

## The Decline of British Identity

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# The Decline of British Identity

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STEVE ELDON KERR, APR 13 2012

### **The Decline of British Identity: Could Liberal-Democratic Values Serve as a Replacement?**

Over the past twenty years there has been a decline in the proportion of British citizens who consider their nationality to be primarily British. This has led to calls for British identity to be redefined for the twenty first century. As a result, the current British government aims to reassert a 'traditional British' identity based on a 'muscular liberalism' that can create a 'shared national identity that is open to everyone' (PM Calls for...Identity). The decline in British citizens' sense of national identity is due to Britain's formation out of a political need for uniform Protestantism throughout England, Scotland, and Wales. British identity depends on Protestantism to provide a cohesive national 'imagined community'. Protestantism is in rapid decline in Britain, and this has led to the decline of British national identity. Nevertheless, the British government's aim to create a new British identity out of liberal-democratic values is illogical, particularly in the face of modern patterns of migration, because liberal-democratic values prejudice a specific conception of the world. The British government would be better served by pursuing a model of national identity based on Rainer Baubock's catalyst model.

Benedict Anderson defines the nation as 'an imagined community' that is territorially limited and united by a 'deep, horizontal, comradeship' between its members (6). Adam Luedtke defines social identity 'an affective (emotional) state of belonging in a social group...that stems from extended socialization, and is not easily changed' (5). A 'national identity', therefore, is the emotional state of belonging felt by citizens towards, and within, the 'imagined community' of their nation. An individual's national identity does not easily change, though an individual can have more than one national identity. Finally, national identity is instilled in an individual by a process of socialization[1] within the imagined community and amongst fellow citizens of the imagined community.

### **The Decline of the British National 'Identity'**

Over the past twenty years there has been a significant decline in the proportion of British citizens who feel their British identity to be their primary national identity. A report by Anthony Heath and Jane Roberts for the British Department of Justice shows that since 1979 the number of English, Welsh, and Scottish residents who consider their nationality to be primarily British has fallen (21). At the same time, the number describing themselves as Scottish, Welsh, or English has risen. In 1979, 38 per cent of Scottish people described themselves as British, a figure which fell to 20 per cent in 1992 and then 14 per cent by 2006 (23). By contrast, in 1979 56 per cent of Scots described themselves as primarily Scottish and by 2006 this had risen to 78 per cent. This pattern is repeated in Wales and England, with an average change in the prevalence of national identities of 25 per cent between 1979 and 2006 (21). The English are the most likely out of the three to describe themselves as British, but by 2006 even English people were 24 per cent less likely to describe themselves as British instead of English. Over the past twenty years there has been a significant decline in the prevalence of a British national identity amongst British citizens.

In order to understand why British national identity is falling, it is important to examine the birth of the British nation, and the foundations upon which British identity was built. The 1707 Act of Union created Great Britain the 'nation'. Following the Act, the once separate kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Wales were merged into 'one united kingdom by the name of Great Britain' (Colley 13). The union arose principally because English politicians wished to ensure the continuation of Protestant rule in Britain. English politicians needed to establish political ties with Scotland

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so that Scottish politicians would not recognise a Catholic, James Edward Stuart, as the King of Scotland. The English fear of Catholicism stemmed from their hostile relationship with the Catholic states of western Continental Europe. France was England's strongest military and economic rival during the eighteenth century, and a real threat to England's success in both those fields (Colley 21). Consequently, neither nation was especially enamoured of the other. In fact, the relationship between the Catholic powers and England was so antagonistic that even after the union of Britain the French and Spanish tried to bring Britain under Catholic control. Between the years 1708 and 1745, Jacobite Catholics, supported by Catholic France and Spain, sent three expeditionary forces to Scotland with the intention of taking the entire island under Catholic rule (Colley 16). A successful expedition would have meant the removal of the British Monarchy and its parliament, as well as an occupying force of French or Spanish soldiers. It is clear, therefore, that the English (and the British) governments had strong reasons to want Scotland to remain Protestant and under the rule of a centralised British government. A united Britain was much stronger than a divided Britain, and it is unsurprising that the founding of Britain has been described as 'a union of policy, not a union of affection' (Colley 11). The union was political, rather than emotional.

In fact, at the turn of the eighteenth century there was little sense of the existence of common national identity even within the individual polities of England, Scotland and Wales. Tom Nairn observes that as different as 'Scotland was from its southern neighbour...it actually contained a much greater internal differentiation within its own historical frontiers' (Nairn qtd. in Colley 13). Scottish people who lived in the Scottish low-lands shared the same ethnicity, language and social organisation as the Englishmen with whom they shared a border (Colley 15). At the same time, Highlanders could not distinguish between lowlanders and the English, and referred to both groups by the same name: 'sassenach' (Colley 14). Indeed, Scottish Lowlanders and Highlanders shared such mutual animosity towards one another that the political importance of intra-Scottish disputes often outweighed the importance of disputes with England.

The Welsh too did not possess a clear national identity. The Welsh were much more unified linguistically than the Scots, and had a much clearer conception of the English as 'other' than many, particularly lowlander, Scots did. But by 1707 the Welsh had already been politically tied to England for so long that many of the other differences had disappeared (Colley 14). For example, by 1707 the Welsh legal system had been subsumed by the English system, and the Welsh religious system was virtually indistinguishable from the English system in an organisational sense (Colley 17). Moreover, the Welsh did not even have a recognised capital City, nor a university, both of which severely limited the possibility of creating the type of cultural environment that could be hospitable to processes of socialisation (Colley 17). Finally, the mountains in North Wales created a significant north-south divide in the country. Economic, political, and cultural integration between the north and the south was almost non-existent, and prevented the formation of a homogenous Welsh national identity.

England also lacked a strong national identity. Northerners were much closer culturally to Scottish Lowlanders because the groups shared the same newspapers and books. Northerners even shared physical characteristics with many Scots that were notably different to the physical characteristics of southern Englishmen. In the same way, the people of Shropshire and Herefordshire were less distinguishable from the Welsh than people from other English counties. In short, as Linda Colley notes:

'Great Britain in 1707 was much less a trinity of three self-contained and self-conscious nations that a patchwork in which uncertain areas of Welshness, Scottishness and Englishness were cut across by strong regional attachments, and scored over again by loyalties to village, town, family and landscapes.' (17)

The 1707 Act of Union could not possibly have intended to 'unite by affection' three nationalities because three distinct nationalities did not exist. The Union was a political act designed to protect the Protestant rulers of England from the Catholics of Western Europe.

Consequently, following the act, the British government pursued numerous policies aimed at strengthening the protestant identity the British in the face of Catholic threats. Catholics were excluded from all state offices, and were prohibited from voting until 1929 (Colley 19). Catholics were also subjected to harsh taxation and were discriminated against in the educational and legal sectors (Colley 19). Moreover, British history books attributed numerous

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disasters and crimes to Catholics. A popular book named 'Old Moore's Protestant Almanac' displayed a very Protestant-centric view of the world by spelling out dates of Protestant accomplishments and Catholic defeats, and up to 500'000 copies a year of it were sold during the 1700s (Colley 22). British people were taught that the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572, the 1666 Great Fire of London, and the Gunpowder Plot were all due to militant Catholics (Colley 20). The British people were also subjected to multiple serious wars with Catholic France between the 1707 Union and the 1815 Battle of Waterloo. British people were encouraged to view Catholics as militant and dangerous at the same time as they actually experienced Catholics to be militant and dangerous. Ordinary British people viewed Catholics as a violent threat to their livelihoods, and indeed the most common slang word they used to refer to Catholics meant 'outlandish': 'Catholics were not just strange, they were out of bounds' (Colley 23). Importantly, for the first time in history, those bounds were very clearly geographically demarcated. The British Isle, once divided into three separate nations, was now one Nation with its borders both defined and protected by the sea. To a people who taught that they were God's chosen people, the British boundary after 1707 'seemed settled once and for all, marked out by the sea, clear, incontrovertible, apparently pre-ordained' (Colley 17). The policies of the British government, and the multiple wars with Catholic Europe, created a strong Protestant identity amongst the British people.

In fact, Protestantism was the only identifiable marker shared by *all* Britons. Colley notes that 'the absolute centrality of Protestantism to British religious experience in the 1700s and long after is so obvious that it has proved easy to pass over' (18). Even after 1707, the island continued to be made up of many small and disparate communities with little else in common other than their religion (Colley 40). Through suffering or success, the only factor that united all British people was their Protestantism. This was partly because the Protestant reformation made nationalised religion possible. In Britain nationalisation was successful: the head of the State was also the head of the Church. Nationalisation was not possible in France, where all Catholics had to remain continually beholden to the Pope; Protestantism provided British people with new experiences that were denied to Catholics. For example, as the number of printing presses increased in Britain more and more British people were able to read or hear reformation literature. As a result, British people began to believe that their Protestantism privileged them because it made God's word available to them in a way not available to Continental Europeans. Therefore, during wars, political crises, or times of hardship it was Protestantism that helped to give 'the majority of men and women a sense of their place in history and a sense of worth' (Colley 53). British people could not separate their British identity from their Protestant identity because both were so intertwined; the British state, at the head of a nation of Protestants, kept winning wars against European states at the head of nations of Catholics. British national identity depends on the shared Protestant identity of its citizens because it is Protestantism that gives the British people a sense of belonging to an imagined community.

Britain, consequently, has been called a nation that is 'under-imagined'. Anderson defines the nation as an imagined community because in a nation there is a 'deep, horizontal comradeship' (7) between individuals that will never know one another, and 'yet in the minds of [whom] lives the image of their communion' (6). In Britain, the imagined community was manifested almost entirely out of a shared religion; Protestantism was the principle factor that held disparate groups of people together and gave individuals a sense of emotional attachment *to*, and involvement *in*, the imagined community. However, an imagined community that is dependent on religion must be subject to the social and political relevance of that religion. As long as the religion is relevant throughout the nation the imagined community remains strong. However, if the religion loses its social and political relevancy, for example by becoming less prevalent, then it can no longer be relied upon to 'glue' the imagined community together.

Over the past twenty years there has been a large decline in the prevalence of religious belief in Britain, and the steepest drop has been the prevalence of Protestantism. A poll by the National Centre for Social Research shows that the number of British people who have no religious affiliation increased from 31 per cent in 1983 to 44 per cent in 2000 (BBC: UK is Losing Its Religion). Over the same time period the number of people who claimed to be members of the state religion, the Protestant Church of England, fell 40 per cent (BBC: UK Is Losing Its Religion). In fact, membership of the Church of England fell 10 per cent faster than mean total fall in religious affiliation. In only four years between 2004 and 2008, the number of Christians in Britain fell by two million people (Gledhill). Additionally, attendance at Church of England ceremonies dropped below one million people in the early 1990s, and data collected by Christian Research predicts that by 2050 this will fall to 350'000 people (Kerbaj). In short Protestantism

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is no longer intertwined with the British identity. For individuals who no longer see religion as a vital part of their identity, the fact that there is someone on the other side of Britain who is Protestant provides no foundation for believing in a shared identity. The British 'imagined community' is no longer made possible by Protestantism because the majority of the community do not identify as Protestant.

At the same time, the prevalence of other 'minority' religions in Britain is increasing. The Muslim population in Britain multiplied ten times faster than the rest of the population between 2004 and 2008, growing from 500'000 people to 2.4 million people (Gledhill). Moreover, the data from Christian Research shows that Hindu and Muslim populations will continue to rise over the next thirty years. The data predicts that by 2050 there will be 2'660'000 active Muslims in Britain, and that the active Hindu population will more than double from its current figure to 855'000 people. These figures hugely outnumber the 350'000 predicted to attend Church of England ceremonies (Kerbaj). Perhaps most tellingly the largest Christian population is among the over-70s, while the largest Muslim population is the under-4s. In September 2008 there were 301'000 Muslims under the age of 4 in Britain (Gledhill). The rapid decrease in Protestant population and increase in minority religions further underscores that British identity is no longer synonymous with Protestantism. The religious makeup of British society is changing at a rapid rate, and British people indentify with a huge variety of different religions. There is no religion or set of religions that can be used to create a sense of emotional attachment *to*, and involvement *in*, the British imagined community.

The rapid changes in the religious makeup of the British population are partly due to the influx of immigrants into Britain throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In 1951 4.2 per cent of total British residents were born abroad, but by 2001 this figure had risen to 8.3 per cent. In other words over 2.5 million *more* people were born abroad in 2001 than in 1951 (Rendall and Salt 2). The fastest rates of growth occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1950s the British government offered citizens of former British colonies the opportunity to move to Britain and automatically gain the full rights of residents (Kymlicka 201). This resulted in large-scale immigration from South Asia and the Caribbean to Britain. So large in fact, that in the 1960s there was a 21.5 per centage increase in the number of British people born abroad compared to the 1950s. Since the 1960s, the majority of new immigrants have come from Europe (Rendhall and Salt 2). This reflects the gradual integration of Britain into the European Union and the subsequent easy passage of labour between the Union's member states. In the 1970s the majority of European immigrants were Irish, and in the 2000s the majority were Polish (Rendhall and Salt 3). In every decade since the 1970s Asia has been the second largest contributor to Britain's foreign-born population, with India the largest single contributing country. All of these immigrants have brought into Britain diverse sets of cultures, belief systems, and religions that they cherish, believe in, and are not willing to lose through assimilation. As Walter Menski notes, 'immigrants resist outright assimilation and will therefore reconstruct their own little worlds in diaspora in new ways' (2). Take a walk through Bethnal Green in London and you might mistake it for Bangladesh. Journey south to Brixton and you won't be able to escape the sounds and smells of Jamaica. Over the past century the statistics above show that the British citizenry has undergone a dramatic change in its ethnic makeup. Indeed, immigration is one of the main causes of the religious changes outlined in the previous paragraph, as Muslims and Hindus arrive from countries such as India. Within this context of continual and large scale migration, Protestantism is unable to create a strong and prevalent emotional attachment towards the British imagined community.

The prevalence of the British national identity has declined because Protestantism has lost its relevance; the foundation upon which the British identity was built has crumbled. The special relationship between the Church of England the British state excludes other religions from being allowed to feel properly British at the very moment that there is a greater plurality of religious belief in Britain than ever before. Firstly, the close relationship excludes other religions because it symbolises the primacy of the Church of England above all other religions. Secondly, as Tariq Modmood notes, because such a relationship:

'reinforces the image that Jews or Catholics or Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs are not really British and therefore cannot really be trusted to understand or cherish Britain...or have a lesser birthright to it, and so may legitimately be denied some of the available jobs, prizes, and distinctions and may legitimately be objects of suspicion in times of political and international tension.' (56)

It is no surprise then that the British national identity is in decline, or that many British residents now identify with their

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sub-nationalities of England, Scotland, or Wales. Protestantism provided the logic behind British identity when it was relevant to most of the population. Nowadays Protestantism is not only irrelevant because of its declining numbers, but it is irrelevant because it excludes many British citizens from feeling British. Protestantism actually works against the creation of a unifying British identity. In short, the British national identity has declined because it does not offer space to different cultures or ways of life. A reassertion of a 'traditional British' identity, as the new government calls for, would mean the reassertion of Protestantism as the most common feature of being British. This is not only not going to happen in the near future, but it would also lead to further decreases in the prevalence of the British identity because of the exclusionary aspects of Protestantism outlined above.

### National Identity Based on Liberal-Democratic Values: The Case of France

The current British government also proposes to create a British identity out of liberal-democratic *values*. The case of France shows that liberal-democratic values cannot be used to unify a modern imagined community because they are exclusionary and prejudicial. In a world of large-scale international migration, values that assert a particular world view cannot unify diverse and heterogeneous populations.

The creation of a French national identity after the French Revolution depended upon factors other than religious homogeneity. David Bell argues that the French nation was built out of political policies that treated the nation 'as something yet unbuilt' (5). French leaders needed to find a way to bind their large, heterogeneous, population together without religion. This is because Catholics, unlike Protestants, are not led by the head of their state but by the Pope. The Catholic Church cannot be nationalised, and so French leaders could not form a strong imagined community by using their citizens' common Catholicism. Moreover, a principle goal of the French Revolution was to remove any religious sovereignty, and so French leaders could not in good faith begin using religion to create a nation. Instead, French leaders used alternate methods to create a strong imagined community. They published writings that 'celebrated and attempted to stimulate love of the French patrie' (11), and they used education to trigger the spread of a common French language, culture, and system of social organisation (18). Bell notes:

'The self-representation of the French as brothers in the great family of the patrie is less important for itself than for the fact that their previous self-characterisations as 'brothers' and 'sisters' took place above all in a religious context—[such as] penitential 'confraternities' and monastic orders.' (19)

Previous imagined communities in France were based upon religion. Leaders of the French state, however, could not use Catholicism to create loyalty to a national imagined community of a nation because it was transnational by nature. Instead, French political leaders used language, culture, and history to create a French national identity.

However, the French Revolution did not just create the French nation out of different groups, it also created France as a republican state. This resulted in a clear separation of church and state, and the creation of a neutral public sphere separate from all identities considered 'private'. The French revolution aimed to bring liberty to Frenchmen by replacing the sovereignty of the Church and the Aristocracy with the sovereignty of the people. For republicans, 'liberty' consists of the ability of individuals to freely and rationally determine the course of their own lives, through the choices they make (Laborde 719). In this view, a truly free individual is one whose mind is emancipated from his given cultural surroundings so that he can instead *choose* the makeup of his cultural surroundings. The choices made by a liberated individual are therefore private choices, and ought not to have been pre-determined by the public sphere. Therefore, the public sphere must remain neutral to cultural differences and recognise only the primacy of the individual and essential human interests; individuals have rights, not communities. As a report from the Haut Conseil de L'Integration notes, 'the French model is based on undifferentiation between individuals [because] every human being has intrinsic worth, independently from the community to which he belongs' (Laborde 719). Consequently, republicans believe that the state must be the dominant political institution, because it represents the will of the people, and not the will of religion or culture. In post-revolution France, the republican conception of the state emerged as the dominant political force.

This means that today, French national identity cannot be seen as descendent from the writings that 'celebrated and attempted to stimulate love of the French patrie' (Bell 11). The cultural efforts that Bell argues French leaders used to

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create French identity united previously disparate groups and created the idea of France. The efforts also showed that Catholicism could not be used to form a national imagined community. However, France's republican constitution clearly separates the public and private spheres. Consequently, the state should use culture to unify their nation, because they would be using the private sphere to influence the public sphere. Katherine Kintzler (Qtd. in Laborde 719) argues that this means a republican state is 'antisocial', because it aims to replace pre-existing and non-voluntary cultural memberships with the capacity for individual self-determination (Laborde 720). Individuals may still freely choose other cultural systems, but:

'these attachments are constructed both as private—having no bearing on the public status of individuals as free and autonomous—and as objects of choice—and therefore open to contestation, revision, and repudiation by individuals'. (Laborde 719)

Group affiliation, such as religious affiliation, is a private choice in France, because the universality of individual sovereignty is of paramount importance to the French identity; it is enshrined in the French constitution and sets up the divide in French society between the public and private spheres. As Alain Finkielkraut notes, 'it is at the expense of his culture that the [French] individual has conquered, one by one, all his liberties (Qtd. in Laborde 718). The French identity is actually founded upon the absence of other identities within the public sphere; to be French means to see religious and cultural affiliation as a choice made possible by the republican value of individual liberty within a Universalist public sphere.

Over the past twenty years, however, the republican values of the traditional French identity have been challenged and undermined. Firstly, the value of a secular public sphere has been questioned. In 1989 three Muslim girls were excluded from their school in France for wearing headscarves (BBC: Muslim Headscarves). Headscarves are symbol of religious affiliation, and so were banned from the supposedly neutral public sphere of the state school. The uproar over the debate revealed that there was not unanimous acceptance of the republican universalism upon which France was founded. Critics of the ban contended that the neutrality of the public sphere was created to protect an individual's freedom to worship. The forcible exclusion from a school for displaying religious affiliation, the critics argued, is the very opposite of protecting individual religious freedoms. Supporters of the ban countered that the headscarves were a symbol of feminine subservience and therefore prejudicial to the absolute equality of men and women (BBC 2004). Nonetheless, in 2004 the French government passed a law banning conspicuous religious symbols from schools and so upheld the complete neutrality of the public sphere.

Yet Laborde also notes that 'in recent years, France has been at the forefront of the defence of global cultural diversity' (722). In 2002 The French president Jacques Chirac decried globalisation as a 'cultural steamroller' (Cowen) that imposed the shallowest and most commercial aspects of a dominant American culture on the rest of the world. Chirac's opinion is in line with numerous French policies that support French cultural protectionism in the face of globalisation. The government has created airtime quotas for French-made television programs and French-made music, special taxes for on films made outside the European Union, and hugely subsidises the French film industry in order to encourage French filmmaking (Passell). These policies contradict the government's ban on conspicuous religious symbols because they undermine the argument that the public sphere must remain 'neutral'. It is impossible for the public sphere to simultaneously support one cultural background and claim neutrality. In fact, policies that promote specific cultures create a public sphere in which certain cultural identities are preferred above others. Such policies undermine the French conception of liberty because they give rights to communities over individuals, and make it difficult to argue that policies of cultural recognition are commensurate with 'traditional' French values.

This is because French Republicanism is actually a form of liberal-democracy. In liberal-democracy the liberal belief in individual sovereignty is combined with the democratic principle of rule by the people. Therefore, for the liberal, democracy must derive its legitimacy from sovereign individuals, and democracy cannot in turn violate the rights of those individuals; a government that violates the right to liberty, property or freedom of expression, is both illiberal and undemocratic. Thus liberalism is the dominant theoretical component of liberal-democracy, because liberalism defines the inalienable rights that must be upheld regardless of the democratic decisions of the majority. In a liberal-democracy, the inalienable rights are the liberal rights of the individual. Indeed, the specific combination of liberalism and democracy that is found in France, Bhikhu Parekh argues, 'is a product of, and designed to cope with, the

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political problems thrown up by the post-seventeenth-century individualist society' (169). Consequently liberal-democracy's relevance is limited when placed in social contexts different to that of the Enlightenment. For example, societies that are undergoing rapid rates of cultural and religious change, or societies that possess high levels of immigration (both cases are true of Britain), because liberal values do not apply across different socio-cultural value systems.

Thus if the British government proposes to create a new British identity based on liberal-democratic values they will not unify the British nation, because the problems posed by modern multi-cultural societies demand greater cultural sensitivity than liberal-democracy can provide. Liberal democracies assert the primacy of the sovereign individual, regardless of societal background or identity, and this makes it unsuitable for dealing with a modern world in which individuals possess many overlapping identities – such as a young French muslim girl. Liberal-democratic values actually prejudice the Muslim part of this person in favour of the female and French parts. The modern world needs systems that recognise the complex identities present throughout the world, not systems that assert a particular worldview. The modern world needs a system that both recognises different social backgrounds, and recognises that some backgrounds can never be assimilated into one another, although they may still overlap.

## The Catalyst Model

Bhikhu Parekh argues that 'there is no obvious reason why a political system may not combine [liberalism and democracy] differently' (169). Parekh suggests the example of a democratic-liberal political system. Such a system would respect individuals, but define their rights in social terms, by respecting their social background and creating a fairer distribution of opportunities. As an example, Parekh describes the Indian state as 'both an association of individuals and a community of communities, recognising both individuals and communities as bearers of rights' (171). In India's incredibly heterogeneous society, different individuals have different rights based on their social grouping. Muslims are free to be governed by their own laws, which the state then enforces. 'Parsis are subject to the same civil laws as the rest of non-Muslim Indians', but maintain some autonomy over their interpretation. The Indian state is also committed to refraining from changing the laws of the Christians without their consent (171). The Indian example, Parekh argues, shows that conceptions of the individual, of rights and of property, and institutions such as elections, political parties and the separation of powers, cannot be universalised. Different societies throw up new and varying challenges, and liberal-democracy in its post-Enlightenment format is not a suitable form of governance for societies in which multiple cultures live.

Moreover, it is unlikely that social cohesion in multi-cultural societies can even be built on democratic or liberal values. Rainer Baubock notes that 'democratic values are said to provide the only defensible basis for national identity in societies of immigration' (4). This is because any insistence on using specific cultural or religious identities as the basis for a national identity undermines different individual's democratic freedom to choose alternative cultures. However, democratic values are presented as universal values, and universal values 'do not tell individuals *which* political community they ought to identify with' (Baubock 5). Moreover:

'The very demand that immigrants must explicitly profess these values before they can become citizens intimates that their origins somehow create a predisposition against these values. It is, then, not the cultural bias of democratic values that creates a problem, but their role as boundary markers for collective identities of citizenship.' (Baubock 6)

Universal values cannot create social cohesion in a given society because they do not define that society's boundaries; they transcend boundaries. At the same time, the core tenets of democracy are principally justifications for the coercion inherent in political rule, and not a common set of beliefs that unite citizens. In fact, as Baubock notes, citizens 'are not required to believe in these values, they are merely asked to accept the legitimacy of a government that respects them' (8). Cohesion in multi-cultural societies cannot be built on shared values, because the values in question are universal and therefore borderless.

Baubock suggests an alternative to shared values and shared identities for ensuring social cohesion. He calls this the 'Catalyst Model'. Baubock's first proposal is that national identities should be conceived of as overarching and overlapping, and not overriding (12). In this conception of identity, states must accept that immigrants may hold

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different identities that cannot be easily distinguished and that may overlap. This supports Charles Taylor's argument that individual identity is inextricably linked to cultural background, and so a public sphere that prioritises some form of individual rights must recognise all cultural backgrounds. Because people cannot escape their cultural roots, cultural membership is an essential, and not a contingent, part of individual identity, and so the state must recognise all cultural memberships (Taylor in Laborde 722). Baubock's second proposal is that shared identities in societies of immigration should be self-transformative. As Baubock notes, 'all national identities have historic depth' that fixes their content (13), and segregates individuals who have had no share in this content. Consequently, it is nearly impossible to create a shared identity out of the past, because people can never all share the same history. Instead, Baubock suggests a shared identity should be formed out of the potential for a common future. In this view, transnational migration is a 'catalyst that sets into motion a process of self-transformation of collective identities towards a more pluralistic...outlook' (14). Rather than the metaphors of the assimilationist melting pot or multicultural salad bowl, the catalyst model suggests that social cohesion between different groups can be assured if citizens understand identities to be overlapping and overarching, and respectfully engage in dialogue with other identities in order to create a coherent identity narrative that balances the needs of all histories and cultures.

Indeed, an extensive study of British peoples' attitudes towards immigration conducted by Mary Hickman, Helen Crowley and Nick Mai found that, within Britain, there are two major narratives that characterise attitudes towards new immigrants. Firstly, there is the narrative that views the local area as comprising people who are 'the same' or 'like us' or 'from here' (185). In this narrative, immigrants are viewed negatively, as a threat to the stable homogeneity of the locality, and so are expected to bare the burden of social cohesion by adopting to the locality's cultural patterns. Secondly, there is the narrative that recognises 'the history of immigration to the area and the mixture of residents in terms of a range of social divisions' (185). In this view, no particular group is believed to have a privileged claim on the area, and so the burden of social cohesion is placed on the whole community. In areas in which the second narrative is dominant, people have low expectations of homogeneity, accept cultural pluralism, and are prepared to adapt to changes following the arrival of new groups (186). It is in areas of the second narrative in which the positive contribute of migrants is accepted and indeed capitalised upon. This in turn shows that 'where there are high levels of historical diversity, there is likely to be a positive relationship between new immigration and social cohesion' (186). This supports Baubock's belief that immigration should be seen as a source of potential and not a source of pain. Moreover, in both narratives long-term residents agree that social cohesion depends on *negotiating* a balance between separateness and unity, and not on achieving consensus. Consequently, Hickman and her team conclude that policies which pursue a 'consensualist' approach to immigration, and which therefore imply that immigration threatens national cohesion, are at odds with the most Britons' understanding that cohesion depends on negotiation and not consensus.

### Some Observations on British Opinions towards Immigration and Multiculturalism

Despite the fact that many British people understand the fact that negotiation is better than assertion when it comes to creating a strong multicultural society, Will Kymlicka notes that in Britain, 'there is if anything a consensus against (non-European) immigration' (203). Many British people have concluded that granting automatic citizenship to former subjects of the British Empire in the 1950s and 1960s was a terrible mistake (203). As a result, British politicians are wary of promoting multicultural policies because of the feared backlash. For example, in a 2003 White Paper, the British government emphasises the view that skilled immigrants should only be accepted as long as they can fill a job that a British resident cannot (Kymlicka 2003 205). Kymlicka remarks that the British government 'felt that the public would not accept increased immigration if there were any possibility that immigrants would take jobs from new residents, even if this cost were more than outweighed by the creation of new jobs' (205). Immigration appears to only be accepted if there are no costs involved, even if the costs outweigh the potential benefits. Moreover, the same White Paper makes no reference to 'multiculturalism', and instead proposes that toleration of difference should only occur once it is shown that the new immigrants pose no threat to the residents (Kymlicka 205). The implication is that multiculturalism should only be accepted if there are no costs to bear. In the twenty-first century, the British perceive immigrants as a burden on their society. As long as this is the case, Britain will never fully benefit from the potential immigration has to offer. It appears that British people are willing to work with immigrants once they are here, but not support their arrival. If the catalyst model is to prove successful, British people must fully commit to a view that sees immigration as having the potential to create wonderful things. Potential will



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sometimes require costs to be advanced, but the returns make the pain worthwhile.

## Conclusion

Over the last twenty years there has been a decline in the prevalence of a strong British identity amongst the British people. The current government has proposed to solve this by reasserting a traditional British identity based on the values of liberal-democracy. However, the British national identity has only ever been constituted around Protestantism, and the reassertion of Protestant values would further decrease the prevalence of a strong British identity. Moreover, liberal-democratic values do not fully respect every individual's culture and history because they assert the primacy of the individual as conceived within the western-Enlightenment model. Liberal-democratic values are therefore not as 'universal' as their supporters presume them to be. Instead of liberal-democracy, modern societies will be better served with a version of Bauböck's catalyst model, based on a form of democratic-liberalism. In this view, multiculturalism is seen as a source of potential to make new, and individual's rights are defined socially, and not 'universally'. For this model to be successful though, British people need to change their views on immigration so that they are willing to 'catalyse' with the new immigrants who will arrive in Britain. Chemical catalysis only works if the two sides of the reaction exist in the correct, stable, conditions. This is true of catalysis between people as well. If each side takes the positive view, and realises that difference is not a barrier because difference is a part of being human, then a model of interaction based on understanding and recognition can thrive and, create multiple new identities.

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[1]According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, socialisation refers to the process by which a human being, beginning at infancy, acquires the habits, beliefs, customs, ideologies, and accumulated knowledge of society, and so replicates a culture's shared norms, customs, values, traditions, social roles, symbols, and languages.

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