

# **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

**Mohamed SERIR HADJ**  
*Ecole Normale Supérieure Mostaganem*  
*Mostaganem University - ALGERIA -*  
*ens-mosta@hotmail.com*

Received date: 08/07/2018

Revised date: 02/02/2019

Publication date: 30/06/2019

## **Abstract**

The last two decades of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first centuries witnessed heated debate over the issue of the failure of multiculturalism in western liberal states such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. A huge number of articles claimed that multiculturalism has come to a dead end or has simply failed. Opponents of multiculturalism believe that multiculturalism has failed because of the increasing tide of tensions between the white majority and British born of South Asian origins. Besides, violence attributed to racism in many British cities, enhanced the need for other policies that could bring all the people around British values and loyalty to the state. The tensions experienced in many British cities have served to increase the feelings of nationalism among some British mainly the young people. In sharp contrast with the previous views, defenders of multiculturalism believe that it is still instrumental because it arises in the context of liberal or social democratic egalitarian and citizenship. Thus, the present research paper attempts to shed light on the state of multiculturalism in the late twentieth and the early twenty first centuries by raising the following major questions: has multiculturalism really failed in the UK? If so, what were the key elements that have led to its failure?

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism; United Kingdom; Twenty First century; Liberal; Democratic; States.

## **1. Introduction**

The establishment of many non-white permanent communities in the United Kingdom in the post World War Two period led to the rise of many tensions between the indigenous white population and immigrants in the cities of England such as Bradford, Tower Hamlets and Burnely. This situation incited the

British government to find policies that would serve to encourage harmony in British society and fight all forms of discrimination.

For that, the government adopted the policy of assimilation<sup>1</sup> that prevailed from the 1950s to the beginning of the 1960s in order to underestimate the resilience of ethnic identities<sup>2</sup>, especially in context where the minority community is marginalized and confronts hostility<sup>3</sup>. The failure of this policy enhanced the need for more practical measures to provide ethnic minorities with more equal opportunities as the white population. In doing so, the British Parliament passed the first piece of legislation in 1965.

## **2. Race Relations Legislations and Combating Racism**

The Race Relations Act of 1965 established an administrative model to punish access racism which was critical to the British institutional development. The Act also stated that those who used threatening abusive or insulting written or spoken expression with intent to stir up hate against others on the grounds of color, race, or ethnic or national origins were subject to a maximum prison sentence of two to maximum five years, or the payment of £1,000<sup>4</sup>. Besides, the Act established a three persons national Race Relations Board (RRB). This latter was designed to create local conciliations committees which would receive and manage specific complaints of discrimination. The Act also made measures to ban racism in public places and work.

Three years later, the Parliament passed the Race Relations Act of 1968<sup>5</sup> which confirmed the cooperation of other institutions to resolve the problem of racism and help integrate immigrants. These institutions were the Race Relations Board and the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants. The Act also extended the law against access racism to cover the spheres of employment, housing, unions and employers' organizations, banking, insurance, goods and services.

After the implementation of the Race Relations Act of 1968, legislators discovered that it was insufficient and

## **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

---

inefficient. Despite the weaknesses discovered, no attempts were made to amend or pass a new Act in favour of ethnic minorities until 1976.

The industrial disputes that marked the Northern cities, from 1972 to 1974, over representations in Trade Unions between white workers and ethnic minorities enhanced the need for more investigation to ensure more equality and secure stability. The events were very crucial in the establishment of research institutions such as the Runnymede Trust. This latter carried a research related to race which was published in its report “Color and Citizenship” in 1972. The report was about the state of race relations in Britain.

The Race Relations Act of 1976, as opposed to the previous Acts, which focused on the declaratory function of race law, inflicted pain on wrong doers. The Act also added new provisions for punishing institutions. Moreover, it assigned to local authorities a particular duty of vigilance with respect to eliminating discrimination and promoting equality<sup>6</sup>.

### **3. Plural Mono-Cultural Model of Multiculturalism**

The then Labor Government also devoted more public spending to allocate resources between communities in an attempt to silence tensions and ensure more integration of non-white communities. This process was followed by recruiting community leaders to organize the allocation of funds and resources<sup>7</sup>. However; the approach was highly criticized by Labor opponents who argued that providing community leaders with funds had been an attempt to create classes among communities and most importantly was to marginalize a large proportion of the ethnic communities that is young people.

The process of allocating funds to communities and allowing them to practise their values and lead separate lives different from the mainstream society was considered as the first seeds of the establishment of the Corporate or plural multiculturalism<sup>8</sup>. The latter was meant to encourage integration of ethnic minority groups by preserving their cultures. However, not all agree on the real aim behind the adoption of such policy as in the case of Fleras Augie who notes that the emergence of

this model of multiculturalism represented apolitical act particularly for political goals namely “cooling out” troublesome constituents by instituting differences<sup>9</sup>.

The rise of Margaret Hilda Thatcher<sup>10</sup> to the premiership in 1979 brought huge changes to the whole country and the ethnic minorities in particular. The financial policy adopted to reverse the economic situation of the state was not without harmful consequences on the entire population. Poverty, the housing and the income of the poor people, which has decreased the most seriously, were the major threats to the then Conservative government.

To cope with these problems, the central government reduced grants to local governments. The reduction in grants led to local governments to reduce home buildings in those areas where ethnic minorities are concentrated. Thatcher’s policies were considered as a step to increase the suffering and disadvantages of minorities in the United Kingdom. In line with economic situation, minorities were set free to educate their children since the local authorities were unable to meet the increasing costs of education<sup>11</sup>.

The decrease in funds for education for ethnic minorities had a very bad impact on British society because it led to the foundation of schools that have been far away from British values. The Stephny Green Boys School in Tower Hamlets for instance was entirely attended by Muslim boys. According to a young Muslim,

*In the multicultural Britain of the 1980s and the 1990s, we were free to practice our religion and develop our culture as we wanted... but British values of democracy, tolerance, respect, compromise and pluralism had no meaning for us. We attended a British Academy but there was nothing particularly British about it. It might as well have been in Cairo or Karachi. Cut off from Britain, isolated from the eastern culture of our parents, Islamism provided us with a purpose*<sup>12</sup>

## **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

---

Adding insult to injury, the events of 1981 were another landmark in the history of racism in the United Kingdom when thirteen young black people died in a fire in New Cross, allegedly caused by fascists. The murder of the young black people enhanced the solidarity of all ethnic minorities to struggle against all forms of racism. Moreover, the event culminated in the establishment of a National Council of Black organization which called for Black and Asian people to withdraw and cooperate with the police.

Unfortunately, the government's response was very slow. After three years of the events, the Minister for Merseyside, Michael Hestine, made an attempt to combat racial disadvantage in inner cities. Such manoeuvre led to an increase in the spending on the urban program to £338 million. In addition to this, the youth training scheme was of religions to the fore front of British politics.

After the controversy of "Satanic expanded and reforms to policing were suggested. Fighting racism and making reforms to policing were not enough to promote multiculturalism in the United Kingdom. John Rex had warned that the problem was not so much ensuring equality by recognizing difference. Ethnic minorities, mainly Muslims were denied the right to be different because of certain traditions and practices<sup>13</sup>.

Muslims also felt pain when the Indian born author, Salman Rushedi, published his most controversial novel, "Satanic Verses", in 1988. The novel that depicted in some of the chapters of the book, the life of the Prophet Muhammed may peace and blessing of Allah be upon him. The novel received criticisms from all Muslims around the world because it created many fallacies about the Prophet.

Radical Muslims threatened the life of Salman Rushedi. The sentence to death declaration came from the spiritual leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Al Khomeini, in February 1989. The novel also had a positive effect on the Muslims because it increased solidarity among Muslims and also brought the issues of freedom of expression and the protection Verses" and the rage it made among Muslims, there

came another bad event which increased solidarity among Muslims and intensified the needs to voice the Muslims' quest for more rights in the United Kingdom.

The war on Iraq in 1990 led by the United States of America and its allies among western states increased hatred to the westerners. The aim of the war, according to the coalition, was to liberate the state of Kuwait and to defeat the Iraqi regime led by the late president Saddam Hussein. Like all the members of the coalition, the British government, under the leadership of John Major, deployed British troops to sustain in the war effort and participate in military operations.

The Muslim community in the United Kingdom opposed the deployment of British troops in Iraq. The Bradford Council of Mosques (BCM) sent a letter to the Queen and another one to the Prime Minister pledging for the return of the troops and also criticizing the deployment of British soldiers in the war against Iraq. It seems that it is always the same old story where Muslims' feelings were ignored.

With the rise of the Labour Government, under the leadership of Tony Blair, in the late twentieth century, the prospects of a New Britain were very promising. These positive prospects were interpreted by the passage of the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998. The Crime and Disorder Act came to reinforce the struggle of the British authorities against all forms of segregation and racism. The crimes motivated by racial animus were met by stiffer penalties. According to the Act, the maximum sentence for the crime of common assault is six months imprisonment and a £5,000 fine, a guilty verdict for racially aggravated common assault can result in up to two years in jail and an unlimited fine.

Two years later, another Act was passed by the British Parliament; the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 came as a result of an investigation made by a commission headed by Mac Pherson<sup>14</sup>. The commission's role was to investigate the murder of a young Black man, Stephen Lawrence, in the South of London.

## **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

---

Some of the recommendations made by the commission were taken into consideration such as the extension of the coverage of the 1976 Act to include the police and other public officials previously exempt from the laws against discrimination.

The labour Government's efforts to rebrand British society and benefit from the diversity of cultures encouraged the leaders of the Government to adopt the notion of "Cool Britannia" and foster the vision of Britain as a young country through emphasizing the nation's plurality, cultural diversity, and dynamism. The government also thought that such a rebranding might strengthen British society and also was a strategy for the United Kingdom's economic survival and success in an expanding globalized market place.

The prospects of Cool Britannia looked gloomy because of the continued forms of racism in the cities inhabited by ethnic minorities. In 2000, the Runnymede Trust published a report entitled the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain and in which the Labour Government was warned that cool Britannia would not succeed because the past and current forms of racism were not confronted. In addition to the report, the declaration of the then Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, Tessa Jowell, in 2001 marked the death of the project of Cool Britannia. She believed that the program of Cool Britannia had sound intentions but its failure laid in its ability to recognize the diverse and continually changing nature of Britain, characterized by and open to external influences as she quoted, "This country is just too complex and too varied. Cool Britannia was at least a well meaning attempt to codify what makes this country special. But it was, I'm sorry to say, doomed to inadequacy because it tried to codify a culture. And if you codify, you ossify."<sup>15</sup>

The Minister's declaration of the failure of the notion of "cool Britannia" paved the way to the emergence of the neo-mono model of multiculturalism in the aftermath of the 9/11 events and the riots that broke in 2001 following the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

#### **4. Neo-Monocultural model of Multiculturalism**

Following the riots of 2001 in the cities of Burnely, Oldham, and Bradford, the Labour Government proceeded to investigations. Two reports were established by Cante and Denham<sup>16</sup> in 2001. Both reports offered a new national policy priority and community cohesion. The report offered by Ted Cante, former chief Executive of Nottingham city council, and head of the Community Cohesion Review Team, came to review national policy approaches and priorities concerning diversity.

The Community Cohesion Review Team views community cohesion requires that there is a shared sense of belonging based on common goals and care social values, respect for difference, (ethnic, cultural and religious) and acceptance of the reciprocal rights and obligations of community members working together for common good.

The head of Community Cohesion Review Team believes that Muslims have many things that make them different from other communities and most importantly adopt the values of the British white. Cante argues that people, if necessary, have to lay aside some of their cultural preferences. He also notes that some old policies were responsible for the self-segregation of some ethnic minorities. Policies of education, housing and unemployment were responsible for the marginalization of a large proportion of United Kingdom's population.

To overcome these barriers and bring these communities to the mainstream of British society, Cante suggested the promotion of cross-cultural contact between different communities at all levels, foster understanding and respect, and break down barriers.

The Community Cohesion project was implemented in the wake of the London's bombings in 2005. After the establishment of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion which was responsible for the implementation of Community Cohesion. The Commission warned of the dangers of white alienation from policies of multiculturalism that seem to ignore them.



## **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

---

The Labour Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone<sup>17</sup> made serious contributions to promote multiculturalism in 2001. His multicultural agenda included the promotion of cross-understanding through the promotion of ethnic projects such as the Notting hill carnival and Chinese New Year.

The challenges set by the events of 9/11 in the United States of America and the rise of World coalition against terrorism created a climate of fear among all the ethnic minorities around the United Kingdom. Muslims suffered injustices due to the origins of the terrorists who attacked the United States of America. The 9/11 events also marked the appearance of new form of racism, Islamophobia. The western media focused too much on the religious identity of the criminals who attacked the United States of America. They also put many arguments forward to provide a fearful image of Islam as a religion that incites its followers to fight and kill the unbelievers.

The places of worships were the targets of the police. The Dudley Central Mosque was a scene for the police intervention. During a police raid, a sum of money was seized and mistakenly believed to be funds for terrorist's activity. Four months later, all the charges were dropped and the money returned back. The Imams were questioned vigourously about the Taliban and Al-Qaida after the 9/11<sup>18</sup>.

The implementation of community cohesion, which is considered as the beginning of neo-monoculturalism<sup>19</sup>, went unfortunately with the London's bombings in 2005. Again the suicide bombers were of Muslim origins<sup>20</sup>. They committed their crime against the innocents who were using the tube underground and a bus.

The religious identity of the suicide bombers was the focus of British mass media. The four suicide bombers were Muslims. Three of them were of South Asian origins and the fourth one was of Caribbean origin, newly converted to Islam. The mass media were not alone for their demands to strike terrorists and eradicate fundamentalism in the United Kingdom

but Nationalists, represented by the activists or the militants of the British National Party.

## **5. Conclusion**

The emergence of the plural mono-cultural model of governance or Laissez faire multiculturalism has given more recognition to ethnic minority groups in matters of religions, languages, values, and daily practices such as traditions that have their origins in immigrants' homelands. However, this model of governance has been highly criticised by its opponents who believed that it has led to the establishment of parallel lives in many English cities such as Bradford, Burnely, and Oldham.

Of equal importance, ethnic minority groups have alienated themselves from the entire main stream society and expressed complete solidarity with Muslims all over the world over several issues such as the Rushedi affair and the War on Iraq. These attitudes were considered by the media and politicians of the mainstream as a form of rebel and non respect of the values of liberal democracy and human rights.

By the early twenty first century, the Labour government turned to community cohesion project which is considered by some writers as a shift from Laissez faire multiculturalism to Neo- monoculturalism. The purpose beyond the implementation of community cohesion is to bring both the ethnic minority groups and the mainstream population together and avoid tensions. Unfortunately, the project of community cohesion faced several problems and events that have decreased people's motivation towards cohesion between ethnic minority groups and the mainstream population. The terrorist attacks of the 9/11 in the United States and the London Bombings in 2005 marked the end of tolerance in many western liberal states because the perpetrators were of Muslim origins. The terrorist attacks also marked a new era for the Muslims in the United Kingdom.

Despite the funds that have been allocated to ethnic minority groups to encourage them to integrate into the mainstream society, both the Mono-plural and the Neo-Mono multiculturalisms have been failed due to the old practices of previous governments who were unable to protect ethnic

## **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

---

religions such as Islam from authors such as Saleman Rushedi in 1989. Governments have also failed to combat racism, mainly, Islamophobia which led many Muslims to feel insecure and prefer to stay away from mainstream society.

### **Notes:**

1- According to Dan Pfeffer, assimilation is a process whereby the newcomer has to conform at least in part to the existing traditions, attitudes and laws of the host country. Dan Pfeffer, 2015, *Group Integration and Multiculturalism, Theory, Policy, and Practice*, Palgrave MacMillan, United Kingdom, p.48.

2- The word ethnic identities refer to the different identities of immigrants who settled in the post World War Two. Ethnic identity includes the key elements such as religion, language and traditions practiced by the members of the ethnic community.

3- Fleras Augie, 2009, *The Politics of Multiculturalism, Multicultural Governance in Comparative Perspective*, Palgrave Mac Millan, United States, p.171.

4- Bleich, Erik, 2003, *Race Politics in Britain and France ? Ideas and Policy Making Since 1960s*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, p.58.

5- Ibid, p.72.

6- Bleich, Erik, Ibid, p.93.

7- Augie Fleras, p.174.

8- Augie Fleras believes that it is possible to govern many cultures if differences are taken seriously in account including the creation of parallel institutions and separate communities. p.16.

9- Augie, Fleras, p.171 the Corporate or plural multiculturalism.

10- Margaret Hilda Roberts was born on October 13th, 1925 in Grantham, Lincolnshire. Her father was a grocer, local politician and laid Methodist. He was also involved in Grantham politics. Margaret was deeply affected by her father's conservative social and fiscal views. Margaret graduated from Oxford with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry in 1947. In the years between 1965 and 1970, Margaret held many numerous key positions while the Tories were in opposition. She became the first female Prime minister in 1979. She resigned from the office of Prime Minister in 1990 after being in power for eleven years and 208 days. Margaret Thatcher died in 2012

at the age of 87 years. She is the author of two bestselling books; *The Downing Street Years* in 1993 and *The Path to Power*. Alan Feiler, *Iron and Mettle*, Margaret Thatcher boldly Streerd her Nation on a New Course,

[https://www.dixonvalve.com1371126880Iron\\_and\\_Mettle.pdf](https://www.dixonvalve.com1371126880Iron_and_Mettle.pdf) Alan Feiler, summer 2013.

11- Jeremy Black, 2004, *Britain Since the Seventies, Politics and Society in the Consumer Age*, Reaction Books Ltd, London, p.135.

12- Sally Tomlinson, 2008, *Race and Education Policy and Politics in Britain*, Mc Graw- Hill, Open University, England, p.118.

13- John Rex and Gurharpal Singh, 2004, *Governance in Multicultural Societies*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England, p.38.

14- Sir William Mc Pherson led the public inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The inquiry was published in February 1999, and became known as the MacPherson report. Guy Smith, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/london/7906641.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/7906641.stm) mardi, 24 février 2009.

15- Fatimah, Awan, 2007, *Young People, Identity and the Media*, unpublished thesis [www.artlab.org/Fatimah-Awan-phd.html](http://www.artlab.org/Fatimah-Awan-phd.html), p.1

16- John Denham held the position of secretary of state for communities and local government. Later he chaired the Home Affairs Select Committee from 2003 to 2007. John Denham <https://www.winchester.ac.uk-profiles/denham.php>

17- Maverick Ken Livingstone was the leader of the then regional government, the Great London Council in 1981. He became the first Mayor of London when this office was created in 2000. Jonathan Fryer, *How Successful a multicultural Model?* Dialogue Society, Great Britain, 2012, p.289.

18- Arun, Kundnani, 2007, *The End of Tolerance, Racism in 21st Century Britain*, Pluto Press, The United Kingdom. p.165.

19- Neo-Mon culturalism is based on the belief that Britain is home to many cultures provided that people's differences do not impede attainment of community cohesion, and common values. The Neo Multiculturalism makes both immigrants and the white indigenous population responsible for the promotion of cohesion and the reduction of inequality. Augie Fleras, p.182.

20- The first three suicide bombers were Muslims of Pakistani origins. They were as follows; Hassib Hussain 19 years old, Shezad Tanweer,

## **The State of Multiculturalism in the United Kingdom in the Late Twentieth and the Early Twenty First Centuries**

---

22 years old, and Mohammed Sadiq Khan 30years old. The fourth suicide bomber was Muslim of Jamaican origin of 19 years old. His name is Germain Lindsay. Glen.M.Segell, *Terrorism/ London Public Transport*, July 7th, 2005, Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 8, (August 2005), p.3.

### **Bibliography**

- Arun, Kundnani, (2007), *The End of Tolerance*, Racism in 21st Century Britain, Pluto Press, The United Kingdom.
- Bleich, Erik, (2003), *Race Politics in Britain and France? Ideas and Policy Making Since 1960s*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom.
- Dan Pfeffer, (2015), *Group Integration and Multiculturalism, Theory, Policy, and Practice*, Palgrave MacMillan, United Kingdom.
- Fatimah, Awan, (2007), *Young People, Identity and the Media*, Thèse en Sciences Humaines, United Kingdom.
- Fleras Augie, (2009), *The Politics of Multiculturalism, Multicultural Governance in Comparative Perspective*, Palgrave Mac Millan, United States
- Jeremy Black, (2004), *Britain Since the Seventies, Politics and Society in the Consumer Age*, Reaction Books Ltd, London,
- John Rex and Gurharpal Singh, (2004), *Governance in Multicultural Societies*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England,
- Sally Tomlinson, (2008), *Race and Education Policy and Politics in Britain*, Mc Graw- Hill, Open University, England
- Glen.M.Segell, *Terrorism/ London Public Transport*, July 7th, 2005, Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 8, (August 2005).
- Jonathan Fryer, *How Successful a multicultural Model? Dialogue Society*, Great Britain, 2012,
- [https://www.dixonvalve.com1371126880Iron\\_and\\_Mettle.pdf](https://www.dixonvalve.com1371126880Iron_and_Mettle.pdf) Alan Feiler
- John Denham <https://www.winchester.ac.uk-profiles/denham.php>
- Guy Smith  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/england/london/7906641.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/london/7906641.stm)  
mardi, 24 février 2009.