is complemented by the social capital theory of "bridging" between communities. It is undermined by disadvantage, discrimination and disaffection experienced by the identifiable community as a whole and by the lack of trust and understanding resulting from segregation and separateness (Cantle, 2008, pp. 54–5).

He posits that it is related to, but also distinct from, the concept of "social cohesion" which "reflects divisions based on social class and economic position" and which is complemented by "bonding between people." Social cohesion, Cantle argues, can be threatened by individuals' and groups' experiences of social exclusion (*ibid*). It is to be noted that while various definitions of social and community cohesion were discussed within the Cantle report, the terms were used almost interchangeably at the time. Since publication of the 2001 report, however, in Cantle's schema the two concepts have been separated so that community cohesion has come to focus entirely on ethnic...
minorities, particularly Muslims, and hence on culture and religion without reference to social class. One must conclude from this that any threats to community cohesion will arise from a refusal of ethnic minorities/Muslims to integrate by building bridges between themselves and other culturally different groups rather than because of economic differences and inequalities which make class “bonding” (i.e., denial of class) difficult if not undesirable.

These notions of community cohesion were worked into New Labour thinking about how to deal with relations between Britain’s newer, diverse immigrant populations, established ethnic minorities, and majority society. The White Paper, Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration and Diversity in Modern Britain, published in early 2002, made the integration of newer migrant groups (through improvement of English language skills and understanding of British culture and values) a priority while emphasising the objective of a more cohesive society. At the same time, the government put together a community cohesion policy programme which would incorporate several government departments and public bodies, namely the Home Office, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), the Local Government Agency (LGA), the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), and the Inter Faith Network for the UK. Over the next three years, these agencies were responsible for a plethora of guides and reports on community cohesion (see, among others, LGA, 2002; Home Office/ODPM, 2003; Inter Faith Network, 2002) and for the creation of organisational structures tasked with developing community cohesion initiatives.

It is fair to argue that race relations within the community cohesion framework during this period became subject to a rather meaningless system of quantification which reflected New Labour’s tight-lipped attitude, since 2001, to problems caused by racism and inequalities based on race/ethnicity. Bonilla-Silva (2006) refers to such an approach as “the minimisation of racism” which arises from an ideology of “colour blind racism.” Between 2002 and 2005, community cohesion was presented with an explicitly ethnic/racial focus, reinforcing the idea that minorities with “wrong values” rather than racism or socio-economic inequalities were to blame for social instability in Britain.


From the second half of 2005, the community cohesion approach to the management of ethno-cultural differences in the UK underwent further transformation. The start line for this transformation can be drawn at July 7, 2005, when four young British born and bred Muslim men carried out coordinated suicide bomb attacks on London’s public transport system, with devastating consequences. The London attacks led to British Muslim communities becoming the target of hostile public attention as never before and to multiculturalism, packaged as an inflexible set of beliefs and practices, being subjected to unprecedented condemnation. Weaving together public fears of multiculturalism and of “suspect” Muslim communities, politicians and media commentators repeatedly sent out one or all of the following messages: first, that, in denying problems caused by cultural differences and in refusing to accept common values and norms of civility, multiculturalism had encouraged social segregation and extreme views, especially among Muslims, in towns like Bradford and Oldham; second, that multiculturalism had suppressed honest debate and critiques for fear of causing offence to ethnic-minority and Muslim communities in particular and that it had therefore allowed certain wrong values and/or illegal practices (forced marriage, crimes related to honour codes, female genital mutilation, etc.) to flourish in Britain; and third, that multiculturalism had allowed the development of a “home grown” Islamic terrorism.

After 2005, Islam and Muslims in Britain (whether British or newly arrived) became the clear focus of the government’s community cohesion policies comprising three facets: the integration of both newly arrived and settled groups into British society; the development of citizenship education in schools and inculcation of British values into young people in particular; and the development of local capacities to resist extremist ideologies. From 2005, a stream of initiatives followed: for example, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC) was established in 2006 to find out and report on how towns, cities, and communities across Britain tackled issues of segregation and social divisions between different ethnic groups; also in 2006, the government white paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities, extended the duty to promote community cohesion on schools and, importantly, announced that tackling and preventing extremism would become central to the community cohesion project; in 2007, the Preventing Violent

7. Cantle uses Putnam’s concepts of “bonding” and “bridging” social capital where bonding social capital refers to social links and networks formed between groups of people within a (socially and culturally) homogeneous population and bridging social capital comprises connections established across diverse social and cultural groups (Putnam, 2001, pp. 22–3).

8. See Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010, pp. 6–12) for a typology of the tactics of condemnation of multiculturalism.

9. The CIC’s final report, Our Shared Future, was published in June 2007.
Extremism or “Prevent” part of the government’s counter-terrorist strategy was combined with community cohesion at local level, although it was not launched widely until April 2008, when 70 local authorities were given funds to develop strategies to combat violent extremism and improve community cohesion. The strategy was further developed over the following two years to include Home Office and Department of Education funding for police forces, youth justice teams, schools, and colleges.

Of the post-2005 initiatives, Prevent has caused the most controversy and has been received warily at local levels. Many local councillors and civil servants have felt that Prevent was imposed on them without consultation (Kundnani, 2009, p. 16). Furthermore, several local authorities are uncomfortable about the embedding of a national security agenda within local communities which has targeted and involved ordinary Muslims in the work of the counter-terrorism services. In Birmingham, for instance, Prevent has been headed since 2008 by a former counter-terrorism officer who, in principle, has access to information that local councillors and civil servants would not normally have. This fact has raised concerns among several local councillors and community leaders on behalf of their constituents. For example, Leicester City Council has questioned the government’s use of counter-terrorism language in the Prevent strategy. It has chosen instead to refer to the strategy locally as one of “Mainstreaming Moderation,” which, it claims, is more suited to the city’s approach as it encompasses all forms of violent extremism and not just those associated with Muslims.

Leicester Council has also argued that Prevent alone cannot address the problem of violent extremism, which is complex and multi-layered. It claims that Prevent has stigmatised and isolated some of Leicester’s Muslim communities and that this has been detrimental to the strong levels of community cohesion that the city has worked so hard to achieve. Muslims have felt stigmatised and targeted as suspect. Prevent needs to address all forms of violent extremism, including that of the far right, and in order to do this, it needs to engage the wider community and listen to unheard voices. Prevent has also been criticised for focusing on the faith basis of “extremism” at the expense of socio-economic factors, such as poverty and deprivation, and/or conflicts of culture and identity.

Finally, the focus on Muslims, in particular the funding made available to projects involving Muslims as part of the Prevent programme, has provoked condemnation from those who feel that this is preferential treatment which is not extended to white working-class communities. Hence, since 2008, a number of councils have invited Prevent funding applications from non-Muslim groups to combat extremisms other than that of “jihadist Islam.”

The confusion caused by the introduction of Prevent into the community cohesion agenda after 2005 has been evident. It has caused uncertainty at the local level amongst elected representatives and civil servants, for many of whom the lines between local service provision and intelligence gathering have become unclear. It has angered voluntary organisations which have worked towards social peace over years and who feel that the imposed Prevent agenda has deepened divisions in British society along “race/ethnicity and religious lines. It has alienated Muslim community associations who feel that Prevent has at best created two categories of Muslims (moderate ones and “bad” ones) and at worst rendered all Muslims potential “jihadists” and hence subject to surveillance. Moreover, post-2005 community cohesion strategies have failed to engage all sections of British society in the “honest” debates promised by New Labour on what it meant to be British in the 2000s and whether or not the idea of multiculturalism should be abandoned. Given this situation, it is unsurprising that in July 2010, the Coalition government announced the dismantling of the Prevent programme in order to separate community cohesion and counter-terrorism initiatives. However, the current Coalition government continues to condemn multiculturalism and push community cohesion rhetoric without indications of how community cohesion policies will develop once the Prevent component is removed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that British approaches to multiculturalism, over the last 45 years, lie along a continuum starting with pluralist liberal multiculturalism (which emphasises integration as a two-way process and is supported by an equal-opportunities and anti-discrimination policy framework) and ending with a minimal liberal approach which not only puts the onus of social integration or “cohering” with society on immigrants and ethnic minorities but also accepts a reduced role for the state, where equal rights and the prevention of discrimination are concerned. Successive British Government approaches to multiculturalism have moved along this continuum depending on prevailing political and socio-economic circumstances. Whereas a pluralist liberal conception of multiculturalism informed the race relations policies of Labour governments between the mid-1960s and late 1970s, Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s purged any rhetoric of multiculturalism from national policy agendas, leaving to local government the management of a variant of multiculturalism that Sivanandan has called ethnic culturalism (2006). When New Labour came to power, pluralist liberal
multiculturalism enjoyed a brief renaissance before it came under fierce attack following the social unrest in northern UK towns and cities. Today it is deemed inadequate as a policy framework for managing ethnic differences and relations and British governments have instead opted for a community cohesion policy agenda, or what we would argue is a minimal multiculturalist approach.

In determining whether or not there is a crisis of multiculturalism, it is important to distinguish between the lived reality of multiculturalism, as opposed to political and intellectual discourses about its capacity to survive as an idea and practice. Is multiculturalism spent because Britain society is becoming more segregated along ethnic and religious lines? The detractors of multiculturalism have difficulty in providing concrete evidence of increasing segregation while recent studies have shown that the reverse is true (Finney and Simpson, 2009). Is multiculturalism dead because the term is no longer used in policy discourses on race relations and managing difference? Vertovec and Wessendorf argue that in policy documents, “diversity is the term now meant to do much of the work that ‘multicultural’ used to” and “multicultural programmes have been replaced by ones concerned with ‘diversity’” (2010, p. 19). They offer ample examples in support of this claim. Has multiculturalism finally been supplanted by community cohesion? We would argue that in reality, the backlash against multiculturalism has not made a significant impact on government agencies and long-established immigrant and ethnic minority support organisations at the local level. The majority of such organisations have, over 45 years, internalised the pluralist liberal view that the integration of immigrant or ethnic minority communities cannot take place without equal opportunities provision and the prevention of discrimination and racism. Many are wary of joining politicians in condemning multiculturalism in a context of discriminatory immigration policies and public hostility towards asylum seekers, Muslims, and so on. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the longer established immigrant/ethnic minority support NGOs and community associations which have worked over years to improve the lives of their clients place clear ground between themselves and what many of them see as moves towards assimilationism.

The questions to be answered are perhaps, firstly, is it easier to talk of a “crisis” of multiculturalism than to confront widespread pessimism in the face of global economic and geo-political insecurities? And secondly, is it preferable to talk of the death of multiculturalism than the crisis of legitimacy facing liberal democratic governments?

BIBLIOGRAPHY


