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What are the key axes of debate between supporters of multiculturalism and supporters of integration in Britain today?

Supporters of multiculturalism and integration are currently locked in heated debates of how best to manage increasing diversity whilst ensuring community cohesion and a sense of national identity are retained. The demographic reality is that Britain is changing. For example, the most recent census in Britain (2001) calculated that ethnic diversity made up 7.8% of the population (Office for National Statistics). Integration and multiculturalism can both mean three different things – it is a description of a population's demography (i.e., homogeneity / diversity respectively), a type of visionary aim for the future and different public policies. Key axes of debates revolve both groups' visions of Britain's national identity – past, present and future. Based on these there are further debates regarding the public policies which are advocated to ensure the differing desired outcomes are realised. These public policies include different approaches to immigration, minority group identity, how minorities are perceived and treated – in particular Muslims - and faith schools. This essay will first analyse the different visions of British national identity and then the different approaches to public policy that result.

It is first important to reflect upon what is meant by British national identity. Britain is a state and not a nation, whilst England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are the four nations that make up Britain. Therefore, Britain technically cannot have a 'national' identity but, for the purposes of this essay, I will use 'British national identity' to describe the collective identity of those within the UK as this is a common, popular understanding of the term.

The first key axis of debate is the different visions of British society that supporters of integration and multiculturalism hold. The visionary aim of multiculturalism is for diversity to be celebrated and valued as a two way exchange process of cultures so society can benefit from the best of what

everyone can offer. They argue that the meaning of British national identity is changing to incorporate diversity. Instead of a melting pot, a symphony (Milton, 1964) is envisioned for the future – each community playing their part and contributing what they can for the benefit of all, while retaining their difference. This is an 'inclusive vision of [Britain] as a community of communities' (Al-Maktabi, 2005).

The visionary aim for supporters of integration regarding Britain's future is for minorities to embrace and adopt the identity of the majority and, as a result, citizens will become more homogenous. This similarity, they argue, would help unite people and society would become more cohesive than those allowed to divide by cultural / religious lines. Today in Britain, supporters of integration claim multiculturalism has gone too far in encouraging such difference between citizens and that, as a result, we are losing our national identity and unity. Trevor Phillips, for example, recently argued that multiculturalism 'makes a fetish of difference instead of encouraging minorities to be truly British' (Modood, 2006, p63) and, the now Prime Minister, David Cameron MP, described, in 2007 when leader of the opposition, 'British multiculturalism as a 'barrier' that divides British society' (Cameron, 2007 in Meer and Modood, 2009, p475).

Supporters of integration envision salvaging the remains of British culture – language, history, art etc – and uniting society by minority groups joining the 'melting pot' of Britain – similar to what occurs in the USA – even if it takes a few generations. Supporters of multiculturalism, however, would argue that integration restricts individual and group identity and, by doing so, limits the strength and richness that can be gained as a nation from them.

The second key axis that will be addressed is what British national identity itself means to supporters of both integration and multiculturalism. Supporters of integration fall into two main categories when discussing this. First, there are those who believe that British (and indeed English) identity should be ethnically based and is an exclusive membership for those with blood ties to the soil of the

land. These views are often found to be held by members of far right nationalist parties, such as the British National Party (BNP) (www.bnp.org.uk), who are often accused as having hijacked nationalism for their own agenda. This position is built on a polarisation of 'us' and them' – sometimes using the terminology of 'host' and 'guest', which serves to emphasise the 'other's' lack of permanence, contribution and exclusion from truly belonging. However, any reference to a homogenous, monolithic Britain is contrary to its own diverse history. Britain's history of diversity has more recently included the arrival of French Protestants in the seventeenth century, Irish and Jewish communities in the early nineteenth century and from 1948 the arrival of West Indians and those from the Sub-Continent. More recently, with the expansion of the European Union, Britain has also welcomed Eastern Europeans to its shores.

The second group who support integration are more inclusive in their definition of British identity and would define nationalism as being civically, rather than ethnically, based – described by Goodhart (2006, p29) as 'progressive civic nationalism'. This civic identity is, however, dependent on certain aspects of culture being accepted and adopted by all members. There are various levels and stages of integration – some supporters would encourage complete assimilation of minorities – i.e., everything of their 'other' identity is rejected and all aspects of the majority's culture are adopted - while others are more specific about what minorities should adopt. These generally fall into three areas – culture (e.g., language), politics (e.g., that minorities should contribute to the political climate) and socio-economic (e.g., that minorities should actively contribute to society).

The basis of vision for both groups of supporters for integration is the belief that 'it is easier to feel solidarity with those who broadly share your values and way of life' (Wolfe and Klausen, 2000, p28) and therefore there is a real need for British identity to be stable and readily identifiable (Goodhart, 2006). There is also a fear that the changing demography is resulting in 'real' British identity being lost.

In contrast, supporters of multiculturalism generally argue that identifying oneself as British does not mean that other aspects of identity need be abandoned. The pressure to adopt the majority's culture and way of life can arguably lead to elements of resistance from minority groups for fear of losing their valued ethnic / religious identity. This can ultimately lead to frustration, resentment and arguably increased segregation.

Supporters of multiculturalism can be split into three groups when discussing what national identity means. The first group emphasises that British national identity should be based more upon inclusive values than the supporters of integration would advocate. Brown (2006a), then Chancellor of the Exchequer for Britain, stated that 'our central beliefs are a commitment to – liberty for all, responsibility for all and fairness to all' and that 'at the core of British history, the very ideas of 'active' citizenship, 'good neighbour', civic pride and the public realm' reside. The broadness of British identity, supporters of multiculturalism believe, allow everyone who lives in Britain an opportunity to belong. This is possible as being British can mean different, equally valid, things to different people (Goodhart, 2006) and, as a result, allows for 'differences of culture, race and faith [to be] recognised and accommodated within an overall sense of identity' (COIC, 2007 in Meer and Modood, 2009, p485). However, it is questionable whether such broad values are specific enough to be particularly 'British' (Kaufmann, 2006), and therefore do not demand enough commonality between citizens to ensure unity and mutual obligation. The problem, but more importantly the success story involved, is that these values of liberty, tolerance, acceptance etc, once seen as exclusively British, have been adopted by other nations and are now seen by some as being of universal value and significance (Kaufmann, 2006). However, Modood (2006a) suggests that that 'our particularities [still] give us our own take on them'. For example, Britain's history, of Protestantism, Capitalism and Liberal Democracy etc, has led to a greater focus on valuing individualism. This has led to an emphasis of protecting individual differences and rights and manifests itself in the form of cosmopolitan multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2009) and

noticeable milestones, such as the abolishment of slavery in 1807, the Race Relations Act in 1976 and The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.

The second group of supporters of multiculturalism emphasise the changing nature and definition of British national identity. Modood (2006) argues that while the demographic diversity of Britain has increased, the presence and inclusion of such difference has changed and adapted the very characteristics and nature of British identity itself. Malik (Crick and Malik, 2005/6, p4) describes this as diversity providing an opportunity to 'forge shared values and common identities through a process of political dialogue and struggle, a process whereby different values are put to the test, and a collective language of citizenship emerges'. In contrast to integration's fear of losing British national identity, multiculturalism is more comfortable with a flexible, evolving definition. In fact Modood (2006a) argues that it is useful to have such ambiguity, as this keeps the discussion about national identity alive and the definition relevant; reflecting the changing environment.

The third group of supporters of multiculturalism argue that British identity is one among many plural identities that people have and value (Colley, 2006). In contrast to integration's need to ensure loyalty and prominence of national identity in its citizens, multiculturalism accepts that other forms of group identities, e.g., ethnic and religious, do exist (Modood, 2006). This is more in keeping with communitarian multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2009), which is based on the understanding that national identity can mean different groups and individuals coming together and working for the common good of society.

The third key axis of debate between supporters of integration and multiculturalism is their positions regarding group identities, in particular the Muslim community who have proved to be particularly resilient to assimilation pressures. Supporters of integration believe that ethnic group identities pose a threat to national identity. This has been especially true, in recent years, for the Muslim

community who are often asked to reassert their loyalty to society and to denounce acts of terrorism (Meer and Modood, 2009) [It is important to note that this denouncement has happened on numerous occasions (e.g., MCB, 2001 and MCB, 2005)]. This reflects a 'fear of a threat from the inside' and has led to far right groups, such as the English Defence League, but increasing mainstream popular opinion, framing Muslims as the internal 'other' that are a threat to Britain and national identity.

Supporters of integration would also argue that ethnic groups and faith communities should not be identified and interacted with purely on the basis of their difference. This is certainly the view of Baroness Warsi who stated in a media interview that she found that approach patronising (Hattenstone, 2009) encouraging a focus on difference rather than on similarities. Instead, people should be addressed, recognised and included as individuals rather than as groups. This position is based on more of an individualist, cosmopolitan multiculturalism and arguably allows for diversity within groups to be recognised more readily (Meer and Modood, 2009).

In contrast, supporters of multiculturalism argue that group identities do not conflict with national identities and that they can co-exist as 'they are not in competition with one another' (Blunkett, 2005, p9). They also note the danger of assuming such conflict exists, as this requires asking people to choose one identity over another, causing unnecessary tension. When groups feel under attack they will arguably be more likely to unite together, increasingly their lobbying power by approaching the issue and those in power as a collective body. This has been the popular approach for many minority communities in Britain – for example, the Jewish community through the Board of Deputies (www.bod.org.uk), the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) (www.mcb.org.uk) for the Muslim community, the Hindu Forum of Britain (www.hinduforum.org) for the Hindu community etc. If people are treated solely as individuals, this would, multiculturalism supports argue, pose the problem as to who the government would consult regarding specific issues that disproportionately

affect specific communities. Having representatives from different communities seems a sensible response. The risk with this position, as Pearce (2007, in Meer and Modood, 2009, p490) describes, is that this may mean 'giving public recognition to groups which endorse fundamentally illiberal and even irrational goals'.

These key axes of debates also translate to differences in public policy suggestions. For example, integration as public policy would advocate capped immigration, citizenship tests for those who wish to become citizens (involving learning the majority's language – in this case, English – and knowledge of British customs and history) and citizenship classes at secondary school, which teach the rights and responsibilities that all British people have (Brown, 2006). Integration's belief that ethnic and religious group identities pose a threat to national identity also led to the previous government's PREVENT agenda, which led to interaction with the Muslim community being conducted through the lens of security rather than attempting to include them. This has proved to have a negative impact on community cohesion (MCB, 2009).

In contrast, multiculturalism as public policy calls for the recognition of strength in diversity and the untapped national resources of talent and ability that are wasted through discrimination and exclusion of others (CMEB, 2000, in Meer and Modood, 2009). There currently appears to be evidence of some hesitancy to embrace difference and extend values of equality and tolerance to include group rights and identities. For example, there exists a legal loophole that allows for Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim hatred to not be addressed through the legal system. This is because Muslims as a group identified by their faith not ethnicity (Meer and Modood, 2009). Brown (2006) argues that 'the modern application of - great enduring British values offers us a rich agenda for changes and modernisation true of these values' and this could arguably be applied to the need to address and combat Islamophobia and Anti Muslim hatred. Indeed, Bragg (2006) recalls that 'when Churchill talked of "their finest hour", he meant 500m men and women of different language and

culture, all coming to our small island to fight fascism'. However, as Goodhart (2006a) demonstrates, Islamophobia is dismissed by some as simply 'paranoia'.

This emphasis of minority contributions is at odds to the one way assimilation of minority identities which supporters of integration seek and is criticised for promoting the special treatment of certain groups (Malik, 2005/6). Joppke (1999, in Meer and Modood, 2009, p479) states that 'a citizenship that has - a 'precarious balance between citizenship universalism and racial group particularism - stops short of giving special group rights to immigrants'. However, supporters of multiculturalism believe they seek equal not special treatment.

Another area of public policy that supporters of integration and multiculturalism often clash over is the existence of faith schools. Supporters of integration believe one way of ensuring loyalty to the state and a united national identity is to discourage the existence of faith schools for minority groups, as this can be seen as exasperating the problem by decreasing interaction between people of different religious identities. In comparison, supporters of multiculturalism would defend faith schools as a choice that should be given equally to all parents and the increase of minority faith schools simply reflects the changing levels of diversity in society. They do not view faith schools as methods of segregation; indeed, many faith schools do accept children from other faiths. Interaction with other members of society will, they argue, come from other aspects of the child's life and it is important to protect, encourage and nurture their valued religious identity in case it is lost. Faith schools, they argue, help facilitate this.

In conclusion, if the government is to work towards achieving a united, peaceful and cohesive society through public policy, it is important that there is a consensus of opinion for what we are aiming for – i.e., what Britain should be like and what British national identity should mean.

Unfortunately, such a consensus of opinion evidently does not yet exist. The key axes of debate between supporters of multiculturalism are visions of British society's future, what British identity means, group identities and the public policies encouraged by supporters of each group. However, as Meer and Modood (2009) argue, perhaps there should be a shift of emphasis to equality rather than diversity, as this is something compatible with both positions. Both approaches do focus on a desire to eliminate community division and agree that dialogue, interaction and working together is vital to achieve this. While conflict and difference of opinion will always be inevitable, all agree this remains a worthwhile venture.

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