

Immigration and Integration in Britain: The Great Nationalism Debate

Multiculturalism, by Tariq Modood (Polity Press, 2nd Ed. 2013)

Interculturalism, by Ted Cattle (Palgrave Macmillan 2012)

The British Dream, by David Goodhart (Atlantic Books 2013)

Eric Kaufmann

Birkbeck College, University of London

In May 2014, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), campaigning on a platform of reducing immigration, won 28 percent of the popular vote, two and a half points ahead of Labour and four and a half ahead of the Tories, to top the poll in Britain at the European Union elections. With opposition to immigration running at around 80 percent, some see the problem as one of poor integration of minority groups and East European immigrants, whose combined number had more than doubled in ten years to comprise a fifth of the population. Lurking behind the scenes is a debate which had raged for the better part of fifteen years. Is Britain, especially England, a nation to which newcomers should assimilate? Is it a melting pot, or cosmopolis, in which a tangle of different groups give and take to create an ever-evolving hybrid? Or is it a carapace under which a growing diversity of ethnic communities conduct their own affairs, albeit celebrating their unity-in-diversity?

In 2001, Britain was in a relaxed mood. The economy was booming under the Blair government and the ceasefire and subsequent peace process in Northern Ireland allowed the gradual return of garbage cans to urban areas in the late 90s and the departure of police with machine guns searching cars entering London. However, in the same year, two events from an entirely different quarter rocked the British political scene. In May 2001, riots between whites and Pakistani Muslims in the segregated northern mill towns of Oldham and Burnley began and burned through the summer, exposing the tense state of ethnic relations in a series of urban areas, especially in the North and Midlands. In September, the 9/11 bombings again opened up a rift between whites and Muslims, which was to widen further with the "7/7" subway bombings in London in July 2005.

These events raised the profile of issues of race relations and immigration: since 2002, immigration/race issues have generally ranked first or second in people's list of electoral priorities according to polls published by Ipsos-Mori. Policymakers, academics and politicians have leapt into this whirlwind, each touting their particular solution. Questions of race - centred on the US but extending to Britain and beyond - preoccupied policymakers from the 1960s to the 1980s. Immigration and multilingualism were central in the 90s, featuring Canadian political theorists Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor, both of whom grappled with the problem of how to satisfy both immigrant and separatist concerns. In the 2000s, however, attention has shifted from language and race to religion, with Europe as the main theatre in which the multicultural drama has played out.

This has focused attention on European writers, especially British Muslim thinkers such as Bhikhu Parekh and Tariq Modood. Their work is also important because it has had to deal not only with the Islamist challenge, but also the reaction of the European mainstream to Islamism and the consequent demise of support for multiculturalism among centre-Left politicians and the media. In this essay we consider the work of Modood alongside two writers from the policy and media worlds, Ted Cantle and David Goodhart. As someone who knows all three fairly well and whose circuit overlaps substantially with their London-based round of policy workshops and academic conferences, I found it fascinating to see book-length treatments of their worldviews.

The publication of Bhikhu Parekh's *Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* in 2000 can be viewed as a watershed for multiculturalism in Britain. Prior to this point, an unstated multiculturalism was the point of departure for the little thinking the government - especially Labour governments - did on the subject. One of the rare statements of "official" multiculturalism was that of Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, who wrote in 1966:

Integration is perhaps rather a 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 would turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of Carbon copies of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman. I define integration, therefore, not as a flattering process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. This is the goal. We may fall a little short of this full attainment, as have other communities both in the past and in the present. But if we are to maintain any sort of world reputation for civilized living and social cohesion, we must get far nearer to its achievement than is the case today (Cantle, p. 65).

In the late 1990s, the Blair government increased immigration and lauded a more open, globalized, confident Britain, with a revived London at its centre. Blair's Foreign Secretary Robin Cook spoke of Chicken tikka masala, an Indian dish created in Britain, as a symbol of the new country.

Yet popular disquiet was growing. In Europe, the far right was surging. In Britain, concerns over race and migration were rising as the volume of immigration increased. Parekh's report reflected many of the assumptions of critical multiculturalism - including the notion of Britain as a racist society - which were current in academia, but it jarred with government ministers who were on the defensive against a rising tide of negative public opinion. Castigated as out of touch, Parekh was a victim of shifting political winds.

Against the backdrop of the Mill Town Riots and London Bombings, the 2000s were hardly an auspicious time for celebrating difference. The second half of the 2000s bore witness to less volatile ethnic relations as global jihadism waned and was later wrong-footed by the Arab Spring. Yet it was precisely this period in which the far right British National Party (BNP), and, after 2009, UKIP, surged. Politicians across the political spectrum began to compete over who could best reduce immigration and promote integration into a shared British national identity.

I vividly recall standing in as a last-minute substitute speaker for the motion at an Oxford Union debate in 2005. The event was to have featured David Goodhart alongside Ted Cantle and Commission for Racial Equality czar Trevor Phillips on the integration side against the late Bernard

Crick, Tariq Modood and several students on the multiculturalism side. Since then, I have been present at many conversations, in print and in person, between Modood, Goodhart and Cante.

The three represent, almost perfectly, competing theories of how to manage ethnic relations and national identity in a modern state. Modood is a multiculturalist. He advocates the recognition and accommodation of ethnic and religious groups, and urges Britain to follow Canada and Australia in celebrating diversity as a national trait. Cante is a cosmopolitan in the Jeremy Waldron sense: privileging individuals over groups, hybridity over boundaries, post-ethnicity over ethnicity, internationalism rather than nationalism. Finally Goodhart is a liberal nationalist who urges immigrants to integrate into a well-defined British nation. He seeks a thicker, more Franco-American, Republican-style national symbolism incorporating national days and a common history.

Their respective books are all well-written and reflect an awareness of each other's position. Modood, as a professor, writes in a mode familiar to academic political theorists. Cante and Goodhart, who stem from the policy world, are breezier and somewhat more concerned with events and public policy, but both have read the academic literature and copiously footnote their arguments.

Modood is opposed to liberal nationalism and, perhaps because an anti-national stance is supported by many liberal theorists, spends little time on it. He therefore expends most of his ink on his liberal cosmopolitan adversaries. He is especially robust in taking on soft multiculturalists like Anne Phillips who defend ethnic diversity against monoculturalism but deny the existence of groups. The somewhat modish tendency to reduce groups to situations or individuals gets Phillips in a bind, as when she defends the right of women to access shariah courts if they wish but opposes the very notion of religious authority that underpins such courts. Modood is surely correct (p. 157) to inveigh against a Thatcherite "no such thing as society, only individuals" approach. He also notes that most members of groups identify with discrete communities, even if no two individuals perceive the group exactly alike. Modood concurs with the need for anti-essentialism, yet cleaves to a Wittgensteinian "family resemblance" conception of identity which allows for the commonsense notions of group to which many feel attached.

Modood makes common cause with soft multiculturalists in attacking assimilation and monoculturalism, but fails to mark out the red lines that Will Kymlicka, for instance, draws around individual rights. This is intellectually bold but insufficiently developed given the importance of these questions for liberal thinkers, policymakers and the public. It leads Modood to defend those who protested against Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* in 1989, though he calls for moral rather than legal sanctions against Rushdie. Just as troubling is the way Modood skates over explosive issues such as the way conservative Muslims treat women, gays, religious skepticism, apostates or heretics. Modood is no Islamic fundamentalist, but his desire to defend Muslims and his principled communitarianism lead him to overstep the bounds of liberal commonsense at a number of junctures. Later in the book Modood takes on the demise of multiculturalism. "Multiculturalism has few advocates and the term is highly damaged," he admits (p. 182). Yet, he insists, if we cut beneath the symbolism, governments continue to set targets or even quotas for minority representation in certain spheres, if only to better address problems of inequality. Integrationists may quibble that these are nationalist aims, but an argument can be made that the recognition of groups, even as a means to a national end, represents a form of multicultural recognition. In law, and in practice, ethnic leaders and authorities continue to be recognized; hence multiculturalism is in many ways stronger even as the multicultural brand has taken a pounding in Britain, as in Europe. It's a convincing argument and Modood puts it well.

Where Modood treasures group identity and urges states to officially recognise group claims against the predations of the liberal state, Ted Cante focuses on the individual. Cante considers ethnic and religious boundaries to be outmoded. He takes multiculturalists like Modood to task for failing to

address illiberalism and extremism. He skewers liberal nationalists like Goodhart for propounding a similarly groupist view of humanity, and for attempting to stanch the flow of global migration which Cattle sees as part and parcel of our decentred, Baumanite world order. Cattle points to the many individuals in modern Britain who identify with the world or Europe on the one hand, or locale and region on the other. To paraphrase Daniel Bell, he argues that for many of the world's people, the nation is too big for the small problems of life and too small for the big ones.

As the author of the influential report into the 2001 Mill Town Riots, Cattle pressed home the importance of community cohesion and inter-ethnic contact: breaking down barriers between communities who essentially live "parallel lives" in segregated ethnic enclaves. For Cattle, "interculturalism" (a term he differentiates from the Quebec nationalist policy of the same name) rather than multiculturalism is the appropriate response to our modern condition. Where multiculturalism is inward-looking, legitimating self-appointed "community leaders" and authority structures with an investment in the segregated status quo, Cattle urges government to cut ties with such leaders and go directly to the people. Interculturalism would promote interaction, intermarriage, hybridity, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. For Cattle, there is already plenty of evidence of this, not least in the sharp rise in mixed-race marriages and households in Britain recorded between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. Mixed-race individuals fail to fit the boxes drawn up for them by multiculturalists or the state. In addition, many are reaching out through social media to like-minded others across the world to forge new modes of post-ethnic, postnational belonging.

Cattle makes a persuasive case, but there a number of points of tension in the argument. First, the book at times appears to be saying that people are retreating from globalization into the comforts of ethnicity, nationalism and faith. Cattle cites the rise of the far right BNP and UKIP as evidence (pp. 86-7). This sits awkwardly with much of the rest of the book where we are assured that people are naturally cosmopolitan and post-ethnic. There is also a tendency to overplay evidence for hybridity and the fluidity of group identity. Can the "parallel lives" of Asian Muslims and whites in Oldham and Burnley really be laid exclusively at the feet of community leaders and state multiculturalism? Surely the preferences of individuals are also involved. Are the cosmopolitan views of youth likely to remain unadulterated, or might people grow more bonded to communities as they have families, experience disappointment and age across the life course? Finally, globalization is, as Michael Mann once noted, a multi-stranded concept consisting of a mix of bilateral, international, transnational and supranational phenomena. Evidence of its inevitable march is strongly contested - in most parts of the world the state is spending an increasing share of GDP. Military procurement is rising among the BRICs and other developing countries. Separatism in Catalonia or Scotland is hardly evidence of postnationalism: it instead reveals the widespread yearning for a nation-state among the stateless. Finally, the globalization of culture has typically been accompanied by a hardening of national identities even if the cultural "stuff" contained in each nation grows less distinct. This exaggeration of globalization feeds into Cattle's political theory: where Modood fails to defend the individual, Cattle pays insufficient heed to the importance of group attachment.

David Goodhart's *The British Dream* was launched on the evening Margaret Thatcher died. Though Goodhart strenuously opposes Thatcherite economics, his views on immigration and national identity bear at least a passing resemblance to those of the Iron Lady. Where they differ is Goodhart's affinity for the welfare state and social solidarity. Hence his call for the centre-Left to embrace national identity, which he sees as having been abandoned by a new breed of metropolitan, Blairite left-liberal, more comfortable in Cattle's cosmopolitan world than in the difficult grind of working- and lower-middle class Britain.

Goodhart, the founder of *Prospect*, a leading British intellectual magazine with a leftish readership, and now director of the centrist think tank Demos, made his name with a provocatively titled 2004 Guardian/*Prospect* article, "Is Britain Too Diverse?" Essentially Goodhart argued there is a tradeoff

between a high-trust, high-solidarity European-style welfare state and a low-trust, individualistic society like the United States. Scandinavia's cultural homogeneity underpins its strong welfare state. The US is diverse, and, according to research by Alberto Alesina, Robert Putnam and others, this diversity reduces trust and the willingness to share resources in the form of public goods. More diverse cities and states of the USA are more opposed to social spending than more homogeneous ones. People need to see themselves reflected among the poor, to identify with them, argues Goodhart, in order to share large chunks of their income with them. In his book he cites survey evidence which shows a striking decline in British support for higher taxes to fund welfare benefits, from 58 per cent in 1991 to 28 per cent in 2012. Young people are especially unsympathetic to welfarist ideals, a harbinger of the future. Putnam's work has been contested by quantitative researchers who argue that such findings are an artefact of diverse areas being more deprived than white areas, or that trust gaps fade with inter-ethnic contact, but Goodhart finds these counterarguments unconvincing.

From previous research, Goodhart, like Putnam, calls for a more robust civic nationalism to integrate majority and minority into a common national identity. However, Goodhart goes further, contending that immigration levels need to fall substantially in Britain to permit integration to catch up, and to respond to the democratic wishes of the British majority. He argues that a tacit social contract with working-class white Britons existed prior to the 90s, based on a more contributory and "fairness"-driven notion of welfare rather than the universalistic needs-based emphasis of recent decades which benefits very poor minorities more than semi-poor whites. He therefore champions the reintroduction of aspects of reciprocity into the British welfare state. For Goodhart, the surfeit of cheap, high-quality, motivated labour provided by immigration - notably from Eastern Europe - allows a short-termist upper-middle class to reap the benefits while ignoring the large pool of deskilled or undermotivated native workers. Accordingly, Goodhart endorses the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition government's attempt to reduce migration to the "tens of thousands".

Goodhart's book brings together his earlier focus on the way diversity challenges the welfare state, and on the consequent need to reduce immigration, with his post-2006 concentration on crafting a deeper British civic nationalism. Much of his tale consists of a brief history and sociological tour through the ethnoscape of modern Britain, from the Caribbeans to the Ugandan Asians, Somalis and Poles. Caribbeans have a high rate of intermarriage and appear to be following the "Irish" pattern of assimilation into the working class. Chinese, Indians and East African Asians perform above the national average, treading the "Jewish" path toward absorption into the middle class. At the other end, Bangladeshis, Somalis and Pakistanis are struggling, hamstrung by institutions such as cross-cousin marriage and patriarchy. Alongside this, the story usefully tracks government policy and the meanderings of British national identity, buffeted by forces such as the end of empire, Europeanization and Scottish and Welsh assertion.

The book takes in the debates which brooked large in the early 2000s such as segregation, Britishness, multiculturalism and radicalization, and injects those of the later 2000s such as immigration and Englishness. This is fitting, for Goodhart's has been one of the most prominent voices in the debate: he regularly interacts with politicians, journalists and policy wonks of various political stripes in person and in print. The book is well-written and engaging, keeping several balls in the air while drawing connections between them. Modood argues there is no agreed-upon definition of Britishness that minorities could assimilate into even if they wished. In reply, Goodhart urges a more Britain-centred history curriculum but also (though this is unacknowledged) bends to Modood's point by admitting there are contentious episodes in the national past and that, to some extent, Britons will belong differently to the nation depending on their ethnic vantage point. Where the two differ radically is over the direction of cultural interchange - Goodhart, like many liberal nationalists, believes the onus is principally on minorities to accommodate to majority traditions because migration was a voluntary choice on their part.

Regardless of where one stands on these issues, there is a tension in Goodhart's argument between a liberal, universalizing impulse which attacks multiculturalism for promoting separatism and division, and a conservative particularism which derides cosmopolitan free-market liberalism for running roughshod over natural social ties, group attachment and social glue. Goodhart and Cattle are on good terms, and agree on much when it comes to attacking multiculturalism, but Goodhart should grant Modood his due regarding the importance of community. What is missing in Goodhart is a conception of how to reduce diversity to achieve solidarity - after all, minorities' young age structure means diversity will continue to rise even if immigration is cut to zero. The logical step would be to champion assimilation and intermarriage but Goodhart is silent on these contentious mechanisms.

One can fault Goodhart for failing to come clean over the liberal-communitarian tension, Cattle for equivocating over whether group attachment matters, and Modood for neglecting the need for social cohesion at national level and gliding past fundamentalism. Yet all have penned impressive, readable books which commendably reach beyond the confines of their particular worlds. If Canadian and American scholars defined the multiculturalism debate in the 90s against the backdrop of affirmative action, aboriginal awakening and Quebec separatism, it may be argued that British writers, faced with the challenge of Islamism, devolution, European integration and far right resurgence, have carried the torch through the 2000s.