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14
Living with Difference: A Forgotten Art in Urgent Need of Revival?

Roger Ballard

To British observers, the suicide bombings on London's underground on 7/7/2005 marked as much of an end of an era as did the attack on the twin towers on 9/11. The days of liberal multiculturalist appeasement appeared to be over. As the Prime Minister put it, the rules of the game had changed: diversity had been overindulged; allowed to go too far. Britain's dilemma was deeper than America's: unlike the dissident Arabs who slipped into the United States to train as pilots, London's bombers were born in Britain. If extremism was an internal threat, it followed that the body politic was rotting from within, and to contain the infection required unprecedented initiatives. If that meant backing out of the European Convention on Human Rights, or even of *habeas corpus,* then so be it.

Although many aspects of established social policy were overwhelmed in the aftermath of the events of 7/7, the tsunami did not arrive without warning. From the publication of Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* to the so-called 'Northern cities riots' two decades later, an escalating series of incidents provided clear indications that young British Muslims were becoming increasingly restless. Moreover their restlessness was of a distinctive kind: from the *Satanic Verses* controversy it was quite clear that the underlying contradictions were as much a product of religious and cultural issues as those of 'race'. The 'northern riots' of 2001 precipitated a further step-change in policy. The report which was prepared in their aftermath, *Building Cohesive Communities* (Cantle 2002), was promptly adopted as government policy. Remarkably, the sharp switch in emphasis which Cantle recommended attracted heavyweight intellectual support. As *Prospect Magazine* argued,

> Lifestyle diversity and high immigration bring cultural and economic dynamism, but can erode feelings of mutual obligation... In the

decades ahead, European politics itself may start to shift on this axis, with left and right being eclipsed by value-based culture wars and movements for and against diversity.... The progressive centre needs to think more clearly about these issues to avoid being engulfed by them...to that end it must try to develop a new language...that transcends the thin and abstract language of universal rights on the one hand, and the defensive, nativist language of group identity on the other...People will always favour their own families and communities; it is the task of a realistic liberalism to strive for a definition of community that is wide enough to include people from many different backgrounds, without being so wide as to become meaningless.

(Goodhart 2004)

At first sight, the 7/7 explosions confirmed Goodhart and his supporters' fears; in their aftermath Britain's 'failed policies of multiculturalism' attracted much criticism. Such policies, it was argued, had facilitated the emergence of unincorporated communities within which extremism thrived unchecked. Britain was adversely compared with France, where the policy of *laicité* was comprehensively antithetical to multiculturalism. Since the Republic's citizen are all by definition French, minorities remain deliberately unrecognised. Homogeneity is a central objective of public policy, and the manifestation of diversity – especially if religiously grounded – in public is consequently deemed illegitimate. Hence in sharp contrast to multicultural Britain where *halal* school dinners are widely available and uniform adjustments to cope with minority proclivities have become the norm, the French authorities successfully prohibited Muslim pupils from wearing the *hijab* in state-funded schools. Suddenly France came to be admired for its refusal to concede to 'divisive' (and hence community-cohesion sapping) demands for minority rights.

Nevertheless, uncritical support for the colour-, religion- and culture-blind policy of *laicité* did not long survive the events of 7/7. Four months later the *banlieue* of Clichy-sous-Bois on the outskirts of Paris – in which (largely Muslim) migrants of African origin and their locally born offspring were warehoused in soulless high-rise apartment blocks – erupted in a series of night-time confrontations between local youth and the *gendarmerie*. The initial reaction of the authorities was entirely dismissive: Interior Minister Sarkozy described the rioters as 'vermin' who should be swept away with high pressure hoses. However, his reaction was read as provocative. As the *intifada* spread round the *banlieues* of Paris and then to many provincial cities, the authorities had no alternative but to pay attention to the causes of these uprisings. Once peace was restored – which did not occur until troops had been called out to reinforce the buckling resources of the police – there was widespread agreement that new initiatives were required to address the underlying issues. We have yet to see whether these will be sufficient to prevent further trouble. But so long as the Republic's overarching commitment to *laicité* remains unchallenged, there appears to be a substantial prospect that further eruptions will occur in due course.

The challenge of plurality

France and Britain face similar problems. Like most industrialised countries, they experienced a mass influx of non-European migrant workers during the years of prosperity which followed the Second World War, such that their populations were rendered substantially more diverse in ethnic terms. Contrary to widespread (if naïve) expectations of swift assimilation, the resultant patterns of plurality have become a permanent feature of the social order. Confusion now reigns over how best to respond. Numbers are too large for expulsion to be a realistic option, and the final solution of genocide is manifestly off the agenda. Yet all the more acceptable solutions – whether framed in terms of anti-racism, of multiculturalism or of *laicité* – appear to precipitate equally unviable outcomes.

These contradictions are by no means confined to Britain and France. Mass migration is now a global phenomenon, and ethnic plurality has become the most salient locus of violent conflict in whichever direction one looks. Yet the source of these contradictions – the presence of religious and cultural plurality within a single social arena – is in no way a novel phenomenon. Human society has always been culturally diverse. It is easy to see why: members of the species *Homo sapiens* are unique in their capacity to create the terms of their own social existence, and hence to be cultured in innumerable differing ways. Likewise our species has also always been exceptionally spatially mobile, and just as eager to trade. What is novel about the contemporary world is not so much the coexistence of persons using differing social, cultural, linguistic, and religious conventions to order their lives, but rather the acute feelings of discomfort which are now routinely precipitated in circumstances of this kind. Contrary to widespread (modern) belief, the explosions which now so often occur when those who differ find themselves confronting one another are not innate. Rather they stem from our newly entrenched

expectation that societies can only be expected to cohere on an orderly basis if they are ethnically homogeneous. Given such a mindset, ethnic plurality is routinely perceived as an unwelcome and destabilising threat to the integrity of the established social order.

Yet just how accurate is that supposition? Are plural societies *necessarily* unstable? Or are our current assumptions merely a consequence of having entrapped ourselves within the ideological limitations of our taken-for-granted 'presentist' and 'unitarian'[1] expectations? A brief historical excursion produces some illuminating results.

The historical roots of Britain's current condition of ethno-religious plurality

Most contemporary societies are cross-cut by ethno-religious divisions of one kind or another. Some are of such antiquity that they have come to be regarded as autochthonous, whilst others are of much more recent origin. Britain – or more accurately the United Kingdom – provides a clear example of the range of possibilities. Over the millennia the indigenous Celtic population of the Atlantic Isles was marginalised by successive waves of immigrants. Those who arrived from North Germany and Scandinavia came to be defined as Anglo-Saxons, and were in turn subordinated by further invaders from Normandy. In the centuries that followed these two disparate immigrant groups gradually merged, leading to the construction of the Anglo-Norman creole which we now know as English. However, English was much more than a language: as an ethnic category it provided a vehicle whereby all those resident south of the Scottish borders and east of the Welsh marches could close ranks, thereby enabling them to differentiate themselves from – and to legitimate their hegemony over – those of their predecessors who had been relegated to the Celtic periphery.

Although the English, Scots, Welsh, and Irish components of population of the Atlantic Isles were eventually brought together in the United Kingdom, the underlying condition of plurality was not eliminated: each of the Celtic nations maintained a strong sense of distinctiveness, not least because of the England's maintenance of a position of hegemonic dominance within the Union. Moreover England's carefully constructed condition of internal homogeneity was further overlaid (and hence compromised) by successive migrant inflows. These included Huguenots, Irish Catholics and Eastern European Jews prior to the two World Wars, and the more immediately visible settlers from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean thereafter. In other words migration is nothing new to English

(or British) history; nor is ethnic plurality. Whatever current mythology may suggest, both have long been the order of the day. Likewise the arrival of newcomers has rarely, if ever, been regarded as welcome by the indigenes. Over and above the additional competition for scarce resources which their presence inevitably precipitated, the newcomers' alien beliefs and lifestyles were routinely perceived as a threat to the integrity of the established cultural, linguistic, and religious order.

Immigration was only part of that story, however. As a result of the systematic changes precipitated by the Henrician and Elizabethan reformation, the English became acutely averse to the prospect of plurality. At an institutional level, the reformation transformed England into one of the world's first nation-states. Having disengaged his kingdom from papal imprimatur, Henry's state required a new source of legitimation. He and his associates found it in the English nation, which was held to have manifested itself in its people, its language, it Parliament and its Church – of which Henry promptly proclaimed himself the head. Henceforward the English were in a position to identify themselves as body of people united in their linguistic, cultural, and religious homogeneity, free of subjugation by their external enemies (especially in the shape of Spain, France and behind them the Pope), and answerable only to the authority of the Crown in Parliament. A nation-state, no less.

All this had far-reaching socio-political consequences. In the context of this explicitly non-plural dispensation, it followed that anyone who failed to accept the theological principles of the Church of England could be labelled a (political) traitor no less than a (religious) heretic. As a result the so-called 'recusants' – those who doggedly resisted the new dispensation by maintaining their commitment to the Catholic faith – were in constant danger of harassment. Whilst dissidents were promptly burned at the stake for their pains, most, usually as the result of a very public refusal to conform to the requirements of the regime, simply lowered their profile, keeping their Catholic commitments as private as possible. Even so, the resultant *de facto* condition of religious plurality was an implicit challenge to England's normative commitment to comprehensive uniformity. What was to be done, given that efforts to eliminate all such deviance would risk something akin to civil war? A solution was eventually found in the regularly renewed Test Acts. These required all those seeking public office or entry to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to swear an oath of allegiance which was composed in such a way that it would only be acceptable to those of an Anglican persuasion. So it was that a substantial minority of England's

population – some indigenous (as in the case of Catholic recusants) and others of immigrant origin (as in the case of Jews and Huguenots) – were reduced to the position of second-class subjects, a position from which they were not formally 'emancipated' until 1831,[2] following several decades of acrimonious debate.

Emancipation did not resolve the underlying issues. When the Act was passed no one was aware of the extent to which the industrial revolution was about to transform the British social order. In the decades that followed Britain's industrial cities grew at an unprecedented speed, and once the resources of the surrounding countryside had been exhausted, their insatiable demand for additional labour led to millions of migrant workers being drawn in from further afield. The arrival of Irish and Eastern European settlers rendered Britain's cities steadily more plural, no less in religious and ethnic terms. The English socio-religious order had been rendered more plural than ever before, and conflict over the issue soon became acute. As Karl Marx – himself a German Jewish immigrant – observed,

> Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the *English rulers in Ireland*.

> This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. *This antagonism* is the secret of the *impotence of the English working class*, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power.

> (Marx 1870/1975: 220)

Most latter-day Marxists have interpreted this final observation as an indication that ethnic conflict is best understood as the outcome of cynical efforts by the ruling class to divide and rule the opposition.

However, closer reading of the text promptly reveals that whilst Marx was well aware of the likelihood of such developments, it was analytically irresponsible to halt the argument at that point. By expanding his analysis to include a consideration of how the dialectics of imperial and racial inequality can intersect with – and in doing so undermine – the contradictions of class, he develops the argument still further, and in doing so develops a further point which remains as relevant as ever: that when ethnic antagonisms come to the boil, *all* contending parties can be expected to pursue their own interests, whether as 'poor whites' seeking to maintain their position of privilege over former slaves, or as Irish Fenians busy repaying English workers in their own terms.

Marx's point is crucial. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, ethnic contradictions were at least as salient a feature of British working-class experience as were those of class. When Churches and Synagogues became defensive rallying points for Irish and Jewish migrants, they immediately became the foci for attacks by English workers. Riots frequently ensued. Education also became a battleground, given the Church of England's stranglehold over the curriculum of publicly funded schools. Hence when Catholics finally managed to gain public support for a separate educational system of their own, the initiative was promptly criticised as 'Papism on the rates' (Fielding 1993). During the course of the twentieth century this particular disjunction has gradually faded, so much so that it is now a pale shadow of its former self. Whilst the Orange order once flourished in most of Britain's industrial cities, today its presence is felt only in Liverpool and Glasgow, and of course in Ulster. But if the existence of this ethno-religious disjunction has gradually been excised from public discourse, so much so that it has successfully been replaced with a myth of proletarian unity, the underlying issues have in no way disappeared. English hostility towards Catholic and Jewish presence may indeed have declined sharply during the course of the past half century – but only because a new set of targets for popular xenophobia have appeared to replace them.

Although structurally similar to their predecessors, Britain's current patterns of ethno-religious polarisation nevertheless include some distinctive features. First, the latest waves of newcomers are easier to target, given their physical identifiability; secondly, the religious and cultural traditions which they brought with them differ much more sharply from indigenous ideas and practices than did those of their predecessors. Hence whilst the reactions to their arrival, including their collective allocation to a status of second-class citizenship, is a close match with established precedent, the additional dimensions of

distinctiveness which the newcomers have introduced are such that contradictions let loose by their arrival are proving to be particularly severe.

A changing world

During the latter part of the twentieth century the structure of the global order has changed radically. Three interlinked developments have been of particular importance. First, the collapse of European empires – of which Britain's was by far the largest – in the aftermath of the two World Wars; secondly, the dramatic increase in personal prosperity which has been experienced in every developed economy, leading to shortage of those prepared to undertake menial tasks and a corresponding increase in the demand for migrant workers. Thirdly, a dramatic decline in the cost of long-distance travel, enabling non-European migrants to penetrate metropolitan labour markets on an unprecedented scale.

In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War gaps in Britain's labour market were filled by several hundred thousand 'European Voluntary Workers' recruited from Poland and the Ukraine. Following the erection of the 'Iron Curtain', migration from these sources came to a halt, and was rapidly replaced by an inflow from British possessions in Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia. Over the years this non-European inflow grew steadily in scale. As colonial subjects, the newcomers had an automatic right of entry into the United Kingdom, and at least at the outset little thought was given to the long-term consequences of their arrival. By the early 1960s this initial absence of mind had ceased to be sustainable. The demand for labour remained high, and numbers were rising rapidly, but there was no sign that the settlers were on the brink of return, and still less of their assimilation into the indigenous mainstream. Whilst the Confederation of British Industry insisted that in the absence of a steady inflow of migrants many factories would have difficulty in maintaining production, especially at night, the Trades Unions viewed the steadily growing inflow with alarm. It was feared that employers would use access to cheap migrant labour as an opportunity to drive down wages of indigenous workers.

In fact these fears were largely unfounded. On arrival migrants invariably took jobs which no one else wanted, and so were rarely in direct competition with indigenous workers. Nevertheless Caribbean bus-drivers and nurses were becoming an increasingly visible in London, as were Indian foundry workers in the West Midlands and Pakistani

mill-hands in the Pennine region. Moreover their presence began to put pressure on other scarce resources, such as housing, prompting further fears of unwelcome competition. Whilst the Labour Party initially stood firm in the face of populist pressures, this principled stance cut little ice amongst its working-class supporters. Matters came to a head in the 1964 General election. A hitherto unknown Conservative running under the slogan of 'If you want a Nigger Neighbour, Vote Labour' toppled a leading Labour politician standing for a safe seat in the industrial West Midlands. Abandoning their earlier scruples, Labour joined the Conservatives in a competition to introduce more restrictive immigration policies. There appeared to be no other means of retaining the support of white industrial workers on which the party depended.

Enoch Powell's intervention

These developments brought 'immigration' to the forefront of political debate, with a consequent focus on the likely future course of 'race relations' in Britain. Breaking ranks with mainstream thought within the Conservative party, Enoch Powell emerged as the champion of those who demanded not just an instant halt to further immigration, but systematic repatriation of the unwelcome aliens. In his notorious 'rivers of blood' speech (1968), Powell chose to hang his arguments around recent efforts of local Sikh bus-drivers to be allowed to wear turbans rather than caps as part of their uniform. Having quoted a fellow Labour MP's remarks to the effect that

> The Sikh communities' campaign to maintain customs inappropriate in Britain is much to be regretted. Working in Britain, particularly in the public services, they should be prepared to accept the terms and conditions of their employment. To claim special communal rights (or should they say rites?) leads to a dangerous fragmentation within society. This communalism is a canker; whether practised by one colour or another it is to be strongly condemned.

Powell went on to insist that

> For these dangerous and divisive elements the legislation proposed in the Race Relations Bill is the very pabulum they need to flourish. Here is the means of showing that the immigrant communities can organise to consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, and to overawe and dominate the rest with the legal weapons which the ignorant and the ill-informed have

provided. As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'.

(Powell 1968)

Stripped of its rhetoric, the logic of Powell's argument is plain to see. Just as it had once been argued that if the Catholics would take a mile if they were given an inch, he envisaged that the newcomers would likewise promptly gain a vested interest in

the preservation and sharpening of racial and religious differences, with a view to the exercise of actual domination, first over fellow-immigrants and then over the rest of the population... Only resolute and urgent action will avert it even now. Whether there will be a public will to demand and obtain that action, I do not know. All I know is that to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal.

(Ibid.)

Although Powell's views were widely condemned as 'racist', careful inspection of his arguments show that he was in fact far more concerned with *ethnic* than with racial plurality. Moreover, in keeping with arguments which had been repeatedly articulated ever since the reformation, he grounded his case in the thesis that aliens could never be a part of the English nation, and that their presence threatened its very integrity. It was on this basis that Powell argued that legislation designed to bar discrimination was completely wrong-headed: instead he insisted that further immigration should be brought to a halt, and replaced by a programme of publicly funded repatriation. Although his views were by now so extreme as to be regarded as intolerable by the Conservative Party – so much so that he was forced to relinquish his seat in Parliament – his arguments nevertheless attracted a great deal of popular support. They could no longer be ignored.

Roy Jenkins' response

In an era when Home Secretaries still sought to lead rather than defer to popular opinion, Roy Jenkins challenged Powell head-on. Insisting that the minorities could, would and should become integral components of British social order, Jenkins rejected as naïve the suggestion that once immigrants had 'fitted in' they would abandon all aspects of their ancestral heritage. Instead he sketched out an overtly *pluralistic* vision of the future course of integration, which should be understood 'not as a flattening process of assimilation, rather of equal opportunity, accompanied

by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance'. Although this vision remains prescient four decades after it was first articulated, it attracted remarkably little support, even in progressive circles. Despite his comprehensive rejection of Powell's nationalistic essentialism, even Powell's most vociferous critics remained unimpressed. No less than their opponents, the prospect of plurality appears to have left them with feelings of acute unease, albeit on quite different grounds. No less committed to a unitarian vision of the future than Powell, his liberal critics argued that the migrants' problems stemmed above all from their condition of *deprivation*, precipitated in their view at least as much by the retrogressive parochialism of their cultural traditions as by their condition of material poverty. To those who adopted such a perspective, Jenkins' position appeared to be incurably romantic. Hence those on the left regarded the assimilation of indigenous ways as one of the migrants' most urgent priorities, on the grounds that this would open the way to progressive modernity.

However well meaning their intention may have been, the consequences of their adoption of this line of argument were disastrous. First, Enoch Powell's core arguments remained unchallenged, whilst his central conclusion – that prospect of comprehensive assimilation was an illusion – was abusively dismissed as 'racist'. Secondly, and yet more seriously still, those who advanced such arguments made themselves hostages to fortune. If Powell was right and the minority presence did indeed precipitate ethnic plurality, the assimilationist ground on which they had taken their stand would be swept from beneath their feet.

The rise and fall of anti-racism

For the while that prospect still lay someway down the road. In the meanwhile once Powell and his many (mostly working class) supporters were defined as racist, it followed that those who opposed that position should identify themselves as anti-racist. In the event both racism and its antonym turned out to be exceedingly slippery concepts. Anti-racists took it for granted that they occupied the high ground; but how could they sustain that claim? Were their arguments primarily moral, on the grounds that racism was as irrational as it was wicked? Or were they primarily political? In the heated atmosphere of the 1970s those who argued that anti-racism was a political project soon found themselves facing acute problems. If racism was an irrational manifestation of false consciousness, as was widely argued at the time, it followed that anti-racism was a component of wider agenda whose ultimate objective was

to overthrow fascism and capitalism. Amongst those who most vigorously supported such views were those who argued that as a result of their condition of super-oppression, black people could be expected to play a vanguard role in the coming revolutionary upsurge. The outcome was predictable. Whilst this far-left agenda proved attractive to many disaffected radicals who had participated in the student uprisings of the late 1960s, those onto whom they sought to project the role of 'vanguards of the revolution' soon realised that this agenda meshed poorly with their own experientially grounded interests and concerns. Other forms of ethno-racial and then of ethno-religious mobilisation proved to be far more to their taste.

Whilst politically oriented anti-racism was steadily marginalised by lack of support, its more moralistic dimension continued to thrive. Once conceptualised as a poisonous mixture of ignorance, stupidity and sin, it followed that racism was best remedied not so much through political action, but rather through educational programmes which would enable those who had been seduced by racist ideologies to see the error of their ways. 'Anti-racism' became the theme of innumerable training programmes, so much so that many Local Authorities began to require all those seeking employment to demonstrate 'a commitment to anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice'. But just what was the 'racism' of which trainees were expected to be aware? And rhetoric aside, just how was 'anti-racism' to be practised?

Given its narrow conceptual foundations, all manner of issues were excluded from the anti-racist agenda. Two deficiencies were of particular significance. First, the absence of any reference to issues of ethnic plurality, and secondly any recognition that people of colour might have the capacity to set their own agendas. Hence far from opening all the issues for debate, the narrow moralist framework within which almost all anti-racist initiatives were conceived effectively closed off discussion, on the grounds that the exploration of these allegedly diversionary issues was inherently racist. The outcome was often little more than a charade. Whilst a small minority of trainees could often be persuaded to accept the invitation to flagellate themselves in an effort to eliminate the last vestiges of original sin, most of those required to participate in such initiatives were far more sceptical. Although challenges to an agenda with which they were required to agree was disallowed, several escape routes were readily available. One option was simply to take the opportunity to gain the capacity to talk the talk – even if this had little impact on the way in which one interacted with people of colour. Nevertheless the acquisition of an anti-racist vocabulary did

make a difference: should trained anti-racists subsequently find their behaviour challenged, they were now in a position to produce waves of patronising verbiage highlighting their awareness of, and sympathy for, the plight of black people. Other escape routes were less sophisticated, if rather more popular. Having returned to the canteen after having been released by one's mentors, one could simply mock the political correctness of the ideas with which one had been required to agree (Ballard and Parveen 2007).

In the face of such developments support for anti-racism steadily crumbled. Moreover the wider political agenda changed radically after Mrs Thatcher came to power in 1979: 'socialistic' notions such as anti-racism were in no way to her taste. Central government support for such initiatives – and indeed for any kind of targeted support for the new minorities – was soon withdrawn. Instead 'multiculturalism', often in the form of unfocussed celebrations of the most superficial aspects of ethnic diversity, became the order of the day. With hindsight, the most salient feature of all these developments was their top-down perspective. Remarkably little attention was devoted to what the minorities were up to – or why.

The development of ethnic colonies in post-war Britain

Life was not easy when the first pioneers set about establishing themselves in Britain. In post-war Britain, finding a job, let alone a place to stay, was not straightforward. This was an era when notices announcing 'no coloureds need apply' were commonplace. However, in facing up to these challenges the newcomers were far from being the helpless pawns which the anti-racist agenda so often sought to suggest. Having made their way to Britain under their own steam, settlers took advantage of every available opportunity to establish self-constructed footholds in what was self-evidently a hostile terrain. Since gaining allies was crucial to survival, and since the natives mostly turned their backs, all the early settlers looked to others in the same position as themselves as a source of guidance and support. Whilst fellow immigrants were normally willing to help each other out, relationships of reciprocity were far easier to construct, as well as much more resilient, when established between those who shared some prior sense of commonality. Hence whilst initial linkages were largely *ad hoc* in character, it was not long before those who shared some degree of linguistic and cultural commonality began to cluster together. In so doing they established the foundations for subsequent processes of ethnic crystallisation, a process which was strongly reinforced once chain migration began to

take off. Far from arriving in Britain as blundering pioneers, the majority of newcomers began to arrive with clear objectives in mind: to link up with friends and kinsfolk who had already established themselves in the United Kingdom. As they did so a whole series flourishing ethnic colonies soon began to emerge (Ballard 1994, 2003).

Whatever their origins, the trajectories of adaptation followed by each stream of migrants initially followed much the same pattern. New arrivals looked out for those of similar backgrounds: prior connections in the form of shared linguistic, religious and cultural codes, and better still immediate ties of kinship, offered a highly effective basis around which to construct networks of mutual reciprocity. Once in place, these networks enabled settlers to face the challenges of their new environment on a collective rather than an individual basis. A dynamic of *settlement* began to emerge. As local ties of reciprocity became steadily more entrenched, temporary sojourners found themselves transformed into firmly rooted colonists, committed to reconstructing all the most significant social, cultural, religious, and familial institutions with which they were familiar back home. Such developments were not driven by nostalgia, nor by mindless 'tradition'. Rather they were highly adaptive in character: the resultant processes of community-construction were a highly effective means of facilitating survival in adverse circumstances. At the outset such initiatives were largely defensive in character. But as settlers began to feel more firmly rooted, they gained the confidence to assert themselves more openly. At the outset they had kept their heads down in the face of the exploitation and marginalisation; now they became increasingly willing to raise the heads above the parapet.

Early awakenings

Overt resistance initially emerged where the shoe pinched tightest of all: on the shop floor. Resentful about being allocated the hardest, dirtiest, most dangerous, and ill-paid jobs, people of colour began to challenge the processes whereby they were assigned to such tasks. As they did so it became clear that managers were rarely responsible for relegating them to such positions. This was a period when the Trades Unions were a powerful force on the shop floor, where shop stewards in a position to determine who was deployed to which task. In doing so they invariably favoured the union's white membership over those drawn from the visible minorities – even though most of them were also union members. During the late 1960s and early 1970s the resultant tensions reached boiling point: people of colour began to take collective action in

an effort to challenge these practices. The confrontations so precipitated had a number of striking features. First, almost all were self-organised: if the local branch secretary and his immediate colleagues were the principal source of their difficulties, there was no point in challenging them through established union structures. Secondly, there was frequently an ethnically specific catalyst behind these initiatives, most notably in the form of the Jat Sikh–dominated (and largely communist-inspired) Indian Workers Association (IWA). Thirdly, their approach to mobilisation was one which consciously sought to unite all *rangdar log* (people of colour) – be they of Asian or Caribbean descent – the better to pursue their common interests (John 1969; Beetham 1970; Brooks and Singh 1979).

At the time these incidents attracted a good deal of attention, they were the first overt signs of collective self-mobilisation by people of colour. But as the 1970s progressed such challenges became steadily less frequent, and have by now been forgotten by almost everyone bar the participants. There were several reasons why challenges of this kind faded away. First, the industrial recession which followed Prime Minister Thatcher's assumption of power, together with the restrictions on industrial action which she imposed, gave those protesting 'from below' ever less space within which to manoeuvre. Secondly, the trajectories of adaptation followed by different sections of the minority population were becoming increasingly diverse. As Afro-Caribbean and South Asian communities began to move off in different directions, inter-ethnic alliances amongst people of colour became steadily more difficult to organise and sustain. Last but not least the majority of better-educated South Asian settlers (who provided the IWAs with their leadership) began to leave the shop floor to pursue more profitable opportunities elsewhere, thereby removing a vital catalyst from the industrial scene. As a consequence active resistance began to move away from the shop floor and onto the streets, and from an older to a younger generation. The resultant uprisings proved to be of far-reaching significance.

The challenges to exclusion articulated from the early 1980s onwards differed sharply from those which erupted in the 1960s and 1970s. First, they were public confrontations – usually with the police – and normally occurred in the residential neighbourhoods where the protestors themselves lived. Secondly, they were precipitated by a much wider range of grievances: initially local, but as time passed increasingly inspired by issues of national and indeed international character. Last but not least all the uprisings became ethnically specific: far from uniting all people of colour, they articulated the concerns of specific local communities.

With this in mind I have deliberately chosen to use the term *intifada* to identify such developments. Like their counterparts in Palestine, these uprisings emerged from the grass roots: they were not a product of careful prior organisation formulated from above. But in using the term, I do not wish to glamorise such incidents: no one who has first-hand experience of an *intifada* would do so. The damage they precipitate is immense, and the greater part of their costs and consequences is invariably borne by the protestors and their families. Nevertheless they convey powerful symbolic messages: that is why I have highlighted them here.

The Afro-Caribbean *intifada* of 1981

In January 1981, 13 Afro-Caribbean teenagers lost their lives in a house-fire in New Cross, apparently as a result of a Molotov cocktail being thrown through the front window of the house where a birthday was being celebrated. But in sharp contrast to the wave of public sympathy which an equally bloody IRA bombing in Ulster had precipitated a few days beforehand, the press and the police promptly blamed the local Afro-Caribbean community as the authors of their own misfortune. Hostility towards the local police was further exacerbated as they continued to target young Afro-Caribbean men in a major stop-and-search operation. The tinder was dry, and the fuse was soon lit. During the following summer confrontations erupted between the police and the young Afro-Caribbean men, first in inner London and then in other cities in which substantial Afro-Caribbean ethnic colonies had also crystallised. The police were ill-equipped to cope. Their command and control mechanisms broke down, their riot shields turned out not to be fire-proof, and before long the officers called out to confront the protestors night after night were so tired that they could hardly stand. Had the troubles not subsided when they did, there would have been little alternative but to call out the troops to restore order.

Alarm bells promptly rang in both Whitehall and the press. Enoch Powell's prognostications appeared to be coming true. Two major initiatives were set in train. First, the Police were retrained and re-equipped for riot control; and secondly, substantial funding was made available to Local Authorities under Section 11 of the Local Government Act, to provide them with (financial) means of addressing the underlying stresses and strains. On the face of it this response was entirely appropriate: the new minorities had long been complaining about the poor quality of

the public services, and the irrelevance of what was on offer to their needs. But whilst lack of ethnosensitivity in service delivery was a central focus of their complaints, the agenda within which the remedial initiatives were conceived did not mesh with these concerns. As a result the greater part of the newly released funds were ploughed into 'community projects' designed to keep young people off the streets, whilst also providing employment opportunities for minority activists. Once so co-opted, it was hoped – often correctly – that their commitment to political activism would diminish.

At least as far as the Afro-Caribbeans were concerned, these initiatives appeared to have had the desired effect. Apart from isolated incidents such as that on the Broadwater Farm (a public housing project in north-west London) in 1985, where a police officer was bludgeoned to death in the midst of protests about a bungled arrest, there was no repetition of the multi-city *intifada* which erupted in 1981. Yet it would be idle to suggest that all is well on this front. Despite substantial efforts to retrain the police, relationships between front-line officers and young black men remain highly problematic to this day. Meanwhile the Afro-Caribbean community has become deeply fragmented. Whilst its many Churches are a focus for resilience, especially for women, drugs and gun-crime attract the attention of many (although by no means all) young men. By 2002 just under 11% of Britain's prison population was made up of people of African or Afro-Caribbean descent. *Intifada* has been replaced by incarceration.

Pakistani Muslim *intifadas*

Given that the participants in the 1981 *intifada* were overwhelmingly Afro-Caribbean, many commentators argued that as a result of their much more orderly cultural heritage, Indians and Pakistanis were unlikely to emulate their 'more excitable' Afro-Caribbean counterparts. That comfortable assumption fell apart in the uproar which followed the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. The initial reaction was relatively low-key: Bradford Council of Mosques organised a public burning of Rushdie's novel to highlight Muslim disgust at its contents. But when neither the press nor the authorities nor even the Commission for Racial Equality displayed the slightest sympathy with Muslim concerns, protests escalated – only to be dismissed as an indication of the inherent backwardness of the Islamic tradition, and of its followers' inability to appreciate the more sophisticated intellectual, literary, and cultural conventions of the contemporary world. For the

rising generation of young Muslims such a humiliating dismissal of their dearly held values was too much to take: in the face of public taunts, their initially well-ordered protests began to degenerate into violence.

In the years that followed local incidents sparked of a whole series of small-scale *intifadas*, of which some of the most spectacular – and certainly the most publicised – were the so-called 'northern riots' which exploded in the former textile towns of Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford in the summer of 2001. Bungled efforts by the police to regain control over the streets in inner city residential areas in which Pakistani Muslims had established tight-knit ethnic colonies precipitated violent resistance to the riot squad, whom local youths regarded as enemy occupiers. In comparative terms the level of violence was relatively mild: it was much more limited than that which ensued when Caribbean youths took to the streets two decades earlier. Moreover this time the police were better prepared. Command and control remained intact, and well-trained and adequately-shielded riot squads soon reclaimed the streets. They also came equipped with video cameras, producing evidence on the basis of which several hundred stone-throwers received substantial prison sentences (Carling *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless the outcome was very different. In the first place improvements in video technology meant that images of burning cars in Oldham and Bradford were flashed around the world. Secondly, the perpetrators were Muslims. Even though 9/11, let alone 7/7, were yet to occur, the events were widely publicised and precipitated a great deal of alarm. The authorities in Whitehall dispatched Tom Cantle, an experienced Local Government administrator, to investigate the causes of the disturbances.

When Cantle and his colleagues returned to London to prepare their report, they appear to have been suffering from shell-shock. It was not so much the incidents themselves which disturbed them, but rather the depth of the ethnic divide out of which they erupted. This shines out from the opening paragraph of their report:

> Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many

communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges.

(Cantle 2002: 9)

On the face of it, their observations confirmed Enoch Powell's prediction that non-European migration in general, and South Asian migration in particular, was bound to precipitate unbridgeable patterns of ethnic polarisation. But whilst Powell saw no solution other than repatriation, Cantle and his colleagues took a different tack: they concluded that efforts to bridge the divisions they had observed through the introduction of active policies of 'community cohesion' should now be the priority. Unlike previous reports on these matters, Cantle's was not placed on a shelf to gather dust. Instead it was promptly adopted as a central strand of government policy: every local authority received instructions to take urgent steps to promote 'community cohesion'. Policies designed to promote 'multiculturalism' suffered the same fate as those of 'anti-racism': they were swept aside.

Before exploring the implications of the new policy – commitment to which was further reinforced in the aftermath of the events of 7/7 – it is worth pausing to consider the specific context to whose problems it was initially devised as a remedy. Bradford, Oldham, and Blackburn are oncethriving mill-towns into which migrant workers from South Asia were drawn in large numbers during the 1960s and 1970s. Most came from Mirpur District in Pakistan, or from Sylhet District in Bangladesh. By the time of their arrival the local textile industry was in terminal decline; it finally collapsed in the early 1980s. This had a disastrous impact on the local economy of the textile towns, since no alternative source of employment was readily available. No section of the local population was more seriously affected than the Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis, since they were overwhelmingly concentrated in this narrow sector of the labour market.

Despite this setback, as a result of which virtually everyone lost their jobs, this was a period of rapid development within the local Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Many men were in the midst of reuniting their families in the United Kingdom; despite everything they continued to do so, even if they had to use their hard-earned savings to finance the transfer. Hence the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a rapid growth of tight-knit and mutually supportive ethnic colonies in the close-packed streets of Victorian terraced housing in which the migrants had settled. The reunion of families also led to a rapid growth of a locally born

second generation, whose members began to reach adulthood come the turn of the millennium. The virtual disappearance of opportunities for unskilled people, for people of colour with a limited command of English to gain access to waged employment had severe consequences for members of the older generation. Most found themselves permanently unemployed. By contrast many of their offspring successfully turned to self-employment as a means of earning an income. A multitude of corner-shops, restaurants, takeaways and taxi services opened for business, enabling members of still-burgeoning ethnic colonies to press their way forward, despite their initial condition of severe disadvantage.

However, their achievements were far from universally welcome. Whilst many of the newcomers' immediate neighbours, the largely indigenous residents of nearby council estates, had also been significantly disadvantaged by industrial collapse, their capacity to cope with adversity proved to be considerably less extensive than their Pakistani neighbours. However, rather than emulating the newcomers' commitment to frugality and collective reciprocity, by displaying a similar willingness to take entrepreneurial initiatives, most of their neighbours responded with feelings of jealous hostility. From their perspective, the fact that the despised newcomers appeared to be doing better than they seemed was deeply unjust.

The indigenous perspective

As far as most members of the indigenous population of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford are concerned, the familiar social order within which they grew up has disintegrated. As they see it, the unthinkable has happened: the 'immigrants' who originally arrived as unskilled and largely invisible night-shift workers have made substantial parts of the town their own; and having done so, they appear to be pulling ahead of the towns' 'real' inhabitants in material terms. How can this be explained? No matter how much objective observers may suggest that the newcomers' achievements are the outcome of hard work, frugal lifestyles and the application of entrepreneurial talent, such arguments leave most members of the indigenous population unimpressed. Nowhere are such feelings of hostility more acute than in the 'sink' council estates which surround the emergent ethnic colonies. Already feeling betrayed by the powers that be, they routinely ascribe all their difficulties to the unfair competition from 'the Pakis', who in their view have been allowed to 'get away with it' by a supine state. Hence it is

regularly asserted that the minorities are disproportionately favoured by government-sponsored programmes which provide them with mosques and community centres, whilst 'we', who have always lived here, get nothing. 'Pakis', it is consequently (if erroneously) argued, enjoy special privileges. 'They've even got a race relations law especially for them; but if we open our mouths to complain, we just get shouted down as racist.' Those who have reached such conclusions view the policies put forward by the British National Party with much favour.

The Pakistani perspective

Those on the other side of the fence dismiss these alleged 'privileges' as entirely fictional. Acutely aware that their achievements are the outcome of their own hard work, they point out that if the *ghore* (white people) are jealous of their achievements, they could follow in their footsteps if they wished. They are also sceptical about the benefits which have actually accrued from the numerous urban regeneration schemes designed to assist the 'socially deprived'. From their perspective the impact of such initiatives have been largely symbolic. They may have provided many Asian youngsters with jobs as link-workers and teaching assistants, but the permanent benefits arising from them have been few. Constantly vulnerable to changes in Whitehall priorities (as, for example, when Section 11 funding was suddenly withdrawn), short-term bolt-on initiatives have done little to provide the (still overwhelmingly white) teachers, doctors, social workers, and police officers who continue to dominate the professional mainstream with improved levels of linguistic and cultural competence. Hence their capacity to provide effective services to their minority clientele remains as inadequate as ever. Although urban regeneration initiatives receive a great deal of publicity – provoking further ire amongst jealous white neighbours – the best that can be said about such programmes is that they have operated as job-creation schemes for restless youth.

The tinder box explodes

Cantle and his colleagues had every reason to highlight the depth of the polarisation with which they found themselves confronted. The underlying contradictions had been brewing for decades. On the one hand large sections of the indigenous population were alarmed by what they saw as an alien canker emerging in their midst, and by the refusal of the powers that were to take cognisance of their concerns. Meanwhile the newcomers, and even more so their British-born offspring, were acutely

aware of the hostility that their presence generated amongst their white neighbours, and of the authorities' reluctance to take serious cognisance of their concerns. Recently a further explosive factor had been added to the brew. Whilst the older generation of migrants had come to regard the position in which they found themselves with resigned equanimity, members of the rapidly expanding British-born generation refused to accept their marginalisation. Suggestions that their colonies had become 'no go areas' for outsiders were particularly irritating. As far as they were concerned, the parts of town which best deserved that appellation were the all-white council estates by which their settlements were surrounded. Asian families unfortunate enough to be rehoused on such estates invariably found the abuse to which they were subjected intolerable, and promptly moved back into the safety of their own community. Meanwhile the late-night drinkers who form a substantial part of their clientele of their restaurants, and takeaways took it for granted that they had a right to abuse those who served them, whilst taxi-drivers unwise enough to demand payment from recalcitrant customers whom they had driven home to an all-white estate had much to fear. In a series of incidents well known within the community, but largely ignored outside it, such arguments had been settled by a resort to homicide.

The tinder was dry and ready to burn. The initial spark may well have derived from reports in the press, and especially on BBC radio, suggesting that Muslim-majority areas in Oldham and Bradford had become no-go areas for whites – and indeed for Hindus. The British National Party promptly sought to raise the temperature. Rallies were organised in both cities, but only attracted a limited response. Then a small group of thugs staged a provocative incident. On the fringe of one of Oldham's major Pakistani ethnic colonies they insulted and assaulted two women. News of the incident quickly circulated by mobile phone, and a large number of young men went to defend the community's honour. By the time police arrived, the BNP thugs had left the scene; instead they encountered a gathering of angry young Pakistanis. It was at this point that the plot was lost. The most senior police officer in Oldham had recently been interviewed on the BBC, where he suggested that localities such as this were becoming 'no-go areas'. His prophesy promptly became self-fulfilling. As police poured reinforcements into the neighbourhood in an effort to regain control, its young residents vigorously resisted the alien incursion. After several hours of riotous confrontation the protestors were driven back indoors – but on the following day similarly structured confrontations erupted in Bradford and Burnley.

Some analytical reflections

On the face of it these uprisings did not pit the 'immigrants' and 'natives' directly against each other. Echoing similar confrontations involving the Irish settlers who arrived in industrial Lancashire more than a century beforehand, young Mirpuri men rose to the bait which had been provocatively dangled before them – and promptly got hammered by the forces of law and order. However, just as in earlier times, it would be wrong to assume that the police stood outside the underlying disjunction. Its officers, from constables to their commander, were overwhelmingly drawn from the majoritarian side of the ethnic boundary. Doubtless they had all attended racism awareness courses; but in the event they still acted as an army of occupation, displaying no obvious understanding of the possible motivations of the young men defending the honour of their homes, their families and their community. From this perspective the incidents which Cantle was sent to investigate were both a symptom of, and had yet further exacerbated, the contradictions which so alarmed him.

At one level the contradictions with which Cantle and his team found themselves confronted were the outcome of a locally specific set of contingencies: no other part of Britain received such a heavy inflow of non-European migrants from a single rural source, suffered so badly from local industrial collapse or received so little infrastructural investment to make good the resultant deficiencies. But whilst polarising processes which precipitated the *intifada* were consequently particularly acute, they were by no means unique to the 'northern cities'. Ethnic plurality is now a *de facto* characteristic of most British cities, and similar patterns of polarisation – governed in each case by specific local contingencies – can be detected everywhere. The issues highlighted by Cantle and his colleagues are a *general* rather than a localised feature of the contemporary British social order.

A theoretical perspective: The dynamics of ethnic plurality

Whilst Cantle does not seek to generalise in this way, a further feature of his argument is worth highlighting: the assumption that disjunctions with which he found himself confronted were unprecedented. He is clearly mistaken on this point. Britain's industrial cities have a long history of ethno-religious disjunctions of just this kind, and similarly structured patterns of polarisation can be observed throughout the

contemporary world. If so, it follows that his assumption that ethnic homogeneity (and its assumed correlate, 'community cohesion') is a normal state of affairs from which ethnic plurality can be regarded as an unfortunate deviation is seriously misleading. Empirical data points firmly in the opposite direction.

Viewed from a less parochial, and less paranoid, perspective, ethnic plurality is much more a normal than an abnormal human experience. With this in mind it is worth turning to Furnivall's carefully argued but long overlooked account of the political economy of colonial South-east Asia, in which he set out a sophisticated analysis of the everyday operation of plural societies. For Furnivall, a plural society is one in which

> two or more elements or social orders live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit ... In its political aspect a plural society resembles a confederation of allied provinces, united by treaty ... for certain ends common to the constituent units and, in matters outside the terms of union, each living its own life. But it differs from a confederation in that the constituent elements are not segregated each within its own territorial limits. In a confederation secession is at least possible without the total disruption of all social bonds; in a plural society the elements are so intermingled that secession is identical with anarchy.

> In a plural society, social demand is disorganized; social wants are sectional, and there is no social demand common to all the several elements ... this ... is the root cause of all those properties which differentiate the political economy of a plural society from unitary economy of a homogeneous society.

> Of necessity it raises the economic criterion to a new place in the scale of social values. There is one place in which the various sections of a plural society meet on common ground – the market place; and the highest common factor of their wants is the economic factor. They may differ in creed and custom, in the kind of music or style of painting they prefer; the members of different sections may want one thing rather than another; but if they want the same thing, they will all prefer to get it for twopence rather than for threepence. Individuals of all sections have in common ... the economic motive, the desire for profit; and they all join ... in forwarding the economic process.

> [a further] characteristic of plural society is a sectional division of labour; although the primary distinction between the groups may be race, creed or colour, each section comes to have its own functions in production, and there is a tendency towards the grouping of the several elements into distinct economic castes.
>
> (Furnivall 1939: pp. 446–450)

Furnivall drew most of his empirical material from his observation of Dutch-controlled Indonesia, where well-established Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic traditions were cross-cut by numerous more parochial disjunctions, and where the whole edifice had been overlaid by further disjunctions precipitated by the arrival of two rival sets of immigrant entrepreneurs, the Dutch and the Chinese. No group occupied a position of comprehensive hegemony. Rather members of each of its component communities (including the soon-to-be-toppled Dutch colonialists) deployed their own distinctive moral and cultural agendas to order activities within the arenas which they were in a position to control. In the midst of all these diversities, it was the marketplace which ultimately brought these disparate components together: as Furnivall observed, trade across boundaries simultaneously united *and* divided all those involved. Hence the edifice was underpinned by a division of labour in which members of every component community found themselves in constant competition with, as well as being economically dependent on, all the others.

Ethnic homogeneity and its alternatives

Although Furnivall used his observations of developments in Southeast Asia as the foundation for his model, his theoretical perspective is of universal applicability. If so, the consequences are far-reaching: whilst pluralistic social orders of this kind remain as commonplace as ever, they stand in comprehensive antithesis to the ethnically homogenous nation-states which 'modernists' have come to regard as the only viable basis for the construction of a stable and harmonious social order. Ironically, Furnivall completed his *magnum opus* just before the outbreak of the second of the World Wars, which were largely fought in pursuit of nationalist dreams of ethnic homogeneity. Moreover, despite the dreadful consequences of efforts to implement such dreams, especially in Nazi Germany, the hopeless pursuit of 'nation-building' has continued unchecked to this day. Formerly plural societies continue to break apart,

accompanied by endlessly repeated efforts to achieve a condition of homogeneity by means of 'ethnic cleansing'. Whilst the industrial-scale efforts to achieve that goal manifested in the gas chambers have not been repeated, the loss of life precipitated by outbreaks of organised homicide in a swathe of hitherto plural societies, including Punjab, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia and now Darfur, has already surpassed that achieved in the European holocaust.

The agendas underpinning these developments were rooted in similar principles. On the grounds that plurality would render their societies socially, culturally, and politically unstable, ethnic homogeneity came to be regarded as a necessary prerequisite for national coherence. Precisely that vision also underpinned Enoch Powell's arguments; although few commentators have since been prepared to articulate that vision as clearly as he did, popular opinion in much of Euro-America is now moving ever more firmly in this direction. The currently favoured concept of community cohesion brings us back to precisely these issues. How much homogeneity is required to enable Britain – or any other contemporary society – to achieve social coherence? That some degree of commonality is a necessary prerequisite for viable social order is self-evident. Unless everyone in any given arena is agreed about which side of the road to drive on, chaos is inevitable. Likewise, without agreement about how commercial transactions should be ordered, and how arguments over matters of common concern should be negotiated and resolved, public order would collapse. But how far must agreement about common principles go to ensure that chaos can be avoided? Does it necessarily follow that everyone should routinely speak the same language? Is it essential for everyone to follow the same principles in organising their families and marriages? Should diversity be formally respected? And if so, in what spheres and on what basis and how far?

With such considerations in mind, Cantle's position is comprehensively anti-pluralistic. With Furnivall's formulation in mind, Cantle's description of a situation in which 'separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social, and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives' is entirely familiar. But instead of recognising that these contradictions are an outcome of differing interests as between subsections of the population, such that the equitable negotiation of conflicting interests would become a central goal of public policy, Cantle concludes that *diversity itself* is the source of the problem. Hence his advocacy of a policy of community cohesion.

An absence of community – or its mislocation?

In a remarkable irony, Cantle did not find himself confronted with an absence of cohesive communities in his excursion to the northern cities, but rather a plurality of them. Moreover, as in the rest of urban Britain, the arena where a sense of community was at its weakest was not amongst the minorities, but rather amongst the poorer sections of the indigenous majority. Hence it is not so much the absence of community which the policy initiative would seek to remedy, but rather its mislocation. His model demands the destruction of communities in the plural and their reconstruction in the singular. Moreover, precisely because a sense of community is much more strongly sustained amongst the various minorities than it is amongst the indigenous majority, the processes of social reconstruction which he advocates would of necessity be ethnically specific in their impact.

As in the rest of Britain, the indigenous residents of the inner-city council estates in Oldham and Bradford are not renowned for the strength of the local networks. Conventions of kinship reciprocity have been severely eroded by individualism and consumer capitalism, as well as a further paradoxical consequence of the welfare state: the collective structures which were once the backbone of English working-class communities have by now all but disappeared. 'Community' in indigenous working-class contexts is now but a shadow of its former self.

The contrast with most sections of Britain's minority population could not be greater. Internal networks within most of the longer established groups such as the Jews and the Irish Catholics still flourish, and are yet stronger amongst their South Asian successors; indeed the *biradari*-based networks which underpin Mirpuri ethnic colonies in the Pennine region are amongst the tightest-knit of all (Ballard 2003). However, Cantle pays no attention to the extent to which ethnic consolidation has been a key feature in the trajectories of upward mobility which members of Britain's once marginalised immigrant minorities have so routinely traversed. The results of this deficiency are clear. In his analysis, as in those developed by the great majority of contemporary social commentators, the networks of inter-personal reciprocity around which ethnic colonies are constructed are not identified as a resource. Instead they are routinely dismissed as problematic, on the ground that they isolate those within them from contact with the indigenous mainstream. Cantle explicitly picks up this 'common-sense' view by highlighting a comment made by a Pakistani interviewee on the opening page of his report: 'When I leave

this meeting with you I will go home and not see another white face until I come back here next week.'

How should this statement be read? Is it an empirically accurate account of everyday experience within local ethnic colonies, as Cantle suggests? Or is it no more than tendentious hyperbole? My experience suggests the latter. Despite the tight-knit character of local minority communities, I know of none in which white faces are entirely absent. Nor are their members entirely cut off from the wider social order. No matter how intense interactions within the *biradari* may be, their members regularly encounter members of the indigenous majority as they take their children to school, consult GPs, go to work, go shopping in town or take a walk in the park. They routinely enter alien social arenas when they do, so social interactions across the ethnic boundary are a routine component of everyday life. The experience of most members of the indigenous majority is quite different. Even if they live in cities with a substantial South Asian presence, the great majority of white Britons rarely interact with people of colour; moreover, when such interactions do indeed occur, the terms of engagement are invariably one-way.

Despite the inherently plural character of the British social order, the existence of ethnic diversity is routinely overlooked by most members of the indigenous majority. Hence when members of the ethnic minorities enter the *ghore* social universe, they are expected to suppress their distinctiveness and to order their behaviour in terms of indigenous social, cultural, and linguistic conventions. By contrast on the rare occasions when members of the indigenous majority traverse the ethnic boundary in the reverse direction, they rarely step right through it, because they have not acquired the social, linguistic, and cultural competence which would enable them to do so. Hence even when they cross the boundary, they find themselves unable to engage with those whom they encounter *on their hosts' own terms*. The exercise of hegemony is a personal as well as a structural phenomenon (Ballard and Parveen 2007).

In hierarchically organised plural societies, cross-boundary transactions are invariably markedly asymmetrical. Whilst those at the bottom of the social order soon acquire a shrewd appreciation of the conventions deployed by the powerful, those in a position of privilege have little need to familiarise themselves with the ways of those whom they dominate. On the contrary they have every reason to dismiss them as mistaken. Cantle displays no awareness of this asymmetry. Instead he goes out of his way to suggest the disjunction is symmetrical, since he follows up the quotation from his Pakistani interviewee with another from a White

informant: 'I never met anyone on this [council] estate who wasn't like us from around here'. In my view this second comment is far more likely to be empirically accurate than the first: if only for reasons of safety, brown faces are rarely seen on council estates. In his efforts to highlight symmetry, Cantle misses a further crucial point: that even in sharply polarised societies interactions across ethnic boundaries occur as a matter of routine, and are ordered in terms of a well-established set of social conventions.

Ethnic groups and the construction of boundaries

That such interactions are a key feature of plural societies is the core theme of Frederik Barth's classic study *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Roundly criticising the naïve assumption that ethnic groups maintain their cultural distinctiveness as a result of the absence of interaction between them, he produces extensive empirical evidence to show

> First ... that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them
>
> Secondly, one finds that stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses. In other words, ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence.
>
> (Barth 1969: 10)

Having explored the *interactive* character of plural systems, Barth dismisses the commonplace assumption that ethnic disjunctions are the outcome of primordial (and hence immutable) patterns of difference. Instead he argues that they are maintained by – and indeed the outcome of – dialectical interactions across mutually constructed boundaries. Moreover, once such patterns of ethnic interaction and differentiation are firmly entrenched, 'the ethnic boundary canalizes social life' (*op. cit.*: 15), so much so that 'ethnic identity is superordinate to most other statuses...and is thus *imperative*, in the sense that it cannot be disregarded and thus set aside by other definitions of the situation' (*op. cit.*: 17). But in what sense is it imperative? Barth takes it for granted that power relations across such boundaries are rarely equal. Hence whilst

excluded groups can be expected to close ranks as a means of self-defence, and to utilise their solidarity as the means of articulating their collective interests, those further up the hierarchy can be expected to use exactly the same tactics to marginalise their challengers, and hence defend their position of advantage. Hence ethnic closure is by no means a tactic deployed solely by disadvantaged minorities. Rather 'the boundaries of pariah groups are most strongly maintained by the excluding host population' (*op. cit.*: 31).

Yet, however stoutly defended the resultant disjunctions may be in conceptual terms, Barth follows Furnivall in arguing they nevertheless remain readily permeable: no matter how powerfully they may have been reinforced by mutual competition. Such cross-boundary transactions are an everyday occurrence in the Pennine region. Most minority businesses attract a large non-minority clients: many could not survive without them. Minority families routinely access educational and health care services, shop in city centre stores, and access (often on an extended family basis) mainstream leisure facilities. Members of the locally born younger generation are yet more familiar with indigenous ways: most work for mainstream employers, and regularly use the same leisure facilities as their indigenous peers.

An analysis informed by Furnivall and Barth's insights highlights the shallowness of Cantle's understanding of the issues. This is not to suggest that the disjunctions which caused him such concern are fictitious. Far from it: their consequences are only too real. The most serious deficiency in his analysis is his failure to recognise that far from being the outcome of a lack of inter-ethnic contact, the disjunctions he observed are the outcome of competitive interactions across them. What renders those interactions problematic is not lack of contact, but the lack of symmetry in the organisation of those contacts, and above all the character of the rules of engagement which members of the indigenous majority routinely seek to impose. These routinely disregard the linguistic, conceptual, and cultural conventions deployed within the minorities' ethnic colonies, and also insist that when members of such communities emerge into public arenas they should order their behaviour, speech and self-presentation in 'acceptable' terms: those routinely deployed by members of the hegemonic majority. In this scenario the minorities' commitment to ethnic alterity, even when restricted solely to domestic contexts, is immediately identified as pathogenic. Far from being identified as an asset, it is routinely perceived as a source of self-induced social disadvantage. Such arguments are steadily being expanded. As demands for homogeneity become more insistent, those

who choose different way can find themselves accused of betraying their basic obligations of citizenship – as in the case of the Hispanic population of the United States.

7/7 and its consequences

All these issues came to a head when four young Muslims from the Pennine region blew themselves up on the London Transport system on 7/7. Their motivations were grounded as much in a belief that Muslims were being systematically marginalised and oppressed on a global scale as they were in more parochial British contexts. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the less spontaneous uprisings by which they were preceded, their actions were carefully pre-planned. Nor can their actions be described as 'popular': the vast majority of British Muslims regarded the carnage they precipitated with horror. But although the perpetrators consequently stood out on an extremist limb, the attitudes and experiences which caused them to behave as they did were a product of the processes described here. Hence the sentiments which underpinned bombers' actions were immediately appreciated by the great majority of young British Muslims, even if the consequences of their display of their anger and despair were simultaneously regarded as being overwhelmingly counterproductive.

With this in mind the atrocities the bombers had the effect of making a crucial symbolic point: the consequences of contradictions highlighted in this chapter are by no means restricted to the *banlieues* of Britain's northern cities, nor were they in any way historically unprecedented. Guy Fawkes hatched a similarly explosive plot four centuries previously, which would have had yet more devastating consequences for the capital if it had not been discovered in time. Disputes about religious pluralism are nothing new in English history.

A singular or a plural future?

Where next? No matter how attractive dreams of a singular future may be, issues of plurality, and the contradictions to which they give rise, can no longer be brushed under the carpet. Neither anti-racism nor *laicité* offers viable solutions to the underlying problems. Nor does the demonisation and delegitimisation of difference offer any kind of solution. Efforts to repress diversity in contexts of plurality merely reinforce the determination to differ. If so, what are we left with? Now that all other solutions appear to be unviable, it is worth re-examining what

has hitherto been described as the multicultural approach, above all to identify just how and why it is deemed to have 'failed'.

With this in mind it is worth reminding ourselves that one of the reasons why the concept was embraced in the first place was that it was perceived as a more easy-going, less aggressive and hence more palatable alternative to the confrontational arguments pressed forward by the anti-racists. To the extent that understandings of multiculturalism emerged from visions of the rainbow delights of 'multi-culti', they were bound to fail: the political and strategic challenges thrown up when the *de facto* reality of ethnic pluralism challenges dreams of national homogeneity are far too deeply rooted to be resolved by soft options. Hence for the proponents of multi-culti the events of 9/11 marked the end of an era, and those of 7/7 punched nails into their project's coffin; but far from acknowledging that this might have occurred because of the inadequacy of their vision, most fair-weather multiculturalists simply blamed the terrorists for letting them down. Piqued by this betrayal, they have proved only too ready to line up behind visions of community cohesion.

Our inspection of Cantle's understanding of community cohesion has served to reveal its inherent flaws. Whilst all plural societies need to establish a viable basis on which to negotiate *social* cohesion as between their component parts, attempts to *impose* cohesion by demanding conformity to a single religious, linguistic, cultural, and moral ideology are bound to fail. The unilateral imposition of homogeneity in contexts of plurality can only be expected to sharpen underlying contradictions, and hence precipitate an increase in heterogeneity. That said, no plural society can operate without some means of ordering cross-boundary transactions. Since no business can be done in the absence of a common transactional code, a *negotiated* lingua franca invariably emerges in plural contexts. The English language is a classic example of just such a lingua franca.

If outright war is to be avoided, the core issue is what the contents, the scope, and above all the symbolic character of such a common transactional code should be. *Negotiation* is the core issue: there is no more effective recruiting sergeant for polarisation than attempts to impose hegemonic solutions. With this in mind it follows that aspects of our current democratic conventions, and especially the expectation that the will of the majority should normally prevail, stands in urgent need of qualification. A pluralist vision would not only support Muslim girls to wear the *hijab* to school if they so wished, but also resist the imposition of restrictions on those who wished to use hounds to hunt foxes. A viable condition of plurality must not only recognise that diversity is

an ever-present dimension of human affairs, but also be underpinned by *a presumption of a right to differ*, even when the behaviour in question is significantly at odds with established conventions.

It goes without saying that this right could not remain wholly untrammelled: even the most plural societies are of necessity underpinned by a restricted number of common conventions. That said, a commitment to plurality demands that such requirements are kept as parsimonious as possible. In doing so it also follows that the liberal dream of identifying a singular set of universally applicable moral principles around which 'the good life' can be constructed must also be set aside, to be superseded by a recognition that every moral system is culturally grounded, ethnically specific and hence *non-universal* in character (Gray 2000). If it could be accepted that moralistic hubris, no matter how well intentioned, is inherently oppressive, many of our current dilemmas would be far easier to resolve. If political and cultural compromise became the order of the day at every level in the socio-political order, the 'threat' of plurality would simply evaporate. Once humanity regains its capacity to acknowledge and respect difference, our current tendency to regard diversity as the enemy of solidarity could be steadily whittled away, opening the way for the emergence of societies in which everyone could feel at ease within 'a community of communities' as Parekh (2000) felicitously puts it. In so far as the objective of community cohesion is to 'help microcommunities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole...[and] to develop common goals and a shared vision' (Cantle 2001: 70), it stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from Parekh's vision.

Conclusion: Ethnic plurality and the challenge of the twenty-first century

The new millennium may well prove to mark a turning point in human affairs. The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were an age of nationalism, during which the world's empires fragmented into ever more numerous national components, each of which sought stability and justice in the context of separate visions of ethno-national homogeneity. As we enter the twenty-first century, unitarianism is proving an impossible dream. The costs of secession and the attendant processes of ethnic cleansing are manifestly unacceptable, whilst the exponential growth of long-distance migration is undermining all efforts to construct ethnically homogeneous nation-states. That Euro-America should find the resultant contradictions acutely challenging should come as no surprise. It was European thinkers from Hegel onwards who initially provided the

philosophical basis for dreams of national homogeneity, and their ideas were exported to the remainder of the globe during the nineteenth-century age of Empire. As we enter the twenty-first century Euro-America's position of global hegemony is fading fast. Millions of non-European settlers have established themselves in the former heartlands of the Imperial order, such that alarm bells have begun to ring across the length and breadth of Euro-America. Populist movements demanding a halt to further (non-European) immigration, the better to sustain our (already irretrievably flawed) condition of ethno-national integrity have emerged on all sides. Yet despite the steady globalisation of the world order, nation-alist dreams of unitarian homogeneity continue to exercise as powerful a hold over Euro-American imagination. Still committed increasingly hubristic expectations of both local and global hegemony, the prospect of living in conditions of religious, linguistic, and ethnic plurality continues to be regarded as a dreadful prospect.

The time has come for a re-think. Our unitarian dreams have passed their sell-by date. The goal of comprehensive ethnic homogeneity – call it 'modernity' if you will – is proving to be unreachable, and its pursuit is precipitating ever more bloody consequences. If our taken-for-granted assumptions are leading us into the wilderness, it is time to turn around. We have much to unlearn. Our un-modern ancestors found plurality far less bothersome to live with than we do. What went wrong? In our doggedly unitarian pursuit of 'modernity' and 'progress', some salient truths about our human condition have been swept aside. Three of the most obvious include the propositions that

- as cultured beings, we humans have an infinite capacity to create the terms of our own existence, and to do so in extraordinarily varied ways;
- although we share many commonalities, there is not, is unlikely to be and certainly never has been a single vision of 'the good life' to which all humans adhere;
- whilst everyone holds their own vision of the good life in high esteem, any attempt to forcibly impose that vision on others is asking for trouble: more often than not such effort will simply reinforce those alters' determination to pursue their own course.

When our ancestors began to construct towns and then empires, they were never so foolish as to attempt to render them ethnically homo-geneous. Whilst all pre-modern states included a hegemonic elite whose members occupied position of enormous privilege, the successful rulers of the far-flung Empires of antiquity never sought to eliminate all traces of ethnic, religious, and linguistic plurality from amongst their subjects. That would only invite rebellion. Instead all they demanded was acknowledgement of and respect for Imperial authority. The epithet 'render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's' promised his subjects a great deal of personal autonomy, provided they accepted the legitimacy of the overarching Roman umbrella. In a post-9/11 context it also worth remembering that all the historical Islamic Empires were markedly plural in character. To be sure every Sultan looked on his Muslim subjects with special favour, but that certainly does not mean that Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Hindus were systematically excluded from positions of power and privilege. Moreover, whatever stories of Muslim besti-ality may have been circulated in western Europe since the failure of the crusades, it was the Latin Christians, rather than their opponents, who were for long the most enthusiastic exponents of Holy War and conversion by the sword. Hence as Sachedina demonstrates in his illu-minatingly titled volume *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, the ferocious visions of Islamic unitarianism through which contemporary *jihadis* legitimate their actions have much shallower historical and ideo-logical roots than do those of the Washington neo-cons who have taken advantage of the assault on the twin towers to launch a global re-run of the crusaders' agenda under the banner of a War on Terror.

Building on key Qur'anic messages which insist, amongst other things, on the unity which underpins all the variety found in God's created world, such that all of Adam's offspring will stand as equals – regardless of gender and tribal affiliations – when they are ultimately called to account for their doings during the course of their sojourn on earth, Sachedina concludes that in historical terms the Islamic vision of a just society has never been as monolithic as the majority of its contemporary ideologues so mindlessly insist. Instead, the focus of the Islamic social message has been to make human beings aware of their true potential, to overcome self-cultivated weaknesses that prevent them from dealing with others with justice and fairness. Islam seeks to remedy these weak-nesses by improving inter-human relations and emphasising people's civil responsibilities towards one another. The challenge for Muslims today, as ever, is to tap the tradition of Koranic pluralism to develop a culture of restoration, of just intra-religious and inter-religious relation-ships in a world of cultural and religious diversity. Without restoring the principle of coexistence, Muslims will not be able to recapture the spirit of early civil society under the Prophet (Sachedina 2001: 138–9).

Democracy, especially when formulated within the context of a nationalist framework, swept such pluralistic understandings to one side. Once plurality was defined as a challenge to national integrity, the only reasonable response to diversity was to seek its elimination. However, it was not democracy *per se* which precipitated that outcome, but rather the majoritarian basis on which nationalists invariably insisted that it should be interpreted. Democratic orders which leave no space for diversity will of necessity be regarded as oppressive by those who differ; and efforts to suppress those differences invariably sharpen rather than eliminate the underlying disjunctions. In these circumstances the remedy is not to back away from the principles of democracy, but rather to temper simplistic majoritarianism with a recognition that accepting the consequences of ethnic plurality is a necessary civic virtue. As a leading American theorist of the imperatives of plurality argues, this will require urgent steps to encourage.

> a wide diversity of religious faiths, sensual habits, household organizations, ethnic traditions, gender practices, and so on, and [to] encourage the civic virtues of pluralism to inform relations between these constituencies. But a democratic pluralist won't willingly, for instance, allow the state to torture prisoners; murder to go unpunished; parents to deprive their children of an education; the public school system to deteriorate; wealthy citizens to evade taxes; orphaned children to be placed under the care of incompetent adults; adult citizens to be unemployed for too long; the gap between the real cost of living in a system and the income-earning ability of most citizens to grow large; the income hierarchy to become too extreme; or narrow unitarians to take charge of the regime ....a diverse culture is one in which pluralistic virtues of public accountability, self-discipline, receptive listening, gritted-teeth tolerance of some things you hate, and a commitment to justice are widespread.
>
> (Connolly 2005: 43)

The pursuit of such strategies will·never be easy. In comparison with the clarity of the unitarian nationalist's vision, plural societies are grounded in endless compromises and hard-driven bargains. To modernists in search of clear-cut solutions, all this will appear impossibly chaotic. But is there any viable alternative? The orderly world of which unilateralists dream can only be achieved by taking exclusivist positions in which alternative perspectives are eliminated. But as current developments

constantly remind us, the consequences of so doing in an inescapably plural global order are exceedingly severe. As we enter the twenty-first century the central challenge facing humanity is the re-establishment of respect for difference. If we could regain the capacity to do so, we would have a much brighter prospect of responding with equanimity to the conditions of ethnic plurality which surround us, no less globally than locally. We all have much to re-learn.

Notes

1. I happily acknowledge my debt to Michael Banton as the coiner of the first of these terms, and to William E. Connolly as the source of the second. If 'presentist' refers to the anachronistic mistake of seeking to read past events in terms of present-day suppositions, 'unitarian' refers to those who make the parallel mistake of assuming that only non-plural societies can ever be viable.
2. Although England was one of the world's first nation-states, it always firmly rejected republicanism. Hence in formal terms Britain's population still remain subjects of the Crown rather than citizens. The only Act dealing explicitly with UK citizenship was passed in 1981, and is primarily concerned with identifying those who do, and those who do not, have unquestioned rights of entry and abode in the United Kingdom.

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In this index personal names have been listed in alphabetical order of first name, as in some cultures this is the significant name. Where authors have been cited for their publications they have been listed under surnames for this is how they would be consulted in bibliographies or catalogues. In some places a page reference is given where the actual word may not be used but the concept is discussed.

Page numbers in bold represents chapters.