

One of the difficulties in discussing multiculturalism is a confusion between two different meanings of the word. On the one hand, 'multiculturalism' has come to define a society that is particularly diverse, usually as a result of immigration. On the other, it has also come to define the policies necessary to manage such a society. It has come to embody, in other words, both a *description* of the lived experience of diversity and a *prescription* for the policies necessary to manage such diversity. And this conflation of description and prescription has brought with it all manner of problems.

The experience of living in a society transformed by mass immigration, a society that is less insular, more vibrant and more cosmopolitan is obviously very positive. It's a case for open borders and open minds.

As a political process, however, multiculturalism means something very different. It describes a set of policies, the aim of which is to manage diversity by putting people into ethnic boxes, defining individual needs and rights by virtue of the boxes into which people are put, and using those boxes to shape public policy. Multiculturalists argue that social justice requires not just that individuals are treated as political equals, but that their cultural beliefs are also treated as equally valid, and indeed are institutionalised in the public sphere. In other words, the public recognition and affirmation of cultural differences. It is a case, not for open borders and minds, but for the policing of borders, whether physical, cultural or imaginative.

This conflation of lived experience and political policy has proved highly invidious. On the one hand, it has allowed many on the right, and not just on the right, to blame mass immigration for the failures of social policy and

to turn minorities into the problem. On the other hand, it has forced many traditional liberals and radicals to abandon classical notions of freedom and liberty in the name of defending diversity. Giving up their attachment, for instance, to free speech, and to traditional notions of equality.

What I want to suggest is that it is critical to defend diversity as lived experience - and all that goes with it such as mass immigration and cultural diversity - but also to oppose multiculturalism as a political process.

The aim of multicultural policies is to manage diversity. But why should diversity need managing? Because multiculturalists see diversity not just as a resource but also as a problem. And why is diversity a problem? Because immigration is a problem. Or rather immigrants are a problem. The presence of immigrants creates a problem that requires multicultural policies to manage. In this sense advocates of multicultural policies view immigration, and immigrants, ironically, in a not too dissimilar way to that of many of the critics of multiculturalism.

'Can Europe be the same with different people in it?' asks the writer Christopher Caldwell in his controversial new book, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, Caldwell is a columnist for the Financial Times, an editor of the Weekly Standard and a critic of multiculturalism. *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* is the latest in a succession of books by authors such as Mark Steyn, Oriana Fallaci, Bruce Bawer and Melanie Phillips warning of how immigration, and in particular Muslim immigration, is threatening the very foundations of European civilization. The melodramatic title is a nod to Edmund Burke and reflects Caldwell's belief

that the impact on Europe of postwar immigration has been as dramatic as the fall of the *ancien regime* in 1789. Europe, he insists, cannot be the same with different people in it. Muslim immigration, for Caldwell, 'is not enhancing or validating European culture; it is supplanting it. Europe is not welcoming its newest residents but making way for them.' There is, he writes, no 'fundamental difference between colonization and labor migration'.

The problem here is a confusion of *peoples* and *values*. Being born to European parents is not a passport to Enlightenment beliefs. Nor does having Bangladeshi or Moroccan ancestry makes one automatically believe in sharia. There is no such thing single set of European values that transcends history in opposition to Islamic values, nor a single set of values that are somehow Islamic. As Caldwell himself puts it, 'What secular Europeans call "Islam" is a set of values that Dante and Erasmus would recognize as theirs'. On the other hand, the modern, secular rights that now constitute 'core European values' would 'leave Dante and Erasmus bewildered.'

But if critics of multiculturalists confuse peoples and values, so do multiculturalists themselves. Caldwell is highly critical of multiculturalists, whom he sees as pandering to Islamism. Many multiculturalists are highly critical of Caldwell, whose arguments they see as pandering to racism and Islamophobia.

Beneath the hostility, however, the two sides share basic assumptions about the nature of culture, identity and difference. Caldwell insists that common values are impossible within an ethnically diverse society. Multiculturalists claim that the presence in a society of a diversity of

peoples limits the possibility of common values.

Both sides assume that minority communities are homogenous wholes whose members will forever be attached to the cultures, faiths, beliefs and values of their forebears. Muslims, in particular, as seen as constituting a distinct population, defined almost solely by its faith, and whose difference must dictate the way that wider society deals with it.

In many Western nations, politicians, including government ministers, have long since abandoned their responsibility for engaging directly with Muslim communities. Instead they have effectively subcontracted their responsibilities to so-called community leaders. When the British Prime Minister want to find out what Muslims thinks about a particular issue invites the Muslim Council of Britain to 10 Downing Street. When the Home Secretary wants to get a message out to the Muslim community, he visits a mosque. Rather than appealing to Muslims as British citizens, and attempting to draw them into the mainstream political process, politicians of all hues today prefer to see them as people whose primarily loyalty is to their faith and who can be politically engaged only by other Muslims.

The consequences of this approach are hugely damaging. 'Why should a British citizen who happens to be Muslim have to rely on clerics and other leaders of the religious community to communicate with the prime minister of the country?', asks Amartya Sen in his book *Identity and Violence*. Far from promoting any sense of integration, government policy encourages Muslims to see themselves as semi-detached Britons. After all, if the Prime Minister believes that he can only engage with them by appealing to their faith, rather than through their wider political or national affiliations, who are Muslims to disagree? Is it surprising that if

mainstream politicians abdicate their responsibility for engaging with ordinary Muslims, that those Muslims should feel disenchanting with the mainstream political process? Or that such disenchantment should take a radical religious form?

The irony of multiculturalism as a political process is that it undermines much of what is valuable about diversity as lived experience. When we talk about diversity, what we mean is that the world is a messy place, full of clashes and conflicts. That's all for the good, for such clashes and conflicts are the stuff of political and cultural engagement.

But the very thing that's valuable about diversity – the clashes and conflicts that it brings about – is the very thing that worries many multiculturalists. The reason why they want to minimise such conflicts by attempting to parcel people up into neat ethnic boxes. But far from minimising conflict what it actually does is generate a new set of more destructive, less resolvable.

When I say clashes and conflicts are all for the good, I do not mean, of course, that every clash and conflict is a good. Political conflicts are often useful because they reframe social problems in a way that asks: 'How can we change society to overcome that problem?' We might disagree on the answer, but the debate itself is a useful one. Another way of putting this is that political conflicts are the kinds of conflicts necessary for social transformation.

Multiculturalism, on the other hand, by reframing political problems in terms of culture or faith, transforms political conflicts into a form that makes them neither useful nor resolvable. Rather than ask, say, 'What are the

social roots of racism and what structural changes are required to combat it?', it demands recognition for one's particular identity, public affirmation of one's cultural difference and respect and tolerance for one's cultural and faith beliefs.

To see the practical consequences of all this I want to look briefly at the historical development of multicultural policies in Britain, and in particular at the consequences of such policies in two British cities – Bradford and Birmingham.

One of the enduring myths of multiculturalism is that Britain has become a multicultural nation because minority groups have demanded that their cultural differences be recognised and be afforded respect. In fact, while the question of cultural differences has preoccupied the political elite from the beginnings of mass immigration, it was not a question that particularly troubled black and Asian Britons for a considerable period.

First and second generation postwar immigrants to Britain were concerned less about preserving cultural differences than about fighting for political equality. Throughout the sixties and seventies, four big issues dominated the struggle for political equality: opposition to discriminatory immigration controls; the struggle for equality in the workplace; the fight against racist attacks; and, most explosively, the issue of police brutality. These struggles politicised a new generation of activists and came to an explosive climax in the inner city riots of the late seventies and early eighties.

It was against this background that the policies of multiculturalism became institutionalised. Local authorities in inner city areas, led by the

Greater London Council, pioneered a new strategy of making black communities feel part of British society by organising consultation with black communities, drawing up equal opportunities policies, establishing race relations units and dispensing millions of pounds in grants to black community organisations. At the heart of the strategy was a redefinition of racism. Racism now meant not simply the denial of equal rights but the denial of the right to be different. In this process, the very meaning of equality was transformed: from possessing the same rights as everyone else to possessing different rights, appropriate to different communities.

By the mid-eighties the political struggles that had dominated the fight against racism in the sixties and seventies had become transformed into battles over cultural issues. Political struggles unite across ethnic or cultural divisions; cultural struggles inevitably fragment. Since state funding was now linked to cultural identity, so different groups began asserting their particular identities ever more fiercely. The shift from the political to the cultural arena helped entrench old divisions and to create new ones.

The city of Bradford provides a very good example of how the institutionalisation of multiculturalism undermined political struggles, entrenched divisions and strengthened conservative elements within every community.

Bradford has a large Asian population - mainly Muslim, but also significant numbers of Hindus and Sikhs – as well as a smaller African Caribbean population. Despite the large Muslim population, the question of Islam was not a political issue in the city in the 1970s. Instead the main issues were the same that concerned minority communities elsewhere – racist

attacks, immigration laws, workplace discrimination and police harassment.

In 1977 the Asian Youth Movement was created to give a voice to radical Asian youth. AYM activists did not distinguish themselves as Muslim, Hindu or Sikh; indeed many did not even see themselves as specifically Asian, preferring to call themselves 'black' which was seen not as an ethnic term but as a generic political term for non-whites. They challenged not just racism but also many traditional values too, particularly within the Muslim community, helping establish an alternative secular leadership.

Faced with this growing militancy Bradford council drew up equal opportunity statements, established race relations units and began funding black organisations. A 12-point race relations plan declared that every section of the 'multiracial, multicultural city' had 'an equal right to maintain its own identity, culture, language, religion and customs.'

By the mid-eighties the focus of anti-racist protest in Bradford had shifted from political issues, such as policing and immigration, to religious and cultural issues: a demand for Muslim schools and for separate education for girls, a campaign for halal meat to be served at school, and, most explosively, the confrontation over the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. This process was strengthened by a new relationship between the local council and the local mosques.

In 1981, the council helped set up and fund the Bradford Council of Mosques. By siphoning resources through the mosques, the council was



able to strengthen the position of conservative religious leaders and to dampen down the more militant voices on the streets.

As part of its multicultural brief to allow different communities to express their distinct identities, the council also helped set up two religious umbrella groups for Sikh and Hindus, as they already had for Muslims, and to fund each community separately. The consequence was to create divisions and tensions within and between different Asian communities as each fought for a greater allocation of council funding.

There had always been residential segregation between the Asian and white communities in Bradford, thanks to a combination of racism, especially in council house allocation, and of a desire among Asians to find protection in numbers. But within Asian areas, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus lived cheek by jowl for much of the postwar period. In the eighties, however, the three communities started dividing, both physically and politically, on communal lines. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, began increasingly to live in different areas, attend different schools and organise through different institutions. By the early nineties even the Asian business community was institutionally divided along community lines with the creation of separate business forums for the three communities. The Asian Youth Movement, the beacon in the 1970s of a united struggle against racism, split up, torn apart by such multicultural tensions.

A similar process has taken place in Birmingham. In 1985, Birmingham was rocked by riots in the Handsworth area of the city during which blacks, Asians and whites took to streets in protest against poverty, unemployment and, in particular, police harassment. In October 2005, 20 year on from the original riots, there was another riot in the Lozells area of

the city, which is next door to Handsworth. This time the riot was between blacks and Asians. An unsubstantiated – and untrue – rumour that a Jamaican girl had been raped by a group of Asian men led to a violent clash between the two communities during which a young black man was murdered.

Why did two communities who had fought side by side in 1985, fight against each other in 2005? The answer lies largely in the policies that were introduced by Birmingham council after the original riots. In response to those riots, Birmingham council proposed a political new framework for the engagement of minority communities. It created nine so-called Umbrella Groups, organisations based on ethnicity and faith which were supposed to represent the needs of their particular communities and to aid policy development and resource allocation. Nine such groups were set up – the African and Caribbean People's Movement, the Bangladeshi Islamic Projects Consultative Committee, the Birmingham Chinese Society, The Council of Black-led Churches, the Hindu Council, the Irish Forum, the Vietnamese Association, the Pakistani Forum and the Sikh Council of Gurdwaras.

Birmingham's policies were aimed at drawing minority communities into the democratic process. Their impact was anything but democratic. First, as in Bradford, the policy treated minority communities as homogenous wholes, ignoring conflicts within those communities. As Birmingham Council's own report put it,

The perceived notion of homogeneity of minority ethnic communities has informed a great deal of race equality work to date. The effect of this, amongst others, has been to place an over-

reliance on individuals who are seen to represent the needs of views of the whole community and resulted in simplistic approaches toward tackling community needs.

In other words, multicultural policies do not respond to the needs of communities but help create those communities by imposing identities on people. And they create communities by ignoring internal conflicts – conflicts that arise out of class, gender and intra-religious differences within communities. What multicultural policies do is empower not minority communities but so-called community leaders, who achieve power not because they represent their community but because they have a relationship with the state.

At the same time as ignoring conflicts within minority communities, Birmingham's policies *created* conflicts between them. As one academic study of Birmingham's policies observes, the 'model of engagement through Umbrella Groups tended to result in competition between BME communities for resources. Rather than prioritising needs and cross-community working, the different Umbrella Groups generally attempted to maximise their own interests'.

Once political power and financial resources became allocated by ethnicity, then people began to identify themselves in terms of those ethnicities, and only those ethnicities. The consequence is what Amartya Sen has called plural monoculturalism – policy driven by the myth that society is made up of a series of distinct, homogenous cultures that dance around each other. And policy makes such a segmented society a reality. The result in Birmingham was to entrench divisions between black

and Asian communities to such an extent as to spark inter-communal rioting.

The real failure of multiculturalism is its failure to understand what is valuable about cultural diversity. There is nothing good in itself about diversity. It is important because it allows us to compare and contrast different values, beliefs and lifestyles, make judgements upon them, and decide which are better and which worse. It is important, in other words, because it allows us to engage in political dialogue and debate, a process whereby different values are put to the test, and a collective language of citizenship emerges. But it is precisely such dialogue and debate, and the making of such judgements, that multiculturalism attempts to suppress in the name of 'tolerance' and 'respect'.

The problem with multicultural policies is not that they stress diversity or engender conflict. It is that they stress one particular form of diversity, and engender a kind of conflict that is politically unresolvable.

To rethink multiculturalism, we need to root our ideas in six basic principles. First, we need to separate the debate about diversity and that about multiculturalism. We need to defend diversity, but oppose multiculturalism as a set of political policies.

Second, and linked to this, we need to separate the debate about immigration and that about multiculturalism. Immigration is a potential resource. It is putting immigrants into ethnic boxes that is the problem.

Third, we need to stop treating minority communities as homogenous wholes. Diversity does not end at the boundaries of minority communities.

Such communities are as divided by race, class, gender, nationality, age and political ideology as the rest of the nation.

Fourth, politicians need to stop subcontracting out their responsibilities to unelected community leaders. We should start treating minorities as citizens who happen to have particular cultural or religious affiliations, not as people with cultural and political affiliations who happen to reside in this country.

Fifth, we need to determine public policy on the basis of need, not ethnic identity. The two may well coincide, but we should not assume that they do. The assumption that identity can define need has distorted public policy by forcing politicians to think less about the equitable distribution of resources than about the distribution of ethnicity.

And finally, we need to separate the public and the private spheres in government policy. One of the most invidious consequences of multicultural policies has been erosion of the distinction of the public and the private, and the insistence that state has a role to play in recognizing, promoting and preserving cultural, ethnic and religious identities. It is a claim that fundamentally undermines equality. The private sphere is inherently unequal. Political equality only becomes possible with the creation of a ring-fenced public sphere, which everyone can enter as *political* equals, whatever their cultural, economic or ethnic backgrounds. The multicultural demand for the public recognition for individual or cultural differences is a demand to erase the distinction between the public and the private spheres, and hence to undermine the possibility of real equality.

At the heart of equality is the acceptance that the state treats all its citizens equally, whatever their colour, creed, culture or faith. That is why we oppose racism. That is also why we should oppose multiculturalism.