

The Baring Foundation

# Interculturalism: Theory and Policy

Malcolm James

## About the Baring Foundation

The Baring Foundation was set up in 1969 to give money to voluntary organisations. Our purpose is to improve the quality of life of people suffering disadvantage and discrimination.

Since 1969 the Foundation has awarded over £90 million in grants. In 2008 we will award around £2.7 million. This will largely be through three grants programmes: Strengthening the Voluntary Sector; Arts; and International Development.

From time to time, the Foundation chooses to work on a Special Initiative outside our main grant programmes. This report lays out some of the influences behind our Interculturality Special Initiative which starts work this year.

## About the Author

Malcolm James works as a research consultant in the areas of 'race', youth and multicultural society. He is also undertaking post-graduate research on youth space and multiculturalism at Department of Sociology, London School of Economics and Political Science. The author previously managed and conducted research for The Runnymede Trust and Community Development Foundation. Prior to this he worked in Central America as a youth and community development worker.

# Foreword

When the Baring Foundation embarked upon an exploration of interculturalism last year, the Trustees were conscious that it was a subject of central importance in the construction and maintenance of civil society. They were also acutely aware that not only had it been raised before by others in different settings but that it remained a controversial and contested matter.

The round-table consultations that subsequently took place bore this out. But they also confirmed that in providing a critique of multiculturalism, interculturalism moved the debate forward. Its key features were openness and dialogue. It was about a gentle but firm obligation placed on all of us to engage in an active negotiation of meaning across assumed cultural boundaries.

But the Trustees also believed that the context had to be right before a productive conversation about interculturalism could take place. This meant that without the elimination of discrimination, the removal of historical disadvantage, the according of respect in the public and private sphere and the right to self-determination, any attempt at intercultural dialogue would remain at best aspirational.

In response to the roundtables, Trustees decided to do two things immediately to support a better understanding of interculturalism. First, they wanted to identify, examine and showcase those practical projects where interculturalism was consciously or unconsciously present. Second, they required a succinct analysis of the theoretical frameworks of leading thinkers in this field.

The first of these objectives has been tackled by commissioning the Institute for Community Cohesion to run awards for interculturality in action at the grassroots level.

This paper by Malcolm James meets the second of these requirements and does so with great clarity and precision. I commend it to you.

**Ranjit Sondhi, CBE**  
**Baring Foundation Trustee**

# Introduction

In 2006/7 the Baring Foundation held a number of discussions to explore the idea of interculturalism.<sup>1</sup> This paper builds upon these enquiries. It looks at how interculturalism has been developed in UK and European policy and asks how leading insights on intercultural society might be used to develop a more multifaceted notion of interculturalism.

Despite the relative lack of press attention interculturalism is not a new notion. The US business case for intercultural communication can be traced back to 1959 when anthropologist Edward T Hall published *The Silent Language* (1973). European perspectives on interculturalism date from French and Dutch responses to multi-culturalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Interculturalism was also the Quebecois alternative to English-Canadian multi-culturalism. These diverse traditions have different roots and applications all of which point to the fact that the discussion on interculturalism is well underway.

In all uses, the key feature of interculturalism is its sense of openness, dialogue and interaction. This understanding of interculturalism has been central to Comedia's work on the *Intercultural City*.<sup>2</sup> To quote Wood, Landry and Bloomfield, three of the authors from the project, interculturalism "requires openness as a prerequisite and, while openness in itself is not the guarantee of interculturalism, it provides the setting for interculturalism to develop" (2006, p.7).

Taking as a point of departure the notion of openness, this paper first discusses how intercultural policy in the UK and Europe has been applied. Second, the paper looks at analysis and criticisms of these policies. The third section reviews some of the leading thinking behind the study of interculturalism. The purpose of this section is to respond to the first two sections and to look how the debate on interculturalism is developing. The final section draws together the central tenets of each author's argument and suggests some important considerations for interculturalism.

<sup>1</sup> As a result of these discussions the Baring Foundation agreed to employ the following working definition:

*Interculturality is a dynamic process whereby people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other's cultures. Over time this may lead to cultural change. It recognises the inequalities at work in society and the need to overcome these. It is a process which requires mutual respect and acknowledges human rights.*

<sup>2</sup> For more information please see [www.interculturalcity.com/home.htm](http://www.interculturalcity.com/home.htm)

## 1. Interculturalism in UK and Europe

The discourse of interculturalism in the UK and Europe is becoming ever more convergent. From the late 1990s, European interculturalism centred on encouraging dialogue between different cultural groups to reduce prejudice. This was largely understood in the context of defined minority groups entering into contact with homogenous majority or national groups (Laflèche 2007, p.1). Today, the European Commission still largely understands interculturalism to be about dialogue between different cultural groups proposing that this type of dialogue will enable European citizens to acquire “the knowledge and aptitudes to enable them to deal with a more open and more complex environment” (European Commission 2007). This is stated as the first aim of the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

As stated, there are many similarities between these European ideals and the post-2001<sup>3</sup> UK model for interculturalism based on the idea of ‘contact’: the premise that intergroup contact reduces prejudice and improves intercultural dialogue and communication. This version of UK interculturalism is evidenced in two key policy documents.

The first document, the Cantle report (Home Office 2001), placed significant emphasis on the need for greater contact between different cultural groups. One central aim of the report was: “to promote community cohesion, based upon a greater knowledge of, contact between, and respect for, the various cultures that now make Great Britain such a rich and diverse nation” (Home Office 2001, p.10). The Cantle Report also points to the lack of “cross-cultural contact” (ibid.) as a contributory factor to the disturbances of that year.

Six years on from the Cantle Report, *Our Shared Future*, the final report from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), presented much of the same analysis and vision for interculturalism in Britain, again expressed in terms of contact and meaningful dialogue (2007, p.110).

## 2. Criticisms of UK and European intercultural policy

These versions of UK and European interculturalism are not without their critics. Perhaps the most common criticism levelled is that by emphasising intercultural contact, communication or surface level dialogue, structural issues of racism, poverty and power cannot be addressed (Laflèche 2007, p.3). Connolly takes this one step further by arguing that the very attraction for government and policy makers of this kind of surface interaction is that by concentrating on immediate interpersonal and intergroup dialogue, social divisions can be put down to the

lack of desire of individuals to interact (2000, p.170). In this same way, poverty, unemployment, educational underachievement, poor housing, crime and violence can be put down to the consequences of dysfunctional cultural groups (Alexander 2005, p.202) rather than the political, social and economic processes that constitute social divisions. This way of thinking about interculturalism potentially means that the government need not address the structural issues that cause social divisions and can instead blame problematic cultural, ethnic or religious groups for parallel lives and urban unrest.

The interculturalism-as-surface-level-dialogue approach has also been criticised from a community development perspective. Gilchrist has argued persuasively that "simply encouraging people from different groups to undertake joint activities [of the kind suggested by UK and European versions of interculturalism]... may not necessarily tackle real and perceived inequalities in the quality of life" (2004, p.13) but instead offers temporary displacements where longer term and complex mechanisms are needed and required (ibid.).

### **3. A review of current thinking on interculturalism**

Outside of policy circles, the debate on interculturalism has also generated a wealth of academic commentary. Among the most influential figures in this debate are Bhikhu Parekh, Paul Gilroy, Avtar Brah, Amartya Sen and Miles Hewstone. This section looks at each of these figures in turn and presents their arguments in their own words. As will be seen, each author draws on different academic traditions and influences and consequently uses different language. Although this is largely not the language of interculturalism as understood in popular discourse their ideas are directly relevant to notions of interculturalism. By returning to the central strands of the argument, the conclusion clarifies the direct relevance of the authors' arguments to the public debate.

#### **3.1 Bhikhu Parekh – interactive multiculturalism**

Parekh's main contribution to this debate is his understanding of pluralism; what he also calls 'interactive multiculturalism' (2007b, p.46). Importantly, Parekh does not understand this version of multiculturalism as ghettoisation but as a dialogue between communities and individuals where each sees the value of opening up and learning from the other (2007b, p.46-47). Central to Parekh's understanding is: "the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the internal plurality of each culture" (2006, p.338).

<sup>3</sup> 2001 was significant because of the attacks on New York and northern disturbances in the UK.

Against the backdrop of discussions over the opposed merits of individualism and communal versions of the good life, Parekh holds that both individuals and communities are important in society. To those who worry that community identities are both static and inward looking, Parekh provides evidence of heterogeneity and fluidity caused by how we “negotiate [and] relate to each other all the time” (2007b, p.54).

However, Parekh, as with Sen (below), notes that all encompassing, closed identities, including strong community identities, can be potentially problematic and compromise reason (Parekh 2007a). All other things being equal, there is more to be said for a culturally open and diverse way of life than there is for a culturally self-contained existence (Parekh 2006, p.172; Parekh 2007c, p.134). However, Parekh does not argue that people must participate in openness and dialogue because people are also entitled to potentially closed ways of living. To demand otherwise would be oppressive. As such, any impetus for openness is better generated from within rather than imposed from the outside (2006, p.337).

For Parekh, a critical appreciation of culture is an important feature of our daily lives. Culture is an important negotiated influence in our lives. Our world is culturally structured and people are deeply shaped by culture. However, this does not mean that people cannot “critically evaluate its beliefs and practices and understand and sympathise with others...” (Parekh 2006, p.336).

Parekh locates interactive multiculturalism in relation to the state. Parekh champions the importance of the state and has criticised Gilroy (below) for negating its importance in his version of cosmopolitanism (Parekh 2004, p.32). However, Parekh does not think that state institutions are perfect, far from it. Parekh simply maintains that people arriving in the UK should accept the legitimacy of the state in the first instance whilst withholding the right to challenge it in the long run if they later disagree with what it stands for (2007b, p.49). In the same way, he also upholds that there are certain norms and basic values that people should start by accepting when they come to live in the UK (2007b, p.50) before deciding if they should later challenge them or not. Such values might include a broad but critical appreciation of liberty, human rights and equalities.

These concrete workings of interculturalism form the basis of many of Parekh’s arguments. He is not interested in abstract notions of integration and cohesion that can mean anything to anyone. He is instead interested in the kind of questions – Is that hedge too high? Is that skirt too short? – that people can sit down and discuss. He is interested in places where this kind of dialogue can happen (2007a) across cultural playing fields (2007b, p51).

For Parekh, this dialogue and discussion of plural values is the basis for a successful multicultural society. A successful multicultural society cannot be built on the commitment to any single ethnic or cultural project or on the adherence to one particular set of substantive values. Multicultural society is too diverse for this. Rather, common belonging among citizens is built on a commitment to political community and to the dialogue, reciprocity and recognition that that entails (2006, p.342). A successful multicultural society values its members by reflecting their diversity in its structures, institutions and policies. This avoids the situation where people can be fully citizens but yet still feel that they are outsiders (2006, p.342).

Parekh concedes that this kind of dialogue requires certain conditions. Participants in the dialogue should enjoy a broad equality “of self-confidence, economic and political power and access to public space” (2006, p.337). In this sense interculturalism is dependent upon wider notions of redistribution and is not itself a panacea (2007a).

### **3.2 Paul Gilroy– post colonial melancholia and convivial culture**

Gilroy’s most recent contribution to the debate on intercultural society has centred around two pivotal notions. One has been the centrality of ‘race’ and racism in post-colonial culture and, the other, linked to the first has been the interplay between what Gilroy describes as ‘post-colonial melancholia’ – a pathological burden borne by colonial and imperial masters (2004, p.57) and ‘convivial culture’ – “ordinary experiences of contact, cooperation and conflict across the supposedly impermeable boundaries of race, culture, identity and ethnicity” (2004, p.viii). These ideas are discussed in the context of ‘planetary’ relations. For Gilroy intercultural exchange in the UK cannot be viewed apart of global population movements and global communication.

Challenging racism is central to Gilroy’s concept of humanism and cosmopolitanism (2004, p.4). Gilroy explores “race” not because he wishes to engage with “race” or with racial conflicts or to make these categorisations more salient and self-evident but because he wishes to confront racisms – racialised discourses and ideologies which produce the social and political orders of “race” (2004, p.9, 16). By doing this Gilroy’s aim is to move beyond “race” and in the words of Fanon disalienate racialised bodies and restore them to “proper human modes of being in the world” (Fanon cited in Gilroy 2004, p.45).

In order to unmake racial difference, the “historical analysis of [global] racial hierarchy” (2004, p.167) is essential. Unmaking racial difference means challenging the reasons why immigrant populations can be bundled into boxes and assigned with negative properties such as ‘evil’, ‘alien’ or ‘foe’ while the invaded seemingly homogenous national population is deemed to ‘virtuous’

(2004, p.21, 27). Unmaking racial difference is essential both to free the national population and allow it to look beyond its borders, that is, to relieve it of its post colonial, melancholic burden, and to restore the vilified to an equal footing in humanity.

Gilroy argues that the potential to think towards planetary humanism beyond the limited and constrained categories of 'race', ethnicity and nationality is hampered by the dominant philosophy whereby categories and classifications are routinely created for people and society (2004, p.5). Gilroy challenges what these categories are, how, and for whom, they are made. Reflecting on recent events, Gilroy notes that the acceptance of this philosophy of categorisation meant that after 9/11 and 7/7 any affiliation to fundamentalist Islam was not an act of will or choice but the result of fixed cultural, biological and genetic characteristics. In other words, being a Muslim or South Asian was synonymous with being a terrorist. This in turn was blamed on lax immigration controls (2004, p.134). These same logics were applied to the Bradford disturbances in the summer of 2001 where paradoxically young Asian men were alien because they rioted and rioted because they were alien (2004, p.134).

Gilroy's solution is to rethink these simple categorisations that have been linked to identity and belonging in order to reflect real life complexities and processes and to frustrate attempts of those powerful people who benefit from absolute identities, ethnic, religious, national or otherwise (2004, p.6).

Gilroy states the benefits of global solidarity or 'planetary humanism'. Gilroy's notion of planetary humanism means an element of estrangement from your own culture (2004, p.75) in which you break the ties to culture as property (2004, p.79). This tempered disloyalty to our culture allows us to interact with others formed elsewhere (ibid.). Gilroy already sees much evidence of this human solidarity in everyday life but he also sees that its existence is hidden from us. What we are commonly presented with is two gloomy options, Gilroy states: one, that everybody must become 'western'; the other, rampant individualism (2004, p.71). These presented choices contradict the real cosmopolitanism that is actually so common to postcolonial life where social relations and technological changes have brought the planet closer together (2004, p.80). Gilroy cites examples of humanitarian solidarity where people from different countries are prepared to become human shields for people they are led to believe they have little in common with. This kind of action challenges the narcissism of minor differences that is so prevalent to the thinking behind postcolonial melancholia (2004, p.88).

Although Gilroy's cosmopolitanism is planetary, he is also keen to highlight the successes of the UK's urban multiculturalism and its important role in making a

remaking everyday life. Gilroy refers to these “ordinary experiences of contact, cooperation and conflict across the supposedly impermeable boundaries of race, culture, identity and ethnicity” (2004, p.viii) as ‘convivial culture’. Gilroy points out that in convivial urban life “racial difference is not feared. Exposure to it is not ethnic jeopardy but rather an unremarkable principle of metropolitan life. Race is essentially insignificant” in comparison to the other challenges of navigating urban spaces (2004, p.105). Gilroy’s final point is that if we are to progress from where multiculturalism has broken down we need to make sense of the gains made through these ordinary and unruly interactions (2004, p.x).

### **3.3 Avtar Brah – diaspora space and identity**

Arguably Brah’s most important contribution to ideas on interculturalism comes from her work on diaspora space and identity. In a time of global population movements Brah’s conceptualisation of diaspora space marked an important step forward in understanding how and where identity and difference are made and remade.

In her acclaimed book *Cartographies of diaspora* (1996) Brah’s uses cartographic metaphors to discuss the social, psychological and geographical aspects of ‘diaspora space’. To understand Brah’s concept of diaspora space it is first necessary to understand how Brah interprets the term ‘diaspora’.

For Brah, diasporas disperse from a centre or ‘home’ (for example, Ireland, India or Costa Rica) and emanate in multiple directions crossing physical borders. In doing this diasporas also cross social, conceptual and psychological borders (1996, p.181). The location of all these dynamics is the diaspora space.

Brah uses the idea of location in its widest sense. It is not fixed but formed by the everyday politics of power. Within these locations, power relationships are politically negotiated and renegotiated. This means that diaspora space is always remaking and resituating.<sup>4</sup>

Within diaspora space there are certain orders of oppression and identification that can be defined by class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, age, etc. It should be noted that although these are orders they are not fixed and are also open to renegotiation. This means, for example, that even though there is an order of institutional racism in the UK this order is neither permanent nor will it always take the same form.

Through her conceptualisation of diaspora space Brah breaks away from misguided and hierarchical understandings of ‘us’ and ‘them’. This allows Brah to reinterpret dominant interpretations of immigration. Brah does not see Britons as

<sup>4</sup> Many parallels can be drawn here with Derrida’s notion of difference (Derrida 2000).

a homogenous entity (an 'us') that needs to defend its social, cultural and economic space from invasion by the migrant 'them'. Instead, Brah stresses that diaspora space is not only inhabited and made by migrant groups and their decedents but also by those who are portrayed to be indigenous (1996, p.209). "The diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native*" (1996, p.209 original italics).

Brah explains that Englishness was actually formed politically, culturally, territorially, economically and psychologically through internal colonialism of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, through relations with European counties and through more recent global migration (1996, p.209).

As with Gilroy (above) and Sen (below) Brah's appreciation of identity formation counters the predominant trends to classify and construct typologies of difference – Western, Islam, Black, White, Gay, Straight, Developed, Developing. She sees the potential for mischief in these ruses of power (2007, p.137.) and perceives the need to challenge them. For example, Brah asserts that racism and homophobia are unacceptable and must be countered through networks of solidarity (Brah 2007, p. 138).

For Brah there is no fixity in identity or difference. Identity and difference are constantly made and remade with reference to their historical contexts. Like Sen (below) Brah points out that any one person may present different aspects of her/his identity. It may be relevant that you are a Sikh or that you are an Indian. Equally, a shared experience of growing up in Britain may be particularly salient in a given situation (2007, p.144). Importantly however, Brah takes this argument further than Sen. Brah does not think that people simply have multiple identities. This would be to replace a limited single identity with limited multiple identities. The point is that identity is a process not a fixed category or categories (2007, p.145).

### **3.4 Amartya Sen – identity and freedom**

Sen's most recent contribution to the debate on interculturalism is presented in *Identity and Violence* (2006). In this book, he outlines his current ideas on identity and multicultural society. Sen's contribution is based on a philosophical discussion of choice and freedom in determining identity. His aim is to challenge "the appalling affects of the miniaturisation of people" (2006, p.xvi) that occurs through the classification and categorisation of humanity.

Sen criticises these limiting systems which assume 'singular affiliation' (2006, p.23) to a particular identity be it national, ethnic, religious or otherwise. Sen develops his argument through a discussion of liberal individualism and communitarianism. Through this discussion he acknowledges the importance of group identity and

lambastes theories of rampant individualism. However, he also criticises communitarianism for valuing community identity over individual identity (1999; 2006, p32-36). Sen feels, that by advocating the predominance of community identity, communitarians overlooks other affiliations such as language, class, social relations, political views, and civil roles (2006, p.160). Putting people in boxes in this way or representing society as a federation of communities can create sectarian extremism and deny people the capacity to interact with each other as citizens (2006, p.164).

For Sen, systems of classification for civilisations, religious, national, ethnic or racial groups (2006, p.xiii, 103) used by cultural theorists “who partition the people of the world into little boxes of disparate civilisations” (2006, p.4) “present astonishingly limited and bleak understandings of the characteristics of the human beings involved” (2006, p.103). They ignore the internal diversity of groups and the history in which human relationships have developed (2006, p.43).

By only allowing conflicts to be resolved through challenging single identities i.e. in rejecting the absurd generalisation that Muslims are terrorists by emphasising equally absurdly that all Muslims are peaceful, people continue to be bound by inaccurate stereotypes and are denied alternative forms of association such as shared civil identity (2006, p.42).

Sen reserves particular stern condemnation for Samuel Huntington’s book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997). In his book Huntington argues that the post-Cold War will be marked by cultural confrontations as oppose ideological confrontations. More specifically, he argues that clashes are likely to occur between eight civilisations which he defines as Western, Latin American, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist and Japanese with African as a possible ninth. For Huntington this theory explains recent Western aggression against the Islamic world and China.

Sen demonstrates how the categories Huntington creates are spurious, grandiose and are far from “ordinary and mundane” real life situations (2006, p.43). Sen asks: “are we actually watching a grand clash of civilizations or something much more ordinary which merely looks like a civilisational clash to determined seekers of depth and profundity” (2006, p.44).

His argument is that the intellectual systems which create these categories “savagely challenge shared humanity” (2006 p.xiii) and nurture violence (2006 p.xiv-xv). He also points out that such fixed notions of identity have often been used tyrannically by those with power to create prejudice against a group for political ends. Sen cites the example of Winston Churchill using the stereotype

that Indians “breed like rabbits” to explain the Bengal famine of 1943 (2006, p.106).

Sen’s solution to these ills is formulated through his ideas on choice, freedom and a shared civil identity: “the point at issue is not whether *any* identity whatever can be chosen (that would be an absurd claim) but whether we do indeed have choices over alternative identities or combinations of identities, and perhaps more importantly, substantial freedom regarding what *priority* to give to the various identities we may simultaneously have” (2006, p.38 original italics). As with other choices people should be free to decide to what extent they want to be labeled as a particular identity (French, Jewish, Arab, Muslim, etc) or to what extent they want to opt for other choices such as a shared civil identity.

### **3.5 Miles Hewstone – the contact hypothesis**

Unlike the social theorists and philosophers that have been presented above, the contact hypothesis, now notably referred to as contact theory, comes from a social psychological root. The contact hypothesis was originally developed by Gordon Allport in 1954 (Allport, 1954). Allport asserted that intergroup prejudice could be reduced by bringing together members of different groups to work towards common goals on an equal footing. The theory has largely been brought to prominence in the UK by the work of Miles Hewstone and colleagues who since 1994 have been developing the idea of contact theory in Northern Ireland to determine what conditions reduce prejudice between Catholics and Protestants (Hewstone et al 2007).

In moving from hypothesis to theory, Hewstone (2003, p.352) asserts that there is now the evidence to affirm that contact between groups does promote more positive, or less negative, attitudes towards the ‘other’. Hewstone also contends that contact can also make the outgroup (the ‘other’) seem less homogenous and can increase forgiveness. To counter his critics he states that there is evidence to suggest that the positive affects of contact continue to occur once the participants are outside the research setting (ibid.).

Hewstone states that the mechanism that most reduces prejudice is when lasting friendships are formed (Hewstone et al 2007, p.103). This is more important than cooperating together or learning about the other group. Hamilton and Hewstone (2007) point to studies on Hindus and Muslim in Bangladesh (Islam and Hewstone 1993 cited in Hamilton and Hewstone 2007, p.97) and Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland (Paolini et al 2004 cited in Hamilton and Hewstone 2007, p.97) which show that having friends from different groups resulted in reduced prejudice to those in the outgroup (members of a different religious group in these cases).

Another important method in reducing intergroup conflict is to promote the generalisation of the outgroup. That is, to portray the 'other' as sharing characteristics and of being a wholly constituted entity. This means that as people overcome their prejudices to individual group members they associate these new understandings with the wider group as a whole (Hewstone 2003, p.353). Hewstone (ibid.) notes that this is a potentially dangerous tool as it risks reinforcing in-group anxiety.

According to Hewstone, the type of contact and the conditions under which it occurs are all important. Contact most reduces prejudice when conditions are 'optimal' (Allport 1954 p.489). Indeed, where conditions are not optimal, for example where there is a high sense of anxiety or threat, contact can increase prejudice (Hewstone 2003, p.353). Optimal conditions are: where members of the two groups are brought together under conditions of equal status; where there is intergroup cooperation; where participants can get to know each other properly; and, where wider social norms support equality (Hewstone 2003, p.352).

## 4. Conclusions

The five authors presented above make diverse contributions to a wider understanding of interculturalism. Drawing on their different disciplines it is possible to underline key areas of agreement but also important distinctions. The purpose of this conclusion is to bring together their ideas and language to a central and perhaps more common understanding of interculturalism. In so doing it is possible to suggest a way forward for intercultural policy.

### 4.1 UK interculturalism in a global context

Brah and Gilroy both situate UK interculturalism in its global (or planetary) context and point to the effect of international markets, communications and migration on British multicultural society. Gilroy is specifically concerned with the way Britain's colonial relations and imperial ambitions have shaped and shape the national psyche and underwritten current discrimination. He also locates UK interculturalism globally through his discussion of planetary humanism and solidarity.

The global context of UK interculturalism is also central to Brah's thesis on diaspora space. Crossing borders socially, physically and psychologically and dislocation from places called 'home' are central to her understanding of the way that identity and difference is located, made and remade in contemporary Britain.

In a time of global movements both authors argue that it is not possible to take an isolationist or wholly national view of interculturalism. Britain as a national

space is formed through and made by global connections and interactions both within and outside its borders. A global appreciation of interculturalism implies both understanding and challenging oppressive global hierarchies and moving away from believing that national space belongs to or is more legitimately defined by any one perceived group.

#### **4.2 Un-fixed identities – from classification to process**

Brah, Gilroy, Parekh and Sen agree on the dehumanising affect that classification has on people and groups. All argue that identity cannot be contained in boxes and point to the abuses of power that are often associated with fixed identity categories. Brah, Parekh and Sen argue that identity is multifaceted and Brah and Parekh go further to state that identity is about unruly processes of formation and reformation rather than simply a shopping list of multiple identities.

Brah, Gilroy, Parekh and Sen also discuss a number of other problems associated with fixed or closed identities. Parekh and Sen acknowledge that closed identities can compromise reason and freedom by limiting the potential for thinking and living outside a cultural sphere. Parekh adds an important addendum to these compelling arguments for openness by reminding us that although intercultural dialogue is desirable openness and dialogue should not be enforced on those that wish to pursue a traditional or closed life.

The central point is firstly that identity is a lived, multifaceted and un-fixed process and secondly that it must be thought of in these terms. If we cannot think of identity processes beyond a fixed system of categories then we will be unable to understand and benefit from how intercultural society is formed and negotiated on a day-to-day basis.

#### **4.3 Structural inequalities and discrimination**

Interculturalism requires that structural inequalities, unequal power relations and discrimination be addressed. These points are stressed by all authors. Hewstone stresses that successful intergroup contact depends on a social context that supports equality. Parekh also notes that if members of a political community are to engage in society, the conditions must exist whereby they can participate equally. Gilroy states that until racism and wider discrimination are confronted those discriminated against and those discriminating will not be able to restore themselves to full humanity.

The authors widely concur that interculturalism requires the redistribution of political and economic power and the eradication of racism and all other forms of discrimination. If people do not have the self-confidence, economic or political power, or if they are discriminated against because of their ethnicity, culture,

gender, sexuality or religion then they are unlikely to be able to participate on equal terms in an intercultural society.

#### **4.4 Spaces of and for interculturalism**

Interculturalism requires spaces for interaction and dialogue. This point is stressed by both Hewstone and Parekh. Hewstone talks about intercultural dialogue in terms of 'contact'. He points to the need for places and spaces for different groups to come together, cooperate, build lasting friendships and reduce prejudices. Parekh's stresses the importance of spaces for intercultural dialogue but sees these spaces as transformative components of a highly participative and plural democracy. Gilroy also sees the value of intercultural spaces, though his emphasis on informality reminds us that through creating spaces *for* interculturalism it is possible to stifle sites *of* interculturalism by subjecting them to the categorisations which they resist and which form the basis of their creativity.

Intercultural spaces for intercultural dialogue can be both valuable and potentially transformative if the right conditions exist. However, we must also recognise that intercultural spaces already exist and their importance should not be underestimated or jeopardised.

## References

Alexander, C., 2005. Embodying violence: 'riots' dis/orders and the private lives of 'the Asian gang'. In: C. Alexander and C. Knowles, eds. *Making race matter: bodies, space and identity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 199-217.

Allport, G.W., 1954. *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley.

Brah, A., 2007. Non-binarized identities of similarity and difference. In: M. Wetherell, M. Laflèche and R. Berkeley, eds. *Identity, ethnic diversity and community cohesion*. London: Sage, 136-145.

Brah, A., 1996. *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*. London: Routledge.

Connolly, P., 2000. What now for the contact hypothesis? Towards a new research agenda. *Race, ethnicity and education*, 3 (2), 169-194.

Derrida, J., 2000. Différance. In: P. du Gay, J. Evans and P Redman, eds. *Identity: a reader*. London: Sage, 87-93.

Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007. *Our shared future*. Wetherby: Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

European Commission. 2007. *2008, European year of intercultural dialogue* [online]. European Commission. Available from: <http://ec.europa.eu/culture> [Accessed 21 September 2007].

Gilchrist, A., 2004. *Community development or community cohesion: bridges or barricades*. London: Community Development Foundation in association with The Runnymede Trust.

Gilroy, P., 2004. *After empire: melancholia or convivial culture*. London: Routledge.

Hall, E.T., 1973. *The silent language*. New York: Anchor Books

Hamilton D.L. and Hewstone, M., 2007. Conceptualising group perception. In: M. Hewstone et al, eds. *The scope of social psychology*. Hove: Psychology Press, 87-106.

- Hewstone, M., 2007. Interview. *A world of difference* [online]. Guardian. Available from: <http://society.guardian.co.uk> [Accessed 11 November 2007].
- Hewstone, M., 2003. Intergroup contact: panacea for prejudice. *The psychologist*, 16 (7), 352-355.
- Hewstone, M. et al, 2007. Prejudice, intergroup contact and identity: do neighbourhoods matter?. In: M. Wetherell, M. Laflèche and R. Berkeley, eds. *Identity, ethnic diversity and community cohesion*. London: Sage, 102-112.
- Home Office, 2001. *Community cohesion: a report of the independent review team*. London: Home Office.
- Huntingdon, S.P., 1997. *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Laflèche, M., 2007. *Interculturality – a critical response?*. Presented at the Baring Foundation's Core Costs Club Seminar, 14 February 2007.
- Parekh, B., 2007a. Interview with Bhikhu Parekh. 17th October 2007.
- Parekh, B., 2007b. Multiculturalism. In: J. Baggini and J. Strangroom, eds. *What more philosophers think*. London: Continuum, 45-56.
- Parekh, B., 2007c. Reasoned identities: a committed relationship. In: M. Wetherell, M. Laflèche and R. Berkeley, eds. *Identity, ethnic diversity and community cohesion*. London: Sage, 130-135.
- Parekh, B., 2006. *Rethinking multiculturalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Parekh, B., 2004. Here and there. *Times Literary Supplement*, 5345, 32.
- Sen, A., 2006. *Identity and violence: the illusion of destiny*. New York: WW Norton and Company.
- Sen, A., 1999. *Reason before identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Wood, P., Landry, C. and Bloomfield, J., 2006. *Cultural diversity in Britain A toolkit for cross-cultural co-operation* [online]. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available from: <http://www.jrf.org.uk> [Accessed 9 October 2007].



## The Baring Foundation

All Baring Foundation publications are free while stocks last and can be downloaded in full from the website.

**[www.baringfoundation.org.uk](http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk)**

The Baring Foundation  
60 London Wall  
London EC2M 5TQ

Telephone: 0207 767 1348  
Fax: 0207 767 7121  
Email: [baring.foundation@uk.ing.com](mailto:baring.foundation@uk.ing.com)

Registered charity in England and Wales number 258583

ISBN 978-1-906172-01-5

Published January 2008