

# citizenship, cohesion and solidarity

Edited by Nick Johnson



THE SMITH INSTITUTE

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## Preface

Wilf Stevenson, Director of the Smith Institute

The Smith Institute is an independent think tank set up to undertake research and education in issues that flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives. In recent years the institute has centred its work on the policy implications arising from the interactions of equality, enterprise and equity.

The challenge of how we build sustainable and cohesive communities at both local and national level is one of the key debates of public policy. We live in a time of rapid change generated by globalisation, demography and technology. Britain, despite its status as one of the world's richest economies and most diverse societies, is still a place of inequality, exclusion and isolation. Segregation between communities seems to be growing in some parts of the country. Extremism, both political and religious, is on the rise as people become more disillusioned and disconnected.

The recent Commission on Integration and Cohesion report, *Our Shared Future*, argued the need to focus on developing policy solutions that enable people to live together rather than side by side, that promote greater shared identity, that support new migrants in adapting to life in Britain, that define what it means to be a citizen, and that instil a greater sense of civic responsibility and social solidarity into all those in our society. We need to make Britain, in the words of the Chief Rabbi's new book, "the home we build together".

Building on this recent work, the essays in this monograph seek to articulate more fully where the policy debate has taken us and to identify the implications for delivery at a local level. The authors come from a variety of backgrounds and we aim to bring a combination of the academic, practitioner and policy-maker perspective to these issues. Most importantly, the essays aim to take the issue forward. The time for abstract discussions is over; it is now time to deliver on cohesion.

The Smith Institute thanks Nick Johnson for agreeing to edit this collection of essays, and gratefully acknowledges the support of the Barrow Cadbury Trust towards this publication and the associated seminar.

## **Introduction: the state of cohesion policy**

Nick Johnson, Research Fellow at the Smith Institute and  
Director of Policy at the Institute of Community Cohesion

In recent years, community groups, public servants and the public at large have been bombarded with a vast array of thinking, initiatives and programmes aimed at generating greater civic involvement and more community cohesion. Much of this work reached its apotheosis in 2007's report from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, *Our Shared Future*, and Lord Goldsmith's citizenship review earlier this year.<sup>1</sup>

For all this activity, however, where has the debate got to? Have we a better idea now of what community cohesion means in practice than we did when the term was first coined in response to the disturbances in our Northern towns in 2001? More crucially, are we moving from a theoretical discussion towards determining the policy and practical implications?

This collection of essays aims to take stock of the debate, draw some lines under recent activity and set out a framework for seeing cohesion, citizenship and solidarity in the future. The time has come to see what cohesion means in practice.

Most reports commissioned in the wake of a crisis or tragedy soon fade into obscurity. However, in the past decade there have been two in the field of race relations whose impact have been seismic. First came the MacPherson inquiry into the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's murder, which led to both a change in the understanding of racial discrimination and an actual change in the law. Then came the Cattle report into the riots in Northern towns that erupted in the summer of 2001. This report helped change discussion about community relations in the UK.

Cattle's assertion was that people from different backgrounds were living "parallel lives". This argument ushered in several years of debate about the state of British multiculturalism. Much of the debate was conducted by those on the left who suddenly questioned whether their commitment to ever-increasing diversity was compatible with their advocacy of social solidarity. Meanwhile, many on the right took the headline findings to dance on the grave of multiculturalism.

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<sup>1</sup> *Commission on Integration & Cohesion – Our Shared Future* (Department for Communities & Local Government, June 2007); Goldsmith, P (Lord) *Citizenship: Our Common Bond* (HMSO, 2008)

Neither side of the political spectrum has covered itself in much glory. What both have also singularly failed to do is to come up with a new agenda. In his essay here, Ted Cantle looks at the fallout from his original report and monitors developments. He seeks to put his notion of community cohesion in a scholarly context, looking at how it fits into Britain's history of race relations. He addresses some of the academic debates that have raged about segregation and tries to rise above the "index wars" he describes.

In doing so, he makes a resolute plea for the fundamental message of his original report to be heeded – that we must break down the barriers between the "parallel lives" that people live and foster meaningful interaction. He links this into inequality and the rise of extremism, but goes beyond the analysis that the original report contained and advocates some of the policy implications for breaking down segregation.

Many of these initiatives are similar to those advocated by champions of social capital. Ed Fieldhouse assesses how social capital – what it is, how it can be measured, what generates it – influences the debates over cohesion. High levels of social capital can be seen as an indicator of social solidarity, and Fieldhouse argues that there is much to help identify how to promote and measure cohesion in social capital literature.

He also addresses one of the most controversial findings of Robert Putnam's work in the US – that there is a strong correlation between higher levels of ethnic diversity and lower levels of social trust. Opponents see this as a US phenomenon but Fieldhouse shows that it may not be. Much UK opposition to Putnam argues that it is deprivation rather than diversity that is responsible for lower levels of social capital. However, Fieldhouse argues that these should not necessarily be seen as conflicting arguments.

This is a point made convincingly by Sukhvinder Kaur-Stubbs. She worries that in the drive for interaction initiatives, many policy makers have forgotten the pivotal role that inequality plays in limiting lasting cohesion. By not addressing the gap between rich and poor, we cannot hope to achieve cohesion. Solidarity is threatened when people feel vulnerable or have to compete for services. The need for equality to be part of the cohesion message is one that was in Cantle's initial report, was fundamental to the work of the Commission for Racial Equality to promote integration and was restated by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. And yet it is still not central to government policy on cohesion.

Kaur-Stubbs' message that cohesion must not exist in a vacuum is reinforced by John

Clarke's essay on the risks posed by the "choice" agenda. Clarke, using his own primary research, argues that the government's public service reform agenda has, at best, been seen independently of cohesion and in some ways may actually be working against it. On the one hand, the government has been looking at ways of making people feel like more active citizens, yet on the other it has been telling people that they are consumers. Clarke, like Kaur-Stubbs, makes the case that as long as cohesion is seen as an independent issue rather than a mainstream aim, it will be peripheral in public policy terms.

Faith has frequently been seen as a threat to cohesion. For some people, it has replaced ethnicity as the way in which people are divided into groups, and is a barrier to interaction. Dilwar Hussein argues against this. He shows that many of the values espoused by those participating in faith-based activities are crucial to building wider social solidarity. He also reinforces a point made by Ed Fieldhouse, in arguing that bonding social capital, such as that demonstrated by faith groups, should be seen as a platform to bridging rather than as a barrier.

The forces of globalisation and increased international migration are often cited as having had a detrimental effect on cohesion in the UK. The Commission on Integration and Cohesion emphasised that the answer to cohesion is local. Hetan Shah turns these arguments on their head and says that we have to rethink our notions of cohesion. Rather than talk about localities or strive for some form of unifying identity that exists within national or city borders, Shah urges us to look beyond narrow definitions and into the need to build a multi-layered concept of solidarity – one that is local, national and global. He then shows the implications of this in terms of education policy, and how we can equip children to live in an interdependent and truly multicultural society.

The relationship between policy and practice is explored in greater depth by the final two chapters. Both are written from the perspective of those who are seeking cohesion at the local level. While the circumstances and experiences of PeaceMaker and the Ashiana Community Project are quite different, the conclusions are similar. Raja Miah and Erin Hoekstra also make the case that some of the biggest barriers to cohesion are the entrenched interests of local community groups and representatives. They advocate looking beyond these and bringing about change through empowerment and engagement with those left out of the system for too long.

Miah and Hoekstra also talk of the need to take a long-term approach, and warn against short-term fixes. Cohesion and solidarity, they argue, are best generated through shared

activities and meaningful interaction in mainstream projects and activities. They make the case for the "organic cohesion" that Meena Bharadwa discusses. She warns of too many top-down and short-term initiatives and shows how, by identifying interests that go across ethnic boundaries and bringing people into a common cause, long-term cohesion can be generated. By contrast, she argues, too much of recent interest in cohesion has failed to grasp this and is akin to being "genetically modified" and therefore likely to be unsustainable.

This collection of essays argue that cohesion and solidarity not only are important elements of public policy but also are not impossible dreams. However, they cannot be achieved if seen in isolation or forced upon reluctant communities. Cohesion is a thematic policy and has interests in all aspects of service delivery and other policy development. Targeted programmes and initiatives can, at best, be sticking plasters. All the good work that can, and is, being done at a local level to boost community cohesion is threatened by a climate where access to services is limited for some and increasingly segregated for others. Poverty and deprivation almost certainly remain the single biggest barriers to cohesion, and talk of increased choice is meaningless for our most excluded communities.

Additionally, cohesion cannot be artificially constructed. The greatest and most lasting social solidarity is generated by meaningful interaction between people over a period of time. Rather than appeal to people as part of an ethnic group, we should look to identities that cross barriers – parents, patients, library users, sports fans. Interaction in these fields breaks down barriers and creates cohesion. It is therefore imperative that the choice agenda does not seek to divide parents into different groups or limit the opportunities for that interaction. This collection can help move the debate on – both in terms of identifying what works at a local level and also by placing cohesion at the centre of wider public policy debates.



## Chapter 1

# Parallel lives – the development of community cohesion

Professor Ted Cattle, Executive Chair at the Institute of Community Cohesion

## Parallel lives – the development of community cohesion

The concept of parallel lives was first established in the report of the Community Cohesion Review Team, which examined the causes of the race riots in Northern towns in England in 2001.<sup>1</sup> It has increasingly become a means by which both the theory and practice of community cohesion can be understood and developed and has begun to be extended beyond the race and faith debate.

The term "parallel lives" was very deliberately chosen to emphasise that the two principal communities (white and Asian) that were the main focus of the report had little or no contact and had developed separately. The concept was neutral in that it illustrated that it was not a case of either community moving away from the other; both had remained in, or developed, separate spheres. Distinctive residential areas did not in themselves constitute parallel lives and were apparent only when supported by separate social, cultural, educational and employment patterns – the parallel lives did not meet at any point. The separation of communities by ethnicity and/or faith meant that there was a lack of shared experiences, with little opportunity for the emergence of shared values.

While the focus was very much upon the Northern towns, the term reflected findings in many different parts of the country and a wider concern about the many levels of both spatial and social segregation. The separation of communities into their parallel lives, even where less acute than in the Northern towns, created a situation in which many communities lived in ignorance and fear of each other, with each feeling that others were receiving preferential treatment, often as the result of regeneration and other programmes.

Little or nothing had been done to break down the barriers between the communities, to promote interaction and mutual trust and understanding – prejudices were allowed to fester with little leadership at either local or national level to promote a positive view of diversity. In these circumstances, it was relatively easy for the far right and other extremists to develop myths and misinformation and stir up race and religious hatred – and to maintain the conditions under which disadvantage and inequalities would persist.

### Separate development

This separation of communities had been constructed on the back of the racism and

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<sup>1</sup> Cattle, T *Report of the Community Cohesion Review Team* (Home Office, 2001)

discrimination in the post-war period. Like migrants before them, the new wave of predominantly Caribbean and South Asian people found themselves pushed into low-grade housing, often clustered around employers that provided low-skilled and low-paid employment. The new migrants were received with great suspicion and often hostility.

Even though anti-discrimination legislation was eventually introduced in 1965, the atmosphere remained highly charged, with Enoch Powell's "rivers of blood" racist rallying call gaining some considerable support in 1968. Not surprisingly, minorities built defensive support systems around themselves and anti-racist supporters, often associated with the left, were quickly rallied when any criticism of minorities began to emerge.

A defensive and protective policy based upon multicultural separateness gained support from both sides of the political divide. The right opposed integration and racial mixing and the left feared that it would precipitate further hostility and that the cultural heritage of minorities would be undermined in a wave of assimilation. The intention to "promote good race relations" – which was actually enshrined in legislation in 1968 – was never implemented with any real sense of purpose, and any discussion of the emerging multi-cultural model appeared to provide an opportunity to excite even more racist sentiment and to give greater oxygen to the far right.

Demands for social justice were, however, impossible to ignore and during the late 1960s an assertive "black" political consciousness, with support from developments in the United States, began to gather steam. This gave rise to a number of remedial programmes, often targeted at geographical areas and neighbourhoods where ethnic-minority groups were concentrated. This was also supported by a range of equal opportunity policies, mainly aimed at tackling discrimination in the workplace and key services like social housing. These initiatives had some success, and some of the values and ideals behind them were internalised and became more widely adopted as part of the "fair play" associated with liberal multiculturalism.

Nevertheless, some sort of notion of "separate development" seems to underpin much of our post-war race relations policy, with a high degree of both social and spatial segregation continuing. The 2001 reports<sup>2</sup> all, in their own way, provided evidence of the

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2 Cattle, op cit; Denham, J *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order & Community Cohesion* (Home Office, 2001); Clarke, T *Burnley Speaks, Who Listens?* (Burnley Borough Council, 2001); Ritchie, D *Oldham Independent Review: One Oldham, One Future* (Government Office for the North West, 2001); Ouseley, H *Community Pride Not Prejudice* (Bradford Vision, 2001)

continuation of separate development. They showed that, rather than a gradual breaking down of social and economic barriers, "segregation" became the focus of policy.

This was taken further into public debate by the idea that the country was "sleepwalking into segregation" – a phrase coined in 2005 by Trevor Phillips, then chair of the Commission for Racial Equality.<sup>3</sup> Again, the difficulty of even discussing our multicultural model quickly became evident, as Phillips was accused of somehow attacking, or blaming, ethnic minorities. Subsequently, the CRE developed an approach to cohesion and integration based upon the three principles of "equality, participation and interaction", but this was also attacked by some who believed that "integration" was some sort of coded move towards assimilation. However, the signs are that there is now room for a more mature debate about the sort of multicultural society that could, and should, be created.

There is no agreement about whether we are, in fact, becoming more segregated – or even what is meant by the term. Most of the debate centres on a comparison of the 2001 census with the data generated in 1991. This data is now acknowledged to be hopelessly out of date, with both inward and outward migration, as well as population turnover and churn, rapidly increasing even since 2001.

The censuses, in any event, provide useful data only in respect of spatial distribution of population. Results also depend upon both the type of index used and the level at which they are applied. There is now little agreement between academic studies on this point, and whereas Simpson<sup>4</sup> argues that segregation is not actually increasing, Poulsen<sup>5</sup> has found that there are a growing number of ethnic-minority "enclaves", based upon his study looking at 16 UK major cities.

The change in the composition of local populations as a result of white population change is significant. Over the period 1991 to 2001, census data reveals that, in those cities in which the ethnic-minority community is already heavily concentrated, the white population reduced by around 43,000 in Manchester, 90,000 in Birmingham and 340,000 in London. Over the same period in those cities, the ethnic-minority population increased by around 15,000, 58,000 and 600,000 respectively.

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3 Speech to the Manchester Community Relations Council, 22 September 2005

4 Simpson, L *Statistics of Racial Segregation: Measures, Evidence & Policy*, occasional paper no 24 (University of Manchester, 2003)

5 Poulsen, M *The "New Geography" of Ethnicity in Britain?*, paper to the Royal Geographic Society given in London on 31 August 2005

Other cities and areas experienced similar change. At the same time, the white population in the neighbouring areas, generally with a low proportion of ethnic minorities, showed considerable growth. Based on "natural factors" – birth and death rates – the white population would have been expected to remain static and, while the ethnic-minority population would have grown (because of a younger age range and higher fertility rates), it was also augmented by inward migration in some areas.

### **Layers of separation**

We should, however, not let an argument over geography distract from wider notions of the "layers of separation"<sup>6</sup> and need to remember that the concept of parallel lives was based upon the compound effect of communities separated from each other at spatial, social and cultural levels. If segregation was simply at the spatial level, with many other points of intersection with other communities – for example, through education, employment and recreational spheres – then it is likely that these shared spaces would provide a means by which mutual knowledge, understanding and trust would grow, compensating for the limited interaction resulting from separation in a residential sense.

It is the case that the various "layers of separation" that have been the subject of measurement appear to show an increasing tendency towards parallel lives. In particular, and of greatest importance, some compelling evidence has begun to emerge from the study of school populations, both in terms of changing composition and in comparison with the neighbourhood or area which they serve. A study of "parallel lives and ethnic segregation in the playground and the neighbourhood"<sup>7</sup> found that:

*... on average school segregation is greater than the segregation of the same group in the surrounding neighbourhood.*

In addition, and using recently released data, Johnson, Burgess et al<sup>8</sup> have now been able to explore the extent of ethnic segregation in schools and whether it simply mirrors that found in local neighbourhoods. Unlike their previous studies, the new data enabled them to base their conclusions on an analysis of every school in England, focus on much smaller and more relevant areas and utilise a graphical concentration profile. Their initial analyses:

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6 Cantle, T *Community Cohesion: A New Framework for Race & Diversity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

7 Burgess, S, Wilson, D and Lupton, R *Parallel Lives & Ethnic Segregation in the Playground & the Neighbourhood*, Centre for Market & Public Organisation working paper no 04/094 (CMPO, 2004) p1

8 Johnson, R, Burgess, S, Wilson, D and Harris, R *School & Residential Ethnic Segregation: An Analysis of Variations across England's Local Education Authorities*, Centre for Market & Public Organisation paper 06/145 (CMPO, 2006)

... show national patterns of both residential and school segregation, with the clear suggestion that the latter is greater than the former, especially among those of South Asian ethnicity.

The position of schools also reflects to some extent, and especially in respect of primary provision, the nature of neighbourhood segregation, again giving credence to the view that spatial segregation is increasing. But segregated patterns of university provision have also been documented recently. There are 53 higher-education institutions with less than 5% ethnic-minority students. About 20 have more than 40%. Half of the Russell Group universities have fewer than 30 black students of Caribbean origin each, and there are more black Caribbean students at London Metropolitan University than at the whole of the Russell Group put together.<sup>9</sup>

Structural and social segregation are inextricably bound together. Residential positions are also generally determined by socioeconomic position: over 70% of the ethnic-minority community live in the 88 most deprived areas in the country<sup>10</sup> and are heavily concentrated in the worst housing in the inner cities. In other words, inequalities create separation and then perpetuate inequalities by maintaining different life chances and lifestyles, which in turn allow stereotypes and myths to be maintained.

### **Community cohesion**

Community cohesion has been founded on the principle that it is insufficient to focus entirely on socioeconomic disadvantage and ignore the belief systems upon which it depends. In fact, the focus on remedial programmes may simply help to perpetuate the very myths and stereotypes that they seek to challenge. Cohesion programmes have been designed to proactively promote the value of diversity and create a common sense of belonging, while still developing equalities programmes.

Compared with a traditional equalities approach, cohesion is in many ways more challenging: not only are negative views tackled, but also community and civic leaders champion a compelling vision of a shared future. The focus of community cohesion programmes is therefore, of necessity, often the majority community or longer-standing residents who seem to have most difficulty in coming to terms with change – and particularly with recent migration.

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9 Commission for Racial Equality *A Lot Done, A Lot to Do; Our Vision for an Integrated Britain* (2007)

10 Social Exclusion Unit *Tackling Social Exclusion: Taking Stock & Looking to the Future* (Cabinet Office, 2004), p5

Interaction programmes aim to promote understanding and respect between majority and minority communities and within them. They are also a means by which attitudes and values are challenged. They have been based upon "contact theory", and, though this is not a new concept, recently a body of substantial research has shown that contact between groups can reduce prejudice<sup>11</sup> and that in some cases the frequency of interethnic contact was the single biggest predictor of positive attitude change,<sup>12</sup> a conclusion supported by new research specifically concerned with predictors of community cohesion.<sup>13</sup>

Contact theory challenges some profound ideas about our forms of associations and particularly the whole notion of "people like us", which seems to be based upon an inherently racialised conception of our fellow human beings. The notion that we identify with, or even prefer, "people like us" appears to be very prevalent and firmly established in the thinking of a range of diverse opinion, from the extreme right wing, like Nick Griffin,<sup>14</sup> to liberal commentators like Goodhart.<sup>15</sup> It also seems embedded into academic studies, such as Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, which distinguishes "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, whereby the latter "requires that we transcend our social and political identities to connect with people unlike ourselves".<sup>16</sup>

But who are people "like ourselves"? Contact theory rejects the stereotypical view and suggests that they are, or can be, the people we know and feel comfortable with because of regular contact – our circle of friends, acquaintances and colleagues; in other words, our various "in-groups". This would suggest that people "like ourselves" are defined by social circumstance and familiarity, rather than by some idea about a common identity or heritage. Changing our associations appears to change our ideas about who is "like ourselves".

The aim of community cohesion is to tackle the "fear of difference" more generally and to enable people to be more comfortable with all areas of difference, including those based on sexual orientation, disability, social class and age. The community cohesion agenda can also be applied to all types of communities, whether in towns and cities or in suburban and rural areas where ethnic-minority and faith communities are very small. We therefore

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11 Brown, R *Prejudice* (Blackwell, 1995), p268

12 *Ibid*, p240

13 Laurence, J and Heath, A *Predictors of Community Cohesion: Multi-level Modelling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey* (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2008)

14 BNP website, 2004

15 Goodhart, D "Too Diverse?" in *Prospect* (February 2004)

16 Putnam, RD *Bowling Alone: The Collapse & Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000), p411

need to look beyond the immediate confines of the race debate, and the "fear of difference" is by no means confined to ethnic and faith divisions. Gays and lesbians, travellers and people characterised as "disabled" face issues that are similar, with pre-conceived notions and stereotypes creating barriers and allowing discriminatory behaviour to be justified on the basis of an imagined inferiority.

There is much good practice in these other fields that is now enshrined in social policy. For example, children with special needs are increasingly being taught within mainstream schools, and mentally ill people are now often cared for in community settings. These developments have not been without controversy, and proposals to move people out of institutional care still meet with concern, and even hostility, in many areas. However, once provision has been established in the community, everyday contact generally results in the removal of fears and allows the differences between people to be seen in a more rational and reasoned way. Interaction allows them to be seen for what they are, rather than what popular misconceptions might suggest.

Critics of community cohesion generally characterise it as a "soft" programme based on "saris and samosas" – joyous experiences that do little to challenge structural inequalities. It is true that some programmes have developed in this limited direction, but that is because some people have chosen to interpret the community cohesion concept in that way, not a fault of the concept itself, which has always been clear about tackling inequalities at the same time as challenging attitudes.<sup>17</sup>

### **An era of "super-diversity"**

Community cohesion is also better able to respond to a wider range of identities in an era of "super-diversity". Whereas previous equality programmes have been based around a small number of ethnic minority and white majority identities, cohesion attempts to relate to a wider conception of multiple identities, not only in respect of the "super-diversity" referred to above, but also in respect of faith, as well as those identities based upon sexual orientation or any other defining difference. And this also represents one of the most significant changes in direction developed by cohesion – the growth of diaspora communities that have become much easier to sustain and now sit alongside national identities.

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<sup>17</sup> See definition in: Local Government Association, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Home Office, Commission for Racial Equality and Inter Faith Network *Guidance on Community Cohesion* (LGA Publications, 2002)

The development of multiculturalism was set in an era of just a handful of identifiable minorities, principally from South Asia and the Caribbean, who struggled to maintain contact with the heritage country (and perhaps more readily clung to each other in what was a hostile environment). This contrasts with the position today, when migrants to and from Britain can take their identities with them, utilising satellite television, the internet, the ready availability of newspapers and other communications – and the ability to return home at a very modest cost, due to a much lower level of airfares. This means that the way migrants now view their association with the country that they happen to be in has changed profoundly. Migrants may be less willing to transfer their identity to their new country, and generally will be more likely to develop dual or multiple identities – and many countries formally recognise this through dual citizenship.

The UK government has begun to recognise this trend and has developed a series of citizenship initiatives to promote a clearer sense of belonging and shared purpose. Citizenship days and events, citizenship tests, and the emphasis on English as a common language, together with new ideas about earned citizenship, are all part of the reassertion of a national identity. This approach may well have its place, but the notion of "Britishness" remains contested and ill defined.

Community cohesion programmes tend to favour a much more bottom-up approach, developing a local sense of place. In general, people seem able to identify much more readily with a particular city or area than with a conception of "nation". This is perhaps because belonging can be built through interaction with others and through participation in local civil society. It again supports the notion that a proactive approach to building a sense of belonging and promoting diversity, which is central to community cohesion, has to stand alongside more traditional approaches to equality.

None of this suggests that poverty and disadvantage do not have a real influence on competing identities and cohesion. It is difficult to believe that any society can be truly cohesive if any one section is particularly disadvantaged and disaffected and has no effective stake in society. Nevertheless, poverty and differential socioeconomic position cannot fully explain inter- and intra-community relations. The research undertaken by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in support of its suite of reports also revealed that poverty and disadvantage only accounted for a "few percentage points of difference" to cohesion indicators and that not all deprived areas had low cohesion.<sup>18</sup>

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18 Laurence and Heath, op cit

It is, of course, possible to conceive of a society based upon "separate but equal development", a society in which parallel lives are seen as desirable and at odds with neither equal rights nor community cohesion. "Separate development", however, assumes a racialised conception of society, in which we "stick to our own kind" – in which "kind" is based on "race" or ethnicity. In other words, in complete contradiction to what we now know about the fallacy of "race", it is assumed that society will be divided by a social and political construct, clinging to the notion of "race" as a primordial distinction, reinforcing rather than challenging such a view.

But can such divided societies, in which so few life experiences, communications and services are shared, ever really offer equal opportunities? In each society where separate development has become manifest, the socioeconomic position of the separate groups is very marked. With regard to the United States, where ghettoisation is most marked Cashin<sup>19</sup> takes the view that, in practice, "through separation and segregation we are institutionalising and perpetuating inequality".

The entrenchment of separate lives means that each group has little or no experience of each other's daily existence. Experience of and access to key services like housing and education, as well as employment opportunities, are also divided. Neither side is in a position to appreciate the circumstances of the other, to judge the extent and nature of differences.

The opposite of parallel lives is not assimilation, as some commentators seem to fear. In fact, some form of clustering on the basis of distinct communities will help to maintain cultural heritage. Interaction is about shared experiences, building trust and understanding differences, not about being the same. Having some values in common does not mean sharing all values. But some level of commonality is necessary for a shared society and generating solidarity – and commonalities can exist only if society is indeed shared.

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19 Cashin, S (*The Failures of Integration: How Race & Class are Undermining the American Dream* (PublicAffairs, 2004), p298

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## Chapter 2

# Social capital and ethnic diversity

Professor Ed Fieldhouse, Executive Director of the Institute for Social Change at the University of Manchester

## Social capital and ethnic diversity

It is increasingly rare to hear talk about citizenship, cohesion and solidarity without hearing some reference to the idea of social capital. The parallels between social capital and social cohesion are immediately apparent: indeed, one of the world's leading thinkers on social capital, Robert Putnam, has described social capital as "the glue that holds society together".<sup>1</sup>

Although there is a close connection between the concepts, social cohesion and social capital are not the same thing. On the one hand, social capital refers to resources – in particular the social networks and social norms that help society achieve desirable collective ends. On the other, social cohesion is generally taken to mean a common national identity based on common values and symbols.

A cohesive society is often regarded as one in which diversity is appreciated and positively valued.<sup>2</sup> One might reasonably expect that a society rich in social capital might display these properties, but this may not always be the case. It is the discovery of a link between diversity and social capital that has had major repercussions for debates about social cohesion. Putnam, for example, has recently warned of the short-term difficulties of building and maintaining social capital in increasingly diverse societies.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I will examine the usefulness of the concept of social capital in helping to understand the debates over social cohesion and diversity. First, though, we need to deal with a more basic question: exactly what do we mean by social capital?

### What is social capital?

Despite (or perhaps because of) its popularity, there is a surprising lack of agreement over what social capital is. The most parsimonious definition refers to social networks and their value: Pierre Bourdieu defined the concept as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition".<sup>4</sup> Putnam's "lean and mean"

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1 Putnam, RD *Bowling Alone: The Collapse & Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000)

2 Laurence, J and Heath, A *Predictors of Community Cohesion: Multi-level Modeling of the 2005 Citizenship Survey* (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2008)

3 Putnam, RD "E Pluribus Unum: Civic Engagement in a Diverse and Changing Society" in *Scandinavian Political Studies* vol 30, no 2 (June 2007)

4 Bourdieu, P "The Forms of Capital" in Richardson, JG (ed) *Handbook of Theory & Research for the Sociology of Education* (Greenwood Press, 1986), p248

definition of social capital extends this to include both "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness"<sup>5</sup>. This succinct definition captures the two key components that run through most writing on the subject.

The first component is the structural component, made up of social networks and other aspects of social organisation such as civic participation. It is argued that denser and more extensive networks are associated with higher levels of trust and co-operation and, in turn, a wide variety of public and private benefits. Networks are therefore closely linked to the second component of social capital – the attitudinal or cognitive component. These are the shared norms and habits of trust and of reciprocity that provide the foundation for co-operation and help create a more efficient and smooth-running society. One of the most commonly adopted indicators of social capital is "generalised trust", which taps the extent to which the population trusts other people *in general*.<sup>6</sup>

The key to understanding social capital is that, like other forms of capital, social capital constitutes a resource, and has value, which ultimately can be converted into other forms of capital. Networks have value to those who are in them – whether that is your neighbour watching over your home when you are on holiday, or a friend helping you find a new job. These are the individual or privatised benefits of social capital that Bourdieu and Coleman identified.<sup>7</sup> However, as Putnam has argued, social capital does not simply benefit the members of networks. Rather, because it facilitates co-operation, social capital is a public good from which we can all benefit.

This has led to many researchers adopting a macro-level or aggregate approach to researching social capital. Macro-level research might address whether or not places with dense social networks or higher levels of social trust enjoy better social, political and economic outcomes. While there is plenty of evidence that this is the case,<sup>8</sup> some believe that the focus on aggregate-level relationships blurs the conceptual clarity and potential usefulness of this approach.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding this, given the evidence that social capital has tangible benefits at

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5 Putnam, op cit (2007)

6 Generalised trust is usually measured by response to the question: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"

7 Bourdieu, op cit; Coleman, J *Foundations of Social Theory* (Harvard University Press, 1990)

8 For example, see: Putnam, op cit (2000)

9 Portes, A "Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology" in *Annual Review of Sociology* vol 24 (1998), pp1-24

various different levels of analysis (from the individual to the nation) perhaps the most useful and complete analytical framework is one that treats social capital as a multilevel concept.<sup>10</sup> It makes sense, for example, to ask not only whether social capital benefits members of neighbourhood groups, but also whether there are additional benefits for neighbours outside those groups.

As well as having different levels and components, there are also different types of social capital. Most notable is the important distinction between "bonding" and "bridging" social capital. Essentially, bonding capital is inward looking, bringing together people who are alike, thereby reinforcing their exclusive identities. Bonding capital is characterised by what are sometimes described as "strong ties", like those that connect family members or close friends. Bridging capital refers to the relatively weak ties that link people who are different from each other in some way. Often this means ties that link people of different social or ethnic groups. It is widely recognised that while bonding capital tends to occur spontaneously, it is a more difficult task to build bridging capital.

However, in terms of improving social cohesion, it is bridging capital that delivers the most benefits. It has been argued that bridging and bonding capital tend to be correlated: that individuals who develop more extensive bonding capital also tend to have higher levels of bridging capital. According to this argument, bonding capital does not crowd out or exclude bridging. The caveat to this, of course, is the words "tend to". Should specific forms of bonding or exclusivity become the focus for inter-group resentment, then this could potentially weaken bridging capital and become thought of as "bad social capital".

But what do we mean by "bad social capital"? Social capital is a resource and can be used for bad ends as well as good.<sup>11</sup> As well as providing opportunities for members of a network, social capital can be used to exclude outsiders from benefits (for instance, access to jobs). Bonding social capital in particular has potential negative effects.

For example, strong bonding social capital is clearly a factor in allowing the growth of organisations such as the Mafia, the Ku Klux Klan, or al-Qaeda. The obverse of this is that when disadvantaged groups rely too much on their own social capital, it can have unfavourable effects (for example, the reliance of immigrants on existing networks of disadvantaged groups). Although sometimes accused of romanticising the positive

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<sup>10</sup> Halpern, D *Social Capital* (Polity, 2005)

<sup>11</sup> Portes, *op cit*

benefits of social capital, Putnam devotes an entire chapter of *Bowling Alone* to what he calls the “dark side”.<sup>12</sup> Like any form of capital, social capital can be turned to objectives that some may regard as bad and others may regard as good.

Perhaps because of its influence and popularity, the concept of social capital has attracted some criticism. According to some, including one of the leading theorists of the concept, Pierre Bourdieu, social capital both derives from and causes social and ethnic inequalities. In other words, it is membership of privileged groups and networks which gives access to resources that we call social capital, and, like other forms of capital, this has material value, leading to a perpetuation of advantage or disadvantage.<sup>13</sup>

Others highlight problems of measurement and validity, in particular whether social capital is a cause or a consequence of many of the social and economic benefits it is reputed to deliver. It has been argued that, because of the huge array of definitions and lack of conceptual clarity, almost anything and everything can be attributed to social capital and that many of the supposed benefits are spurious.<sup>14</sup> Some have argued that research focusing on civic behaviour and norms has eroded the more valuable relational features of social capital which were at the heart of Bourdieu's and Coleman's ideas.<sup>15</sup> It is certainly true that use of large-scale national surveys does lend itself better to measuring social attitudes and civic participation than it does social networks.

Yet, while social capital should not be seen as a universal panacea, there is a large body of evidence linking social capital to favourable outcomes across a wide spectrum of areas of public and private life, including health, economic performance, political participation, crime and government effectiveness.<sup>16</sup> No doubt because of these links, the concept of social capital has become increasingly adopted by policy makers in countries around the world, from Bill Clinton to Colonel Ghadaffi. In Britain, the Cabinet Office's Strategy Unit has taken a keen interest in the potential of bridging social capital for increasing interaction between ethnic groups and improving social cohesion, and Gordon Brown is a known admirer of the idea.

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12 Putnam, op cit (2000)

13 See also: Portes, op cit

14 Fine, Ben *Social Capital versus Social Theory: Political Economy & Social Science at the Turn of the Millennium* (Routledge, 2001)

15 For example, see: Edwards, B and Foley, M “Civil Society and Social Capital Beyond Putnam” in *American Behavioural Scientist* vol 42, no 1 (1998), pp124–139

16 See: Putnam, op cit (2000); Halpern, op cit

However, social capital poses two major challenges for policy makers. First, the general consensus is that social capital is in decline. In *Bowling Alone* Putnam extensively documents the decline of social capital in the US over the past 50 years. The decline is attributed to a range of factors, including the passing of the "civic generation", the rise of electronic entertainment, especially television, suburbanisation and changing working patterns.

Whether a similar decline is occurring in Britain is less clear. For example, Peter Hall has argued that, while there has been a decline in social trust, there is no equivalent decline in civic association in Britain.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, others have stressed both increasing inequalities in social capital and also a change in the quality and depth of associational life.<sup>18</sup> Second is the thorny issue of the link between ethnic diversity and social capital. It is to this that we now turn.

### **Social capital and diversity**

Perhaps the most disturbing finding of the large body of research, mainly in the US, on social capital in general and generalised trust in particular is the observation that social capital and trust tend to decline as racial or ethnic diversity increases.<sup>19</sup> This is attributed to the idea of economic or cultural "threat". Whereas the "contact hypothesis" posits that experience of diverse populations makes us more tolerant, "conflict theory" predicts that, due to a variety of factors, including conflict over limited resources, members of the majority group feel threatened by "outsiders", leading to distrust and intolerance of outsiders and solidarity with one's own group.

In a world where increasing levels of diversity due to international migration are the norm, if this research proves to be true beyond the US it poses major policy challenges for government this side of the Atlantic. Probably the best-articulated and most comprehensive analysis of the relationship between social capital and diversity is Putnam's Johan Skytte Prize lecture and article "E Pluribus Unum", in which he reports a systematic and detailed analysis of the relationship between social capital and diversity in America.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Hall, P "Social Capital In Britain" in *British Journal of Political Science* no 29 (1999), pp417-461

18 For example: Grenier, P and Wright, K "Social Capital in Britain: Exploring the Hall Paradox" in *Policy Studies* vol 27, no 1 (2006)

19 For example: Alesina, A and La Ferrara, E "Who Trusts Others?" in *Journal of Public Economics* no 85 (2000), pp207-234; Costa, DL and Kahn, ME "Civic Engagement and Community Heterogeneity: An Economist's Perspective" in *Perspectives on Politics* no 1 (2003), pp103-111

20 Putnam, op cit (2007)

The analysis uses sophisticated statistical techniques and takes account of a comprehensive range of potential factors, before concluding that various aspects of social capital, including social trust, community co-operation and informal socialising, are detrimentally affected by neighbourhood diversity. Furthermore, contrary to the simple conflict hypothesis, it is not only trust of people from other ethnic groups that is affected but also trust of one's own group. Putnam describes this as "hunkering down", whereby residents of diverse communities do not become hostile to outsiders, but rather withdraw from collective life more generally. In other words "diversity, at least in the short run, seems to bring out the turtle in all of us"<sup>21</sup>

There have been a number of challenges to the validity and implications of this argument, much of which, but by no means all, followed the publication of "E Pluribus Unum". First, there are those that argue that social capital formation is contingent on racial homogeneity.<sup>22</sup> Such critics argue that research on social capital tends to ignore inequality and conflict in society. In his book *Racial Diversity & Social Capital*<sup>23</sup> the American political scientist Rodney Hero argues that the supposed benefits of social capital are an artefact of the more crucial role of racial diversity and inequality in America. Once the diversity of states is taken into account, the beneficial effects of social capital all but disappear.

Moreover, Hero argues that not only are high levels of social capital accrued primarily in racially homogeneous areas (that is, ethnic homogeneity is a precondition for high social capital), but that the benefits of this social capital are enjoyed primarily by the white majority population, and not by racial minorities. He also says that the impact of diversity and inter-racial interactions tend to be different for majority and minority groups.<sup>24</sup>

Critics have also argued that much of the work on social capital has focused on generalised trust (see above) and that this is much more likely to be negatively related to diversity than other forms of social capital. According to psychological literature, trust is more prevalent among people who resemble each other and is therefore more widespread

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21 Putnam, op cit (2007), p151

22 For example: Stolle, D and Marc, H "Inaccurate, Exceptional, One-sided or Irrelevant? The Debate about the Alleged Decline of Social Capital and Civic Engagement in Western Societies" in *British Journal of Political Science* vol 35, no 11 (2005), pp149-68

23 Hero, RE *Racial Diversity & Social Capital: Equality & Community in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

24 For example: Marshall, M and Stolle, D "Race and the City: Neighbourhood Context and the Development of Generalised Trust" in *Political Behavior* vol 26, no 2 (2004), pp125-153

in more homogeneous communities. Moreover, it is also well known that dominant groups in societies tend to be more trusting than minorities. Both these factors mean that increasing diversity will inevitably be linked to declining trust. However, other forms of social capital – for example, social networks or norms of reciprocity – may be less sensitive to diversity.

Marc Hooghe, for example, has argued that diverse societies may simply build forms of social capital that are different from homogeneous societies.<sup>25</sup> While this argument rightly warns of too much reliance on a single indicator of social capital, others have shown that other forms of social capital (such as interaction and reciprocity) also tend to be inversely related to diversity. For example, using experimental methods, Ed Glaeser and colleagues show lower levels of honesty and reciprocity in inter-racial exchanges,<sup>26</sup> and Putnam<sup>27</sup> demonstrates that a wide selection of indicators show the same basic relationship.

Overall, while most research seems to agree on the direction of the relationship between diversity and social capital, scholars disagree on the implications. For example, Hero regards this as the failure of the social capital thesis to account for, or to address, the underlying question of racial inequality, while Putnam regards this relationship as a challenge posed by the increasing diversity of societies, but one that can be ultimately resolved.

But can the findings of Putnam and others be generalised to other settings outside the US? After all, many have challenged both the universality and the inevitability of this relationship. It is not unreasonable to question whether findings from US-based research might be generalised to other contexts. First, the US has a very different history of immigration and diversity from Britain or other European countries. Second, there are also important and significant differences in the sheer size of ethnic minority populations. Third, general and relative inequalities are more exaggerated in the US than in Britain or Europe, and this might exacerbate the effects of diversity. Fourth, welfare and civil rights regimes are different, with Britain having a more extensive welfare state, while the US has more civil rights protections. Finally, the US assimilationist model of integration is rather different from the British model of multiculturalism.

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25 Hooghe, M "Social Capital and Diversity: Generalized Trust, Social Cohesion and Regimes of Diversity" in *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* vol 40, no 3 (September 2007), pp709–732

26 Glaeser, EL, Laibson, DI Scheinkman, JA and Soutter, CL "Measuring Trust" in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* no 115 (2000), pp811–846

27 Putnam, op cit (2007)

On this latter point, John Helliwell, the Canadian economist, has argued that the apparent negative relationship between social capital and diversity is a reflection of government policies and may not be generalised to countries beyond the US.<sup>28</sup> He attributes the greater identification of Canadian immigrants with their adopted home, as compared with their American counterparts, to the difference in government policies. More specifically he points to the more integrative or multiculturalist policies of Canada compared with the assimilationist tradition of the US. For similar reasons, we may not expect to find the same relationship between diversity and social capital in Britain.

To date, research from around the globe, including from Britain, suggests rather mixed results, but generally supports Putnam's findings. For example, in Australia, Leigh<sup>29</sup> found that linguistic heterogeneity reduced localised trust for both natives and immigrants and reduced generalised trust only for immigrants. In Canada, although research found that levels of social capital increased as community-level diversity increased, there was a negative correlation with visible minorities.<sup>30</sup>

In a study of 44 countries worldwide, Anderson and Paskeviciute<sup>31</sup> found that indicators of population heterogeneity did not have uniformly positive or negative effects on individual-level measures of civil society. However, they did find that ethnic and linguistic diversity decreased levels of interpersonal trust. In Europe, Marc Hooghe found no significant relationship between country-level immigration and diversity and generalised trust, though this may simply be a reflection of the problems in using an entity as large as a country as a basis for measuring diversity.

In the UK, the evidence is more mixed. A Home Office report examined the issues of "diversity, trust and community participation in England" and found that generalised trust was lower in areas of greater ethnic diversity.<sup>32</sup> Letki<sup>33</sup> by contrast suggests that socioeconomic factors exert a greater bearing on "community" and interpersonal trust than does racial heterogeneity. She concludes:

28 Helliwell, JF "Well-being, Social Capital and Public Policy: What's New?" in *Economic Journal* no 116 (2006), ppC34–C45

29 Leigh, A "Trust, Inequality and Ethnic Heterogeneity" in *The Economic Record* vol 82, no 258 (2006), pp268–80

30 Aizlewood, A and Pendakur, R "Ethnicity and Social Capital in Canada" in *Canadian Ethnic Studies Journal* vol 37, no 2 (2005), pp77–103

31 Anderson, CJ and Paskeviciute, A "How Ethnic and Linguistic Heterogeneity Influence the Prospects for Civil Society: A Comparative Study of Citizenship Behavior" in *Journal of Politics* no 68 (2006), pp783–802

32 Pennant, R *Diversity, Trust & Community Participation in England*, Home Office findings 253 (Research, Development & Statistics Directorate, 2005)

33 Letki, N "Does Diversity Erode Social Cohesion? Social Capital and Race in British Neighbourhoods" in *Political Studies* (forthcoming, 2008)

*... when the association between racial diversity and economic deprivation is accounted for, there is no evidence for the eroding effect of racial diversity on interactions within local communities ... There is no deficiency of social capital networks in diverse communities, but there is a shortage of them in disadvantaged ones.*<sup>34</sup>

This conclusion is shared by Laurence and Heath, who report that "once other factors are accounted for ethnic diversity is, in most cases, positively associated with community cohesion" and that "deprived, diverse areas have higher average cohesion scores than deprived, homogeneous White areas. It is thus deprivation that undermines cohesion, not diversity". However, this analysis examines only one indicator of social cohesion and controls for the potentially confounding effect of trust, which itself is likely to be related to diversity.

On the issue of deprivation and diversity, it is notable that Putnam's analysis does also allow for the effect of deprivation. Furthermore, he points out that the effect of deprivation (or poverty) is in fact larger than the effect of diversity, thus sharing more in common than Laurence and Heath's or Letki's analysis than it would at first appear.

Finally, like most work on the topic to date, the British research described above looks at the effect of diversity across the population as a whole. There is reason to think that diversity will affect minorities and majority groups differently. For example, studies of voting and registration in Britain have shown that diversity has positive effects for the participation of minorities but zero or even negative effects for white people.<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Despite the large amount of apparent disagreement about the relationship between ethnic diversity and social capital and the implications of that relationship, there are some fairly well-established empirical observations that can be agreed upon and lessons that can be drawn.

First, and perhaps most notably, although the relationship is not universal, diversity and deprivation are closely interrelated and are usually negatively related to social capital. Second, not all aspects of social capital are equally affected by diversity. For example, while there is much evidence that there is a negative relationship between social trust and

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34 Ibid, p21

35 Fieldhouse, E and Cutts, D "Mobilisation or Marginalisation? Neighbourhood Effects on Muslim Electoral Registration in Britain in 2001" in *Political Studies* vol 56 (2008), pp333–354

diversity, there is less consistency for other forms of social capital such as associational membership and various forms of political participation. Third, diversity may affect the white majority and ethnic minority in different ways or by different magnitudes.

Fourth, it is clear that attempts to build social capital will benefit social cohesion only if the benefits are accrued by all sections of society, not just the white majority. This means finding ways of building bridging capital, which, as I remarked above, is rather trickier than building bonding capital. The need to build (specifically) bridging social capital was recognised by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. A submission for the Commission for Racial Equality quoted in *Our Shared Future*<sup>36</sup> stated that:

*By encouraging the growth of bridging social capital and a local sense of belonging, we can bring the community together to create a culture of respect, restore neighbourliness and build good relations. We need to discover those sites, spheres and agents that encourage positive interaction and help us to restore community. We need to build on citizenship education but also invest in youth groups, sport and cultural projects that bring people together.*

But if, as Putnam argues, bonding and bridging are complementary rather than competing, in order to build bridging social capital we should encourage bonding social capital rather than seek ways to erode it. For example, the supposed strength of bonding capital in British Asian communities should not be regarded as a threat to social cohesion but as a foundation for building bridging social capital.

Moreover, a great deal of scholarly work has shown that recognition of difference is a more effective way for developing social cohesion and social capital than expecting diverse populations to assimilate into a dominant culture. The emerging body of evidence concerning social capital and diversity should not be misrepresented as an argument against immigration or in favour of the virtues of assimilation over multiculturalism, but as an important piece of evidence to inform debate about social cohesion.

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36 *Commission on Integration & Cohesion – Our Shared Future* (Department for Communities & Local Government, June 2007); Goldsmith, P (Lord) *Citizenship: Our Common Bond* (HMSO, 2008), p112



## Chapter 3

# Poverty and solidarity

Sukhvinder Kaur-Stubbs, Chief Executive of the Barrow Cadbury Trust

## Poverty and solidarity

In recent years, the government has launched a flurry of policy initiatives with the apparent aim of enhancing the unity of Britain's diverse populace. In the past few months alone, we have witnessed the Commission on Integration and Cohesion; the Citizenship Review; and, of course, Gordon Brown's musings on the meaning of Britishness.

These initiatives are a clear move away from the discredited multicultural policies of the past. In post 7/7 Britain, an approach to race relations that "celebrates" cultural difference is out of favour. The government's efforts are now directed at forging greater national unity. However, the new initiatives share striking parallels with the old multiculturalist approach of yesteryear: there is still the same fixation on culture, rather than economics. This misses the key point that the main barriers to integration are poverty, exclusion and alienation.

No amount of flag waving or oaths of allegiance to the Queen will increase social solidarity when too many Britons live in communities blighted by failing schools, crumbling housing, drugs and crime. To heal the deep wounds dividing modern Britain, the government needs to equip disadvantaged groups – black and white – with the skills to compete in the global marketplace. A focus on economics over culture, on class over race, is the key to Britain's solidarity and social harmony.

That is not to say that the multiculturalist approach of the past was wrong. Multiculturalism was a product of its time. Britain in the 1950s and 1960s was a very different place from the modern, globalised state it is today. The country was steeped in a racist colonial history, which ascribed little value to Asian or African cultures. New migrants who came to Britain from old colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent faced a frosty reception.

Many immigrants were conscripted into low-paying jobs that "indigenous" Britons chose not to do. They settled in the poorest inner-city areas, often in slums earmarked for demolition. In this hostile climate, immigrants were expected to know their place at the bottom of society. For those that failed to understand, notices in lodging houses and factories reminded them: "Blacks need not apply".

Multiculturalism helped change this post-war climate of claimed racial and cultural superiority. Although there has never been a "multiculturalism bill" on the statute book, it

was an attitude to race relations that valued diversity. By embracing other cultures as "different but equal", multiculturalism was the Alka-Seltzer that helped ease Britain's colonial hangover.

Most Britons now genuinely celebrate and enjoy the foreign cultures and influences that were shunned in the post-war era. The Notting Hill Carnival is no longer demonised as an "orgy of violence", as it was in the 1960s. Rather, the world's second-largest carnival, after Rio, is now a mainstream celebration of cosmopolitan London, bringing in millions of pounds of tourist revenues. The recent embracing of Bollywood pop culture demonstrates how open-minded – and globally connected – Britain's youngsters are today.

These successes give us reason to believe that the multicultural approach to race relations has largely served its purpose. Furthermore, changes in immigration patterns and social mobility also suggest that policy makers need a new approach.

Immigrants no longer hail from a handful of countries in Africa, the Caribbean or the Indian subcontinent. Today's newcomers arrive from countries scattered all over the world: from Germany to Ghana, from Sri Lanka to Singapore. As academic Steven Vertovec points out, changing immigration patterns mean that Britain's minorities can no longer be categorised into blocks of large, well-organised African-Caribbean and South Asian communities. With scores of different nationalities living in modern Britain, government can no longer build a community centre for every community.

Furthermore, Britain's ethnic minorities have moved on from the low points of the 1950s and 1960s. My parents and I emigrated from the Punjab in the early 1960s and settled in Aston, in inner-city Birmingham. In those days, whether you were Caribbean, Pakistani or Indian, life was similar: people worked in menial jobs, lived in the poor parts of town and tried to keep their noses clean, despite overt racism and prejudice. In this desperate and hostile climate, there was a sense that we were all "in it together". Today, there is no common trajectory for Britain's ethnic minorities. Some communities have pressed ahead, while others have not been so fortunate. Multiculturalism assumed a kind of level playing field for ethnic-minority people. Today's playing field is full of troughs and mounds.

### **Bread and butter, not steel bands and samosas**

The most important reason why multiculturalism has now passed its sell-by date is its focus on culture rather than economics. It played an important role in highlighting and appreciating cultural difference. Aside from the current abhorrent and worrying rise in

Islamophobia, that cultural debate has largely been won. The main concern of disadvantaged ethnic-minority communities is no longer racism, but poverty. The "steel bands and samosas" approach to community relations needs to make way for more immediate "bread and butter" concerns.

That is not to say that many people no longer face discrimination. Stephen Lawrence's murder highlighted the overt racism still lurking in some corners of our society. People from ethnic minorities also face discrimination in the jobs market, in education and certainly in politics. Shamit Saggat's research shows that ethnic-minority people suffer an "ethnic penalty" that makes it harder for them to achieve. As Britain becomes ever more plural, however, there is reason to believe that the ethnic penalty is not insurmountable, as it once was. Many people from ethnic minorities are succeeding, even though others are not. Race and ethnicity no longer seem to be the problem above all else that holds people back. Race still matters in modern Britain, but not as much as it once did.

Writing in a Smith Institute monograph last year, Labour MP Sadiq Khan spoke powerfully of the need to refocus our cohesion efforts on reducing poverty:

*Our vision of Britain must be one of social justice. A sense of belonging comes from a feeling of being included ... Community cohesion can be measured by the equality of life chances, and here the predictor is as much class as race.<sup>1</sup>*

Khan's comments are supported by hard economic statistics that show that some ethnic-minority communities are failing to keep up in Britain's increasingly globalised and competitive marketplace: the average pay for a man of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin is just £7.60 per hour, compared with £10.60 for white men; just 36% of boys from African-Caribbean backgrounds leave school with five or more GCSEs, but for white children the figure is 46%; and more than two-thirds of British Muslims live below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup> Although there is no common trajectory for Britain's different ethnic minorities, they are often disproportionately disadvantaged, whether you look at benchmarks such as female employment, drug abuse, or prison populations.

The BBC's "white season" has shone a spotlight on the grievances of the white working class, another group falling behind in Britain's super-competitive new economy. Jon

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1 Johnson, N (ed) *Britishness: Towards a Progressive Citizenship* (Smith Institute, 2007)

2 Fawcett Society *Black & Ethnic Minority Women in the UK* (2005)

Cruddas, Labour MP for Barking and Dagenham, is seriously concerned about the rise of the far right in his constituency, a traditionally white working-class area that has received considerable numbers of migrants in recent years. Cruddas fears that economic change coupled with large-scale migration is fuelling racism, which in turn is threatening the social harmony of the area.

The demographic change that has affected Barking and Dagenham has taken place at the same time as major changes in the UK economy. Jobs in traditional industries such as shipbuilding and car manufacturing have largely dried up over the past 20 years, as the West's manufacturing base has gradually relocated to Asia. This has caused economic insecurity for the white working-class communities typical of Barking and Dagenham. Well-paid, secure jobs in industry have been replaced by insecure, poorly paid work at the bottom end of the service sector.

For working-class families, economic insecurity – caused by macro trends in the world economy – has occurred at the same time that demographic change has accelerated at home. It's not difficult for far-right political parties to – misleadingly – tell people that their economic predicament is a direct result of increased migration.

In the 2006 local elections, the British National Party made unprecedented gains in Barking and Dagenham. The BNP finished second in the election, leaving the ruling Labour Party relegated to third place. This electoral success for a party with fascist undertones reminds us of the damage that economic insecurity can do to social cohesion.

The government must tackle the chronic economic problems that impoverished communities face. The Labour government has done much, including worthy assaults on child poverty, but far too many communities remain blighted by poverty, underachievement and crime. If the government wants to enhance "cohesion", then ensuring that every baby born in Britain has an equal chance in life is the surest way to give everyone a genuine stake in the country's future.

Rather than concrete initiatives to reduce inequality, however, Whitehall continues to obsess over culture, producing populist "cohesion" proposals for oaths of alliance to the Queen and an overhaul of the Proms. For reasons so far unexplained, these ideas are somehow supposed to enhance ethnic-minority Britons' sense of belonging. Far from fostering solidarity, however, these proposals further stoke the flames of the BNP's fascist bonfire.

Perhaps it is a sign of the government's desperation that it has resorted to various forms of flag waving in a vain attempt to foster greater social harmony. Flying the Union Jack makes little difference to the problems that disadvantaged families face.

Naseem Akhtar is the project manager of a Saheli women's group in Balsall Heath, a diverse but economically poor part of Birmingham. She notes that local residents are concerned about the bread-and-butter issues associated with poverty. Akhtar says:

*Can anyone put their hand up and say they don't want a good education, to get a good job and live in a safe area? If you want to turn a generation around, you need to put in place a generation of resources. How can local councillors allow schools to fail kids, allowing them to leave with no English qualifications when the new jobs are all in IT and services? There is a mismatch between children's education and the new jobs that are being created.*

To build a well-integrated Britain, the government's key task lies in tackling the root causes of poverty and deprivation. That is why the life chances agenda is so important. As Seamus Milne stated in his column in *The Guardian* in March:<sup>3</sup>

*Focusing solely on the middle-income, swing voters, rather than creating a fairer society, won't help integration. Refusing to give exploited agency workers equal rights, for fear of upsetting the City, won't stop the wages of the very poorest being eroded.*

But is tackling poverty enough to ensure social cohesion? Certainly, as Britain's plurality increases, it isn't healthy for different ethnic and religious communities to live parallel lives, side by side but with little interaction. Extra efforts are required to foster bonds of commonality between the country's diverse populace, both as a means to increase cohesion and for disadvantaged communities to unite around common concerns.

### **Building bonds of commonality**

The longer that poor, diverse communities remain divided through distrust and resource competition, the harder it will be for them to pursue the interests that will really make a difference to their lives. This is why the Barrow Cadbury Trust is putting more resources into community projects that help build bonds of commonality – what the trust calls “habits of solidarity” – between Britain's increasingly diverse populace.

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3 Seamus Milne “Either Labour Represents Its Core Voters – or Others Will” in *The Guardian*, 13 March 2008

It is worth pointing out that habits of solidarity need to be forged between all of our communities, not just ethnic-minority groups. Many white working-class communities are also affected by severe disadvantage. Moreover, these communities often blame their situation on a host of equally unfortunate others – from Muslims to asylum seekers to Eastern European migrant workers – whom they regard as unjustly favoured competitors for jobs and resources.

A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation study in North Tottenham and Moss Side highlighted this point:

*... while tensions among residents in the neighbourhoods commonly took a racial form, they were mostly driven by struggle for resources such as employment and housing. People's perception of "unfairness" of the distribution or allocation of such resources pervaded many accounts.*

In fact, white working-class communities have a great deal in common with asylum seekers and poor ethnic minority communities. The material disadvantage and social problems they face are often very similar.

Building habits of solidarity is by no means an easy task in modern cities, where mobility, flexibility and individualism are the norms. However, there are examples of excellent projects run by voluntary and community groups that help to foster habits of solidarity between people of different religious, cultural or social backgrounds.

The East London Communities Organisation's London Living Wage campaign, for instance, is one such example of community cohesion in action. There, a diverse group of organisations, from churches to mosques to trade unions, joined forces to lobby for a London-weighted "living wage" for the poorest-paid workers in the capital. In coming together, not only were marginalised people empowered to take control over the forces affecting their lives, but also people from different backgrounds worked successfully together in an example of genuine and sustainable community cohesion. Tackling deprivation and fostering habits of solidarity are mutually reinforcing. Habits of solidarity are the antithesis of divide and rule.

Voluntary and community groups play a crucial role in fostering cohesion and integration in poor, fractured communities. Not only do they help reduce inequality and improve bonding between disadvantaged people but they also create bridges between different

ethnic and religious groups. Government and foundations must ensure that voluntary groups are well funded to continue this crucial work.

The multiculturalist policies of yesteryear have passed their sell-by date. In the rush to find alternatives, ministers should avoid a present-day fixation on culture and identity. The path to social cohesion lies not in "celebrations of Britishness" but the more pressing task of equipping disadvantaged communities with the tools to succeed in the global marketplace.

## Chapter 4

# Citizens becoming consumers? Choice, diversity and inequality

Professor John Clarke, Professor of Social Policy at the  
Open University

## Citizens becoming consumers? Choice, diversity and inequality

Public services have been the focus for continual projects of reform and modernisation by Conservative and Labour governments since the 1980s. One increasingly important feature of such reforms has been the idea that these services should treat their users as consumers. This vision of reform has proposed that public services should match or mirror the experiences that people have as choice-making consumers in the marketplace.<sup>1</sup> Proponents of this view have argued that public services have been left behind by patterns of social and cultural change:

*Many of our public services were established in the years just after the Second World War. Victory had required strong centralised institutions, and not surprisingly it was through centralised state direction that the immediate post-war Government chose to win the peace. This developed a strong sense of the value of public services in building a fair and prosperous society. The structures created in the 1940s may now require change, but the values of equity and opportunity for all will be sustained. The challenges and demands on today's public services are very different from those post-war years. The rationing culture that survived after the war, in treating everyone the same, often overlooked individuals' different needs and aspirations.<sup>2</sup>*

The result has been reforms that aim to offer consumer-like experiences and relationships. These range from the extension of choice mechanisms (in education and healthcare, especially), through sponsoring multiple competing providers (in residential and domiciliary care, for example) to endorsing "customer-centred" cultures among front-line staff in service organisations (in policing). Such innovations are linked by the commitment to treat citizens as consumers in their encounters with public services.

New Labour's championing of choice and consumer orientations anticipated the controversial character of this view of reform. Choice became woven into a series of political and ethical arguments about the place and significance of public services in the modern world. One recurrent theme was that choice was popular. It was what people wanted, said Tony Blair:

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1 Le Grand, J *The Other Invisible Hand: Delivering Public Services through Choice & Competition* (Princeton University Press, 2007)

2 Office of Public Services Reform *Reforming Our Public Services: Principles into Practice* (2002)

*In reality, I believe people do want choice, in public services as in other services. But anyway, choice isn't an end in itself. It is one important mechanism to ensure that citizens can indeed secure good schools and health services in their communities. Choice puts the levers in the hands of parents and patients so that they as citizens and consumers can be a driving force for improvement in their public services. We are proposing to put an entirely different dynamic in place to drive our public services; one where the service will be driven not by the government or by the manager but by the user – the patient, the parent, the pupil and the law-abiding citizen.<sup>3</sup>*

At the same time, promoting choice would itself be an equitable policy. On the one hand, it would extend choice "from the few, to the many",<sup>4</sup> enabling ordinary people to make choices that were previously restricted to the affluent. On the other, choice would enable public services to respond to the diversity of needs and wants among the public, thus escaping the monopolistic tendency to provide services on a "one size fits all" basis. In short, choice was central to modernisation. It would bring public services up to date; it was what people wanted; it was equitable and responsive to diversity; and it would drive efficiency and innovation as service providers had to compete for customers.

Choice and the consumer orientation have been persistently controversial, not least because many critics see them as a front for unpopular policies of privatisation. Here, though, I want to concentrate on three core issues at stake in the attempt to treat citizens as consumers: the tendency to individualise the public; the strange case of diversity; and the relationship between choice and inequality.

### **A consuming public?**

Despite narratives about social change and the rise of a consumer culture, our own research into people using public services found little enthusiasm for the role of consumer.<sup>5</sup> This is important in two respects. First, people did not think of themselves as consumers when they encountered the police, healthcare or social care (the three services that we studied). Indeed, they struggled to think about how such a relationship could make sense in public services, insisting instead that "it's not like shopping". Public services were – and needed to be – different from cash transactions in the high street or supermarket:

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3 Tony Blair, quoted in *The Guardian*, 24 June 2004

4 Tony Blair "Progress and Justice in the 21st Century", Fabian Society annual lecture, 17 June 2003

5 Clarke, J, Newman, J, Smith, N, Vidler, E and Westmarland, L *Creating Citizen-Consumers: Changing Publics & Changing Public Services* (Sage Publishing, 2007)

*I don't like "customer" really, because it implies a paying relationship on a sort of take it or leave it basis – more like going into a shop and seeing what's available and choosing something. I don't think it's quite like that ...<sup>6</sup>*

Second, people did not think this was a model that they wanted in their relationships – it was not an attractive prospect. In a recent study, Catherine Needham argues that even where people were dissatisfied with public services, such dissatisfaction “did not lead participants to want them to be more like private services, but rather more like what they felt public services should be ... fair, consistent and needs- rather than profit-based”.<sup>7</sup> This echoes our own findings – people had a strong sense of the “publicness” of public services, even when they thought public services could be better.

This sense of publicness is important. Many of our respondents identified themselves as “members of the public” or “members of the local community”, rather than as consumers, customers or even citizens. This sense of membership brings with it a sense of belonging to a larger collective that involves entitlements to services, to being treated properly, to being treated fairly. But it also carries obligations, not least the acceptance that other members of this public, or the local community, might have more pressing or urgent needs that the service has to address first.

The imagery of being a member also carries some reciprocal obligations that are significant for public service reform. People expect to be addressed and recognised as both a member of the public (and thus a person with legitimate claims on services) and as an individual: in short, they expect to be treated with respect.

Choice appeared as a puzzling policy in these contexts. At some points, people could see that it might be a way of ensuring that they and their needs were taken more seriously – here choice became a substitute for voice and recognition. But they were not at all clear how it would work, and feared that it might have a variety of hidden downsides or costs. These ranged from the fear of being held responsible for a choice that might turn out to be a wrong choice, through anxieties about hidden financial costs (travelling to get treatment) to suspicions that choice would reproduce or even exacerbate inequalities.

Stories about parental choice in education – and the problems associated with it – feature

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6 Newtown health user, questionnaire 1

7 Needham, C *The Reform of Public Services under New Labour: Narratives of Consumerism* (Palgrave, 2007)

often in discussions about choice in public services,<sup>8</sup> and this reflects the continuing controversy about the policy along with the anxiety and anger surrounding its annual implementation. But choice was also seen by some of our respondents as running counter to an ethos of publicness that was about the combination of quality and equality:

*I know "consumer" and "customer" imply choice and that is what we are supposed to want. I would consider it an acceptable achievement if everyone could have what was best in the matter of treatment as of right. There are certain cost considerations but that is another issue. "Choice" may be a political ploy to take our eye off the ball and confuse us as to what really matters. Choice sounds a good thing – but is it?<sup>9</sup>*

### **A diverse public?**

Reform through the choice/consumer orientation has made much of the need to reflect and respond to Britain as a more diverse society. For much of the period since the Second World War, public services encountered challenges to their assumptions about the social character of the public. Different movements have pointed to discriminatory and oppressive practices in public services – in their employment patterns and in their relations with people who use services.

Women's movements challenged the gender biases of social policies and practices; anti-racist movements demonstrated the "institutional discrimination" of a range of public service institutions, not only policing. Gay and lesbian organisations questioned the normative judgments of heterosexuality that both excluded and actively oppressed people with other sexual identities and orientations; while disabled people contested the able-bodied assumptions that organised both social life and the services meant to "support" (or control) disabled people. All of these movements tried to announce that Britain was a more diverse society than was represented in the official life of social policies and public services.

Such movements left their marks across the British welfare state, often formalised as equal opportunity policies and anti-discrimination practices. But something strange happens to these ideas of a diverse society as they are adopted and adapted in New Labour policies. First, diversity becomes flattened into a social landscape of individual differences – as in the Office of Public Services Reform quotation above: a nation of individuals with "different needs and aspirations" that had been neglected or overlooked.

<sup>8</sup> For example: Needham, op cit, p188-189

<sup>9</sup> Newtown health user, questionnaire 23

It may be true that all individuals are different and have unique needs and aspirations, but that was not the issue being raised by challenges to normative views of the public in policies and services. There, difference was seen as structurally connected to patterns of discrimination, exclusion, oppression and inequality. In the choice agenda, such patterned consequences of social differences are made to disappear – in their place we see just a series of unique individuals. It is clearly not the case that structured patterns of inequality, exclusion and discrimination have gone away – indeed, the government's 2007 equalities review<sup>10</sup> demonstrated the persistence and even intensification of some of the relationships between difference and inequality.

A second thing happens to the idea of diversity in the arguments for choice. The claim about a diverse public is converted into an argument for diverse provision of public services:

*Since every person has differing requirements, their rights will not be met simply by providing a "one size fits all" service. The public expects diversity of provision as well as national standards.*<sup>11</sup>

Here diversity of provision is seen as necessitated by diversity of requirements – and diversity of provision really means diversity of providers. The public – as patients, parents, and more – should be able to choose between different service providers.

This is a tenuous case, to say the least. Having different providers of public services carries no guarantee that particular sets of needs or requirements will be met by any of the providers – unless those needs are explicitly identified, and prioritised in policy, planning or contracting. In the absence of a full-blown market in which people pay money to have their wants met, needs are a focus of negotiation, recognition and prioritisation.

Furthermore, for a government concerned about "postcode lotteries" in services, this is a view about diversity of provision that pays little attention to geography. Imagine a household with a need or desire to send a child to a specialist school for music, but living 50 miles from the nearest provider. Or someone seeking a Gujarati-speaking care home for a relative, when the most accessible is 100 miles away. The problem recurs with nearly all services – localities are too small to produce a market in which every diverse need can have its niche provider.

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<sup>10</sup> Equalities Review *Fairness & Freedom: Final Report of the Equalities Review* (Department for Communities & Local Government, 2007)

<sup>11</sup> Office of Public Services Reform, op cit

I have tried to suggest that the way that diversity is used in the choice debate and reform of public services produces a very thin conception of diversity that separates it from questions of social difference, inequality and power. Instead it has been attached to an argument for disaggregating public services into more or less local markets of competing providers. It produces a disaggregated – individualised – conception of the public to be served. At the same time, the emphasis on diversity sits uncomfortably alongside government concerns with promoting social cohesion, restricting access to citizenship and making social rights more conditional: even this thin version of diversity has its limits.

### **An unequal public?**

Finally, we must turn to address questions of inequality directly. Earlier I noted that the promotion of consumer orientation and choice had been explicitly justified in terms of increasing equity and fairness in access to public services: "choice for the many, not the few". But choice in public services poses other problems of equity and equality, and these are themes raised consistently by people that we talked to in our study.

Parental choice has been the focus of much analysis and debate, as parents with superior economic resources try to make them work for their children – within both private and state education systems. In the state system, various tactics have been invented by parents anxious to secure their school of choice – moving house, renting accommodation addresses, doing the school run for commuting pupils, making contributions to school funds and so on.

But social inequality can work its way through public services even when there is no direct or indirect economic mechanism. The middle classes also possess significant amounts of social and cultural capital – networks, styles of speech and interaction, the confidence to know and use codes of conduct and more. These too can play significant roles in the allocation of resources and treatment in public services. Such people are typically perceived as good parents, good patients and good pupils (by comparison with the troublesome, difficult, unreasonable and inarticulate).

Other indicators of social difference and the expectations that they bring with them are also still at work – about gender roles and identities; about racial/ethnic differences; about disability and sexuality. Equal opportunities norms may have moderated some of the worst effects of discrimination and unfairness, but the evidence suggests that inequalities have not just persisted but even deepened in some respects during the last 30 years.

Two questions stand out about public service reform and inequality. First, do the new structures and mechanisms for public service delivery reinforce or even exacerbate existing inequalities? Among the people we interviewed who used and worked in public services, there was anxiety that choice could produce or reproduce inequalities – of money, of cultural capital and of social or political networks – because people would know how to act to make choice work to their advantage. These are consistent concerns about fairness, equity and justice within the world of public services. They are contentious and difficult in their own right, but they are only one aspect of the inequality problem.

The second question concerns whether public services should do anything about redressing the pattern of social inequalities in which they are enmeshed. In this, New Labour tended to stress the importance of equity rather more than equality. For many people working in public services, the relationship between equity and equality is an important, if uncomfortable, one. It is one of the core questions posed in the idea that working in public services is associated with the hope or desire to “make a difference”. But there remains some political, moral and organisational confusion: what should be the responsibilities of public services in a society where some forms of inequality have deepened; where access to basic living standards remains fundamentally compromised for many people; and where “success” is increasingly measured in the unstable cocktail of high incomes and conspicuous consumption?

New Labour has been strangely silent about this version of “consumer culture”. But it poses very sharply the question of what publicness involves – not least for the people who use and work in public services. If the consumer/choice orientation persists as a model for public service provision, there are two likely political consequences. The individualising transactional model of choice will fail to engage public enthusiasm because people know that using public services is not – and should not be – “like shopping”. Political parties promoting choice as the one best way are, then, unlikely to receive enthusiastic support for their reforms. Indeed, choice may increase public scepticism and cynicism about public service reform (a problem from which Labour has suffered already).

Secondly, persisting with a consumer choice model may, in the longer term, undermine those sentiments of membership in which people feel themselves connected to others – as a public or a community. If people do start thinking of themselves as consumers, we should be prepared for the social and political effects. Consumers tend to behave badly – either in the pursuit of their own particular interests or in the tantrums that accompany frustrated desires. The publicness of public services, and the wider political culture, would

prove difficult to sustain: unless, perhaps, these consumers of public services turned out to be ethical consumers, whose consumption is tempered by new forms of solidarity, connectedness and political or moral norms.

*Details of the research project Creating Citizen Consumers (ESRC/AHRC funded grant number RES-143-25-0008) can be found at: [www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/creating-citizen-consumers](http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/creating-citizen-consumers)*



## Chapter 5

# Faith and social capital

Dilwar Hussain, Head of the Policy Research Unit at the Islamic Foundation

## Faith and social capital

Religion is a divisive phenomenon, or so the received wisdom goes. And of course religious people have done, and continue to do, enough to keep this idea in circulation. In this chapter I would like to explore this notion a little further and see if there are contributions that faith can make to solidarity as well. The focus will be the context of British Muslim communities, although very obvious (and possibly more important) examples can be found from the Christian experience in the UK.

Robert Putnam, in his famous work on social capital,<sup>1</sup> highlights the decline in cooperative public association in American society. And the US doesn't seem to be alone – one can identify such trends in other societies: decline in membership of political parties, decline in church attendance, voter apathy, and so forth. This is not to argue that public association is in a state of collapse – indeed, data from Europe and the US does seem to show different results, and part of the “decline” may actually be a sign of transformation of the nature of association as we enter a more globalised digital age.

However, the theories around social capital – including the works of prominent sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, in addition to Putnam – put forward a compelling thesis of the importance of relationships and networks in society. Ed Fieldhouse's chapter in this volume goes into more detail on social capital theory and how this affects debates around cohesion, citizenship and solidarity, but for the purpose of this chapter I am concerned with the impact of faith on social capital and how this feeds into social solidarity.

### Solidarity and social capital

Putnam describes how:

*... the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups.<sup>2</sup>*

Social capital theory is concerned with networks, participation, shared values and trustworthiness.<sup>3</sup> It thus has at its core notions such as mutuality, community and solidarity.

1 Putnam, RD *Bowling Alone: The Collapse Et Revival of American Community* (Simon Et Schuster, 2000)

2 Ibid

3 Field, J *Social Capital* (Routledge, 2003)

Durkheim differentiates between the nature of solidarity in modern and pre-modern societies. The latter is characterised by "mechanical solidarity" based on habit, routine and bonds of similarity, whereas the former is related to "organic solidarity", which is more fluid, mobile and open to difference.<sup>4</sup> In a culture of organic solidarity, relationships are more open to transient interactions and, given the nature of immigration today, diversity is a crucial factor in thinking about solidarity.

The ability to plug into networks was seen by Bourdieu as not only a means of enhancing one's power in society and getting along, but also a way of the elite to maintain power and to exclude others from privilege, thus maintaining inequality. Social capital, therefore, like any other form of capital, has the potential to be used positively or negatively. And this means that just as solidarity can be enhanced by increased social capital, it can also be undermined.

This is further nuanced by the identification of three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Putnam reminds us that these can be present in different quantities in any given situation. For example, a local Muslim congregation can have strong bonding social capital in the way it holds together – a factor that may also cause others to view it as isolationist and parochial – and at the same time it may be bridging between generations or ethnic groups within the congregation that would not normally have such close interaction in wider society. At the same time, analysis of the bridging or linking social capital of that congregation when relating to the local working men's club may show this to be very low.

According to Putnam, "bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging capital provides a sociological WD-40"<sup>5</sup> Very strong bonding social capital may thus be good for the in-group (its internal solidarity), but can be seen as divisive and isolationist (when considering a more general idea of solidarity) unless balanced by strong bridging and linking social capital.

### **Faith and social capital**

This brings us on to the point of how religion relates to social capital. Vivien Lowndes identifies three different approaches in the social capital literature: i) that religion is irrelevant, ii) that it is detrimental, and iii) that it is invaluable to social capital.<sup>6</sup> This

4 Ibid

5 Putnam, op cit

6 Lowndes, V "Religious Involvement and Social Capital: Incompatible, Invaluable or Irrelevant?" in Graham, E and Baker, C (eds) *Religious Capital in Regenerating Communities: Proceedings of the Launch Conference of the Manchester Centre for Public Theology*, 10 May 2004 (2004)

summary is partly based on Putnam's work in Italy and the US, which seems to yield different results for each country. It would seem that the nature and dynamics of the religious community under scrutiny have an important bearing on its potential for social capital.

Beyond religious practice, other historical factors are also crucial. Putnam found, for example, that there was a difference between northern Italian and southern Italian culture. This he put down to historical Norman autocracy in the south and the autonomy of medieval city-states in the north.<sup>7</sup> Factors such as authoritarianism, degree of democratic culture and accountability, whether a faith community looks outwards for engagement or is primarily focused inwards for parochial concerns, would therefore seem to be important considerations.

Religion most definitely presents an ambivalent input to solidarity and social capital. On the one hand we have seen fundamentalist and extreme conservative attitudes towards the "other": the extreme and racist politics of movements such as the Ku Klux Klan, intolerant religious nationalism or the jihadist terrorism of al-Qaeda. On the other hand, charitable giving, various movements aimed at peace and reconciliation, and even the inspiration behind the welfare state, all or partly stem from religious motivation.

While some interpretations of Christianity may have played a role in maintaining apartheid in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation process also showed the immense healing potential of Christianity and the role this played in rebuilding solidarity in a very fragmented society. Examples could also be cited from other faith traditions, including the particularly well-known Sikh tradition of hospitality of the *langar*.

Putnam's US experience led him to conclude that:

*Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America ... as a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context.*<sup>8</sup>

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7 Field, op cit

8 Putnam, op cit

In the UK, the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Life and Faith coined the term "faithful capital"<sup>9</sup>. This was in recognition of the role that communities of faith play, particularly through the language (hope, mercy, love, forgiveness, hospitality) and practice (charity, encounter, nurturing) that they bring to the public arena and the contribution of this to social capital.

A Leicester-based research project identified that just over half of the 240 faith-based organisations in the city were administering 443 faith-led social projects, including assistance for asylum seekers, support for people with HIV, counselling and youth club provision. An estimated worth of the volunteering time from faith communities reached nearly £5 million per year.<sup>10</sup> So it would seem that while faith can divide, the contribution of faith communities is important nonetheless and needs assessment.

Because of the congregational nature of religious structures, there seem to be clear motivations for bonding social capital at the very least. But if we also consider aspects of Christian teaching around welcoming the stranger and the downtrodden,<sup>11</sup> it is little surprise that churches play a prominent role in refugee and asylum campaigns.

Beyond the impact on social capital through social action, places of worship can also provide a direct experience and training ground for generating solidarity. Many religious congregations, particularly in larger cities, are increasingly multi-ethnic spaces; they also provide potential for interaction across boundaries of class and wealth and, crucially, across generations. Places of worship can, and do, function as social centres, and the best mosques, like churches, provide a growing opportunity for social engagement and capacity building, be that through a youth club, a keep-fit class, or a counselling service.

An interesting model for bridging and linking is provided by the Citizen Organising Foundation and its affiliated bodies, Birmingham Citizens and London Citizens. These broad-based organisations have managed to bring together thousands of volunteers from different backgrounds, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and non-faith people, to work for issues of common local concern. The philosophy is to teach politics through action and to show that individuals can make a difference if they organise themselves together with others, building solidarity across faith and institutional boundaries.

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9 Commission on Urban Life and Faith *Faithful Cities* (Methodist Publishing House/Church House Publishing, 2006)

10 Ravat, R *Embracing the Present, Planning the Future* (Leicester Faiths Regeneration Project, 2004)

11 See, for example: Morisy, A *Beyond the Good Samaritan* (Continuum, 2003); Bretherton, L *Hospitality as Holiness* (Ashgate, 2006)

Among the successes achieved by this model of community organising is the London Living Wage adopted in 2005, bringing a much-needed boost to the income of some of the poorest in the capital. This has also been extended to the Olympic Delivery Agency's employment policy.<sup>12</sup>

At some point, all of this raises the sensitive question of faith and politics. Without going into the question in detail here, it is no doubt an important point and deserves serious reflection. A democratic culture of debate presupposes a critical exposure of one's ideas – I can say "This is my view", albeit with deep conviction, but not insist that it is the only view because that's what God tells me. And I should be able to take on the chin another's criticism of my view.

Thankfully, the secular arrangement we have creates a structural plurality for difference to be aired. But we would be worse off if we insisted that religious values should not be articulated at all in the public sphere. Where would the civil rights movement be without the Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr? While the institutions of religion and politics should remain separate, stripping religion of any public role whatsoever could turn it into exactly what Marx feared, an opiate for people.

### **Islam, solidarity and public policy**

Islam has a very strong tradition of social justice and encouragement for people to participate in public life. In addition to its more esoteric and spiritual teachings, the Qur'an describes one of the roles of the believers as being to "promote the good, and discourage the wrong". Furthermore, a strong emphasis on community life and mutual support has ensured that notions such as *zakat* (a religious obligation to pay 2.5% of one's savings to charity) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) have been popularly upheld among Muslims.

Muhammad emphasised that "he who eats his fill while his neighbour starves is not one of us" and that "food for two is enough for three". Such basic teachings have created a devout community that views social engagement, community building, charity and sacrifice as religious and human obligations. This is not unique to Muslim communities, as we have already seen; rather it shows the important role that religious sentiments and motivations can play as resources for reaching out to others.

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12 Ritchie, A "Do We Need Institutional Religion?" (2008). At: [http://www.theothinktank.co.uk/Do\\_we\\_need\\_institutional\\_religion.aspx?ArticleID=1895&PageID=47&RefPageID=11](http://www.theothinktank.co.uk/Do_we_need_institutional_religion.aspx?ArticleID=1895&PageID=47&RefPageID=11)

However, the current discourse around Muslims is quite obviously framed in problematic terms. Not only is the nature of the problem related to extremism, but also segregation and, more importantly, alleged self-segregation. It is useful to note here that the debate around segregation must have an economic dimension to it, as well as being seen in its historical context as evolving from the history of housing policy.

The bonding social capital within Muslim communities could be symptomatic of a defensive posture often associated with minorities, accentuated and reified by the sense of being under the proverbial spotlight. However, it is important not to exaggerate the presence of bonding social capital across the Muslim "community". The ethnic, cultural, denominational and class differences mean that it is very difficult to describe the British Muslim experience in singular terms. Mosques are entirely autonomous entities, which can become part of a voluntary network, but are not part of a formal diocesan structure, even at the local level – let alone nationally.

But in considering the hindrances to wider civic participation, perhaps we do need to think in more specific terms. One such issue is in the perception of the state and civic participation. Some Muslim traditions, which developed in authoritarian climates, may not be well versed in the art of public association. For some, the experience of Muslim states has historically been of an unchallengeable leviathan with very little opportunity for engagement. There are also particular sociopolitical forces at work that affect Muslims in unique ways, not least their image in the media and the impact of globalisation.

Furthermore, one may find very conservative views espoused by some Muslims, who are trying to negotiate the move from rural traditional society to urban modern Britain and are afraid of losing their long-established religious and cultural values. Then there are the multi-level disadvantages that some Muslims, by virtue of being of working-class immigrant background, face in education, employment, housing and other areas of social policy; the rise of Islamophobia, especially after 9/11; and the toll of the "war of terror" in alienating and disenfranchising some, especially among the young. Unless such issues are addressed adequately, simply asking Muslims to integrate more or to hold hands with their fellow citizens will have little effect, even if they were to collectively sing "Kumbaya"!

There are also many Islamic theological resources for building solidarity that are now being explored, and that journey must continue with confidence and a sense of urgency. Consider that, in contrast with popular Muslim practice today, early Muslims interpreted permission to eat meat from the table of "People of the Book" as a concession for

social interaction. Such a gesture from the Qur'an itself shows how Islamic theology could always be read as a negotiated, and often pragmatic, journey through life and, furthermore, how confidence impacts on the type of effect faith can have on social interaction.

The Qur'an also emphasises solidarity in the pursuit of good: "... and join together in pursuit of good and pious things ...".<sup>13</sup> It further clarifies that the differences among people are there to be explored rather than to be obstacles to interaction: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other, (not that you may despise each other) ...".<sup>14</sup> For, "If God had willed he could have made you all one people ...".<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary debates around Muslim identity are clearly moving in the direction of more rooted and localised European and Western identification. It is no longer strange to talk of "British Muslims" and no doubt that journey will continue further as Muslims develop a stronger sense of nationhood in a British context. Muslim thinkers are emphasising the importance of the social contract (which is seen to have a strong resonance with Islamic values) and the impact this has upon loyalty to the state. The concentric circles of loyalty to one's family, neighbourhood/community, the national and the global are not a source of tension for Muslims alone. Indeed, this tension can be healthy.

The Qur'an recognises that while truth and justice are the benchmark of any loyalty (even to one's kin), the contractual relationship overrides an emotional one in the case of a conflict. Hence the loyalty to nation is underlined. The word *umma* (usually referring to the global Muslim community) is often spoken of in problematic terms, as something that potentially threatens loyalty to the nation. Notwithstanding the similarities of this and older debates around Catholics, Muhammad actually used this term contextually.

When he created treaties between the Muslims of the city of Medina and outlying non-Muslim tribes, he described their collective as one *umma* (a single community). Muslims themselves, therefore, need to rediscover the original context of such terms and rescue them from the last two centuries of anti-colonial (and hence anti-Western) connotations.

But there is a real problem here. The policy engagement with Muslims must move beyond merely dealing with Muslims through the prism of prevention of extremism, radicalisation

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13 Qur'an, 5:2

14 Ibid, 49:13

15 Ibid, 5:48

and violence. This was an understandable imperative given the terror attacks, and no doubt the threat remains. But in that process, if government finds itself promoting, patronising or nurturing groups because of their compliance, even if they represent authoritarian tendencies that never hold elections, or carry extreme misogynistic views, then something dangerous is happening. This will only serve to undermine civil society and the social capital of Muslim communities in the long term. Loyalty does not mean having an uncritical view of the nation.

This is not to say that government should be soft on terrorists, but between violent rejection and muted compliance a vast middle ground does exist. But the way in which use of the term "Islamism" has developed has could have undermined a nuanced and sophisticated discussion around these issues. It is now such a catch-all term that it includes anyone that is a Muslim and believes in the political relevance of their faith. As such it could include a spectrum of orientations from al-Qaeda to the ruling AKP in Turkey, which is akin to a secular, Christian democratic party. This naturally blunts the usefulness of the term.

If government policy rewards those who keep their heads down, while it punishes those who are engaged (albeit critically), then do not be surprised if in another generation we are wondering where the collapse of the Muslim civic space came from, and why Muslims are more isolated and not less.

## **Conclusion**

I have looked at the ways in which faith can fragment society as well as contribute to building solidarity. Association and social solidarity are at the core of social capital theory, but we must resist exaggerating the expectations of how far social capital can go to explain the very complex issues at hand. As Lowndes asserts:

... in policy circles, social capital has emerged as a "magic bullet" for tackling not just political disengagement but issues as diverse as crime and disorder, educational underachievement, ill health and small business development.<sup>16</sup>

The fact that a high level of social capital exists does not automatically mean that it is used to promote solidarity. Lowndes is also sceptical of the way in which we talk of faith's role in social capital, commenting, "are church and faith groups part of the lifeblood of healthy social capital, or are they more of a sticking plaster to be applied to an

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<sup>16</sup> Lowndes, op cit

injured patient?"<sup>17</sup>

If faith groups are to be part of the lifeblood of healthy social capital, then their role in providing welcoming hospitality, creating and maintaining familiarity, and nurturing solidarity needs to be acknowledged more strongly by policy makers. Yes, faith can be divisive, but then the impact of individualism, as outlined by John Clarke elsewhere in this collection, is probably a more corrosive and more pernicious factor, leading to isolation and the fragmentation of society. At a time when some people do not even know their immediate neighbours well, because of pressures of work, what do "community cohesion" and solidarity actually mean?

For settling communities, such as Muslims, government still plays a very important nurturing role. Yet there is a danger that the government-community interface could actually serve to fragment rather than to build solidarity. In pitting Muslim community groups against each other as they vie for government patronage, we could further undermine civil society in the long term. Also, although I am all for levelling the playing field, government funding strategies targeted at one faith group could create community tensions and unnecessary hostility through competition for resources, with a detrimental impact on solidarity at the neighbourhood and city levels.

It is important for Muslim groups to view civil society and engagement with other partners therein (bridging and linking) as a priority. This also means identifying funding sources that are UK based but outside government (not as a replacement for, but in addition to government sources), so that the vibrancy of the civic arena is not stifled by long-term dependency upon a single source.

Muslim thinkers are beginning to explore the theological resources for a more open and outward-looking community that can enrich bridging social capital, but these debates need to be much more widely disseminated and discussed among Muslim audiences. Such a "contextual theology" of Islam also needs to be deepened, as we are in the very early stages of its development. There is a lot to learn from the experience of other faith communities, and indeed from the humanist tradition in the West, as well as from living in an environment of free and critical thinking. This gives diasporic Muslim communities a potential vantage point enabling them to be the conduits of an adventurous local rethinking that could have global impact on Muslims, citizenship and solidarity.

17 Ibid

## Chapter 6

# Solidarity in a globalised society – implications for education policy

Hetan Shah, Chief Executive of the Development Education Association

## Solidarity in a globalised society – implications for education policy

Globalisation is not easy to define, but it is obvious that the global context is central to our lives, whether in terms of the world economy, climate change, the internet or where the food we eat comes from. We live in an age of "super-mobility" which implies fast-changing patterns of migration that have major effects on our lives.<sup>1</sup> Discussions about citizenship and community cohesion need to recognise this context, or risk being redundant before they begin. They cannot be understood purely at the national level but must consider the global context. This chapter explores what all of this means for what our school system should be like to meet the needs of today's young people.

I want to begin by outlining why community cohesion is problematic philosophically and politically. While community cohesion is a contested concept, the commonly used definition of a cohesive community is:

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities.
- The diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued.
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities.
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup>

### Interpreting community cohesion

To understand the concept, we need to look at where it came from and how it is being used and understood. Community cohesion could be a very radical concept if the idea of "a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all" were taken seriously. But it has not been used to justify a programme of major redistribution. Indeed, it can be argued that community cohesion as understood in practice – particularly by the government – draws attention away from structural inequalities in terms of life chances, as it focuses rather on cultural, racial and religious differences.

In practice, the term is better understood as being driven by fears initially about the race riots in the North of England, and more recently perceived Muslim fundamentalism and terrorism. What was a concept that had been developed around a particular issue –

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1 Rutter, J et al *Beyond Naturalisation* (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2008)

2 Taken from: Local Government Association *Guidance on Community Cohesion* (2002)

disturbances in Burnley, Bradford and Oldham – has now morphed to encompass other things.

The government interpretation of community cohesion is situated within wider discussions, catalysed by Gordon Brown, about the nature of Britishness. He has argued that Britishness is based upon "shared values",<sup>3</sup> which he articulates as liberty, responsibility and fairness. This brings us to the idea of citizenship.

The origin of citizenship as an idea is a legal one – about belonging to a particular state. It has been enhanced in recent years through notions of "active citizenship". Seeking to redefine it on the basis of shared values, as Gordon Brown does, is understandable as a device for building national identity. This is, however, conceptually unsound. What does it mean to say that liberty, responsibility and fairness are our shared values? Does it also mean that we would not recognise as citizens those who prioritise other values, such as equality, locality, environment? Of course not.<sup>4</sup>

This leads to the question of what it means when the definition of community cohesion requires a "common vision". In a liberal democracy we recognise that people have different visions, and that so long as these do not harm others, they are legitimate. Few would dispute this. Does the term "common vision" have real content in this context, beyond the repudiation of terrorism?

Another problem with the concept is that community cohesion is conceived in terms of "communities", which implies that there are clear and distinct communities that need to cohere with each other. This flows from the fact that the idea in practice is rooted in fears about Muslims, and sees them as a relatively homogeneous community that is unwilling to integrate. Ironically, this assertion is shown to be incorrect by research, which reveals that the attitudes of white communities are more likely to be a barrier to integration than those of Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

Identity is, however, something that ultimately only individuals have, and it is multiple. Therefore we are all part of many "communities" and the importance of these differs depending upon context. One person may see themselves as an accountant, a mother, a

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3 "The Future of Britishness", speech by Gordon Brown at the Fabian Society conference, 14 January 2006

4 I have argued elsewhere, as have others, that we should use human rights as a basis for citizenship. See: Rutherford, J and Shah, H *The Good Society* (Compass, 2006)

5 Billings, A and Holden, A *The Burnley Project: Interfaith Interventions Et Cohesive Communities* (Lancaster University, 2007)

Sikh, of East African descent, a basketball player, a Northerner, a British Asian, an avid reader and a supporter of Barnsley football club. Which community are they part of and with whom do they need to cohere? Similarly, what does it mean to think about racial "communities" when predictions are that mixed-race people will be the biggest non-white minority in the country by 2020?

Our identities stretch across the local, national and global, and are multiple and sometimes contradictory. Research shows how globalisation has radically changed the nature of identity and made it much more complex.<sup>6</sup> We are not just British, and that is a positive thing as many of the social and environmental challenges that we face are global, and require us to think, act and have solidarity on that scale.

Solidarity at this level means we need to think about how our daily actions can have effects around the world. This includes thinking about the products we buy (food miles, labour standards, fair trade), our finances and pensions (do we invest ethically?) and how we travel (are we living sustainably?). Dealing with climate change, international poverty, unstable financial markets or mass migration requires thinking and acting at the local, national and international levels. In turn, this means that our identities are wider than often considered by notions such as community cohesion.

All of this suggests that community cohesion may not be useful starting point for policy thinking. This is a problem when the idea is in fact turning into law, as illustrated for example by the duty on schools to promote community cohesion.<sup>7</sup> Are there any useful alternative concepts to community cohesion?

### **Cosmopolitanism – a more helpful concept than cohesion**

Cosmopolitanism is an idea that can be traced back to the Cynics in Ancient Greece in the fourth century BC. Cosmopolitan literally means "citizen of the cosmos". Cosmopolitanism is based on the idea that all humans belong to a single moral community – that we are world citizens. The idea is elaborated by the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah:

*People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to*

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6 Croucher, S *Globalisation & Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004)

7 Education & Inspections Act 2006

*their own way ... [T]here will be times when these two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.*<sup>8</sup>

Cosmopolitanism is pluralist but not relativist. It accepts that there are a wide range of good lives that can be lived, but also agrees that there are some values that are not worth living by. This pluralistic view comes with a sense of curiosity and a sense of the fallibility of our own knowledge. It is positioned against dogma and closed-mindedness, whether this comes from religion, environmentalism, consumerism, or sheer laziness. In the global arena it implies that we look at other countries and peoples and think about what we have to learn from them as much as what we can teach them, and about how our lives are interdependent.

Given the problems with community cohesion that I have outlined, I would argue that cosmopolitanism is a more helpful idea to enable us to think through what we are seeking to do. It embraces notions of citizenship, and at its heart is solidarity at the local, national and global levels. Indeed, some proponents of community cohesion may indeed be seeking cosmopolitanism, but, as I have suggested above, the way that the concept has been developed and the way it tends to be used means that often this is not the case.

Obviously, not all learning happens in school. Much of what young people learn comes from their family and friends, the television and the internet. In particular, the growth of social networking sites such as Facebook means that young people *de facto* operate on a global stage. But this does not necessarily mean that they are cosmopolitan. Just as there are people who travel abroad but will not talk to anyone but other travellers, so it can be with the global world young people inhabit, on-line and off-line. Therefore what schools do to promote a cosmopolitan approach is crucial, especially for those who do not have this fostered through their families or lack access to this from other sources in their life.

### **Promoting cosmopolitanism in schools**

There are many initiatives in the English education system that could be said to be promoting cosmopolitanism – an understanding of the wider world and of solidarity with others:

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8 Appiah, KA *Cosmopolitanism* (Penguin, 2006), pxiii. There are many other thinkers who have written about cosmopolitanism. For example, see: Nussbaum, M (ed) *For Love of Country* (Beacon Press, 1996); Osler, A and Starkey, H *Changing Citizenship: Democracy Et Inclusion in Education* (Open University Press, 2005)

- Citizenship is a statutory subject at key stages three and four, and the recent Goldsmith review<sup>9</sup> suggested it be made statutory at primary level.
- The new secondary curriculum that will come into force from September 2008 has a series of "dimensions" including "identity and cultural diversity" and "global dimension and sustainable development".
- The new secondary curriculum has three aims, one of which is to "enable all young people to become responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society".
- The Department for Children, Schools & Families has a programme of work on "sustainable schools", which looks at embedding greater understanding of sustainable development issues.
- There is a duty on schools to promote community cohesion.
- The Department for International Development has a major programme of work raising the profile of development issues in schools, including funds for non-governmental organisations' projects with schools, and funding of a website with teacher resources on global perspectives ([www.globaldimension.org](http://www.globaldimension.org)).
- The DCSF funds "Who Do We Think We Are Week", which runs in schools to promote discussion of identity and diversity.

At the Development Education Association, a charity and network that has been in this field for 15 years, we have recently published a set of case studies illustrating the range of excellent educational practice that is going on around the country. It includes a foreword from Gordon Brown in which he states: "I want to see the teaching of global issues given more weight in our schools and colleges."<sup>10</sup>

A major question for us, however, is what stands in the way of cosmopolitan education, despite the great number of policy initiatives such as those above? Policy appears to be the best it has been for 20 years – so why is practice still patchy? The answer is primarily a structural one. The big driver in schools is the "standards agenda", which means numeracy, literacy, and test results. Other worthy aims become secondary when Ofsted inspections, league tables and other incentives pull teachers to teach to the test and maximise results.<sup>11</sup>

We need to go back to the big question of "What is education for?" and align our education system to this. It is not just about preparing people for the global employment market-place. It is to develop well-rounded individuals who understand and can contribute to the

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9 Goldsmith, P (Lord) *Citizenship: Our Common Bond* (HMSO, 2008)

10 Development Education Association *Global Matters* (2008)

11 See, for example, the wealth of evidence emerging from the Cambridge Primary Review: [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)

world around them. Many of the education policy initiatives described above are treated as bolt-on extras, but they need to be seen as central to the purposes of education, and the incentives surrounding the education system need to support this view.

What would need to change for education to become more cosmopolitan? The curriculum would have to be more flexible, and indeed the recent Qualifications & Curriculum Authority reforms to the secondary curriculum have moved very much in the right direction. The curriculum could look at the world we inhabit and what it means to live in it – exploring issues such as poverty, climate change, globalisation and identity. This is not necessarily to do away with subject knowledge, but to use that knowledge to shed light on key issues in the world we live in. (A recent report by Ofsted showed that much geography that is taught is not relevant to today's world and that many teachers need to update their approaches to integrate global issues and sustainable development into them.<sup>12</sup>)

Citizenship education would also need to widen to take a more global perspective, rather than being mostly rooted in the national context, and would need to be better at exploring power relationships. The recent *Diversity & Citizenship Curriculum Review*<sup>13</sup> helps to create a culture where teachers think about how the curriculum links to diversity.

An example of a curriculum that takes a cosmopolitan approach seriously is the international primary curriculum.<sup>14</sup> One of its core aims is to "explicitly help children develop an international perspective as well as reinforcing their own cultural heritage". Taught now in over 300 schools in the UK, it addresses history, geography, art, ICT, science and a range of other subjects, but does so through a topic-based curriculum, exploring topics ranging from "chocolate" to "What price progress?"

### **Educating teachers about global learning**

For a more cosmopolitan education, teacher education is a major issue – for example, half the teachers involved in teaching citizenship have not received any training in citizenship.<sup>15</sup> Many issues about the wider world do not have easy answers: Why is there poverty? How can we lead a sustainable life? Issues around diversity and race are particularly difficult to address in general – sometimes for fear of saying the "wrong" things – and there are

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12 Ofsted *Geography in Schools: Changing Practice* (2008)

13 Ajegbo, K et al *Diversity & Citizenship Curriculum Review* (Department for Education & Skills, 2007)

14 [www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com](http://www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com)

15 National Foundation for Educational Research *Vision versus Pragmatism* (2007)

particular issues about addressing these in areas of primarily white pupils.<sup>16</sup> As well as knowledge about content, these topics require new pedagogical methodologies which start from the fact that teachers do not necessarily have all the answers and which allow for greater pupil participation and voice.

Cosmopolitanism knows there are often no easy answers, and so focuses upon conversation and process rather than a "right answer" as the way to deal with this – what some educationalists have called "dialogic teaching".<sup>17</sup> There are emerging examples of methodologies that take this approach, such as Philosophy for Children<sup>18</sup> and the Open Spaces and Dialogues for Enquiry methodology.<sup>19</sup> The best methods to teach complex global issues need to be found and then made a stronger part of initial teacher education and continuing professional development.

One of the best models for teacher learning is Tide~ Global Learning, a teacher network in the West Midlands that has been running for 30 years. One of the main ways they have worked is to collaboratively create publications and teaching resources looking at the educational value and challenges of global dimensions and development perspectives. Publications range from *Citizenship & Muslim Perspectives to What Do We Mean by Development?*

In many ways the greatest importance of the network's publications is the way they are created – through the discussions of groups of teachers working together to share ideas and to respond to the challenges of exploring their own understanding of key issues. This process also helps thinking about ways to enable young people to engage in similar learning. This dynamic of professional development of educators is at the core of how Tide~ works. It is based on the belief that if we want to promote critical and creative global learners, then teachers must also have the spaces to engage critically and creatively with global issues. In many ways the network shows cosmopolitanism in practice – it is based on a continuing democratic dialogue.

Teacher support is also provided by a range of other organisations. The UK is unique in having a network of around 45 development education centres (DECs) across the country.

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16 Gaine, C *We're All White Thanks* (Trentham, 2005)

17 For example: Alexander, R *Education as Dialogue: Moral & Pedagogical Choices for a Runaway World* (Hong Kong Institute of Education/Dialogos, 2006)

18 See, for example: [www.sapere.org.uk](http://www.sapere.org.uk)

19 [www.osdemethodology.org.uk](http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk)

These are local centres that work to promote a more cosmopolitan education. Examples of the work they are doing include:

- Liverpool World Centre has worked with pupils from over 40 school councils to increase their understanding of global issues and fair trade, and many of the schools have gone on to take up fair-trade products as a result of pupil action.
- Bridges DEC in Shropshire is running the "Views from Shropshire" project, collecting oral and written accounts of individuals from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds in the county and producing a booklet to be distributed in schools, community venues and libraries, and educational resources to enhance teaching at key stages two and three.
- Reading International Solidarity Centre is working with a number of schools to help them become "global schools", through training staff in all subjects on how to promote a global dimension in the curriculum and measuring changes in pupil attitudes over time relating to views about poor countries.

This kind of support for schools tends to be done on a shoestring, by people committed to promoting a wider understanding of the world. Greater time and funding for professional development support for schools in this area is necessary to help teachers meet the needs of students in a diverse and fast-changing world. The DCSF needs to take the lead on this agenda and create a strategy to take it forward.

A cosmopolitan approach needs to be a whole school approach. If it is taken forward by just one or two committed teachers, then it will tend to die out when they move on – it takes several years to become properly embedded.<sup>20</sup> Therefore the role of leaders and especially head teachers is crucial. The National College for School Leadership is the major provider of training and support to head teachers, and needs to reflect global perspectives and realities in its training and research. In particular, how do schools integrate more fully into the local geographical community that surrounds them and make the links to wider global agendas?

This needs to be supplemented with better measures of what a cosmopolitan school looks like. These could provide an alternative way for Ofsted to assess schools, which would be an important move in promoting a more cosmopolitan education system.

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<sup>20</sup> EES South West *Change Your School for Good* (2007)

One danger in educational practice, however, in promoting more solidarity and understanding of the wider world, is that it can tend towards promoting uncritical behaviour change. Education must at its heart be about learning, and approaches that tend towards simple messages such as "recycling is good" do not necessarily promote learning. Ultimately, what society needs is citizens with critical minds who can come to their own conclusions about the world around them.

Some activities in schools, such as fundraising for overseas aid, links with overseas schools or the "saris, steel bands and samosas" approach to cultural understanding, can perpetuate stereotypes as often as change them. The evidence suggests that it all depends on how it is done and whether specific work is undertaken to counteract stereotyped views. More research is needed into what works in teaching and learning for a more cosmopolitan education.

As the political philosopher David Held has argued:

*Only a more cosmopolitan outlook can ultimately accommodate itself to the political challenges of a more global era, marked by overlapping communities of fate and multi-layered politics.*<sup>21</sup>

It is crucial that our education system can adapt to help meet this challenge.

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21 Held, D "Cosmopolitanism and Globalisation" in *Logos* vol 1, no 3 (2002), pp1-17

## Chapter 7

# Building local solidarity

Raja Miah and Erin Hoekstra, Director and Delivery and Training Manager at PeaceMaker, Oldham

## Building local solidarity

As an organisation, PeaceMaker developed out of the hostility and resentment that has become the legacy of the regeneration programmes in the mill towns of the North. A cause of immense frustration and anxiety, government regeneration policy has historically encouraged communities in poverty to compete with each other for resources. Many of us who created PeaceMaker were nothing more than teenagers at the time of the old SRB regeneration schemes, but even then we could see the long-lasting detriment this competition would have on our communities.

Here we aim to share our experiences of how solidarity can be successfully built across communities and, just as significantly, what challenges remain both within our communities and among the attitudes of policy makers and service providers. Our experiences are based upon our practice in the town of Oldham, where the civil disturbances of 2001 were pivotal in illustrating the detrimental side effects that government regeneration policy was having in our communities.

Government reports and external evaluations present an impression that much has changed as a consequence of the big regeneration programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the legacy of such interventions has been deep scars that make the task of building solidarity across communities, in particular communities that are socioeconomically indistinguishable in every aspect but their ethnic make-up, far more challenging than it should be.

Seven years after the disturbances took place, on the surface very little has changed. Certain groups feel just as oppressed today as they did in the spring of 2001. The anger and resentment within the primarily Pakistani communities of Glodwick, where the disturbances were greatest, are just as strong today. The under-siege perception of the nearby white working-class communities is, if anything, more ingrained today than seven years ago, especially in light of current debates on immigration and terrorism and the acknowledgment among key politicians that society has failed the white working class. Our communities are just as segregated today as they were then, and schools and places of employment have seen little if any demographic change.

Admittedly, the clear, recognisable change is that at local and national levels this competition and the ensuing resentment are now acknowledged as a problem. Within this context, we as an organisation attempt to present a different way of responding to the

challenges that our communities face. Our first step in building local solidarity is to acknowledge that the methods that historically have been used to engage communities have significant failings and that these historical mistakes have generated distrust within communities towards consultation and engagement.

### **The challenge of engaging with community gatekeepers**

The immediate challenge has always been and, in our opinion, will always be not how to engage with people living within these communities but how to successfully engage with the organisations and individuals who present themselves as representatives of these communities. Within our white working-class communities, these representatives tend to be elderly people affiliated with tenants' and residents' associations. While there are parallels in our ethnic minority communities, there are far more youth representative organisations here. However, young people from ethnic minority communities are increasingly affected by apathy and disengagement, which is mirrored in our white working-class communities.

The quest for community legitimacy and genuine representation has led many organisations to question the way in which they have traditionally engaged with different communities. Consequently, they reject this traditional approach and try to bypass established community organisations and civic leaders with the belief that these people do not truly represent their communities. However, there are drawbacks to this approach as well. Service providers can spend all their time talking to individual community members but not taking any action until they find an organisation or group that is truly representative. We take a far more pragmatic approach here. We understand that we will never be able to speak with everyone nor will we ever make everyone happy. So legitimacy of representation is not the challenge, rather history is.

The politics of poverty is all about gatekeepers. Local authorities have historically invested heavily in gatekeepers and their partners, thus providing legitimacy to the actions and interventions of such organisations. The politics of poverty was once about playing off against each other individuals who represented different communities. Following 2001, such cumbersome techniques, however well meaning they may be in some instances, are no longer the accepted way to respond to needs and challenges.

They have been replaced with a more sophisticated methodology in which each community "takes its turn". This maintains the mono-ethnic status quo of community organisations within towns such as Oldham and does not encourage solidarity across

communities. Of course, those communities that are more politically linked can ensure that their “turn” has a higher priority than that of others.

In this context, we attempt to encourage communities to come together for collective benefit. It is our belief that our communities are stronger when they stand side by side rather than when they embark on the politics of poverty. While most people within our communities accept this, there is a gap between what goes on locally and the approaches used by those in power. In the circles where it matters, building solidarity across communities is nothing but rhetoric. Entrenched divisions and mono-ethnic representation leads to some groups ignoring our activities or indeed openly criticising them.

Going against conventional wisdom, our experience has been that it is far easier to engage in communities where the support structures and political representation are virtually non-existent than in communities where there is a strong voluntary sector and visible civic leadership. This is because, unfortunately, at a local level there are still no carrots or sticks to encourage communities with such strong infrastructure to work differently than they have historically. Indeed, some national initiatives seem to encourage the continuation of ineffectual engagement with local communities.

### **Turning gatekeepers into gateways**

This is not to say we can ignore these groups or individuals. Building solidarity across communities is extremely difficult without successfully engaging local civic leaders and community groups that have a historical affinity with any one community. However, much remains to be done to encourage representatives of communities to understand the value of building solidarity across communities. The challenge remains to transform individuals and organisations from being gatekeepers of communities to becoming gateways into and across communities.

We have found those that are most willing to adapt this stance are individuals and organisations with less power and influence. In particular, we have found women’s organisations and youth-led organisations to be most accepting of this methodology and most willing to embark with us on activities that foster relationships between people of shared interest from different ethnic communities.

Of course, there needs to be a motivation for building solidarity across communities. The belief that it is simply the right thing to do, while laudable, actually carries very little weight in the places where we tend to operate. We also must not assume that

segregation naturally either stems from or leads to the belief that different communities share nothing in common. Regardless of how segregated or how prejudiced a community is, it is naive to think that people within these communities believe that they have nothing in common with their neighbours from a different background. This is simply not the case.

Through our experiences, we have come to realise that a more sophisticated approach is required to generate real solidarity across communities. We cannot simply bring people from different backgrounds together and expect them to recognise and accept that they have far more in common than they would otherwise think. For instance, the fact that some of the most segregated and alienated communities share similar socioeconomic profiles does not mean that we will be able to create a bond over that. On its own, this is a methodology that is doomed to failure.

Something more needs to exist in terms of activities when we bring people together and the reasons why we bring them together. In the Oldham context, PeaceMaker had a number of options for how to respond to the challenges we saw. In our experience, we can have the most significant opportunities within communities that are most at risk of radicalisation and extremism.

Community cohesion has evolved since we first began piloting our interventions over 10 years ago; there are numerous organisations that now recognise and have expertise in bringing together people of difference. In this context, just like the gateways that we speak of, we see our role as having changed. We share our practice and experiences but concentrate our efforts in areas of challenge, where practice is scarce and expertise non-existent.

### **Bringing together those at risk of extremism**

Our unique experiences of developing and delivering services in our poorest white working-class communities as well as our South Asian Muslim communities has placed us in a position where we have come to recognise that significant parallels can be drawn in successfully responding to the challenges faced within these communities. Our practice is now focused on attempting to develop a shared methodology that encourages young people from both these communities who are at risk of radicalisation and extremism to come together to build solidarity and collectively respond to the challenges faced in their individual communities as well as across communities.

We have worked with young people in the most deprived white working-class communities where engagement in far-right political activities is just as much a generational characteristic as is the chronic lack of aspiration. We have also worked with young people in South Asian Muslim communities where, until recently, young Muslims were encouraged to turn their backs on our society and in some cases even actively work against it. From these experiences, we have found that young people, who are attracted to both sets of ideologies, have much more in common than people realise.

It is commonly accepted by professionals working in deprived communities, as well as policy makers at local and national government levels, that the most significant commonality between these groups is their socioeconomic circumstances, the impact of poverty. This is inaccurate; rather, the most significant shared commonality is the failure of the engagement strategies of organisations that have sought to champion and respond to their needs and, in some cases, the complete absence of any engagement whatsoever.

Over the last 10 years, consultation has become a fine art through which organisations and local authorities legitimise their actions without really listening to communities and consistently fail to return to these communities to explain their actions afterwards. It is very easy for individuals who preach extremism and hatred to intervene and present mainstream political engagement as a waste of time and indeed something that should be openly fought against.

Meanwhile, there is no longer the nerve or indeed the desire to even attempt to consult or engage with some communities – and indeed these tend to be our white working-class communities, where interventions have consistently failed for generations. Within this vacuum, it has been very easy for the far right to recruit. In both deprived white working-class and South Asian Muslim communities, extremists preach separateness and blame other communities for the circumstances of the communities in which they operate. It is here that we feel that our interventions are most needed.

Since our first projects, we have believed in the need genuinely to empower communities to help themselves and to leave individuals whom we have supported with the skill sets to challenge prejudice and discrimination within their peer groups. Too much emphasis has been given to the delivery of anti-racist or cultural diversity workshops by professionals. These are then idealistically expected to deliver an attitudinal change that, in turn, will encourage better understanding and communication across communities. This assumes that communities themselves will always be the reactive part of any process of building

solidarity across communities.

In our experience, we have found that professionals working within community development organisations need as much if not more support in recognising the value of building solidarity across communities. We have found that through engaging with, supporting and training individuals recruited from within communities and then equipping them with the skills and understanding necessary to understand the complexities of these challenges, we will have a longer-lasting impact.

PeaceMaker has always used peer education as a methodology in working with children and young people. It is important to recognise that this methodology is not exclusive to working with children and young people, however. Our interventions within mono-ethnic and segregated communities where a culture of working together across communities does not exist recognise the significance of using a peer education approach.

Fundamental to this approach is a recognition that the fears, anxieties, and alienation felt by each individual are genuine and valid. It is not for us to belittle or disregard these, but rather to empathise and acknowledge that society has had a negative impact on their lives. This means that we must also value the life experiences that have created their view of the world. Our methodology is built on the foundation that they are the experts and that the role of organisations such as ours is to act as a social broker rather than a trainer. Our interventions thus seek to support individuals to become civic leaders both within their communities and across other communities.

### **Collective action creates solidarity**

As simplistic as it may sound, solidarity across communities is built when people collectively make a difference. Every successful community cohesion case study has been one where people who would otherwise not come together do so to improve something, whether it be a park, a community centre, or the services of an organisation. Generating the opportunities for this meaningful interaction is therefore crucial.

Finally, and most significant, is our belief in the need to foster and encourage activities that provide sustained long-term opportunities for positive interaction. Positive relationships are not created overnight, and the fostering of solidarity across communities is a long-term process. In the communities where we operate and the client groups with which we work, we need to remember that after every activity, meeting or intervention people return to their mono-ethnic, mono-cultural communities where segregation and

separateness are the norm.

Although the impact of segregation has been extremely well documented, one must actually experience the significant, and indeed profound, levels of segregation that exist between and among communities to truly understand the challenge and the need to encourage the different peoples of areas such as Oldham to work together.

All of our interventions encourage people to challenge discrimination and hatred within their own communities. We want people to become beacons of hope to promote a different way in which to respond to challenges and to act as a counterweight to those that preach separateness. We are of the opinion that we do not have to work with everyone, nor do we have to change the views of everyone, in order to create a climate where solidarity can be successfully built across communities. Rather, just as the entire community cohesion agenda has evolved from the frustrations of a few hundred South Asian young men, it takes a small minority of people to act as advocates and champions within communities in order to instigate a visible change.

The task, therefore, even in the most extreme and challenging of situations, is never as daunting as it may first appear. Our success stories are numerous, ranging from white working-class young people who have never known anything other than hatred for those from different backgrounds, to Muslim young men who would never have described themselves as in any way having an emotional attachment to their community, town or indeed nation.

### **Fostering collaboration at the organisational level**

Finally, as a leading voluntary-sector organisation in this field of work, one of our greatest frustrations is the re-creation of the politics of poverty at an organisational level. The very same competitiveness that was encouraged by government in the regeneration schemes of the 1980s and 1990s is being replicated across third-sector organisations, which must increasingly compete for resources.

We can never hope to build solidarity across our communities if we do not foster a climate of collaboration and partnership at an organisational level. Of course we understand the challenges of maintaining an organisation, but we are becoming increasingly sceptical of government funding programmes that continuously focus on innovation and difference. The reality for all organisations is that they too have far more in common than they might originally have thought.

Even with our limited lifespan of little more than a decade, we at PeaceMaker have come to see that what is good practice today becomes old hat tomorrow and forgotten about the next day, only to return as innovative practice the following week. This mentality is not only detrimental to our organisations. More significantly, it contributes to the growth of apathy and disillusionment within our communities, as the same old ideas are rotated, never seen through, never invested in significantly enough, and rarely making the difference to which they aspire.

Building solidarity across communities in order to be successful requires a step change at government level. The rhetoric surrounding community cohesion needs to end, and some clear policy needs to be developed and implemented that encourages solidarity to be forged across those that service our communities. This includes the plethora of third-sector organisations, and the civic leaders in whom considerable time and resources have already been invested. The most dangerous reaction here would be to attempt to replace these organisations and individuals with a new generation of different-thinking people more conducive to building solidarity. In our opinion, this would simply recreate the mistakes that have historically been made.

Alongside this policy change, recognition must also take place at the service-provider level that the game known as consultation has actually damaged communities more than it has engaged them. People understand that sometimes decisions are taken because they need to be taken, whether or not they agree with them. Greater honesty and transparency here can also foster a climate in which there is a greater willingness to get involved when organisations such as ours are encouraging people to do things differently.

Finally, building solidarity across communities is still a relatively new concept. It will take time. What is still ambiguous is why we choose to build solidarity across communities: is it an attempt to fix a broken model of multiculturalism? Is it about more effectively using limited resources? Is it about countering radicalisation and extremism? Of course, it could be a combination of these or something entirely different. But the most significant challenge for those of us who embark on these activities is to have clarity of purpose and ourselves know why we are embarking on such endeavours.

Professionals seeking to build solidarity across communities, in particular communities that have historically been in conflict with one another, need to develop an approach that acknowledges the historical disappointment of these communities as a result of broken promises and mismanaged regeneration schemes; understands the historical competition

between communities for resources; acknowledges that no community has civic leaders or community organisations that are truly representative; and recognises local organisations' hesitancy and potential lack of appreciation of the need for and value of such an approach.

It is fundamental that for communities to work together requires more than a "talking show" – solidarity needs to be built across communities by people working together to respond to a need that they have collectively identified.

## Chapter 8

# Go organic for a healthy cohesion crop

Meena Bharadwa, Co-ordinator of the Ashiana Community Project, Birmingham

## Go organic for a healthy cohesion crop

Cohesion is an overused but oft-misunderstood concept. Politicians and pundits frequently refer to "community" or "social" cohesion without defining the term. In many respects, integration and multiculturalism share a similar confused fate. As a result, the ensuing debate can appear amorphous. Many commentators, perhaps wary of being labelled xenophobic or racist, appear to hide behind abstract, loosely defined buzz-phrases. It is not surprising that the subsequent debate is often confused and therefore largely unhelpful.

Last year's Commission on Integration and Cohesion attempted to provide a clear definition of "integration and community cohesion". The fruit of its labour was a verbose, 170-word explanation, encompassing everything from the rights and responsibilities people owe to each other to people's life chances, their trust in institutions and respect for migrants. It has little relevance to those of us working on the ground.

A slightly more workable definition, this time of "cohesion", was that provided by the Home Office in 2003. This stated that cohesion comprised four key factors:

*... a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities; the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.<sup>1</sup>*

Such definitions are often drafted by politicians and policy wonks in Westminster, viewing the country from afar. From the grass-roots level, however, the world can look a very different place.

The Ashiana Community Project (ACP), a project based in Sparkbrook, Birmingham, run by and for local people, has developed its own definition of cohesion; what it terms "organic cohesion". This definition is drawn from ACP's experience working in Sparkbrook, a super-diverse but highly marginalised part of the inner city.

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office and ODPM *Community Cohesion Advice for Those Designing, Developing & Delivering Area-based Initiatives (ABIs)* (2003)

Our values of inclusivity – of people joining forces to tackle common problems, regardless of religious, racial or cultural background – lie at the heart of our concept of organic cohesion. Organic cohesion can be defined in one simple phrase: *individuals and communities working together to share a journey or to achieve a shared goal.*

Forging alliances between people of different backgrounds is no easy task in a locality as impoverished as Sparkbrook. The ward is one of the most deprived in the country: 20% of local people have a debilitating illness; and a quarter of the population are unemployed. The ward is also highly diverse: 60% of people identify themselves as Asian or Asian British, with the largest sub-group identifying themselves as Pakistani. There is a significant white population (around 20%), with 10% of people describing themselves as Black African or Caribbean.

In our experience, cohesion cannot be imposed on an unwilling population. Rather, cohesion needs to grow organically. ACP's gender project, Sparkbrook Women Together, is an example of "organically grown" cohesion. Six years ago, local women who used the ACP facilities got together to try to redress the woefully inadequate public services available in the area.

Local women found it difficult to access any provision that was gender specific. It was particularly disconcerting trying to access health provision that was appropriate not only to the cultural and religious beliefs of the growing Muslim population but also to the sensitivities of women's health in general. Intermediate support was needed to look into areas such as breast and cervical screening as well as mental health. All these were areas with a huge amount of associated stigma, and women in the local community were not receiving the necessary support and information to access the relevant health provision.

Instead of moaning about inadequate service provision, the women who formed Sparkbrook Women Together were determined to change things through their own hard work and effort. Ten local women, who had no previous knowledge of how to run a community project, coming together to create the project.

From the start, this was a project for all women in the area in need of support. There was no emphasis on providing services tailored to just one ethnic or religious group. Rather, great efforts were made to ensure that the service could and would be accessed by everyone. It was about local women, regardless of background, who shared the same problems, joining forces to find common solutions.

The project has demonstrated that when local people are united, they can better address their mutual needs. Problems in Sparkbrook will persist as long as the area remains deprived, but through Sparkbrook Women Together local women can now access services that were hitherto unavailable. Furthermore, what was initially about one specific area of service provision has grown to encompass much more. Sparkbrook Women Together now boasts an engagement and empowerment project for disadvantaged local women, an employment and training project and an on-site nursery.

Crucially, the project has also fostered cohesion among women who use its services. There is no better example of this organic cohesion in action than that of two women, from very different backgrounds, who came to Sparkbrook Women Together two years ago to address a common need.

The two women, one of Pakistani origin and the other of Irish descent, enrolled on a 12-week confidence-building course aimed at improving the esteem of women who thought that they had few skills and little to offer society. The participants learned that all people have knowledge and skills, and experts were on hand to increase their confidence. Having completed the course, the two women each decided they wanted to take a childcare course, a daunting prospect as both had been out of education for the past decade. They were able to support each other through what was often a challenging and demanding course. This shared journey, coupled with achieving a common goal, resulted in a close friendship that has lasted to this day. This is an example of organic cohesion in action: when the environment is appropriate, different people can naturally form positive relationships.

There is a solidarity that emerges when people realise that they have the same needs, despite their different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. This realisation allows people to see the common humanity in each other. A shared journey supports the development of bonds that transgress superficial boundaries, so that people focus on what they have in common and what they have shared, rather than what differentiates them.

This is not to say that cohesion is an easy thing to foster. Even when cohesion develops organically, it can face resistance from some quarters of every community. Some people become defensive when they hear about efforts to promote cohesion or integration. Some communities perceive cohesion as a veiled threat, promoted as something "good" but which will, over time, dilute and eventually destroy their original cultural identity.

ACP has been able to navigate the perilous course between fostering organic cohesion and still being well received by all sectors of the local community. But this has taken years of painstaking work to achieve. Whether the perception of a true original cultural identity is valid or not, the reality is that until a project is deemed to have a real and respectful understanding of the community it serves, it will be unable to serve the whole community and therefore will be ill placed to bridge community divides.

For ACP, it is important to be sensitive to cultural issues without necessarily making them a primary focus. It is important that services and projects delivered within a community are intelligently designed and take into account certain cultural and religious standards. For example, an ACP worker was able to visit and talk to the family of a young woman who wanted to attend an ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) course. This visit helped allay the fears and misconceptions of the woman's family. ACP was able to appreciate that the cultural norm, in this case, was for the family to make a decision, and ACP was able to navigate that barrier in order to cultivate a respectful and trustful relationship.

ACP's organic cohesion appears to work precisely because the organisation does not define itself as a body explicitly set up to promote cohesion. Rather, ACP is an organisation that helps local people to achieve their aspirations. Moreover, we do not define the local community in ethnic, racial or religious terms. For us, Sparkbrook is merely a geographical area. Perhaps it is this very lack of a racial, ethnic or religious definition of what constitutes the "community" that is the key to our success. The project's values are about encouraging local people to work together towards a common goal; full stop.

### **"Genetically-modified" cohesion projects should be viewed with scepticism**

We are sceptical of community projects that explicitly set out to foster cohesion. In ACP's experience, top-down, "guided" social cohesion does not work. Rather, robust and long-lasting cohesion is usually a welcome by-product when people of different ethnicities, faiths or cultures share a journey, in pursuit of a common cause.

In recent months, it has been difficult to pick up a newspaper without reading about some form of government-inspired community cohesion project. In recent months we have heard proposals calling for Muslim women to be trained in "leadership and assertiveness" so they can tackle extremism; Lord Goldsmith's suggestion of an oath of allegiance to the Queen for schoolchildren; and news of numerous Muslim-Jewish-Christian "cultural understanding" projects.

While elite-led discussions on religious texts are important insofar as they can demonstrate that different religions are not predestined to “clash”, it is perhaps wise to remain sceptical about the ability of such initiatives to foster cohesion at the grass-roots level. The people most likely to attend a project explicitly designed, for instance, to increase understanding of another culture are those already interested in and open to other people’s cultures.

The strength of the organic cohesion approach is that it brings people together around mutual concerns, not because other people think they should integrate more. People come together not because they are from different backgrounds but because of mutual interest. People get involved in activities because they gain something from them: a shared journey; a common interest; an end result. If an individual’s or a community’s journey creates a shared bond organically, a more sustainable form of social cohesion will ensue.

People who may not have had an interest in mixing with someone from another background will still see the benefit of co-operating around a shared agenda. In disadvantaged, ethnically mixed communities, people do not have the access to wealth, powerful contacts or lawyers that is required to pursue individual or narrow agendas. For this practical reason, there is logic in people of different backgrounds uniting around shared problems, to attain maximum political and economic leverage.

### **The danger of single-identity funding**

In recent weeks, a furore has also broken out over whether government should continue “single identity funding”, where state resources are channelled to third-sector organisations that help one specific ethnic or religious group. Proponents of the funding regime claim that single-issue groups provide specialised, tailored services that are better targeted towards the needs of specific communities. Critics claim that single-identity funding leads to segregation.

ACP remains sceptical of voluntary and community groups that serve only one particular ethnic or religious community. Our scepticism stems from local experience of single-identity funding streams in Sparkbrook.

Within the last five to 10 years, Sparkbrook has seen a large Somali population settle in the area. This influx has had a largely positive effect on the locality, as newcomers have set up businesses and local community projects. However, short-sighted funding regimes have caused unnecessary tensions between newly arrived Somalis and some established

communities. For instance, some established ethnic-minority communities view Somali-only youth projects as exclusive. Furthermore, people worry about resources being diverted from established initiatives to fund new single-identity youth projects. This may be a misperception on the part of more established groups. Nevertheless, if single-identity funding leads to some communities feeling sidelined, the funding regime risks pitching community against community – the reverse of what organic cohesion aims to achieve.

The situation is not helped by those members of any given community that play on the particular needs of narrow ethnic or religious communities for political or financial gain. For instance, leaders of some settled communities have called for more development and regeneration money, claiming that "their" community has not received the bounty bestowed on newly arrived groups. In the same vein, newly arrived community leaders are prone to claim that their communities have not had the same opportunities for growth and development and so they should be the primary target of intensive support.

Tensions between communities will always be strained as long as competition for limited resources remains fierce. Nevertheless, these strains can be overcome. ACP has worked hard to ensure that it is perceived as "safe" and neutral by local communities. This has enabled us to reach out, in a culturally sensitive way, to the "hardest-to-reach" people within every community in Sparkbrook, without having to go down the road of providing single-identity services.

Sparkbrook Women Together has developed a "positive gossip network" to inform and engage isolated local women, many of whom are newly arrived, do not speak English and are unaware of their rights and entitlements in Britain. The "gossip" network includes local engagement mentors from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds who have been trained and informed about various activities being run by ACP. Engagement mentors spread the word by talking to local women over the garden fence, at the bus stop or while waiting for their children at the school gates. Because women from different communities are initially approached by women of the same background, initial fears and apprehensions about getting involved in a community project are reduced. You could call this method a sort of "chai-diplomacy".

The message started to percolate out to local women, many of whom are highly marginalised and largely unreachable through traditional forms of advertising. Each "single-identity" group was permeated by a mentor that local women could identify with initially and who would support them to access the project's activities. In the long term this means

that a diverse group of women use ACP's services because they have had the intermediate support to access the project from someone with whom they can identify. This example highlights the fact that single-identity targeting and support can work but if the end goal is shared then a more profound effect on cohesion can be achieved.

Serious consideration is needed before promoting single-identity funding streams. Groups within the community need to have a positive perception that their needs are being addressed fairly. Single-identity groups can sometimes miss the point; that is, they can sometimes become too introspective and as a consequence miss the larger picture of what they are trying to achieve. Such groups can act as a positive stepping-stone, but the end goal must be about engaging, on any level, with the wider community.

So where does this leave us? After all the emphasis and new initiatives in recent years, are we more cohesive than we were before the term was coined after the 2001 riots in the Northern towns? As has been witnessed in government and media rhetoric over the past few years, "cohesion" is a fuzzily defined and often-quoted concept. Our view is that cohesion has been too much of a top-down imposition and has ignored the best way to generate real and lasting local solidarity, which is supporting what must start as an organic process.

The idea of organic cohesion is simple, and focuses on the experience of *sharing* a journey or experience – the outcome being greater understanding and better relationships between different groups or communities. Clearly, a suitable and healthy environment must be created in order for a natural process, free from government meddling, to take shape. Government's role is in creating that climate, not developing a fixed notion of what it might create.

Actions such as single-identity funding, which simply focus on cohesion as a goal, can risk becoming a self-defeating prophecy by actually interfering in the organic process. However, a shared journey or experience leads to cohesion almost as a positive by-product, achieved by moving together towards a collective goal. We must make sure that we have understanding, that misconceptions do not remove our ability to form positive relationships with people or communities that have a different background from ourselves.

Building on this foundation, we should be able to develop communities of interest that have shared or are sharing a journey. For example, people who have shared the experience of university may be from different backgrounds but have formed a sustainable relationship

because of their shared journey; and positive relationships can be developed in a work environment because of the shared experience of what is achieved in the workplace.

So we should encourage interaction and mixing of people, because once they do mix they recognise their shared humanity rather than allow themselves to be pigeonholed into distinct groups or identities. We must make sure that national policies, programmes and funding mechanisms do not encourage people into ever-narrower identities. However, we should not let this extend into manufactured, or GM, forms of cohesion where everyone is expected to behave in the same way, regardless of their local circumstances.

What is important to promote is the idea that, if we choose to, we can share an experience or journey towards a common goal. It is this organic, grass-roots model of cohesion that offers a sustainable model for society now and in the future. Cohesion should develop within and between local people. Only if it is allowed to grow organically will it flourish.

## **The Smith Institute**

The Smith Institute is an independent think tank that has been set up to look at issues which flow from the changing relationship between social values and economic imperatives.

If you would like to know more about the Smith Institute please write to:

The Director  
The Smith Institute  
3rd Floor  
52 Grosvenor Gardens  
London  
SW1W 0AW

Telephone +44 (0)20 7823 4240  
Fax +44 (0)20 7823 4823  
Email [info@smith-institute.org.uk](mailto:info@smith-institute.org.uk)  
Website [www.smith-institute.org.uk](http://www.smith-institute.org.uk)

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