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Diversity and identity in societal context: introductory remarks

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This introductory piece highlights key themes raised by Sir Bernard Crick and Professor Tariq Ramadan. Firstly I consider why citizenship is on the agenda and how these discourses are increasingly linked to discourses of diversity and identity. Secondly, I consider understandings of integration, especially with respect to Muslims, and thirdly, multiple identities and the public/private sphere debate. I propose the concept of 'institutional multiculturalism' which entails firstly, a recognition that public institutions are not culture-neutral domains, and secondly, promoting the process of a diverse 'authoring' in public sphere institutions to reflect the UK's diversity today.

Keywords: 'Britishness'; citizenship; diversity; integration; multiculturalism; Muslims

The latter half of the conference programme explored issues of diversity and national identity in societal context, with keynotes given by Professor Sir Bernard Crick, Emeritus Professor, Birkbeck College, University of London, and Professor Tariq Ramadan, St Antony's College, University of Oxford. Professor Crick focused in particular on the interplay between the UK as a multinational and multicultural state, situating this in historical context, whilst the focus of Professor Ramadan's talk critically explored Muslims and national identity in the contemporary European context. In this brief introduction, I will take the opportunity to highlight what I consider to be some of the key themes raised by both Crick and Ramadan, and how these might be juxtaposed and interpreted. These include firstly, a consideration of why citizenship is on the agenda and how these discourses are increasingly linked to discourses on issues of diversity and identity. Secondly, I consider understandings of integration, especially with respect to Muslims, and thirdly, multiple identities and the public/private sphere debate.

There has clearly been an upsurge of interest in citizenship, not only in the UK, but indeed globally over the last 10 years or so. In the UK context, citizenship has been a policy priority right across government, with 'Citizenship' introduced as a statutory school subject in England in 2002, following the recommendations of the policy review of the 'Crick' Advisory Group (QCA 1998). There has also been the introduction of new requirements for the acquisition of British citizenship and permanent settlement, with the introduction of courses and a 'citizenship' test for those applying to become British citizens (Home Office 2005, 2006).

Whilst the rationale for the original Crick report was framed in terms of meeting a need to address the political apathy of young people and a potential democratic crisis, increasingly, we are witnessing a shift in public and policy discourses, with citizenship and diversity increasingly linked. For example, the House of Commons Education and Skills[1] Select Committee conducted an inquiry into citizenship education, which included as its terms of reference how citizenship education might promote 'shared values', an understanding of identity and diversity and 'Britishness'; this report was published in March 2007 (Education and Skills Select Committee 2007). In

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addition, the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) commissioned a review of diversity and citizenship, also published in 2007, which was publicly launched by Minister Bill Rammell in May 2006 at a community cohesion event. This review recommended an extra fourth strand of the 'Citizenship' curriculum to address issues of identity and diversity in the contemporary UK, situated in historical context (Ajegbo, Kiwan and Sharma 2007).

Crick refers to the increasing focus on diversity in the context of citizenship, pointing out that 'we seem obsessed with one form of diversity – the Islamic' (2). Whilst this particular focus can be understood and contextualised by taking account of the occurrence of key international events such as 11 September 2001 and the London bombing in July 2005, Crick argues for 'broadening the picture' and to examine diversity in relation to the history of the UK. He explains that the UK is a 'multination' state and also an increasingly multicultural society, giving examples of internal migration as well as immigration to the UK of different immigrant groups, such as the Irish in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Jews and the Hugenots.

Related to this, the theme of 'integration' and what this means in practice was explored and discussed by both Crick and Ramadan. Ramadan argues for a shift in the conceptualisation of integration to a focus on participation, contribution, reform and transformation, in contrast to the more dominant conceptualisation in policy discourses of integration as adaptation and assimilation. Ramadan's active participative conception of citizenship certainly concurs with Crick's original formulation of citizenship as participative in the Crick Advisory Group report (QCA 1998). Ramadan explains that whilst clearly there are 'initial steps toward adaptation undergone by all immigrant populations' in the 'first decades of their new presence in the West', unless Muslims start to feel that they belong within society, their participation will remain on the margins, and will remain 'symbolic' or tokenistic, confined to formal voting in elections (Ramadan 2004). Ramadan argues for Muslims to show intellectual 'independence', by which he means that Muslims should contextualise their identities and beliefs and acknowledge that these need to be situated within the Western societal context within which they are living. He asserts that Muslims living in the west must actualise their identity as 'westerners', rather than primarily in terms of Arabs or Pakistanis, for instance.

Yet, implicitly he acknowledges that this is not so straightforward, when he asks the question – addressed to both Muslims themselves as well as the political elite and the public in the west as well – whether a Muslim can be an authentic European or American, a real citizen, a loyal citizen? (Ramadan 2004, 86). Ramadan, in his writings, has argued that such questions are in fact falsely constructed as they are not of the same order. He asserts that Muslim identity is 'essential … primordial … a justification for life itself" (94), in contrast to nationality, which he sees as an organising element of identity, and primarily about relationships to fellow citizens.

Crick argues that the English, despite their dominance in the Union, never expected cultural assimilation of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. With regard to the position on immigrants, drawing on historical examples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Crick proposes that integration has come about gradually over time rather than through concerted top-down governmental policy initiatives. Crick goes on to note that the fact that immigrants rarely refer to themselves as 'Black English' or 'Asian English' (although comfortable with 'Black British' and British Asian') illustrates their understanding of the distinction between British and English, to a greater extent than do what he has referred to as the 'old Brits' – thus making a distinction between national and state identity. But here the nation is a cultural identity, where it is not expected that 'Blacks' and 'Asians' become English, but rather that they can buy into a civic identity of being British.

An alternative interpretation might suggest that the term, 'Black English' is rarely heard rather because there is a dominant schema that 'Englishness' is synonymous with 'white-ness', therefore anyone of non-white designation cannot authentically be English. It is clear that a civic

identity without an identity to a sense of place is too abstract, with research showing that many Blacks and Asians culturally identify at a more local level, saying that they are from London, Manchester or Birmingham for example. It is yet to be seen how these levels of perceived 'authentic' identification change across generations.

Perhaps in contrast to Ramadan, Crick expresses wariness with respect to any attempts to reformulate or 'redefine' Britishness, as had also been proposed by Bhiku Parekh's Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain in 2000 (Runnymede Trust 2000). It is of note that these proposals were critically received by the media and the public at the time. Instead Crick argues arguments for minority rights are less likely to be effective than arguments appealing to Britain's history of 'tolerance' of diversity and its history of representative government. However, it may be that these two seemingly opposing arguments are talking at cross-purposes: Crick's argument, it would seem, is not negating that identity as a concept is fluid, or that it changes over time, or that new populations contribute to that change, but rather, Crick appears to be addressing, what I am calling the 'politics of effective acceptance'.

What Crick seems to be concerned about is how effective arguments for rights made by minorities are to the political elite and most importantly to what he calls 'the prejudiced and the worried' (7). So his argument is about the *politics* of negotiating interests between different groups, a key theme of his classic *In defence of politics*, where politics is defined as 'activity' (Crick 2000). As already mentioned, this emphasis on 'acting' or participating is a dominant theme in the conceptualisation of citizenship in the Crick report which was conceptualised in terms of three 'strands' or components: a moral component, a political literacy component and an active participatory component, with particular weight being placed on this third component (QCA 1998).

Yet what is not sufficiently addressed in a participatory-based conception of citizenship is the question of whether a focus on active participation without a concomitant focus on people's diversity of identities can achieve an inclusive empowerment of all types of young people. In order to be motivated to participate, it is arguable that one must be able to identify or relate one's own personal identity/ies with those reflected in the larger community. Whilst fleeting reference was made in the Crick report and subsequent curriculum guidance (Programmes of Study and Schemes of Work) to forms of identity – national, regional, religious and ethnic, the advocated 'light touch' approach intended to give teachers the flexibility to address these general guidelines as they deem fit, has resulted in issues of identity and diversity in the 'Citizenship' curriculum on the whole being neglected (Ofsted 2006). The Ajegbo report recommendations of a fourth strand of 'Identity and diversity in the UK' to be added to the original three strands of the Crick report attempts to address this issue.

The final theme that I am highlighting relates to the public/private sphere distinction. This theme is evident in the lively debates for and against faith schools. Those supporting faith schools argue in terms of equality of treatment between different religious groups (Pring 2005), parents' right to a diversity of choice, that such schools provide a strong moral framework, and that they are often academically successful (Parker-Jenkins 2005). Arguments against faith schools are usually framed in terms of their being divisive and potentially undermining community cohesion (Gates 2005), and that they are discriminatory. It is typically argued that religion should remain in the private sphere, yet this assumes that there is a clear divide between the public and private sphere and that the content of the public sphere can be context-free. Furthermore, it has been argued that individuals need a 'secure cultural context', which should be considered a 'primary good', like religious freedom and the right to vote (Gutmann 1995). Therefore, this would require public institutions to recognise difference rather than ignore it, what Modood (2005) refers to as 'inclusiveness rather than neutrality' of the public sphere.

It is therefore important to operationalise multiculturalism within a conception of citizenship so that it moves beyond merely describing a societal context. This would require what I have

called an 'institutional multiculturalism' (Kiwan 2008), which entails firstly, a recognition that public institutions are not culture-neutral domains, and that the identities – ethnic, religious, personal – of those in such positions of power implicitly shape our public institutions to make them what they are – what Taylor (1995, 44) has referred to as 'particularism masquerading as the universal'. Therefore, it is a misrepresentation of reality to talk about the distinct separateness of the public and private sphere. Therefore, this recognition entails a second feature, promoting the process of 'authoring' in public sphere institutions by those from a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds to reflect the diverse range identities in the contemporary UK today.

Notes

1.   Now renamed Children Schools and Families.

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