DOING GOOD BY STEALTH, WHILST FLIRTING WITH RACISM:

Some Contradictory Dynamics of British Multiculturalism

A Public Lecture under the aegis of:

The Office of Multicultural Interests and the

University of Western Australia

Perth

Tuesday 15th June, 2003

by

Professor Charles Husband

Director of the Ethnicity and Social Policy Research Unit\

University of Bradford

England

In this paper I want to track two contradictory strands in the politics of contemporary British multiculturalism, and explore their implications for immediate and future developments. One strand is the creep of progressive legislation and the attendant policy directives that are incrementally consolidating a distinctive commitment to a pluralistic multiculturalism. A striking feature of this process is the unusual political modesty with which the Government is pursuing this agenda.

The other strand is the robust pursuit of a politics aimed at deterring refugees and asylum seekers from considering Britain as a preferred place of refuge, and as a corollary of this to drastically reduce the number of asylum seekers who are granted refugee status. Unlike the former political initiative this policy is being pursued with a robust and explicit political rhetoric which panders to xenophobic and racist sentiments.

As any comparative analysis of European states' management of ethnic diversity would reveal, the history of their nation building and the particular construction of their distinctive political institutions, is always central to an understanding of any country's current politics of multiculturalism. (Koopmans and Statham, 2002; Geddes, 2003) Thus, I would like to initially provide a thumbnail sketch of key features of the British experience.

Firstly, in Britain there is a long history of the management of ethnic diversity. The United Kingdom itself represents a process of conquest and partial incorporation by the English over the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh: memorably described by Hechter (1975) as <u>Internal Colonialism</u>. And, from Colley's (1992) influential account, the meshing of these national minorities together in armed struggle against 'common' Catholic enemies in Europe helped to forge a <u>British</u> identity.

Externally the dual processes of colonisation and Imperial administration that were the weft and warp of the British Empire provided centuries of experience of the management of ethnic diversity overseas. The practice of Imperial management was, of course, accompanied by a complementary process of ideological justification. One

core element of this was the progressive elaboration of race theory which developed in response to, and legitimated, British involvement in slavery and the expropriation of other peoples' lands and resources. A second ideological element which was central to early race thinking, until substantially overtaken by scientific racism, was Christian theology. (Jordan, 1969) In the late nineteenth century 'muscular Christianity' provided a powerful underpinning to British expansionism in Africa and elsewhere. Race thinking (Barzun, 1965) and Christian theology and idiom continue to exist in British life as two ideological strands in a national imagery woven together like strands of DNA, with the many bridging linkages being formed around specific issues in ethnic interaction. The growth of Islamophobia in recent years has been one such highly visible, and disturbing, linkage.

With this history the British, and perhaps particularly the English, are comfortable with the management of ethnic diversity. It is an established part of our political repertoire and has both the institutional structures and the conceptual language comfortably established as part of the national political fabric. Recognising ethnic diversity and managing ethnic relations does not embarrass the British either personally or politically.

A sense of how important this is can be gained by comparing Britain with France, where, as an on-going consequence of the Jacobin tradition of the French Revolution, the political system is deeply uncomfortable with recognising ethnic diversity. The concept of *laicite* underpins a secular citizenship which is entire unto itself: not something to be fragmented by considerations of either gender, religion or ethnicity. (Hargreaves, 1995) As struggles over the wearing of the chador in school by young Muslim women have revealed, a routine acceptance of cultural diversity and differential citizenship does not sit easily with French political tradition. (Geddes, 2003)

In Britain on the other hand, there is both a political capacity and a language for addressing ethnic diversity. It is the language of 'race' and of colour. Early in the modern phase of demographic change through post-war migration of labour from the

Commonwealth into Britain both of these languages became established as the norm. In the 1960's and 1970's it was through a discourse about "coloured immigration" that the British state and the British people developed their understanding of contemporary events. (Hartmann and Husband, 1974); and the state apparatus rapidly developed a corpus of law and institutional practice based around a series of <u>Race Relations Acts</u>: 1965, 1968,1976. (Solomos, 1993)

Thus, in the British political context we now have four decades of parliamentary policy formulation and highly contested public debate, in which the language of race and colour has been normalised as both unproblematic and acceptable. We should pause to consider the Promethean significance of this discoursive practice. Firstly, we should perhaps reassert its fundamental factual inaccuracy and consequent political danger.

Race is a social construct not a meaningful biological entity. Thus, as Banton and Harwood (1975) noted:

> *"As a way of categorising people, race is based upon a delusion because popular ideas about racial classification lack scientific validity and are moulded by political pressures rather than by the evidence from biology."*
>
> (Banton and Harwood 1975, p. 8: see also Mason, 1986)

The danger, and error, in using the language of race is that it introduces a whole historically rooted mode of thought, of 'race thinking' which makes rigid categorisation of peoples reasonable; and readily facilitates the routine utilisation of socially constructed stereotypes. Where 'race' is used to 'explain' social phenomena there is necessarily a distortion of understanding. This process of *racialisation* (Omni and Winant, 1986) excludes other modes of understanding and specifically denies acknowledgement of the complexity, flexibility and social nature of human identity

4

and behaviour that is *potentially*[1] accessible through the alternative language of ethnicity.

However, if the historical experience of contact with people of other cultures has provided Britain with a cultural and institutional capacity to recognise ethnic diversity; and to manage it through a racialised understanding of difference, it has also laid down a quite different edifice of belief and value that is relevant to our current circumstances. The British have a strand of self-belief and self-stereotyping that can be found rooted in the collective sense of the long continuity of Britain as a Parliamentary democracy. In the creative acts of selective retention and strategic myopia that goes into the building of a national identity, and the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) the British have come to see themselves as blessed with an inherent decency. Notions of Britain the 'mother of Parliaments', of being an historical haven for refugees and of having a distinctive capacity for tolerance, are part of this tradition. (Husband 1974,1987) That there are historical bases for these perceptions is important. Equally, a critical scrutiny of these claims would require a considerable exercise of qualification and suitable humility. However, the veracity of self-images is not the sole determining facet of their relevance. Their credibility is <u>de facto</u> more important than their truth, and their ubiquity as general ideas is more potent than knowledge of any supporting evidence. These ideas and values have in the past underpinned imperial expansion, as Britain "took up the White Man's Burden", and in the last decades they have been co-opted into the politics of negotiating the changing ethnic demography of Britain.

A recurrent theme in the political discourse of managing the changing ethnic diversity of Britain has been an explicit concern with "maintaining harmonious community relations". This liberal concern with guaranteeing tolerance and decency in inter-ethnic interactions both draws upon and sustains this notion of British decency. It was classically invoked in the 1960's when a Labour government sought to introduce immigration controls. In the 1965 words of the Labour politician, Roy Hattersley:

---

[1] Ethnicity is of course itself capable of reduction to rigid and inflexible usage; especially where *essentialist* notions of identity generate powerful policing of the processes of inclusion and exclusion from membership in an ethnic group. (Erikson, 1995)

> *"Without integration limitation is inexcusable, without limitation integration is impossible."*

This casuistry in which a tolerant concern for ethnic harmony can be invoked to justify discriminatory immigration legislation was not without its precedents; and has been much copied subsequently.

Notoriously, after Crystal Nacht in 1938 Nazi Germany, the British Government understood the current and future circumstances of German Jews, and yet they assiduously endeavoured to limit the number of Jewish people who would be received as refugees in Britain. In the words of one commentator:

> *"… one basic assumption emerged, whether all its implications were consciously understood or not. If more Jewish refugees meant, or might eventually mean, more anti-Semitism in host countries, then the cause of anti-Semitism was – the Jew. And since anti-Semitism, at least in its more virulent form, was clearly wrong and barbarous, the only course was to prevent any notable increase in our own Jewish population."*
>
> (Sharf 1964, p. 170)

Here we have a wonderfully corrupt rhetorical formula which in its essence states:

-       as decent and tolerable people we are naturally opposed to any form of racism and discrimination

        and simultaneously

-       we are committed to a harmonious society

-       immigrants and ethnic minorities have a capacity to generate racial hostility and discrimination from the majority population.

-       consequently, in order to guarantee harmonious community relations we must rigorously control immigration: but

        not all immigration – just the immigration of categories of people who attract racist responses.

Consequently, Jews are responsible for anti-Semitism and 'coloured immigrants' are responsible for creating racism and discrimination. The locus of this racism, and the access to discretionary power that permits discrimination remains an irrelevant penumbra in this formulaic rehearsal of British tolerance and decency. It is a formula that has been irresistible to successive Governments of the left and right in Britain. In 1973, after a Labour government had passed the deliberately discriminatory 1968 Immigration Act, and when the then Conservative government was pursuing rapid and extreme policies to stop the entry of East African Asians into Britain, the then Home Secretary, Robert Carr, asserted that:

> *"The Government therefore thinks it right, at this time, when we have just swiftly and honourably accepted the Ugandan Asian refugees and when there is no threat to UK passport-holders elsewhere, to make it clear that while we shall continue to accept our responsibility to UK passport-holders by admitting them in a controlled and orderly manner through the special voucher scheme, this is as much as it is reasonable and realistic for us to do if good community relations are to be maintained in Britain."*

This mode of argumentation has been rehearsed by politicians advocating controls on immigration throughout the last four decades, and is amply present in the current politics of anti-Asylum seeker policy.

It is important to recognise the real double agenda in this rhetoric. Whilst its aim is to sustain illiberal and discriminatory border policies, it also <u>does</u> rehearse the British concern with tolerance and decency. Whilst efficiently legitimating racism it also asserts assumed common fundamental decencies. That unalloyed explicit racism has been defined as extremist and beyond the political pale is important. The existence of far right neo-Fascist parties such as the National Front in the 1970's and the British National Party, (the BNP), currently is a potent complement to the rhetoric of generic tolerance and decency because they provide an entirely arbitrary, but politically expedient, definition of racism as extremism. If the BNP racists are extremists, then by definition the rest of us are moderates and reasonable citizens. Through this perversion of a commitment to decency, racist policies may be <u>de facto</u> pursued. And the mainstream steals the thunder of the explicit far right. Perhaps also the persistence of an extreme racist far right political movement in Britain makes a commitment to these fig leave of decency for the majority routinely important.

As I proceed later in my argument I will return to this question in order to ask why these values are not equally available for co-option to support progressive political initiatives.

Having developed this brief historical context, let me now return to the two parallel processes I wish to examine. I will start with a selective account of two instances of progressive policy development. The first is an instance of primary legislation signalling a political will to pursue equity and social inclusion. From the 1960's British policy response to migration and a changing ethnic demography has contained two parallel agendas echoing Hattersley's formulation. Immigration legislation in 1962, 1968, 1971 and 1981 progressively restricted entry into Britain and attempted to close the boundaries of 'Fortress Britain'; whilst in 1965, 1968, 1976 and 2000 <u>Race Relations Acts</u> sought to prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race, and set up institutional bodies - the Community Relations Commission and, subsequently, the Commission for Racial Equality to promote equality and ethnic cohesion. The 1976 Act was particularly significant in its move away from conceptualising racism as merely a behavioural expression of personal prejudice. The 1965 and 1968 Acts were

focused around direct discrimination. Critically, the 1976 Act introduced the concept of *"indirect discrimination"* which addressed situations where treatment is formally equal, but in its effect discriminates against a group defined in racial or ethnic terms. This removed the issue of intent from the process of demonstrating discrimination and opened up the exploration of *institutional racism* where the routine practices of an organisation in their effect are discriminatory. (See, for example, CRE 1999) From this perspective workplace cultures rather than individual actions become significant in exposing the discretionary powers of the majority in marginalising and discriminating against minority ethnic communities. Practically, it reveals the distressing truth that 'nice people' can discriminate.

This Act provided a legislative environment in which no institution could take for granted the adequacy of its equal opportunities policy and practice. The absence of explicit racist behaviour was no guarantee of defending yourself against successful prosecution under the Act for procedural discrimination. The Commission for Racial Equality in its pro-active, educational mode published a framework for local authorities to guide their performance in race equality. This was entitled Racial Equality Means Quality – a standard for racial equality for local government in England and Wales. More usually referred to as "The Standards" these guidelines have been influential in informing policy and practice.

Currently the Government is implementing the implications of its Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 which came into effect this year. Section 71 (i) of this Act now imposes on every public authority (or organisation fulfilling public functions) a new general duty to:

> *"make arrangements to ensure that its functions are carried out*
> *with due regard to the need:-*
> *(a)   to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination*
> *(b)   to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between*
> *   persons of different racial groups."*

This Act moves towards a pro-active policy in which institutions must demonstrate that they have <u>anticipated</u> their capacity to respond to the cultural diversity that is present in the world in which they operate. Much will depend upon how this legislation is implemented and policed. But, it is potentially a significant shift in State intervention in regulating ethnic relations in Britain. It is at the very least an indication of a political will to confront racism and discrimination in the mundane practices of the majority and not just in the expressive extremism of the far right racists.

A parallel process of progressive Governmental intervention has proceeded through the policy initiatives of individual government departments where, through departmental directives and policy statements, significant shifts in practice have been promoted. I will illustrate this in relation to health and social care, where over the last ten years I have been actively engaged in policy related research and development.\\

Isolated grass roots commitment to recognising the distinctive health care needs, and health care beliefs, of minority ethnic populations has been present in the health care professions since at least the 1970's. But, this has very much been driven by the personal insight and commitment of isolated individuals. As recently as 1996, when with Kate Gerrish and Jenny Mackenzie (Gerrish et al (1996)) we published our extensive study of nurse education in Britain, the provision of training in transcultural health care practice was sporadic, excessively dependent upon minority ethnic professional initiative and frequently totally absent. And, in a recent study of how minority ethnic nursing staff achieved senior positions within the NHS it was revealed that the supportive actions of isolated individuals was one of the key variables. (Elliot et al 2002) Equal opportunities and transcultural competence in nursing had not become addressed in a systemic manner. In effect, it was up to 'nice people' to take responsibility for putting these issues on the professional agenda

Now, however, quietly and cumulatively the Department of Health has shifted the policy framework. There has been a considerable body of research on the inequality in access to care and discrimination within health care experienced by minority ethnic

communities (Ahmad, 1993; Nazroo, 1997) and increasing awareness of the differing health care needs and health care beliefs of minority ethnic communities. These insights have been reflected in the recent policy initiatives of the Department of Health. For example, the 2000 Department of Health Paper <u>The Vital Connection</u> clearly stated the intention of the National Health Service to address the health care needs of minority ethnic users. And, the regulatory body of professional nursing, the UKCC, in its 2000 <u>Requirements for Pre-Registration Nursing Programmes</u> put transcultural competence onto the level of a professional requirement. And currently, as the NHS rolls out <u>National Service Frameworks</u> which provide clear guidance on health care provision and bench marking of good practice for specific health care needs, issues of race equality have been explicitly included in these documents. And more recently, the Department of Health's (2002) <u>Essence of Health: Patient Focused Benchmarking for Health Care Practitioners</u> continues the process in linking the benchmarking of clinical practice to the process of clinical governance. Clearly, the Department of Health has actively engaged with addressing the challenge of providing equality of care, and appropriate care, for the minority ethnic communities in Britain. It is important to recognise a key conceptual agenda that has been implicit in this process.

In recognising the demands of guaranteeing equitable treatment in the provision of health care to a diverse range of minority ethnic communities it has necessarily become apparent that 'treating everyone the same' is not a viable option. The universalism of Taylor's (1992) <u>equality of respect</u> does not provide an adequate basis for responding to the different health beliefs and priorities contained within a multi-ethnic client population. Consequently, pragmatically, there has been a drift towards a necessary acceptance of Taylor's <u>politics of difference</u> with its powerful implication that "if you want to treat me equally you may have to be prepared to treat me differently". This could sit comfortably with the normative mantra of British nursing – "we deliver individualised holistic care": but generic xenophobic and racist assumptions have also to be contended with within the profession.

11

Given the starting point of only a decade ago this transition within the British nursing profession constitutes a positive and important policy transition. It is in its infancy in its impact on actual practice; but it nonetheless represents a significant shift in policy.

For the purpose of my argument here, one of the most striking features of this transition in health care policy, and in the introduction of the Race Relations Act (Amendment) 2000 has been the relatively low profile these initiatives have occupied in the Labour Government's propaganda. At the last election the potential of the Race Relations Act as an explicit indication of the Government's commitment to equality and decency was not a major platform in the electoral strategy. And, it is likely that the expanding transcultural agenda within the NHS is unknown outside of the health care service.

It is as though the positive values that these initiatives articulate cannot be relied upon to generate an adequate political pay-off. It seems as though these values of decency, tolerance and equality are part of a national rhetoric of self-regard that can only be pressed into service when they are self-serving. Or put another way, these values are not so robust that they can effectively compete with other prevailing interests and values. We can pursue this question by turning our attention to the second major policy area of this address, namely border policy and asylum seeking.

In 1962 when a Conservative government introduced the first legislation to restrict immigration from the Commonwealth into Britain the Labour Party were resolutely opposed to it. However, following the unambiguous electoral evidence of 1964, of how effective the 'race card' could be in national elections, when Peter Griffiths won a seat for the Tories, against the national trend to Labour, with the slogan "If you want a nigger for neighbour vote Labour", the Labour Party have pragmatically pandered to the racist sentiments of the electorate. The 1968 Immigration Act which was rushed through Parliament in three days in order to restrict Asian immigration from East Africa made some people de facto stateless and represented an explicit escalation in inter-party willingness to use racial antipathy for electoral gain. The process of inter-party competition resulted in a legislative progression through the 1971 Immigration

Act until Britain, in 1981 under Margaret Thatcher, had a new British Nationality Act. As Geddes (2003, p. 37) observed:

> *"The effect was that millions of people found their citizenship status amended to deny them access to the country of which ostensibly they had been citizens."*

In effect, economic immigration of labour into Britain had exhausted its potential as a distinguishing feature of party politics. However, family renewal and asylum seeking remained potential issues for political contestation.

From 1990 onwards there has been an erratic, but consistent trend, of increasing asylum applications for entry into Britain: from 26,205 in 1990 to 71,700 in 2001. This demographic reality has fuelled a 'moral panic' of classic proportions over the threat such immigration represents to British life and culture. This fed a political ferment to radically demonstrate that Britain was not generous to settling refugees. This was a task to which the Labour Party, and its Home Secretary David Blunkett, applied themselves with zeal. In warming to this task they were perhaps succoured by that Party's ideological flirtation with communitarianism. Through the prism of communitarianism the Government actively developed a discourse which favours a moral emphasis on communities; and specifically on the rights and obligations of individuals within them. This emphasis on 'the community' has the capacity to extrude asylum seekers from domestic affiliation and render the moral claims of equality under international legal instruments appear flimsy and emotionally thin by comparison. Such sentiments would certainly be supportive of the Government's attempts to place asylum seekers outside of the normative circle of persons entitled to welfare benefits.

Whilst in opposition the Labour Party had opposed the Conservative Government's tough stance on asylum seeking. But, following their landslide election in 1997, they set about the task of reducing the number of asylum seekers entering the country. The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced vouchers for asylum seekers instead of

cash benefits and introduced a national dispersal system to inhibit the concentration of asylum seekers in London and the South East. This Act has subsequently been superseded by the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act which, amongst other things, scrapped the vouchers that had generated a good deal of anger amongst Labour Party activists, and set up the system of rural accommodation centres to pursue their policy of dispersal of refugees and asylum seekers.

Additionally, the Government have been actively pursing a proposal to create "regional protection processing", which would be temporary holding centres for asylum seekers entering Europe; these would be within the European Union. This is itself a moderate variation of the ideas floated by the Blair administration to have 'refugee transit processing centres' on routes of entry into Europe. These would be based outside of the European Union in countries such as Albania. In these centres the asylum seekers would lodge their claims and be detained while they are being processed. One such camp is reportedly under construction at Trstenik near Zagreb in Croatia. These camps would be the United Kingdom's version of Christmas Island, and asylum seekers arriving in Britain and seeking to lodge a claim would no longer stay in Britain while their claims were being processed. They would instead be transferred into one of the camps outside of the UK.

At the recent European Union Summit on 19th June, 2003 these controversial plans for such 'zones of protection' proposed by Britain and some other member states, were rejected. However, to the accompaniment of the sound of a pragmatic washing of hands, Britain was given permission to proceed on an experimental basis with pilot schemes. Perhaps the British historical experience of introducing concentration camps into South Africa during the Boer War has lowered our sensitivity to policies other member states find distasteful; if still attractive.

The frenetic pace of recent policy formation around asylum seeking and the accompanying assertive rhetoric of Draconian impacts on asylum seeking numbers can perhaps be better understood in the light of the press coverage of the issue. Whilst border policy and the policing of Fortress Britain has remained a recurrently

popular theme in British media coverage of ethnic relations, in recent years the increasing number of asylum applications has been paralleled by an increasingly rabid media coverage of the issue.

Throughout 2000/2001 the 'threat' posed by asylum seekers entering Britain through the Channel tunnel from a Red Cross reception centre at Sangatte in France provided a focus for a media neurosis. The perception was that Britain was seen as a 'soft option' for refugees, with more generous welfare benefits than elsewhere. And media anger at the French Government was matched by a vehement populist campaign against Asylum seekers. In January of this year, the Sun newspaper, a populist tabloid newspaper with the largest circulation of any newspaper in Britain, launched a "crusade" against what it called "Asylum madness". On the 17th January, under the headline "Asylum Meltdown" it urged its readers to "Read this and get angry." At the end of the month the paper was able to claim that it had "touched a nerve in the nation" and that more than half a million people had signed its petition urging the government "to stop bogus refugees flooding the country".

Over the last six months the Sun has not been alone in pursuing this fetid agenda. The Daily Mail, the Express and the Daily Telegraph have similarly milked the issue of asylum seeking with a relish that has made a mockery of extant codes of practice for reporting ethnic relations. Asylum seekers have been painted as criminals, welfare scroungers and as occupants of extravagantly favourable housing at state expense. However, as if association with terrorism, malfeasance and unwarranted privilege was not an adequate stigmatisation of asylum seekers, they have also been accused in the press of being the vehicles for the entry into Britain of Aids, TB and Hepatitis B.

The language of this media assault has reminded me of the mindless venom unleashed against Germans during World War I. It is beyond any defence of relevant fact, it is deliberately emotive and extreme and it is calculated to engender hatred against a whole category of people. It is propaganda of the vilest kind that should shame British journalism. However, it does increase newspaper circulation.

In its Parliamentary existence as one of <u>the</u> most pressing policy issues and in its centrality to press reporting of ethnic diversity, the issue of asylum seeking has revealed a deep vein of xenophobia and myopic nationalism within British life. The ease with which government policies can render someone destitute, provided they are an asylum seeker; and the ease with which the media can maliciously vilify thousands of people, provided they are asylum seekers, must be challenged. That this should be so in a country that is simultaneously pursuing progressive multi-cultural initiatives adds an ironic, and bitter twist to the current situation.

The reality is that in comparison with many other nation states in the European Union, and in the ten accession states of the expanding European Union, Britain has a much more extensive legislative and institutional framework aimed at challenging racism and at promoting ethnic equality within a pluralistic framework. Additionally, although evidence of discrimination, racial antipathy and, indeed, racial assault is not hard to find, judged against a benchmark of 1960, or 1970 the nature and extent of such behaviour has changed. And, undoubtedly Britain is a <u>de facto</u> multi-ethnic society in which ethnic diversity has been normalised in everyday life in a way that would have been unimaginable to the anti-immigrant lobby and the racist ideologues of the 1960's and 1970's. Minority ethnic communities and individuals are present in the everyday fabric of society in a way that demonstrates a progressive transition toward equitable pluralist multiculturalism. There is a long way to go: but, without an historical perspective the current racism and discrimination can seem inevitable and irresistible.

Thus, in this context the parallel politics of anti-asylum seeker malice and social exclusion, and the contradictory cumulative creep of progressive anti-discriminatory policy and practice, is both distressing and dangerous. And, I would like to conclude by offering a brief analysis of this scenario.

To return to my opening argument I feel it is necessary to locate aspects of the ideological environment which underpin the possibilities of <u>both</u> policies. Clearly, despite all the literature about globalisation and its post-modern social correlates, the

nation state is far from being an obsolete organisational and political entity: and is still a viable element of collective identity construction. In the United Kingdom the recent history of extending the political autonomy of Scotland and Wales has, if anything, highlighted the English national sentiment and made national identities generally more salient within the United Kingdom. This, of itself, provides <u>one</u> vehicle for sensitising popular feelings about both shared identities and territorial integrity. We have seen the Home Secretary asking pointed questions about the possible cultural criteria for entry to British citizenship, and strong border policies have a ready resonance with the wider population.

At the same time, as we noted at the outset, the British have a strong positive self-regard about their own decency. And, the language of tolerance has been invoked to sustain the politics of progressive social inclusion <u>and</u> the discriminatory border policies. In terms of the internal politics of progressive multiculturalism the language of tolerance necessarily places the majority ethnic population in a position of flattering moral virtue. For as I have argued previously:

> "*For tolerance to be necessary, there must be a prior belief that the person to be tolerated has an intrinsically undesirable characteristic, or that they are not fundamentally entitled to the benefits which are to be allowed them. Those to be tolerated,, by definition, possess some such social stigma.*
>
> *Tolerance is the exercise of largesse by the powerful, ultimately on behalf of the powerful. It is the generous extension of forbearance toward someone who is intrinsically objectionable or not deserving of the privilege being allowed.*
>
> <div align="right">(Husband 1994, p. 65)</div>

In the context of contemporary multi-ethnic Britain promoting positive pluralistic social inclusion on the basis of majority tolerance fatally ignores a key reality of British ethnic demography: namely the very great majority of our minority ethnic

population are full British citizens. They do not require the generosity of the majority to allow them the resources and freedoms they demand. They have these as of right as citizens. Minority ethnic communities do not seek privileges granted by a tolerant majority, they are demanding their rights. As long as large sections of the majority population hang on to the notions of national identity that render minority ethnic citizens as 'not quite British' then they will continue to have difficulties in recognising the rights claims of their minority ethnic neighbours. Perhaps one of the reasons for governmental tentativeness in positively asserting the nature and purpose of their multi-ethnic policies is that they are all too aware of the ambivalent ideological basis of the majority ethnic community's acceptance of their legitimacy.

At the same time, in the past and currently, we have seen that restrictive border policies have also been legitimated in the name of tolerance and a commitment to harmonious community relations.   However, it is apparent that such tolerance is regarded as having natural limits. Nation states appear to be very comfortable with the idea that there is a natural limit to their tolerance; that they should not be pushed too far in the name of equality and decency. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) in their analysis of the Belgium response to ethnic diversity identified the construction of an idea of 'the threshold of tolerance'. This is an idea which in its essentials asserts that there is a threshold (a limit) beyond which it is not reasonable to expect majority populations to continue with their 'normal' level of tolerance. As, for example, when immigration rates or minority ethnic numbers become too high. In their words:

> *The threshold of tolerance is an objectifying socio-mathematical concept that defines the conditions under which the all-European tolerance and openness may be cancelled without affecting the basic self-image. The European does not become intolerant, until this threshold is crossed. Just let him or her step back over the same threshold, i.e. just reduce the number of foreigners again, and the good old tolerance will return. In other words, even in moments of intolerance the European is still tolerant at heart, and the observed behaviour is completely due to the factual circumstances which*

18

render it impossible to exercise this essential openness. Needless to say, the threshold of tolerance is not an exclusively Belgian notion. It is commonly used in other European countries.

(Blommaert and Verschueren 1998, p. 78)

The 'magic' in this use of the notion of a threshold of tolerance lies precisely in its ability to define tolerance as an on-going property of the majority; which may regrettably be curtailed due to external conditions. From this perspective the proper politics of managing ethnic diversity lies in creating the environment in which tolerance can reign free. This, of course, may mean Draconian border policies excluding asylum seekers and/or restrictive citizenship criteria. Concretely, policies that fly in the face of humanitarian engagement with the lives of others are rendered meaningful as expressions of concern with internal 'harmonious community relations'. The whole, of course, permeated by an implicit nationalist xenophobia. It is hardly surprising that governments are so aggressively pursuing anti-asylum seeker policies.

In a period where Western capitalism has revealed awesome levels of corruption and fallibility; where the economically comfortable are financially neurotic about share values; where home owners have no reason to believe that their endowment policies are likely to fulfil their stated targets, and where pension schemes emerge as a new variant on the South Sea Bubble Corporation, large sections of the population feel deeply insecure. And, in a world where active participation in politics through the electoral system has almost become a minority activity, large swathes of the electorate are <u>de facto</u> politically irrelevant. In what J.K. Galbraith memorably called 'the culture of contentment', governments are likely to shape their policies to service the anxieties and priorities of this politically salient cohort. So perhaps again we can see why the robust claims of secure borders have greater political play than progressive policies aimed at securing equality of rights, <u>and</u> potentially difference of treatment, for minority ethnic citizens.

As short term pragmatic politics, this perverse differential pursuit of parallel politics may be 'politically' understandable. But, as a collusive reinforcement of misguided majority population values and a denial of the political realities of multi-ethnic Britain this is an irresponsible nurturing of future troubles.

_____

REFERENCES

Ahmed, W.I.U. (1993) (ed) *'Race' and Health in Contemporary Britain.* Buckingham: Open University Press

Banton, M. & Harwood, J. (1975) *The Race Concept.* London: David & Charles

Barzun, J. (1965) *Race: A Study in Superstition.* New York: Harper & Row

Colley, L. (1992) *Britons: Forging the Nation.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

Commission for Racial Equality (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry: Implications for Racial Equality.* London: CRE http://www.cre.gov.uk

Elliot, J., Walker, R., Balson, G., Choudheri, S. and Husband, C. (2002) Getting on Against the Odds: how Black and Ethnic Minority Nurses can Progress into Leadership. London: NHS Leadership Centre, Department of Health

Eriksen, T.H. (1995) *Small Places, Large Issues.* London: Pluto Press

Hargreaves, A.G. (1995) *Immigration, 'Race', and Ethnicity in Contemporary France* London: Routledge

Hartmann, P. & Husband, C. (1974) *Racism and the Mass Media.* London: Davis-Poynter

Hechter, M. (1975) *Internal Colonialism.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Hobsbawn, E.J. and Ranger, T. (1983) *The Invention of Tradition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Jordan, W.D. (1969) *White Over Black.* Harmondsworth: Penguin

Husband, C. (1974) (ed.) *White Media Black Britain.* London: Arrow Books

Husband, C. (1987) (ed) *Race in Britain: Continuity and Change.* London: Hutchinson Education

Mason, D. (1986) 'Controversies and Continuities in Race and Ethnic Relations Theory', in J. Rex and D. Mason (eds) *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations.* pp. 1-19, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Nazroo, J.Y. (1997) *The Health of Britain's Ethnic Minorities.* London: Policy Studies Institute

Omni, M. and Winant, H. (1986) *Racial Formation in the United States.* New York: Routledge

Sharf, A. (1964) *The British Press and Jews Under Nazi Rule.* London: Institute of
Race Relations/Oxford University Press

Solomos, J. (1993) *Race and Racism in Britain.* Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press