Between policy and reality: multiculturalism, the second generation, and the third space in Britain

Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, Edmund Terence Gomez & Zarine Rocha
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Abstract Despite the significant level of cultural diversity that exists in contemporary Europe as a consequence of immigration and diaspora, state policies on multiculturalism in several countries have not kept pace with the complex and dynamic processes created by these pluralising social forces and realities. This has given rise to exclusionary contexts that have led to feelings of alienation by immigrant communities. In Britain, the violent street confrontations in Bradford in 2001 and the London bombings of 2005 both epitomised, as well as were outcomes of, the British nation state’s failure to foster dialogue and a sense of inclusion among these communities. Foregrounding the extent of the grievances and frustrations prevalent in British society, these social disturbances have also contributed to renewed debates on issues of national identity, belonging, and multiculturalism. More importantly, these clashes, involving mostly the second-generation British Asian Muslim community, have brought to the fore the dissonance between assumptions of belonging underlying “state multiculturalism”, which moves to fix and stabilise identities, and those that inform the complex processes of identification and constructions of the “third space” of belonging by racialised minority communities. Focusing on Britain, this paper’s central hypothesis is that official multiculturalism has failed to take into account the fluid and heterogeneous frames in and through which second-generation British Asians ground their cultural and political identities and demands. As many of the nation states in Europe are today, like Britain, multiethnic in composition with expanding Asian communities, how successfully or not Britain modifies its integration policies with respect to the presence of minorities of immigrant...
origin has enormous implications not only for Europe but also for Asia and Asia–Europe relations.

Introduction

Over the course of the last half century, substantial numbers of immigrants have settled in Britain, beginning with the post-World War II arrival of people from the former colonies of India and in the Caribbean in the 1950s and from Pakistan from the 1960s onwards. Another wave of immigrant arrival took place with the coming of Africans of Asian descent in the 1970s and the influx of Chinese and Bangladeshis in the 1980s (Dobbs et al. 2006). Today, about 8% of Britain’s total population is described as belonging to a “minority” ethnic group and a significant proportion of this group is British born (Dobbs et al. 2006).1 Indeed, not only Britain but most other nation states in Europe today have sizeable immigrant populations, many of Asian origin. The integration policies in relation to immigration or the presence of immigrants from Asia (as well as their descendants) in countries like France, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Norway, and other European states differ not only in terms of the degree or extent of their success, or failure, at fostering inclusion and harmony but are often based on different, sometimes even mutually exclusive, models or paradigms of integration and citizenship.

The need for public policy in Britain to be inclusive in the face of the changes introduced into society by the mass arrival of non-white immigrants, and their cultures, values, and practices, was first expressed in 1966, when then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins proposed a programme of social solidarity aimed not “at a flattening process of assimilation but at equal opportunity accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance (Jenkins 1967)”2. Although Jenkins’ speech has since been criticised for its “liberal” approach to multiculturalism (see, for instance, Parekh 2000), it is notable for drawing attention to a significant phenomenon created by immigration—the “second generation”:

The next generation however—who will not be immigrants but coloured Britons—will [...] expect full opportunities to deploy their skills. If we frustrate those expectations, we shall not only be subjecting our own economy to the most grievous self-inflicted wound, but we shall irreparably damage the quality of life in our society by creating an American type situation in which an indigenous minority which is no longer an immigrant group feels itself discriminated against on the grounds of colour alone (Jenkins 1967, p. 216).

1 We are aware of the negative connotations (“less important”, “peripheral”, and “marginal”) associated with the use of the term “minority.” Furthermore, in some cases, particularly in urban areas, this term is misleading as minority groups actually constitute the majority population. In this paper, “minority” is used to refer specifically to a politically subordinate ethnic group.

2 Commentators have commonly taken this speech to signal the moment of the beginning of British multiculturalism.
Jenkins’ prescient warning about the challenges posed to the concept of society and its self-understanding when members evolve from “immigrants” into the “second generation”3 a transformation that signals a fuller participatory citizenship, suggests that a viable policy of multiculturalism is one that takes stock of the aspirations to “Britishness” of the generational descendants of immigrants.

However, close to 50 years after Jenkins called for a programme of social cohesion and equality that would be more attentive to the needs and claims of the second generation, the scale of the eruption of issues involving youth from Britain’s minority ethnic communities suggests that that goal of multiculturalism remains largely unrealised. Clashes between British Asian youth and police in Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford, cities with a long history of social unrest, culminated in street confrontations over 2 days in Bradford in July 2001, where 200 police were injured (BBC News 2001). The series of bombings in London on 7 July 2005, which killed 52 people, were planned and executed by four young men, three of whom were from the British Asian community (BBC News 2007).

The Parekh Report on The Future of Multiethnic Britain, published before these moments of civil breakdown, on 11 October 2000, already warns that the British nation state has been unable to mediate between the nation’s different communities. The basis for this failure, the report suggests, is the state’s continued representation of Britain and of Britishness in terms of the nationalist myth of cultural homogeneity. It denounced how “a sense of [British] national identity is based on generalisations and involves a selective and simplified account of a complex history. Much […] is ignored, disavowed, or simply forgotten (Parekh 2000, p. 16”). It also describes multiculturalism in Britain as being the outcome of a “multicultural drift” rather than the result of “conscious policy” (Parekh 2000, p. 14). As a result of this “drift”, as reflected in policy shifts and inconsistencies, relations both between and within ethnic groups had become increasingly strained, segregation of minorities was increasing, gaps between groups were widening, and extreme reactions to inequalities, both perceived and real, were on the rise (Commission for Racial Equality 2007).

While the causes of the Bradford uprisings and London bombings are complex and varied, with the spontaneity of the former contrasting quite markedly with the conscious plotting of the latter, what was common to both was the extreme sense of marginalisation and exclusion felt by second-generation Muslim youth. While the British Asian Muslim community and its grievances are invoked here, it must be stated that other minority ethnic communities such as for instance the Afro-Carribean and even European immigrant communities also face similar feelings of alienation and have reacted with their

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3 The term “second generation” is a problematic one, not least because a significant portion of its members are actually third-generation descendants of immigrants. The other, more significant, problem associated with the use of this term is that it tends to link this generation with the previous, immigrant, generation, suggesting that this generation is not a legitimate part of the national space. For this reason, care has been taken in this paper to avoid the phrase “second-generation immigrants”, the use of which is still pervasive in contemporary discussions and sociological literature. However, we find the term “second generation” useful for drawing attention to the process of cultural negotiation in the everyday practices of contemporary minority ethnic communities in ways that foreground their difference from the identity constructions and identifications of their immigrant ancestors. Since this temporal as well as cultural distinction between generations is necessary, this paper will fall back on the use of this term. For a general discussion of definitional issues involving the second and subsequent generations, see, for instance, Karthick Ramakrishnan (2004) and Gomez and Benton (2011).
own expressions of discontent. Neither is the problem of minority discontent unique only to Britain. There have been rising struggles for inclusion and acceptance also by minority groups in France and the Netherlands, for example. However, it is the scale of the grievances and protests involving the Muslim communities of these nation states and other parts of Europe that has compelled us to place Britain, and the 2001 riots and 2005 bombings, at the heart of our discussion.

The 2001 uprisings have been described by Arun Kundnani as “the violence of the violated”, with British Asian youth expressing their hopelessness and rage at the discrimination that had left them isolated and segregated in poor urban areas, at their vilification by the media, at their being cast as racialised “outsiders” by right-wing political organisations, and at the failure of their political representatives to protect them and the areas in which they lived from physical attacks by police and fascist groups (Kundnani 2001). The London bombings, intertwined with questions of foreign policy, extremism, and religion, highlighted the accumulated anger and resentment of a group of second-generation youth who had felt unable to make themselves heard in the nation they considered their homeland. In the parting words of one of the suicide bombers:

[O]ur words have no impact upon you, therefore I’m going to talk to you in a language that you understand. […] Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters.
Mohammad Sidique Khan

The idiom of these conflicts clearly highlights the government’s failure to foster dialogue, inclusion, and a sense of belonging to the British nation by minority ethnic, principally Muslim, communities. The novelist and playwright Hanif Kureishi, born in London to a Pakistani immigrant father and an English mother, asserts that living in multicultural Britain today is to “live under a reconstituted colonialism; this is not only a matter of racism but a question about how people […] live in a world dominated by white political, social and cultural power (Kureishi 2004)”. Kureishi’s comments merit serious consideration for they draw attention to how hegemonic power is formed, maintained, and reproduced in Britain through the privileging of Britishness as a prior and fixed identity, existing outside and untouched by the vicissitudes of history. The rising currency in the public sphere of racist ideologies of identity, as seen in the recent renewed appeal of white-supremacist political organisations such as the National Front, the British National Party, and the English Defence League is a measure of the struggles that still need to be waged against definitions of Britishness that would admit only one race into the cultural community of the nation. Indeed, as Kureishi suggests in his memoirs, the idea of what it means to be “British” today is still moored to the old racial trajectory underlying assimilation and conformity to white norms—something that Jenkins himself had cautioned against way back in the mid-1960s when he spoke of the predicament of the next, “coloured”, generation of British subjects. In short, as the Parekh Report also makes

4 An excerpt from Khan’s recorded message released after the bombings, BBC News 2005.
clear, one of the principal causes for the failure of multiculturalism in Britain is the reluctance of the state and its agencies to come to terms with the reality of difference. Indeed, the challenge posed by the “spectacle” of difference to a nation state that has refused to recognise, accept, and explore the reality of cultural difference was made alarmingly palpable, even before the Bradford riots and the London Bombings, in the “Rushdie affair” of the late 1980s. These signs of difference, growing in strength and visibility in the wake of 9/11 and Britain’s role in the global “war on terror”, have sparked intense discussions on the national allegiances of British Muslims in particular and of minority ethnic communities in general. Entering these national debates is also the larger but equally pivotal question of what multiculturalism, national identity, citizenship, and cultural belonging mean in societies, not only in Europe but also in Asia, that are becoming increasingly multiethnic in the face of realities of immigration, globalisation, and diaspora.

Placing these issues at its core, this paper attempts to bring to the fore the dissonance that exists between assumptions of identity and belonging that underpin multiculturalism as social policy and multiculturalism as social reality. In other words, the paper aims to demonstrate the ways in which state invocations of British multiculturalism and the corollary view of Britishness as a static, innate, and homogeneous identity fail to cohere with the social and cultural practices “from below” and their everyday negotiations with identity and difference that have rendered “Britishness” a complex, contested, and contextual category. To this end, excerpts from official speeches and public statements made by leaders of state on the subject of British multiculturalism at the time of these social disturbances, principally Tony Blair’s pronouncement on integration in 2006 and Gordon Brown’s speech of 2007, will be examined alongside re-presentations of Britishness in the processes and practices of everyday life, in cultural productions as well as in the self-identifications and expressions of the second generation. Indeed, a key hypothesis of this paper is

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5 Salman Rushdie’s fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which uses historical themes to satirize Islam, was at the centre of a major and unprecedented global controversy at the time of its publication in 1988. Banned in the subcontinent and several other countries with large Muslim populations such as Malaysia and South Africa, it drew protests from Muslims across the world. The demonstrations in Britain attested to the split between Britishness and a Muslim identity, with the protestors, some of them well-integrated in society, aligning themselves clearly and visibly with a Muslim rather than a British identity. (Muslim) Cultural sensitivity was shown as having taken precedence over the (British) sense of right to the freedom of expression. This deeply unsettled the mainstream white community and its assumptions about the homogeneity and stability of British identity.

6 On 11 September 2001, the militant Islamist group Al-Qaeda coordinated a series of suicide attacks on the USA. Hijacked passenger jetliners were used to crash into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. These attacks are often referred to in common parlance as “9/11” or “September 11th”.

7 Quotes taken from BBC Have Your Say (HYS) Online Forum, unless otherwise specified (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/default.stm). The platform provided by this forum provides researchers with an important source of raw and heretofore under-utilised data, as such online public fora allow the general public, especially the young, a safe and accessible medium through which to engage with current issues and debates. By posting anonymously, individuals feel they are able to express their views without fear of repercussion, sanction, or judgement. While the responses might suggest a higher degree of honesty than face-to-face surveys, the anonymity involved also means that the identity of the respondent cannot be verified. Random quotations selected from this forum, and other sources, are integrated into various parts of this paper.
that the disjuncture between the mediated, overlapping, and permeable forms of identification constructed by second-generation British Asians and the categorisation of their identities as fixed and static by state policies, has alienated these communities, contributing to social unrest and political tensions. In short, in attempting to unpack the cultural assumptions behind national belonging at the level of both the discourses of the state and society, the paper aims to highlight the divergence that exists between policy and reality, between the state rhetoric on multiculturalism which adheres to a unitary image of Britain and the complex articulations of Britishness on the ground.

**Britain’s second generation**

“My parents might… still feel attached to Bangladesh… But it’s different for us. We belong here. We do the same things as anyone else” (Malik 1995 cited in Bennett 2001, p. 111)

With immigrant groups having arrived, investing in long term settlement and integrating at various levels into society, there has been a growing population of what has been called the “second generation”—the term used to refer to the descendants of immigrants born and raised in Britain, who have attended British schools, and who speak English and may also know the “mother tongues” spoken by previous generations. Since a considerable proportion of the total number of individuals of minority ethnic descent in Britain today have been born and raised in Britain, this makes the second generation a group of key importance in society, one which is increasing at a significant rate. This also indicates the importance of this generation for shedding light on the dynamics of change, adaptation, and resistance in society and the implications of these for (re)conceptualising ethnicity and national identity.

The social and political importance in society of the second generation is becoming increasingly evident, as demonstrated by the works of scholars such as Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut in the North American context (see, Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001). This social grouping draws attention to significant identity shifts that have occurred in society with the evolutionary passage of time, thus highlighting the need to contest and re-interpret “nation”, ethnicity, race, and belonging, as well as to review the problems or shortcomings in current or prevailing policy initiatives on these issues. In Britain, the claims to a “British” identity made by the second generation, as well as the exclusion and alienation felt by this group despite their appropriation of this identification, have triggered important national debates on questions of citizenship and belonging which can influence the capacity of individuals and communities to interact productively as equals in a multiethnic society (Benton and Gomez 2008).

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8 An increasing number of foreign-born women are giving birth in UK, particularly in urban areas such as London, where 60% of newborns have foreign-born mothers. See BBC News (2008).
9 The problems and issues confronting the second generation in Europe have been discussed since the 1970s. See, for example, Castro-Almeida (1979).
These debates have arisen largely because of the distinct cultural and political claims that are being made through the articulation of a second-generation consciousness. The first generation became, at most, naturalised citizens, their cultural and national identities largely shaped by the workings of a social context which viewed them as outsiders (Hussain and Bagguley 2005). And because, in the popular social imagination, the cultural and national affiliations of this generation were to their own “home” countries, and not to the “host” nation, this worked to reinforce their minority status (Song 2003). For the second generation, however, cultural and national identity becomes a much more vexed concept. Citizenship has become for them more than the legal right to reside in Britain. Whether or not they or their parents retain any links to their ancestral homeland, this generation have been part of British society from their birth, and have been interacting with and moving between at least two cultural spheres, including the mainstream culture, for all or most of their lives. The strength of their attachment to “Britishness” was clearly shown in the 2001 census, where almost two thirds of minority ethnic groups professed “British” as their national identity, while only just over a third of the majority population did so, with most selecting English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish identities (Modood 2007).

However, in spite of their claiming a British national identity, the dominant community has continued to question their loyalty to the nation. Nor have these groups’ cultural negotiations with “Britishness”, an intrinsic aspect of the processes of generational change, been recognised or acknowledged by the state and wider, mainly white, community, which for various reasons continue to hold on to the perception that minority ethnic groups are not only cohesive but also insular and profess cultural allegiance solely along ethnic lines (Benton and Gomez 2008).

A recent study carried out by Manning and Roy indicates immigrant groups which are often perceived as being least likely to integrate, that is, those from poorer and less democratic countries, tend actually to assimilate faster into British society than do groups from Western Europe and North America (Manning and Roy 2007). Thus, one of the greatest challenges facing these communities, especially the Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups, is that although they tend on average to integrate faster than other minority ethnic groups, they are persistently cast as “outsiders” or “foreigners” in the national psyche (Manning and Roy 2007). Such exclusionary perspectives have created a great deal of frustration for minority ethnic groups, impeding their attempts to integrate into wider society (Manning and Roy 2007).

There is thus a disjunction between how this generation see themselves and how they are seen and categorised by mainstream society. So, while racism and wider discrimination were equally problems for the first generation, for the second generation, a social grouping that is much more integrated into British society, such exclusions are felt much more acutely (Malik 1995 cited in Bennett 2001, p. 111). This is one of the reasons why they object to the term “second generation” for they feel it links them to the ethnic or cultural identities of the first generation (Song 2003), reinforcing the popular perception that they are still immigrants or strangers, not really insiders. As Kureishi puts it, the term “second generation” ensured “that there was no mistake about our not really belonging in Britain” (Kureishi 1986, pp. 134–35).
The second generation and everyday multiculturalism

“I’m British, born here, Indian. We celebrate Christmas, eat roast dinners, pies (homemade), wear western dress, are interested in this country’s history and high culture (art and literature) yet will never be fully accepted by some sections of this population.” Monica, London

“I am a British Muslim of Indian extraction. There is no part of me that does not feel British. There is no part of me that does not feel Muslim. There is no contradiction.” Zamila Bunglawala (Kajue and Panja 2004).

Such exclusionary contexts have prompted new ways of conceptualising ethnic and, as a corollary of this, national identity. Tariq Modood, for example, points to an alternative conception of ethnic identity, which he describes as an associational ethnic identity (Modood 2007), that allows the individual to take pride in his or her ethnic origins while allowing for the complex and intricate ways in which multiple cultural identities can be woven together to produce something both familiar and new (Huq 1996).

The development of these associational forms of ethnic identity by the second generation indicates that it is possible to retain one’s ethnic identity and integrate into British society (Song 2003). Rather than trying to hold on to the cultural identities of the earlier generation, or assimilating completely into the dominant culture, the second generation has galvanised the resources of both, creating radically new composite cultural configurations. The flexibility inherent in such identity negotiations and adjustments carries a greater range of options for self-definition and points to the ability of the second generation to move and interact between different cultural values and assumptions (Parekh 2000, p. 29). In so doing, this generation disrupts simple and linear—as well as hegemonic—definitions of what it means to be “British”.

In addressing the need to better understand the complex, mediated relationship between cultural, economic, political, and social processes in an era of global population movements, Avtar Brah proposes the conceptual metaphor of “diaspora space” as a site of “intersectionality” that is inhabited by all national subjects. Focusing on South Asian immigrants and their generational descendants and their daily life interactions with other social groups in contemporary Britain, Brah conceptualises “diaspora space” as an alternative paradigm for constructing “the national” which privileges the trope of intersections over the fixing of identities. For Brah, diasporas disperse in multiple directions from a centre or “home” location (for example, India, Africa, or China) and cross not only geographic but also social, conceptual, and psychological boundaries. The location of all these intersections is “diaspora space”. And because power relations within these locations are negotiated and renegotiated on a day-to-day basis, “diaspora space” is never fixed but is always remaking and resituating itself.

It is worth reiterating that Brah does not view diaspora literally. Rather, for Brah, “the diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native” (Brah 1996, p. 209 (emphasis in original)). By incorporating

10 Quote taken from the BBC “Have Your Say” (HYS) Online Forum.
the narratives of those represented as “immigrants” by hegemonic discourses into those constructed as “indigenous” by such discourses, Brah’s cartographic metaphor foregrounds “the entanglement, the intertwining of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’” (Brah 1996, p. 209). Such “intertwinings” and “entanglements” disrupt the linear and homogenising impetus in regimes of representation that privilege one social group over another for the purposes of either including or excluding them from constructions of the “national”. Far from overlooking the figurations of power, the intersections of “diaspora space” are continually inscribed by multiple axes of differentiation such as ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and sexual orientation that define how individuals and communities live their daily lives. In this framework, “the ways in which one group constituted as a ‘minority’ along one dimension of difference may be constructed as ‘majority’ along another” (Brah 1996, p. 183) allow us to understand that identity and difference are not fixed but made and remade, located and relocated through an active process of negotiation and re-negotiation of power and meaning in any given context or situation. In doing so, the multi-axial dimensions and confluences of “diaspora space” create intersecting identities that interrogate the fixed and frozen categories at the “centre” of multiculturalist constructions, re-defining “us” and “them”, “native” and “immigrant”, and “Britain” and “Britishness” in the process.

In seminal conceptual ways, Brah’s “diaspora space” shares resonances with Bhabha’s “third space” as an in-between space that articulates the performance of cultural difference and creates alternative “strategies of selfhood—singular and communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha 1994, p. 2). The “diaspora space”, like the “third space”, is characterised by constant contestation and negotiation where there is neither a beginning nor an end, nor any unity or purity, and where essentialist notions of nation and culture have been replaced by fluid categories of meaning that create new identities in the process. Brah’s foregrounding of the specific political and economic as well as cultural experiences of national formations is particularly significant for being an effective response to the criticism that postcolonial theories of culture, specifically theories of hybridity, often overlook the material dimensions of power and everyday lived experiences.11 In short, the theoretical salience of Bhabha’s “third space” is countervailed by Brah’s more empirically grounded “diaspora space” and its concrete underpinnings, emphasising the value and significance of both analytical frameworks for policy recommendations and the construction and maintenance of more inclusive and democratic national spaces.

These dynamic forms of everyday cultural contact and negotiation are readily evinced in the culinary landscape, where what is now seen as typical “British” food already carries South Asian, Caribbean, Chinese, and other accents or “traces”. In fact, one of the most popular dishes in Britain since the 1990s has been Chicken Tikka Masala (James 1997). Calling it a “true British national dish” in 2001, then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook drew attention to how “the Massala sauce was added to [the Chicken Tikka, an Indian dish] to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy” (Cook 2001). However, while the political elite are quick

11 For Parry’s criticism of Bhabha’s theory of cultural difference which she argues runs the danger of being indifferent to real existing structures and social systems, see, for example, Parry (2004).
to celebrate the transformative impact of the British Asian community and their cultural productions in “Balti Britain”, they remain unwilling to address the very real obstacles that this and other minority ethnic communities face in their struggle to be recognised as truly British.

The musical scene in Britain has similarly been profoundly influenced by the practices and strategies of intervention and representation of minority ethnic groups. The development of British Bhangra (as distinct from traditional bhangra) illustrates the ways in which marginalised social groups challenge essentialist notions of authenticity and homogeneity to construct new collective and individual identities (Bennett 2001). With its origins in the traditional folk music of the Punjab, British Bhangra has disrupted containment by traditional cultural boundaries and developed into a new form of dance music, the third space of hybridity of which is constituted by the mixed verbal and musical scripts, accents, and repertoires of the British Asian community. It reveals the “entanglements” between established identity categories on the level of the lived practices of social groups. In particular, Bhangra acts as a means for second-generation British Asian youth to publicly perform and negotiate their identities in a way that displays their affiliations with as well as their difference from assumed notions of Britishness. Such assertions of identity through the mobilising of Bhangra, by intervening in cultural history as well as the present, destabilise stereotypical definitions of “Asianness” while at the same time subverting traditional conceptions of Britishness. Importantly also, it has been suggested that the popularity of British Bhangra demonstrates a developing pan-ethnic or pan-British (i.e. including white) identity in Britain.

A related form of this growing pan-British identity is evocatively captured in the “third” multicultural space of Gautam Malkani’s debut novel, Londonstani, which attests to a strong masculine culture that is shared by the “rudeboys” across the religious and ethnic divides. It is upon this collective but indeterminate “gang” culture and its mixed linguistic codes, rather than upon ethnic cultural difference, that the narrative twist at the end of the novel is predicated. The young “Asian” men of Hounslow, whether “Sikh”, “Hindu”, “Muslim” (or “White”), themselves are an amalgamation of contesting cultural notions. Their independence and embrace of urban youth subculture leads them to distance themselves from some of the traditions of the first generation. Yet, at the same time, they take pride in their cultural heritage and their “desiness”. It is the unstable space of cross-over and mélange they inhabit and the various boundaries they traverse in the course of their day-to-day lives that deliver a powerful critique to the fixed and hierarchical cultural codes governing “Asianness” and “Britishness”, creating in the process radically new and composite “Londonstani” identities.

Indeed, some of the more compelling expressions of such dynamic negotiations and redefinitions of identity from the perspective of the second generation are found in literary and cinematic productions. Along with Malkani’s, the works of writers and film-makers such as Hanif Kureishi, Meera Syal, Monica Ali, and Gurinder Chadha problematise received versions of Britishness by undermining notions of a stable,

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12 In Britain, the term “Asian” is commonly used as a blanket label to refer to individuals of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi descent.
unchanging construction of the British nation from the “third” and dialogic perspectives of the British Asian community.

In her insightful study of the processes of cultural change and multicultural negotiation exemplified in the works of British Asian writers, Ruvana Ranasinha demonstrates how the cultural strategies of either assimilation or resistance deployed in the narratives of first-generation South Asian literary practitioners (such as Nirad Chaudhuri and Kamala Markandaya) have given way to probing representations of inter-generational conflict by contemporary writers of this community (such as Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal). The argument here is that as immigrant communities become settled over time, they no longer view the mainstream culture as an alien or external culture which one either assimilates into or resists. Rather, with the passage of time and the evolution of a new generational consciousness, there is a certain unself-consciousness about being British on the part of the second generation which makes them turn inwards to examine the problems within their own communities. In other words, rather than focus on conflicts between cultures, as was typical of the concerns and preoccupations of the first generation, second generation writers, because they already instinctively claim a British identity, tend to focus on the tensions between generations and within communities (Ranasinha 2007, p. 225).

These cultural representations and practices highlight a key dynamic of generational change. While the first generation was more acutely aware of inter-ethnic differences, there appears to be a shared or unifying sense of collective identity through the claims to Britishness made by the second generation. In short, while the cultural trope for the previous generation was either assimilation or segregation, as Ranasinha suggests, the second generation has mobilised a “third” space of identification and belonging, a crucial step in the process of re-defining Britishness. This formative space is the site for the creation of what Tariq Modood calls complex forms of Britishness (Modood 2007) which articulate new and other ways of being British. What is significant about such forms of Britishness is that they allow minority ethnic communities to make a claim on it rather than conform to a particular cultural norm (Saeed 1999). Through such identifications we see how the second generation aligns itself with a perspective that views culture or ethnicity as a mobile and incomplete process. This asks that we recognise and consider, against current popular stereotyping and the dominant assumptions of the political elite, the very real cultural dynamism that is to be found within minority ethnic (and white) communities.

Taken together, these processes and dimensions of generational change as well as cultural exchange and their articulations of identity attest to the emergence of “interculturality” in society. In a postcolonial context such as that of contemporary Britain, interculturality refers to the ongoing processes of the contact, encounter, and exchange between and within cultural communities, and the disseminations and transformations of identity and belonging which occur as a result of these spatial, temporal, and also generational inflections. Stuart Hall describes interculturality as a form of cultural translation that is distinct from assimilation, as the resulting transformation involves all cultures, including the dominant one (Nazroo and Karlsen 2003). The myriad negotiations, struggles, and adaptations in food, language, dress, music, dance, and other social and cultural productions are sites of hybridisation in which forms of intercultural identifications operate on an everyday level.
More importantly, the different cultural or ethnic groups, both “native” and “immigrant”, “mainstream” or “marginal”, do not merely interact with or influence one another but work towards creating something new. Thus, rather than referring to a process of cultural loss or decline, interculturality is a site of cultural gain and change through the dynamic practices of interaction and exchange between groups in everyday life.

Thus, a stark dissonance exists between intercultural processes taking place in society, as described above, and multicultural discourse at the level of the state and political elite. While the dynamic and fluid nature of everyday experiences is clearly seen in the interculturality of social relations and practices that are predicated on the particularities of time and place, the discourses of identity of the state lean towards the de-historicization of difference and compartmentalisation of ethnic groups. This dissonance between state and society suggests two key points for reflection. One, that the multicultural state and its policies, procedures, and institutions must create conditions that foster intercultural dialogue and exchange, conditions that can be both valuable and potentially transformative. And, second, and as importantly, that both state and society must, as Malcolm James asserts, recognise that intercultural spaces already exist (James 2008, p. 16). It is the failure to recognise this and to act on this recognition that gives rise to the emergence of conflictual relations and antagonisms in society.

The workings of state multiculturalism

“…to me multiculturalism means, separatism, alienation and ghettoisation.”

Nader Mozakka, London

“If I’m walking along the road, in this country that I live in and if you were to ask ten people at random, oh where does that person come from? They wouldn’t say from the UK, but that was where I was born.”

Balwant (Sekhon and Szmigin 2005)

This lack of coherence between state discourse and the reconstitutions of identity from below, as it were, has, directly or indirectly, created feelings of alienation and marginalisation in society, leading to social unrest and antagonisms. In the face of escalating tensions, there have been considerable debates on the viability of multiculturalism as a narrative of social cohesion and equality in Britain. (Then) Prime Minister Tony Blair responded to these concerns in a speech, “The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values”, delivered in December 2006, where he argued that:

The right to be in a multicultural society was always, always implicitly balanced by a duty to integrate, to be part of Britain, to be British and Asian, British and black, British and white. Those whites who support the BNP’s policy of separate races and those Muslims who shun integration into British society

13 Quote from BBC HYS Forum, 2006.
both contradict the fundamental values that define Britain today: tolerance, solidarity across the racial and religious divide, equality for all and between all (Blair 2006).

Although these are genuinely well-meaning sentiments to advance cultural dialogue, underlying them is a worrying assumption of cultural fixity and homogeneity within both the majority and minority ethnic communities. Thus, Blair espouses a seemingly inclusive view of the diversity—“to be British and Asian, British and black, British and white”—of British society, but his view reiterates static conceptions of cultural identity, where the notion of “Britishness” is seen to exist, not as one with, but apart or distinct from the categories of “Asian” and “black”. In other words, two binary or absolute categories of identity—“across the racial and religious divide”—have been set up as temporally stable and even immutable. The effects of this essentialised perspective to identity serve to exclude certain communities from normative definitions of Britishness.

Furthermore, Blair, in the same speech, asserted that British multiculturalism was not in any way responsible for the civic disturbances of July 2005: “Integration or lack of it was not the problem”, he asserted. “The 7/7 bombers were integrated at one level in terms of lifestyle and work” (Blair 2006). On one level, the British Prime Minister was indeed correct. The cause of the bombings was not cultural separatism or closure on the part of the British Asian community; by all accounts, the young men, like the men involved in the disturbances of 2001 in the Northern English mill towns (Kalra et al. 2001, p. 14), were integrated into wider society. However, the Prime Minister should have found it fitting to use the actions of 2001 and 2005 to ask himself why, despite their cultural integration into society, these men had still felt alienated by the government and mainstream social groups. Instead, in reiterating that multiculturalism was not at fault he was highlighting the lack of political will on the part of the state to consider the role that its discourse of multiculturalism might have played in contributing to social unrest. Rather than turning inward to examine Britain’s foreign and national policies, Blair took recourse to the facile discourse of apportioning blame on the “other”, drawing a neat distinction between Britain and “certain countries” out there, between “good” British Muslims and the “bad” Muslims of Al Qaeda:

[Terrorism] is a problem with a minority of that community [the Muslim community], particularly originating from certain countries. The reason I say that this is grounds for optimism, is that what the above proves, is that integrating people whilst preserving their distinctive cultures, is not impossible. It is the norm. The failure of one part of one community to do so, is not a function of a flawed theory of a multicultural society. It is a function of a particular ideology that arises within one religion at this one time (Blair 2006).

Such essentialist discourses, which implicitly call up Britain as the norm against which the “otherness” of cultures seen to be outside it can come into existence, are simply a continuation of practices that have characterised Britain’s long history of imperial invasion and colonial rule. Here, as when

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14 See suicide note left by one of the bombers, as reproduced in this essay.
articulated by a serving leader of state, these simplistic discourses of here and there, inside and outside, designed to maintain the privilege of Whiteness and keep Britain “safe” and homogeneous, fail to realise that Britain has already been colonised in reverse, that it is already mongrelised at its core. As Ashley Dawson, in his incisive study of the exclusionary practices and policies built around conceptions of Britishness, argues: “such facile discourses of assimilation to a homogeneous British national identity have become increasingly untenable as the inequalities and consequent conflicts of neoliberal globalisation have come home to roost in Britain” (Dawson 2007, p. 26). Indeed, despite implementation of an anti-racist multicultural policy, the British nation state, Dawson continues, has still retained assumptions of homogeneity and assimilation that had legitimated practices of racial inequality and popular authoritarian ideologies of identity throughout its long history of colonial rule.

Significantly also, instead of accepting and exploring the reality of difference, what is endorsed is the notion of the “tolerance” of difference which again inscribes the notion of a centre against which the otherness of difference is defined:

[T]olerance is part of what makes Britain, Britain. So conform to it; or don’t come here… If you are permitted to stay here permanently, you become an equal member of our community and become one of us. Then you, and all of us, who want to, can worship God in our own way, take pride in our different cultures after our own fashion, respect our distinctive histories according to our own traditions; but do so within a shared space of shared values in which we take no less pride and show no less respect. The right to be different. The duty to integrate. That is what being British means (Blair 2006).

Thus, although tolerance of difference is again and again touted by the political elite as a commendable and conciliatory gesture on the part of the nation state, it implicitly suggests that the recognition of heterogeneity and inclusion of communities and identities the state does not perceive as “native” can only be effected through tolerance—not through genuine dialogue and engagement with difference. Thus, the notion of “tolerance” is deeply revealing of the play of power in the hegemonic discourse of the state. As Virinder Kalra et al. cogently put it, “tolerance is not much if we start from a degree of inequality” (Kalra et al. 2001, p. 137).

This sense of inequality in British multiculturalism is rooted in a conception of British identity and society that is predicated on the notion of “cultural diversity”:

The whole point is that multicultural Britain was never supposed to be a celebration of division; but of diversity. The purpose was to allow people to live harmoniously together, despite their difference; not to make their difference an encouragement to discord. [...] So it is not that we need to dispense with multicultural Britain. On the contrary we should continue celebrating it. But we need—in the face of the challenge to our values—to re-assert also the duty to integrate, to stress what we hold in common and to say: these are the shared boundaries within which we all are obliged to live, precisely in order to preserve our right to our own different faiths, races and creeds (Blair 2006).
The terms that Blair employs reveal that the state discourse of multiculturalism is underpinned by a belief in the purity of cultural identities. Blair asserts that the purpose of multiculturalism is to allow “people to live together despite their difference” (our emphasis). This traditional framework assumes from the start the existence of pre-given cultural forms. A natural corollary of this conception of culture is the view that all identities, whether minority or mainstream, are stable, closed, and separate unto themselves—untouched by one another’s difference. An immutable boundary is thus constructed between cultures and cultural forms, ultimately “fixing” identity and crystallising the notion of racially defined and definable communities. This reified and insular model of identity thus forecloses the possibility for cultural negotiation, change, and transformation. Not only the fluidity of cultural identities but also the heterogeneity within such identities is repressed.

By contrast, what is required if multiculturalism is to be genuinely inclusive in a postcolonial, multi-ethnic nation is a conceptualisation of cultural identity that is defined by a conception of identity which, as Stuart Hall has argued, “lives with and through, not despite, difference” (our emphasis) (Hall 1990). Because it recognises difference as a fundamental component in the construction of cultural identity, such an approach to identity formation rejects essence in favour of praxis. In short, because difference is already in-built, identity is not closed or sufficient unto itself but always producing and reproducing itself through “newness” and transformation.

The gap, thus, between its intent to be inclusive and the actual alienating effects of its homogenising symbols and practices raises serious questions about the conceptual ability of British multiculturalism to serve as a unifying social discourse. The idiom of Blair’s speech highlights the way in which the application of current multicultural policies, instead of taking into account the increasing overlap and permeability of ethnic and cultural boundaries as a result of temporal shifts and generational change, compartmentalises as separate and distinct the nation’s ethnic groups. Thus, in place of acknowledging the complex and mediated nature of everyday cultural experiences, the state continues to divide and organise society along the fixed lines of “race”, which in turn informs government reactions to national crises, such as the 7/7 bombings, where it was the Muslims who were immediately singled out as the perpetrators because they were the ones who were culturally and “biologically” different. Rather than representing the difference posited by “Asian-ness” or “Muslim” identity as being part of the complex and ongoing construction and negotiation of what constitutes “Britishness”, Blair’s idiom of multiculturalism has moved to fix difference as the epistemological national other of British identity.

This form of exclusionary multiculturalism is what Homi Bhabha critiques in his seminal unpacking of the notion of “cultural diversity” which undergirds the policy of multiculturalism in Britain and many other multi-ethnic nation states across the globe. Because it depends on separation and division, and not on the “in-between” spaces of interaction for cultural meaning, such a construction of multiculturalism does not address the reality of interculturality in society. In the place of “cultural diversity” Bhabha advances the more inclusive concept of “cultural difference”. This way of conceptualising heterogeneity is not premised
on the simplistic recognition of the existence in society of a “diversity” of cultures, which tends to essentialise or exoticise difference, or tolerate its existence, “but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha 1995). In other words, this conception of multiculturalism questions the established bases for identity construction through the privileging of a “third space” that recognises the process through which identities come to acquire meaning. Cultural difference thus always-already rejects as untenable the range of fixed identities that cultural diversity accepts as its starting point. This form of multiculturalism is a site of counter-authority because it contests notions of cultural purity and absolute difference; it is also a location where cultural difference can be renegotiated into new, hybrid, cultural forms and identities. In short, a multiculturalism underpinned by cultural difference accepts that the “third space” already exists in society.

Adhering to the normative, what Bhabha calls the “anodyne [and] liberal”, principle of cultural diversity, the politics of “othering” deeply embedded in state multiculturalism and national self-definition, undoubtedly a key process in the ideological conflation of Britishness with Whiteness, reinforces notions such as “insider” versus “outsider”, “migrant” versus “indigenous”. It is this binary logic in the understanding of identity that underlies assumptions about cultural authenticity and inauthenticity, ultimately determining notions such as belonging and non-belonging, inclusion and exclusion in society.

In the literary context, such notions have contributed to the categorisation of authors in oppositional terms—“indigenous” or “white British” versus “immigrant” or “non-white British”. Alert to these essentialising underpinnings, the Bombay-born British writer Farukh Dhondy has accused British multiculturalism of reducing other forms of culture or knowing the world to “polite or critical anthropology” (Dhondy 2002).

Thus, despite professing inclusive ideals about the rights and identities of minority ethnic groups, the ideology behind British multicultural policy has served to push these groups to the margins of national life. The implications of this are particularly alienating for the second generation; as individuals who were born and raised in Britain they have the right to stake a claim to Britishness, yet are still perceived as “outsiders” or “migrants” (Mirza et al. 2007).

Such in-built exclusionary assumptions in multiculturalism have thus served to distance and alienate minority ethnic groups in British society. The dominant national discourse has failed to adequately address the ways in which conceptions of Britishness can be re-negotiated so that the second generation are seen to be equal and legitimate members of the nation. If, as Parekh emphasised, the nation is an imagined community and is therefore open to being imagined and re-imagined anew (Parekh 2000), the question that then arises in the wake of the failures exemplified by the events of 2001 and 2005 is, when will the government see it fit to rise to meet this imaginative challenge?

Gordon Brown, before his appointment as Prime Minister in 2007, drew attention to the limits of official multiculturalism:

[W]e are waking from a once-fashionable view of multiculturalism, which, by emphasising the separate and the exclusive, simply pushed communities apart. What was wrong about multiculturalism was not the recognition
of diversity but that it over-emphasised separateness at the cost of unity. Continually failing to emphasise what bound us together as a country, multiculturalism became an excuse for justifying separateness, and then separateness became a tolerance of—and all too often a defence of—even greater exclusivity (Brown 2007).

While not specifically proposing the need to account for generational change and the processes of interculturality, the comments by Blair’s successor, nevertheless, gesture towards a more critically self-conscious (re)evaluation of multiculturalism on the part of the political elite. In emphasising “what bound us together as a country” Brown implicitly gestures to his awareness of the strong sense of national identity developing among minority groups, including British Muslims, as evidenced in their response to incidents such as the 2005 bombings. In fact, Muslim groups had, in their discussions with him after the bombings, made it very clear to Blair that he needed to formulate more inclusive policies in acknowledgement of this developing national ethos. This is perhaps the spirit and approach that the present government under David Cameron could emulate to formulate a more inclusive state narrative of multiculturalism, one which does not overlook the changing and evolving claims, aspirations, affiliations, and alignments of contemporary British society.

Conclusion: implications for practice

“I still see no interaction with the Islamic community, no coherent immigration policy, no improvement of race relations or development of deprived communities… As a Londoner, I am proud of my city and its freedom, but also fear that the fabric is being stretched way too much in all directions.”

Murli, London15

The conceptual and epistemological underpinnings of multiculturalism as conceived by and implemented in the policies under the administration of Tony Blair worked to repress cultural difference. They also simultaneously fostered divisive forces through their pursuit of homogeneity. This urge to homogenise through the keeping apart of difference is one of the primary reasons why multiculturalism in Britain is unable to account for the fluid dynamics introduced into society by the concepts of generational change and interculturality. Neither can it address the reality of cultural shifts taking place within and across ethnic groups and the hybridising impact on mainstream and minority cultures of such intercultural processes.

However, despite the restraints and limits of official multiculturalism, intercultural spaces already exist in society. By failing to recognise the on-the-ground reality of new forms of interculturality developing among the second generation by intercultural practices, and therefore the transformative cultural processes and gains set into motion by the workings of difference, British multiculturalism has blinded itself to the national desires and identifications of its minority ethnic populations. This has

15 Quote from BBC HYS forum, 2006
ultimately served to fix the identities of both mainstream white and minority ethnic communities, further marginalising the latter.

A chief outcome of this policy orientation is that second-generation minority ethnic groups are not perceived as equal or legitimate members of the nation. This denial of their status as *cultural* citizens appears to be a key source of discontent among ethnic minority youth. While legal or formal citizenship of the political community is a question of rights and status, cultural citizenship is about acceptance and inclusion, about being recognised as bona fide members of the cultural community of the nation, with the same right of claim to the nation. An individual may enjoy all the legal rights of citizenship, but still feel excluded from feeling a sense of belonging. British citizenship and Britishness can no longer be seen to be separate or autonomous categories.

The lack of emphasis on the cultural dimensions of citizenship is a primary reason why British multiculturalism, as a discourse of home, belonging, and national identity, has not been able to successfully promote social cohesion and solidarity. In terms of the effects of this discourse on social relations, deep divisions remain between, on the one hand, the state and Muslim communities and, on the other, between the latter and other members of British society. How to develop policies that transcend these divides is the fundamental issue that needs to be addressed and resolved, involving in particular the need to get non-Muslims and the larger white British society to understand that British Muslims are a constitutive element of British national and cultural life.

What is urgently required is a re-thinking of multiculturalism through a new conceptual language where Britishness as a cultural and national construct is no longer associated exclusively with mainstream notions of race and identity formation. Such a de-racialised and dialogic discourse of multiculturalism also requires that more nuanced attention is given to the transformative processes involved in the construction of second-generation cultural identities. Indeed, how multiculturalism is defined *culturally*, as a narrative of national identity, has important implications for the politics of identity and belonging in contemporary Britain.

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