

Thinking Past Integration and Community Cohesion

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Why in Britain?

Why have the acts and thoughts of the few after 9/11 been allowed to yield the moral commentary on racial integration that we have in Britain today? By what conceit has the immigrant – Muslim to be more precise – come to be re-imagined as a threat to national security and the national way of life? Why have the asylum seeker, poor immigrant, family of faith trying to get on with their lives and be part of to the nation (as pointedly argued in Rageh Omaar's and George Alagiah's recent books) become an object of suspicion? How, after 7/7, has the British establishment commentary ended up deciding that multiculturalism is to blame? Why has the language of 'sleepwalking into segregation', community cohesion, core British values become the prevailing language of national unity? Is the new regime – underpinned by survey after survey of segregation trends and contact networks, daily commentary on the lives of Muslims as though they were animals in a zoo, proposals to encourage inter-ethnic mixing – the answer to Britain's racial, cultural, and security problems?

Governing Lives

Whatever the answer to the last question, it seems the new thinking is here to stay. Phrases such as 'sleepwalking into segregation' may be dropped conveniently, as the research starts to show that in fact the trends are not that alarming after all¹, or new research such as that of Steve Vertovec's (2007) on 'super-diversity' may reveal that multiculturalism is inevitable. The emphasis, however, on governing individual lives – minority lives, to be more precise – is not likely to change. This is a regrettable turn. It is misinformed and morally dubious.

¹ It is far from clear, compared to the US, if ghettoisation is anything other than a very minor, and not even rising, trend in the UK. The inter-census data tells no clear story, if the changes between 1991 and 2001 are grouped into different categories of ethnic mixture. For example, according to Poulsen and Johnston (2006), even in places like Bradford, the percentage of Whites living in relatively mixed, but White dominated areas increased, while the percentage of Whites living in more exclusively White areas fell. As regards people from a Pakistani background, there were increases in relatively mixed, White-dominated areas, as well as in more segregated, Pakistani-dominated areas. Similarly, in more multicultural cities such as London, there was a considerable fall in the percentage of Whites living in predominantly White areas, matched by a substantial increase in the percentage of Whites living in mixed areas with over 50% Whites in 2001. As regards most large non-White ethnic groups, the trend has been towards living in mixed neighbourhoods, in which Whites, however, are a minority (i.e. areas of mixed non-White ethnicity). The trends, thus, are complex enough to disallow any simple segregation story to be told. In any case, interpreting housing segregation as a sure sign of 'increasingly inhabiting separate social and cultural worlds' (Trevor Phillips, September 2006), in an age of considerable participation in other cultural spaces, from travel, consumption and diaspora to education, work, and virtual space, is a heroic leap of logic. The parallel lives led by elders, veiled women, and very young children in a small number of neighbourhoods in Britain should not be read as the proxy for most minority ethnic communities.

I do not have the space to go into these claims in detail, but in brief, Britain has become an *irreversibly* plural and multicultural society. This is the result of a long history of migration from different parts of the world, the nation's imperial and colonial legacy, the proliferation of spaces of cultural formation, and the rise of post-secular and post-universal modes of belonging. The nation's cultural life has become profoundly decentred. We are a gathering of communities characterised by multiple loyalties and geographies of affiliation, largely averse to political or moral instruction if this restricts choice, and moved by the politics of national cohesion only when presented with the risk of threat and contamination.

In this cultural context, a politics of race based on the governance of selected lives, situated in a narrative of nation imagined as (White) cultural heritage, is a politics made up on the hoof, based on knee-jerk response to the acts of the few projected onto entire ethnic and religious groups. It is a politics of denial, harking back to an ideal of national community that has long passed. Exactly for this reason, however, it is a Janus-faced race politics. At one level, no one will take heed of the new instructions. The warning to minorities to integrate and mix, learn English, respect the enduring values of the land, will be simply ignored or spurned. Super-diverse Britain will simply go about its daily life, and even where cohesion is enforced, there will be no miraculous increase in integration with the other and the nation's core values (whatever these are). This may not prove to be a problem, for there is no conclusive evidence to prove that leading a 'parallel life' is the spark for disaffection. It has yet to be shown that minorities inhabiting separate social and cultural worlds – doesn't everyone in these post-modern times – are the terrorists of tomorrow.

Conversely, the chances are that increased ethnic mixture will not decrease fundamentalist violence, as the government expects, for it is becoming increasingly clear after 7/7 that the politics of violent action against state and society – by young Muslims in this case – has to do with complex entanglements of ideological indoctrination, the blinding lure of truth and community within purist counter-cultures, intra-community disaffection, a psychopathology of aversion to doubt, ambivalence and impurity, and above all, unambiguous hatred of Western imperialism. Understanding political violence in the name of a fundamentalist cause requires more considered work, but to reduce the latter to a problem cultural isolation and denial of the British way of life is to beggar belief. Britain as a community of communities may be breeding dislike, intolerance and indifference towards the other, but it is not the cause of murderous violence and political extremism.

If anything, the new doctrine of race demanding conformity will make matters worse. It will put minorities on the back foot, indignant at what is being asked of them (while mainstream culture, which is just as mixed and unsettled, is left unquestioned) and disappointed that their right to be different is read as anti-British. It will push those already disaffected further back into communities of closed ties. It will play into the hands of those who have long felt that the time has come to discipline the stranger, to rekindle the fiction of Olde England, safe in a White myth of origin. Most worryingly, the new doctrine, which allows easy slippage from commentary on cultural difference to photo-fits of tomorrow's fundamentalists and terrorists, is placing Britain at the forefront of a new form of racism that is unfolding in the aftermath of 9/11. This is a racism harnessing phenotypical judgement of human

difference to a state politics bent on disciplining the deviant racial subject – Muslims and the Islamic world - at home and abroad.

A new form of *phenotypical racism* is emerging, building on older forms of racism predicated on biological and cultural difference. The new racism relies on bodily summations that continually accommodate new attributes and new persons into less new hierarchies of racial worth. The summations are instantaneous, gathered through the flicker of an eyelid, the sweep of a gesture, the trace of an utterance, but each response comes with classificatory grip, laden with emotional, sensory, and neurological reflexes that tap deep into pre-cognitive categories of human difference and worth (Saldhana, 2007). The judgements of racial phenotype have no need for a science of racial essence in the way that biological racism did, nor are they constrained by the limitations of cultural racism, since any marker of difference on the body of the other will do as a proxy. The result is the racialization of everything, without any need for explanation or accuracy (Amin, 2007). Biology, inheritance, bodily marking, behavioural trait, and cultural practice are now rolled together in a culture of blame that reads the entire human from the single observation.

The power of phenotypical racism is clearly revealed in two recent ethnographies of young Asian men in the mill towns that were at the forefront of civil riots of 2001 (Alexander, 2004; Swanton, 2007). The studies show how public commentary on drug trafficking, sexual slavery, Islam, and terrorist empathy has relied on images linking prayer caps, beards, brown skin, backpacks, loud music, shiny cars, shabby dwellings, and ‘oriental’ clothes. Through casual inference has emerged a frightening racial other linked to similar looking types in a web of national and international threat, and in the process the long history of racism, unemployment, deprivation, and survival against the odds in these towns is conveniently brushed out (Amin, 2002). This example is no exception. The interpretation of difference based on racial phenotype has become an industry. This is how asylum seekers, migrants, militant youths, pan-handlers, the carriers of transmissible diseases are becoming labelled as the new Black, perpetually deviating from standards of White normality gathered from behaviour and comportment².

At most times, these judgements of racial phenotype generate ambient watchfulness and anxiety towards the stranger in plural Britain. Not so, however, at a time of charged bio-politics. This is a politics read off the body, politics counting on the disciplined and disciplining body, politics aiming to re-centre civilization around particular bodily practices. The world after 9/11 is exactly such a time. The war on terror/Islam has turned the judgements of racial phenotype into a war of outright condemnation of selected racial others, without the need for qualification or restraint. Britain’s bravado in the war on terror - sustained by vamped up surveillance, licentious arrest and detention, foreign invasion, and endless media commentary linking rogue states, Islam, and terrorism – has tainted even well-intended gestures to

² The judgements come in intermediate shades too, as the social Darwinism of attack and counter-attack in Rwanda revealed, as do the on-going atrocities of ethnic cleansing in Darfur. Across the judgements, there are standards of evaluation weaving together histories of pigment, gait, manner, language and style, grasped from an utterance, a political warning, a media discussion, to remind the stranger of how elusive is his/her ambition to belong, but also to warn misguided natives of the dangers of becoming the other.

foster inter-cultural understanding and community cohesion, by reasserting the strangeness of the stranger. No longer are Muslims people from different racial, ethnic and national backgrounds, people getting on with their daily lives, members of disadvantaged, socially excluded, and vilified communities, subjects with complex and multiple identities, citizens with sophisticated political antennae (Omaar, 1996). Instead, the common Muslim has been conjured into existence, cast as a threat to national security, western civilization, and the modern secular state.

All of a sudden, the explosive combination of phenotypical judgement and a new politics of bio-power, has displaced the late 20th Century discourse of pluralism, recognition and inclusion by a charged language of monsters at large. Overnight, the celebration of multiculturalism has given way to a sombre pledge by certain states to domesticate or evict the monster by perfecting surveillance, setting up zones of exclusion, banning the veil, restricting religious schools, insisting on language and citizenship tests, demanding loyalty to spurious norms of national belonging, pressing for mixed neighbourhoods. Britain has been at the forefront of this turn. It need not have been like this. More liberal polities such as Canada have studiously avoided such easy caricature and vilification after 9/11, coming to the conclusion that the acts of the few should not be confused with the aspirations of the many within minority communities, that multiculturalism is an asset to be valued. Consider the contrast in tone between Vancouver's emerging public statement on immigration and diversity in Table 1 and where we have ended up in Britain.

Recovering the Commons

What can be done to reverse the mean governmentality of race that has emerged in Britain? Eliminating the judgements of racial phenotype is a realistic option – these come with the territory of super-diversity and visceral racial coding of difference. Nor do I think that the forcings of racial and ethnic mixing will work for the reasons already given. This is not to suggest that super-diversity should be left to its own race politics. Instead, what is required is a politics of race that works *with* multiculturalism, by reasserting the value of diversity in the way that Vancouver has elected, and by looking for ways in which the shared commons can be projected out of the entanglements of diversity. Like Suikvinder Stubbs, I have habits of solidarity in mind, but conceived less as habits of direct engagement with the other, than as habits of affiliation to shared space and to the common weal.

In what follows, I wish to link the politics of race with a politics of public space/culture³. This is because I believe that an important catalyst of contemporary anxiety towards diversity is the gradual devaluation of the public sphere by privatised and tribal forms of association and engagement (James, 2006). Being among our own, working in isolation, withdrawing from public life, obsessing with consumption, not knowing our neighbours, seeing freedom individualism and self-advancement, are some of the symptoms of this process of evacuation of the public (Sennett,). This is by no means a linear or complete process; many small publics and counter-publics remain, gathered around shared interests, associative circles, social movements,

³ This is definitely not an argument in favour of returning to an age of universalistic politics antithetical to the specificities of race, gender, sexuality, and place. Instead, it is an argument about constructing a public out of a plural society in the way that pragmatists such as William James and John Dewey intended a century ago.

diaspora communities, friendship networks, cultures of consumption, and so on. It seems clear, though, that the fiction of the public sphere as a universal space, a space of cultural and civic formation and necessary demos, has lost its romance and grip. Instead a more diminished meaning has emerged, one of qualified access based on many evaluations of worthiness, cultural orientation, and social acceptability, and an understanding of public participation that falls short of principles of *public mindedness* and democratic jostle between strangers as equals.

<p>Table 1 Mayor’s Proposal on Immigration and Diversity in Vancouver</p> <p><i>Priority One: Vision and Values</i> Proposal: to adopt a City of Vancouver Vision and Value Statement Concerning Newcomers</p> <p><i>Preamble</i> While immigration has traditionally been under federal and provincial jurisdiction, most immigrants in Canada live in cities. It is therefore increasingly important that cities play an integral role in advocating for the inclusion of newcomers in Canadian society.</p> <p><i>Vision and Value statement concerning newcomers:</i> Vancouver is a city where newcomers to Canada have the best opportunities to become an integral part of the social, economic and cultural fabric of civic life.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The City of Vancouver is proud of its cultural diversity and values the distinctive characteristics of its residents, including newcomers to Canada. 2. The City of Vancouver is committed to fostering an open, welcoming and safe environment to people of all cultural backgrounds. 3. The City of Vancouver acknowledges that newcomers contribute to the social, cultural and economic vitality of Canadian society, locally and nationally, and that newcomers contribute to the relationships with other countries and cultures. Accordingly, Vancouver seeks ways to maximize newcomers’ contributions to civic life, socially, culturally and economically. 4. The City of Vancouver will ensure that newcomers have equitable access to all the services provided by the City. 5. The City of Vancouver will help to ensure that newcomers have access to appropriate and timely settlement and integration services, by working in partnership with other orders of government and non-governmental organizations. 6. The City of Vancouver acknowledges its role with respect to a large number of visitors to Canada, including tourists, international students, and temporary migrants
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This shift in the culture of the public sphere represents an erosion of one of the most significant and emblematic sites of negotiating difference and developing loyalty to the commons. My argument, thus, is that interventions to recover the public sphere as the space in which the public aware of a totality beyond both self and other is formed, have an important role to play in preventing judgements of difference from causing racial harm. Two examples will help to illustrate my argument: one that works with grounded multiplicity, and another that makes something out of multiplicity.

Urban Public Space

Cities are *the* sites of super-diversity, none more than their public spaces – busy streets, squares, parks, libraries, schools, workplaces, shopping centres, leisure complexes. When least regulated – or regulated for inclusion – these spaces most visibly manifest the ‘throwntogetherness’ that characterises plural and open societies (Massey, 2005). They reveal the closest possible juxtaposition of difference, the constant ebb and flow of different forms of life, and the unanticipated novelty that arises out of multiplicity. Such ‘situated surplus’ comes with no guarantees: urban public spaces that are replete with life can be spaces of bewilderment, fear of the unknown, and crowd anxiety, while those devoid of life or dominated by certain groups can pose considerable threat to minorities and stray visitors. This is the story of inner- and suburban public space in the US.

In contrast, urban public space in Britain, despite the trend towards surveillance, privatisation, and homogenisation, remains largely vibrant and inclusive (see, Worpole and Knox, 2007, for a summary of work commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation under its Public Spaces Programme). Of course, all manner of small terrors are committed from time to time – against immigrants, asylum seekers, vagrants, young children, and women – but the steady state seems to be one of public acceptance of ‘throwntogetherness’. This, I believe, is the product of pre-cognitive social adjustment to situated surplus, based on practice and repetition. The rhythms of public space, the tramlines of usage, the fixing of time and flow by architecture, the hidden technological infrastructure of rules guiding movement, the images of collective life projected in public displays, can all be counted as modes of orientation responsible for generating a kind of *studied trust* in urban multiplicity.

This is an important social outcome, with significant implications for a politics of the commons situated in multiplicity. Could there be a way of drawing on this studied trust to renew attachment to the commons? A start might be to revitalise and populate public spaces so that multiplicity resounds with vitality and promise, keeping fear and anxiety kept at bay through daily rhythms of movement, talk and watchfulness. This is precisely what is at work in markets, bazaars and communal gardens, where the intensity of presence and regard for the situation, crowds out harm long with naturalizing difference. In the communal garden, for example, this is the result of occasional sharing, curiosity over the neighbouring plot, or solidarity among the gardeners in face of threats to increase rents. In the market, it is the product of overlapping interests and informal reciprocal arrangements, as Lyons and Snoxell (2005) have shown in their work on market traders in Nairobi, or the division of space between different claimants, as Moyer (2004) has shown in her work on street traders in Dar es Salaam.

Harnessing multiplicity to an ethic of the commons can also draw on appropriate symbolic uses of public space (long a weapon of social inculcation in urban planning⁴). The kind of intervention I have in mind concerns symbolic promotion of a public culture of ‘the margins’. This is a projection – in public spaces – of the city

⁴ The history of modernist planning has been an experiment of precisely this sort, with plans for symbolic buildings, public art, architectural symmetry, and massive squares and boulevards, seen by its visionaries as a means of inculcating a sense of awe, gratitude, fear or modesty among people in face of big urban provisioning.

as plural, for the many, for the idiosyncratic and ill-conforming – but always in the spirit of revealing the ties that bind. An obvious example of such ‘solidarity in a minor key’ is the use of public art. In Birmingham, for example, this has included imaginative experiments such as comic strips placed in the back seats of taxis telling the stories of the city’s Asian cab drivers, public sculptures that deliberately play on the mixed racial narratives of the city, and photographic projections of the multiplicity of faces on the street on public buildings (Kennedy, 2004). There are also examples of urban art that are more exploratory in intent. These include attempts to commemorate painful legacies, in the way that the Power of Place project has attempted in Los Angeles by remembering the slave and midwife Biddy Mason (Hayden, 1995), or in the way that new-genre arts projects in Cape Town have tried to confront past and continuing social inequalities (Minty, 2006). Other examples include art forms intended to spark the imagination or shock, through artworks such as the Angel of the North in Gateshead, inviting reflection on the nature of community and belonging, or phantom art deliberately arranged to unsettle, as the artist ‘Banksy’ has sought. How successful these visualizations are in combating ethnic and racial prejudice is a matter of conjecture, but they do come with powerful signals of non-conformist public culture.

Finally, intervention in urban public space might focus on cultivating *conviviality*. Considerable interest in conviviality has emerged in contemporary thinking on multiculturalism as the ethos of living with difference, supported by policy effort to bring together people from different backgrounds in common spaces (e.g. mixed housing estates or youth clubs) or common ventures (e.g. school twinning or multicultural festivals). The idea of conviviality that I wish to propose is a form of solidarity with space rather than among strangers⁵. It stems from cultivating an attachment to urban public goods. It expresses a trust in urban plenitude, for example, shared experience of the safe park or the well-stocked library. Here, the promise of social regard comes from having access to collective resources, the knowledge that more does not become less through usage, the assurance of being part of a wider fabric of urban life. The result is conviviality towards a situation, mediated by the collective experience of bodies, matter and technology, and requiring attention to the social agency of mundane stuff such as sewage systems, traffic rules, time schedules, public toilets, street furniture, cars and pushchairs - seeing potential for social cohesion in improvements to the urban infrastructure.

A New Discourse of National Unity

There are many other possibilities to explore in such a politics of the commons. These include the provision of universal welfare, tackling social inequality, scaling up human rights, renewing ideas of utopia, and bringing back the idea of national society as more than community. These interventions will not eliminate the judgements of racial phenotype that daily come to the fore, but they might channel them in ways that do not cause harm, perhaps even sweep them into an idea of the public sphere as a space of restorative justice, public formation, and democratic empowerment.

⁵ This is partly because I am sceptical of the expected behavioural changes. The prosaics of inter-personal encounter rarely break the mould unless prejudice is tackled early, jolted out of complacency and surety, or rubbed this through meaningful and lasting contact. These are not forms of encounter that can be easily engineered.

In today's climate of disciplinary response towards the stranger, however, what is most needed is a radical change in the language and tone of national belonging. A first step would be to emulate the kind of multiculturalism that cities like Vancouver have been brave enough to actually deepen after 9/11. The charge that multiculturalism is a recipe for terrorism/seditious dissent or a threat to the national way of life, is an insult to Britain's minorities and a denial of the irrepressible pluralism of an open and fast changing society. There is no cultural essence to return to, only the hope of advancement through negotiations of diversity and the revitalisation of the public sphere so that new loyalties of solidarity can come to the fore. The return to the language of assimilation may succeed in drumming up populist fervour and restore a sense of superiority and direction for those nostalgic of times gone by, but it will not domesticate the stranger, it will not produce national cohesion.

The language of national belonging has to begin with pluralism, projecting a sense of community to come. There are many concepts and metaphor of human unity in moral and political philosophy, which come without the baggage of primordial culture and ethnicity⁶. Adam Smith's invocation of *sympathy* as the social glue in a market economy is an example, one that could be placed at the centre of official declarations of national unity. There are also more recent ideas that dig into a deeper ontology of inter-subjectivity. These include Levinas's (1998) idea of subjectivity itself as 'a form of trespass, which impinges on the other' (Popke, 2003: 304), therefore demanding *responsibility* towards the other well before any social mediation. Similarly, Derrida (2002) argued for the idea of *unconditional hospitality* towards the stranger as a new pillar of Europe, to safeguard the rights of migrants and to ensure that mutuality becomes a condition of citizenship.

These are abstract principles that need more work by practitioners in order to have grip. What is clear, though, is that without discussion of belonging along these lines, the danger of slipping back into divisive definitions of national unity will remain. One way of stopping the drip of daily instruction to the stranger is to treat the right to belong as a right acquired - by citizens and outsiders - through demonstration of an ethic of care towards the unfamiliar, the vulnerable and those at risk (Bauman, 2007). This would make being on the inside a matter of ethical practice towards the stranger, not a matter of instruction to the latter. This understanding of citizenship as ethical practice chimes with Parekh's (2000) call to link the politics of difference to a politics of shared principles of freedom, justice and liberty. Such a politics demands continual public reflection on the value and role of common sources of well-being and progress, including human rights, welfare, public life, association, civic participation, and democratic freedom. The quality of public debate on these questions shapes the degree to which racism is allowed to take hold. The irony is that in Britain increasingly their invocation has become tied to stranger anxiety, rather than to wider and continual discussion on what makes a decent society. It is time to stop placing the demands of citizenship on the shoulders of the imagined other.

⁶ For example, pre-Socratic thought linked the right to claim humanness to the relationship between strangers. Subjectivity itself was presumed as not fully formed prior to the encounter.