Cohesion: Coming of Age at 21 Years

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About the Author

Ted Cantle set up the **Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo)** and this became the UK's leading authority on community cohesion and intercultural relations. He has established the **iCoCo Foundation** to build on this work and to develop policy and practice on interculturalism and community cohesion.

In August 2001, Prof Cantle was appointed by the Home Secretary to Chair the Community Cohesion Review Team and to lead the review the causes of the summer disturbances in a number of northern towns and cities. The ground breaking Report –known as 'the Cantle Report' – was produced in December 2001 and made around 70 recommendations. **The concept of 'community cohesion'** was subsequently adopted by the UK Government and many of the interventions which it spawned have been used by local communities in this country and around the world. Community cohesion programmes have succeeded in reducing tension in local communities by promoting cross cultural contact, developing support for diversity and promoting unity. Cohesion also continues to tackle inequality and the prejudice and discrimination which underpins it. Prof Cantle's book ***Community Cohesion: a New Framework for Race and Diversity*** provides a historical background and review of current policy and practice.

This review reflect the personal views of Ted Cantle based on his insight and experience. They do not reflect, in whole or in part, the views of any associated organisation.

Foreword

It has been a pleasure working with the inspiring individuals and organisations in this sector over the last 21 years. They have been responsible for the creation of entirely new programmes to tackle tensions and divisions, often with only limited resources and in the face of challenging circumstances. They have not had the recognition and respect they deserve.

We do have to recognise that delivering on cohesion has at times been quite difficult and frustrating. Support has ebbed and flowed with renewed attention generally only following another disturbance or riot. By then, the lines of division have hardened and the costs of repairing the physical and human damage will have become much greater. The skills of individuals and the capacity of organisations are also likely to need yet another reinvention.

After 21 years, cohesion policy and practice has become established and is well supported by academic research and practical experience. But the landscape is constantly changing. I have been particularly struck by the impact of social media and the changing political narrative which appear to create new dimensions for cohesion to consider. This therefore seems like a good point to build on the lessons of the past and consider what more needs to be done to cope with these challenges.

We need to recognise that cohesion is a basic requirement for a healthy society - we need to be able to live together. That means expecting more of our education and other public services and our workplaces. We also need more from our civil society organisations who are at the forefront of this work, but they will also need the necessary investment and support. As the pandemic demonstrated, there is a great willingness in our communities to work together and reach out to support others if asked to do so. Having witnessed first-hand the commitment and ingenuity of those working in this sector, I am sure that they will be able to tap into this positive spirit and continue to challenge the groups who peddle hatred and division.

Cohesion has come of age; let's work together to build more trusting, kinder and inclusive communities.

Ted Cantle CBE

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Summary

It is almost exactly 21 years since the publication of the first report on cohesion[1]. The UK should be proud of its leadership in this area, having developed a new and radical approach to breaking down barriers and building more positive relationships in our communities. Cohesion has come of age, but its nascent maturity requires - and deserves - more recognition and support to successfully rise to the challenges ahead.

Britain has clearly become a more tolerant society over the last twenty years, with many forms of difference now widely accepted. There can be little doubt that the many hundreds of cohesion schemes, led by such inspiring individuals and organisations, have contributed to a reduction in prejudice and a greater understanding and respect for people regarded as 'different'.

The delivery of cohesion schemes has gradually improved, with implementation based upon clearer objectives, an empathetic context and both quantitative and qualitative evaluation. The costs are often low, perhaps only requiring agencies to do things differently rather than additionally. Where schemes require investment, this is modest - certainly when compared to the cost of repairing the physical and human damage caused by tensions and conflict.

However the infrastructure upon which cohesion stands is quite fragile, with support only seeming to ramp up following another disturbance or perceived threat. This 'crisis management' approach means that skills are constantly lost, and schemes often have to be re-invented, which makes continuous development very difficult.

Despite wider acceptance of difference and diversity, racism is still clearly evident with the way that it is expressed becoming more extreme, particularly in social media. Antipathy towards migration has remained strong and this is able to tap into racist sentiment - but there has been a failure to respond to wider concerns about change and identity, and the need to make adequate provision for a growing population, whether or not it is due to migration. The focus on employment rules as an attempt to control numbers fails to address these concerns.

The physical separation of communities in schools, residential areas, workplaces and social and cultural spheres has not changed significantly over the last two decades. This means that many people have little real-life experience of the 'other' and little ability to disconfirm prejudices or come to terms with change.

This has now been worryingly compounded by the 'virtual' segregation of social media. Attempts at moderation of content have been focused on limiting extreme and malevolent views. This has had little success to date - but there has been a singular failure to even begin to consider the way social media imposes a partial view of the world on its users. Change is now urgently required to address this, as well as the many safeguarding issues.

One of the most serious concerns over the last twenty years has been the way in which our formal education system has failed to adapt and ensure that all children have the critical thinking skills and resilience to resist fake news, challenge malign influences and disconfirm stereotypes about 'others'. This has become an even greater challenge given that younger people now gain much of their information and news from social media.

1 Community Cohesion Review Team (2001) 'Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team' London: Home Office

Our education system also needs to consider how it can offer first hand inter-personal experience of 'others' to tackle prejudice and stereotypes. School admission policies, their curricula and extracurricular activity should be reviewed, and a new implementation model made subject of inspection.

A similar approach should be taken within further and higher education, where there is also evidence of segregation and where earlier problems can remain unchallenged and may even be reinforced. There are now serious concerns about the willingness of students to engage in open debate and consider alternative viewpoints.

Unregistered schools and home schooling also need to be properly regulated to ensure that those children are also given the necessary critical thinking skills and intercultural experience.

All other public services, such as health and housing, should also consider how they currently construct and deliver their roles. They may unwittingly continue to reinforce separation rather than providing their services on the basis of cultural exchange. This should not entail extra work but does mean planning their services on a different basis and with greater attention to detail.

In the same way, sporting, social and cultural activities also need to be reconsidered. As Belong – The Cohesion and Integration Network have shown with their 'Power of Sport' toolkit, the method of delivery can be changed to ensure that sports are more inclusive and begin to challenge myths and stereotypes. This should become the 'industry standard' for this sector and be adapted for other sectors.

It is fortunate that many businesses have been prepared to commit considerable resource to the introduction of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training. However, employers should also consider how barriers are actually broken down to promote cohesion within the workplace, as some research suggests that these goals are not always clear, with the effectiveness of these schemes being questioned, including the possibility that they may be counter-productive in some cases. Workplaces are potentially an important neutral space and the role that they can play in the wider community should also be considered.

Leadership and vision are key, yet our political class often seems to be locked into narrow and competing interests rather than working collaboratively across divisions and boundaries. Trust is fundamental to cohesion but trust in politicians is at an all-time low and most of the electorate do not even identify with any of the main political parties. Without trust, there will be a continuing and growing danger of extremism and the reduction in support for democratic principles will continue. Politicians need to fundamentally rethink their working arrangements, and the culture and behaviour that they exhibit.

This limited shared political narrative is unfortunately compounded by the decline of shared national and local institutions. It is also made more difficult by the advocacy of singular identities which is not balanced with support for bridging and common purpose. Yet, there is a great willingness to be and work together - as the 750,000 people who volunteered to help the NHS during the pandemic demonstrated. More shared citizen activities, in support of wider goals, such as tackling environmental degradation and climate change, could help to create a more united sense of purpose and overcome divisions. And by bringing people together across divides, this could also promote cohesion. This will not happen, however, if left to chance. Local and national programmes need guidance and support.

A new vision of a shared and kinder society could easily become an empty and rhetorical statement, so it must be based upon clear and agreed metrics. In the past, these were provided to a limited extent, by the *Place Survey* which was curtailed as long ago as 2014. An updated measurement system is now needed at the national level, but this must also be supported by local partnerships who constantly develop and review community relations and resilience in every local area.

Looking Back: what lessons have we learnt?

The theoretical, political and practical dimensions of cohesion have changed over the last two decades. However, its adoption as a framework for changing underlying attitudes and tackling tensions and conflicts has become embedded.

Cohesion as a Radical Idea

21 years ago, cohesion was a radical idea - and in some ways it still is. There had been a belief that tensions and conflicts would settle and diminish over time, but the sudden emergence of conflict between minority and majority communities in many different towns and cities exposed our complacency. Up to that point, there were four approaches that had been formed into a loose 'race relations' policy.

> First, the UK had again led the way when in 1965 it legislated to control racial discrimination. The legislation was gradually strengthened over the years (with incitement to racial and religious hatred eventually added to the legislative approach). The legislation of course could never be entirely watertight but making certain behaviours unlawful did help to change the moral code. And attitudes did begin to shift, but in itself this has never been sufficient to win peoples' hearts and minds.
>
> Second, a range of equality programmes had been developed, and again with some success, but often the programmes were contested and even frustrated, with clear racial disparities persisting.
>
> Third, there was a widely shared understanding that, to avoid conflict, it was simply best to keep people apart. Any public discussion of race or difference was therefore generally avoided. Eventually, the theory went, acceptance of the 'other' would grow and develop naturally. After 70 years though, this had proved to be a rather optimistic view.
>
> Fourth, there was a widespread fear that any public debate would give the far right the 'oxygen of publicity' they needed to stir up race hate. This governed much of the national and local media coverage. And given that the BNP was represented on several of the local councils of areas that had riots in 2001 and had lost no opportunity to stir up trouble, this caution was understandable.

While not in any way wishing to diminish the need to control discriminatory behaviour and promote equalities, cohesion policy and practice has been based upon bringing people together, breaking down barriers and seeking to open-up discussion, rather than close it down. Cohesion sought to change the underlying attitudes that drove those behaviours.

Perhaps understandably, the concept of 'community cohesion' was not immediately accepted; it took a few years to establish, particularly amongst academics. This is not surprising, as the established theology of multiculturalism was challenged. However, in contrast to some of the academic responses, policy makers and practitioners were much more receptive, and support was gradually developed to grow and share resources and build the necessary skills and techniques.

Interestingly, the focus of the academic debate began to shift away from the multicultural theorists towards the situation-based work of social psychologists who increasingly began to engage in the debate and

develop the evidence to support the new focus on prejudice reduction programmes[2]. The work of social psychologists has continually grown and, for example, has now provided the basis for examining core beliefs in the recent *More in Common* report[3].

As part of this change in emphasis, 'contact theory' became 'reinvigorated'[4] as new and specific schemes began to be devised to bring people together across divides, encounter and discuss differences - and to see the human face of the 'other'. This was not as difficult as might have been thought and many creative programmes were soon developed as non-threatening, and even reasonably enjoyable, activities for both sides.

These included a wide range of local and national programmes. A few examples of which included: The Linking Network, who have had a 'curriculum impact' on 200,000 children in schools, across 29 local authority areas.[5]; very localised 'myth busting' programmes, including the use of facts about migration on beer mats; the international Human Library Project, based in Denmark and used in 85 countries[6] (sometimes known as the 'living library' in the UK) - where people 'borrow' a person different from them (the person could not be taken out of the library!); inter-faith visits and encounters to promote inter-faith understanding; sports programmes with teams comprised of people from different backgrounds, for example the 'Breaking Boundaries' three year cricket scheme.[7]

More challenging events - or 'dangerous conversations'[8] - were also devised, such as the Manchester based GW Theatre company's production of 'One Extreme to Another'[9] which put the opposing and extreme views of two families on stage and invited the audience to discuss the play with the actors after the performance.

The conditions for a successful programme using 'contact theory' to bring people together and reduce prejudice were identified as long ago as 1954 by Allport[10]. These conditions were: working towards common goals; an equal footing for participants; a co-operative, non-competitive environment; and supportive institutions. These have been validated more recently by Abrams[11] and, more importantly, they have been augmented, especially to make it clear that the contact must not be fleeting, it must be close and meaningful.

There has also been a welcome recent upturn in schemes to tackle prejudice and discrimination in the workplace in the form of equality, diversity and inclusion training (EDI) schemes. However, in some cases they may not have been as carefully constructed as required by contact theory and may have adopted

2 See for example Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) 'A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 90 (5), 751

3 More in Common (2020) 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in the 2020s. p31 More in Common: London

4 Cantle T. (2012) 'Interculturalism: The New Era of Cohesion and Diversity' p14. Palgrave: Basingstoke

5 **https://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/about/** (accessed 29.09.22)

6 **https://humanlibrary.org/meet-our-human-books/** (accessed 29.09.22)

7 **https://www.youthsporttrust.org/programmes/breaking-boundaries#:~:text=Breaking%20Boundaries%20aims%20to%20socially,by%20playing%2C%20spectating%20and%20volunteering**. (Accessed 29.09.22)

8 Cantle T (2015) 'It's Time For Dangerous Conversations' **https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283302731_It's_Time_for_Dangerous_Conversations**

9 GWTheatre Company 'One Extreme to Another.' **gwtheatre.co.uk**

10 Allport, G. W. (1954) 'The Nature of Prejudice' Cambridge MA: Addison Wesley

11 Abrams, D. (2010) "Processes of Prejudice: Theory, Evidence and Intervention'. London: EHRC

an 'accusatory approach' becoming ineffective insofar as they induce negative affect such as anxiety or threat.'[12] This view is supported by Abrams; 'It is also known that various commonly used techniques can be counterproductive if applied inappropriately. These include direct attempts at persuasion and diversity training'[13]. The use of the term 'White privilege' has also been cited as provoking an emotional and negative response amongst Whites, because of the way in which it is has appeared online, and because it assumes an inherently unequal relationship[14]. Further, it appears that many such schemes often have unclear goals at the outset and limited evaluative frameworks and: 'may even be counterproductive and associated with a decrease in the representation of employees from historically marginalised groups'[15].

As most of these training programmes are provided by a wide range of commercial providers with their own carefully protected programmes, it will be difficult to establish a standardised methodology and performance framework. Given the clear need, and willingness, of employers to provide training schemes that promote workplace cohesion, it may now be necessary to consider this further and establish clearer pre-conditions and ensure a more empathetic approach based upon 'contact theory'.

Tackling racial stereotypes is never easy and, as Jon Yates points out[16], our learnt preference for 'people like me' is what really determines our prejudices and is built upon our early life experiences. It therefore has many different facets and is much broader than 'race'. This preference is not presented in primordial terms of 'birds of a feather flock together'. Rather, Yates provides many examples of how the idea of 'people like me' becomes re-defined by common moments, events and challenges. Yates takes contact theory a stage further in which people do not simply begin to accept the 'other', but that identities become dynamic and re-defined to become fused with each other.

The reality is then, that everyone has prejudicial views of 'others'; these are a fundamental - and necessary - part of our socialisation process from which no-one is immune. And, by designing schemes that recognise that this is the case, a form of mutuality is created with a willingness to explore and change our views. We perhaps now need to recognise the power of 'allyship'[17] in which a foundation of understanding and empathy is established across a range of different actors in the first instance. Instead of a victim-perpetrator axis, 'allyship' can create a new and collaborative sense of 'we' in which a more positive environment enables attitudes - and behaviours - to change.

Contact theory has now spawned many hundreds of schemes and projects. These have also been extended to other areas of difference - social class, gender, age, faith, sexual orientation and health. However, the early and rudimentary forms of measurement based on 'people from other backgrounds' were largely thought to apply to ethnicity. Most schemes were focused on this, and they did appear to lead to decreases in local

12 Everitt J, Onu D. (2013) 'Intergroup Contact Theory, Past Present and Future' *The Inquisitive Mind* 2013 Issue 17

13 Abrams D. (2010) 'Processes of Prejudice:Theory, Evidence and Intervention' London: EHRC

14 Quaries C and Bozarth L (2022) 'How the term White Privilege affects participation, polarisation and content in online communication' PLoS One 2022: 17(5); e0267048 **https://doi.org/10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0267048**

15 Devine, P. And Ash, T. (2022) 'Diversity Training Goals, Limitations, and Promise: A Review of Multidisciplinary Literature'. Annual Review of Psychology 2022 January 04; 73: 403-429

16 Yates J. (2022) 'Fractured-How we Learn to Live Together' Harper North: Manchester

17 See for example, the Business in the Community guide to **https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/anti-racism-and-allyship-in-the-workplace-a-brief-guide/**

tensions, as evidenced by the then Government backed 'Place Survey' which measured attitudes. This was, however, last updated in 2014, and unfortunately cancelled by the Government from that time[18]. It has been partially replaced by a national 'Community Life Survey' (CLF), but this does not distinguish local places. In 2020, the CLF reported that 82% of those surveyed felt that their area was one where 'people from different backgrounds got on well together'[19] but without local differentiation it has very limited practical value. However, other evaluative techniques have also improved and many of the national and local schemes now have in-built evaluation processes which chart the positive impact on cohesion. More recently, in a major and groundbreaking report, the Belong Network has demonstrated the success of cohesion programmes on communities that have had modest levels of cohesion investment[20].

Prejudices are of course, multi-directional and multi-faceted and not simply based upon the White majority/non-White minority axis, as has been shown in a number of more recent disturbances, including in the city of Leicester. Though it is clear that the predominant prejudice based on ethnicity is formed along the majority-minority axis, there are many longstanding and more recent tensions and conflicts within and between minorities and also within the white majority community. These tensions are dynamic, with a continuous need to assess community resilience and to monitor the potential for conflict, even in areas that have not previously experienced tensions.

At the same time, inter-personal and inter-community relations and the way we view diversity and difference has seen a real and positive change. Mixed heritage relationships are widely accepted and the idea that 'you have to be White to be British' is now rejected by an overwhelming majority[21]. More in Common have also found that a large majority of people are committed to race and gender equality, with 70% proud of what has been achieved on gender equality[22]. Similarly, other areas of difference such as support for gay and lesbian partnerships, the open discussion of mental health and disabilities are widely accepted and portrayed in ways that would have been inconceivable 21 years ago. This does not mean that 'micro-aggressions' have disappeared, of course, far from it. In fact, while the general level of acceptance seems to have improved, more extreme micro-aggressions have developed and been largely fuelled by the very accessible and anonymous use of social media [see below].

Cohesion, then, represented a fundamental change of approach, but the reliance on the law and the use of equality programmes were still very much supported and stated in guidance issued from the outset in 2002[23]. These were to be continued alongside the new programmes that sought to fundamentally change attitudes, challenge prejudices and confront stereotypes.

18 **https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/590601fb-1a79-43ff-b3b8-badd3cc5ce29/place-survey** (accessed 28th September 2022)

19 **https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-201920** (accessed 28th September 2022)

20 *Belong et al* (2021) 'Beyond Us and Them: Societal Cohesion Through Eighteen Months of Covid 19. *Belong:* Manchester

21 More in Common (2020) found that 93% agreed that people can be British regardless of colour p199 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain. More in Common: London

22 ibid p 18/19/166

23 LGA et al (2002) Guidance on Community Cohesion (London: LGA Publications)

However, the UK cannot be described as a country 'at ease with itself'. Longstanding grievances remain under the surface, with the potential to rise in response to the alluring voices of extremists. New challenges, especially those that have emerged at a global level and fuelled by social media also now represent a threat to community solidarity. And it is also clear from both attitudinal evidence and the assessment of inequality outcomes that a prevailing undercurrent of racism and other prejudices remain in the UK.

The Cohesion Journey

The 21 year journey has been characterised by an episodic approach with many changes in the support offered by national government. The Coalition Government in 2010 chose not to use the term 'cohesion' perhaps because it had been introduced by the previous Labour government and despite having been widely adopted by local authorities of all colours. The new Government then took two years to introduce its own position statement based on 'integration'[24] which unfortunately did not establish the difference between cohesion and integration.

Over the past two decades, a renewed focus on cohesion has usually only followed on from another violent event, disturbance or riot, and reports were commissioned accordingly. The *Independent Riots Panel Report* in 2012 followed the London riots in 2011 and led to the above government statement, *Creating the Conditions for Integration*; and the *Casey Review* of 2016 followed a General Election and concerns about 'long-standing – and worsening – divisions in our society ... being exploited by extremists, predators, and those seeking excuses to legitimise their hate … a growth in the reporting of religious and racially motivated hate crimes[25].'

It is unfortunate to reflect that many of the conclusions which are drawn here can also be found in earlier reports, partially implemented, time limited, or simply put into the 'too difficult' box and ignored. Indeed, this was also noted in the last significant review by Louise Casey in 2016:

> 'There have been numerous studies and reports on community cohesion over the last fifteen years but a failure to implement practical actions with sufficient consistency, persistence or force to keep pace with the rate of change in communities over that period.'[26]

In addition, Casey reviewed recommendations of 13 previous reviews and set them out in a separate Annex, concluding that they 'make sorry reading as the vast majority – if not all – of these findings, recommendations and concerns could be or are echoed in this report'[27].

The introduction of the counter terrorism policy also represented another muddying of the cohesion waters. A recent review of *Prevent*[28] charted the development through its first phase (2006-2011) as one characterised by the merging of community cohesion with counter-terrorism. It pointed out that while there is an association between the two, connecting them in such a way was a mistake. It found that counter terrorism work was distrusted because it 'securitised' the relationship between the state and British Muslim communities. And it also undermined the credibility of cohesion by association and by providing millions

24 DCLG (2012) 'Creating the Conditions for Integration'

25 Casey L. (2016) 'The Casey Review: Opportunity and Integration. HMSO

26 ibid. p.147

27 ibid, p.148

28 Counter Extremism Group (2022) 'The UK Prevent Strategy: A Literature Review 2011-2021'

of pounds in funding for activities which were, in most cases, only very loosely, if at all, connected to preventing radicalisation.

The second phase of *Prevent* followed the review by Lord Carlile of Berriew published in 2011 and this resulted in a clearer separation of *Prevent* and cohesion and a broader approach for Prevent to tackle all types of extremism, as well as non-violent extremism. Cohesion programmes were however largely ignored by Government as a result and even the funding for *Prevent* was reduced.

The third, and current phase, of *Prevent* began in 2015 with the duty upon public servants and others to report individuals who may be exhibiting early signs of radicalisation. This was followed by attempts to rehabilitate those known to have been engaged in terrorist activity. These measures were again controversial but also cemented the idea that prevention revolved around individual processes rather than broader community influences. The CEG report also cites clear evidence that even the so called 'lone actor' terrorists 'regularly engaged in a detectable and observable range of activities with a wider pressure group, social movement, or terrorist organisation' and that 'Lone-actor terrorist events were rarely sudden and impulsive'; and that 'in the time leading up to most lone-actor terrorist events, other people generally knew about the offender's grievance, extremist ideology, views, and/or intent to engage in violence'[29].

There has been no clear strategy to try to build the resilience of both individuals and communities to withstand wider negative influences that create a climate of intolerance and hatred in which extremism develops. While there is often a real concern about the influence of external actors, especially via social media, there has been a failure to ask why both individuals and communities lack the necessary resilience to resist such influences.

The Independent Commission for Countering Extremism, led by Dame Sara Khan, though, does appear to understand the impact of wider societal influences and has developed the notion of 'Challenging Hateful Extremism'[30] summarised as:

- Behaviours that can incite and amplify hate, or engage in persistent hatred, or equivocate about and make the moral case for violence;
- And that draw on hateful, hostile or supremacist beliefs directed at an out-group who are perceived as a threat to the wellbeing, survival or success of an in-group;
- And that cause, or are likely to cause, harm to individuals, communities or wider society.

However, the full recommendations of this report are yet to be implemented and developed into a programme to effectively tackle the persistent climate of hatred towards 'others'.

29 ibid p16/17

30 Commission for Countering Extremism (2019) 'Challenging Hateful Extremism' London: HMG

In September 2021 Dame Sara Khan made a statement with Sir Mark Rowley[31] to support further recognition of the harm caused by 'hateful extremism' This pointed out that:

> 'In February 2021, the Commission published its findings in the report, *Operating with Impunity*. The report evidenced how hateful extremists are able to operate lawfully, both online and offline, due to a lack of legislation designed to capture the specific activity of hateful extremism. We evidence the ghastliness and volume of hateful extremist materials and behaviour which is currently lawful in Britain, including online. As a result, we concluded that this is creating a climate conducive to hate crime, terrorism or other violence; or is eroding and even destroying the fundamental rights and freedoms of our democratic society as protected under Article 17 of Schedule 1 to the Human Rights Act 1998'

The Government's *Online Safety Bill* is currently before Parliament and the coverage of hateful extremism is unlikely to be addressed in full. In any event, it would only be one part of tackling the climate of hatred towards 'others' and building the necessary community resilience to resist it. There have also been concerns about whether the Bill will restrict freedom of speech. In terms of a cohesion programme, however, the emphasis has always been on opening debates, even on controversial issues, in order to build resilience and recognise false and divisive narratives, rather than closing them down.

31 https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/39123/pdf/

How the agenda has changed (and stayed the same)

The last two decades has seen some very familiar and recurring themes, but there are also some very new challenges, especially the role that social media now plays and the way in which people consume news and information. This also sits alongside a new political narrative which is now far less constrained by national and other boundaries.

The Immigration Debate

Immigration has remained a 'toxic' and divisive issue over the last two decades. This remains the case today, with the recent divide over the need for inward migration to ease the labour shortages and to fuel growth on one hand, and concern about negative social and economic impact of increased numbers on the other.

Over the years, this issue has been sufficiently 'toxic' to enable extremists to have significant success in electoral terms. For example, in the European elections in 2009 the BNP gained two seats and almost one million votes in England; surpassed by UKIP who gained 27.5% of the vote (and 12.6% in the General Election in 2015), and of course; in the Brexit referendum of 2016 when 'take back control' was also a rallying cry for the many seeking stronger borders. However, the concern about immigration has been much wider, with 25 - 50% regarding immigration as the most important issue facing the country over the last twenty years[32].

The Government seems to be almost entirely focussed on the control of migration through employment mechanisms, most recently to restrict entry of higher skilled workers. These are also intended to reduce migration numbers, (though this has not yet been the case) and thereby assuage public concern. However, the employment bona fides of migrants is not the sole issue driving the apparent support to 'take back control'.

Anti-migrant sentiment has been part of a wider process, reaching high levels in other European countries in recent years - partly because populist and Far Right parties have promulgated the idea of the 'Great Replacement Theory' developed by the French author Renaud Camus[33]. The theory suggests White people in European and North American nations are being replaced by non-white, especially Muslim, people. This has also been developed into a conspiracy theory because of the alleged connivance of elites within those countries. It has unfortunately gained real traction in many countries, including the UK, and has even inspired terrorist attacks by white supremacists.

In keeping with the approach outlined earlier, that of trying to avoid discussion and the heightening of concerns, there has been little attempt to counter the anti-migration rhetoric and such views tend to be dismissed as 'racist'. This is a mistake. Without challenge, the claims will continue, and the proponents will present the failure to engage as proof that the 'establishment' or 'elite' have no answer. In other words another 'conspiracy' - this time one of silence - to try to avoid what they see as the 'truth'.

32 Schmidtke O. (2021) 'Winning Back Control: Migration, Borders and Visions of a Political Community'. International Studies 58(2) April 2021

33 The recent More In Common (2020) 'Britain's Choice' report also noted that 'many believe' in the Great Replacement Theory in the UK p217.

The impact of an increased population, through migration, on the living and working conditions of the settled community is too readily dismissed. This is, no doubt, partly to avoid giving credence to the strong opponents of migration, such as Migration Watch. But the argument that public services should be expanded to support a larger population is therefore largely ignored. This also applies to the fiscal impact of migration which is complex and more contested and depends upon how it is measured, with 'no single correct estimate'[34]. In so far as it is might be agreed as positive, for example in respect of EEA migrants, a second question remains unanswered - whether the additional revenues raised are actually applied to public service provision.

A 2013 study[35] of the social and public service impacts of migration at local level also proved to be highly unsatisfactory and inconclusive. In the absence of any real data or evidence, the study had to take an 'impressionistic' view relying on an online panel to put their views forward on the impacts on health, education, housing, social services. Even these panels failed to reach clear conclusions. There have been no further comprehensive independent assessments of the public service impacts at national and local level. This means that it is very difficult to counter the claims that public services, infrastructure, health, education, housing and other community facilities have not kept pace with population growth, and that there has been no detriment to the settled community.

The impact on wage levels is similarly contested and inconclusive. Jonathan Portes is very clear that settled residents have suffered no detriment in terms of employment outcomes, though the impact on wage levels is 'less conclusive'[36]. The TUC is more concerned, referring to 'inadequate enforcement by government agencies of employment regulations – such as those around the National Minimum Wage … too many employers have been able to use migrants (and other vulnerable workers) to undercut other workers, which in some cases has fuelled division'[37]. At the macro level it is also only possible to speculate as to whether the stagnation of UK wage levels over the last decade or so is due, in part at least, to employers having had access to an elastic international labour market.

The main instrument for providing additional resources to communities has been through the Migration Impacts Fund. This was set up in 2009 to provide financial support to local communities to manage the transitional impacts of migration on the provision of public services. It was funded by immigration itself, through a levy on non-EEA migrants' visas. The fund was cut back and re-born as the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) in 2016 under DLUHC. It is very unsatisfactory in many respects; in particular it provides no overall assessment of priorities and, in its present form, is a bid-based system. The sums of money involved are very small, providing just £100m for the period up to 2019/20. As transitional funds, they are widely seen as insufficient in scale and as a means of responding to population change and assuaging any public concern. Further, a 2022 Review[38] of these measures found they lack rigour, proper evaluation and even

34 The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford (2022) **https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-fiscal-impact-of-immigration-in-the-uk/**

35 Home Office (2022) 'Social and Public Service Impacts of International Migration at the Local Level'. **https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210324/horr72.pdf**

36 Portes J. (2018) 'The Economic Impact of Immigration to the UK'. **https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/economic-impacts-immigration-uk**

37 TUC (2016) 'A Fairer Deal On Migration' TUC: London

38 DLUHC (2022) Controlling Migration Fund Evaluation . London: DLUHC

clarity of purpose. The Review made a whole series of recommendations to improve the scheme. Some public services, like health and education, are of course adjusted for population but the funding for these services are circumscribed by wider public expenditure decisions. Given the scale of population growth - more than 8 million over the last 20 years - it is clear that public service provision has not expanded to anything like a commensurate level and the CMF cannot even begin to deal with the scale of public service provision required.

A further and most significant problem is the way in which government has presented the argument. According to the *Social Market Foundation*, the CMF sees this as a 'migrant issue', whereas:

> 'community cohesion requires a focus on integrating all segments of society rather than solely considering integration as an immigration issue … it should become part of an expanded Integrated Communities Fund, addressing the integration of all in the community, not just recently arrived international migrants'[39]

This is well said, but the reality is this can only be delivered with sufficient resources and a clear strategy that links public expenditure provision to population growth and demographic change - something that successive governments have seemed happy to avoid. Additionally it is the lack of open discussion that has enabled opponents of migration to garner even more support by claiming that genuine concerns and grievances are being suppressed by a culture of 'political correctness' and obfuscation.

And Here is the News…

The way news - and information of all types - is presented and disseminated has changed profoundly over the last 21 years. The dominance of the BBC and ITV television channels, and the national and local newspaper and radio network, have all been substantially eroded.

A study for DCMS in 2020 found that the position of local newspapers had significantly declined and that this loss had negative consequences for cohesion in democratic society[40]. The same source quoted a 2018 study which identified a causal relationship between newspaper closures and increasingly polarised political behaviour. Further, local newspaper closures impacted negatively on electoral participation and democratic scrutiny. The Covid-19 lockdown, also referred to in the report, was expected to lead to a much greater decline in the role and influence of local and regional newspapers.

According to Press Gazette, national newspapers sales fell by two-thirds in the twenty years to 2020[41]. Again, this decline is likely to have continued as a result of the pandemic, though on-line revenue may in some cases have provided a little mitigation.

Radio and television in the UK is well regarded - and regulated - for impartiality. The BBC is by far the most widely accessed source of news but its position is currently under threat and its resources reduced. The medium of television and radio is also under threat from social media. While it remains the most used platform for news (79%), it is closely followed by the internet (64%), of which 44% was via social media; with

39 Social Market Foundation (2019) 'All Immigration is Local' p6. SMF: London

40 Lave, T. et al (2020) Research into recent dynamics of the press sector in the UK and globally. (London: Plum Consulting

41 Press Gazette (2020) https://pressgazette.co.uk/uk-national-newspaper-sales-slump-by-two-thirds-in-20-years-amid-digital-disruption/ (accessed 30.09.22)

radio (44%) and newspapers (40%) playing a strong role too. However, for those aged 16-24 and for ethnic minority groups, the internet is the most-used platform, with (82%) of those aged 16-24 using the internet for news, compared to just six in ten (57%) that use television. For ethnic minority groups, 73% use the internet for news and 69% use television[42].

So shared sources of news have declined and impartial and reliable news sources have declined even more substantially. This is especially true for younger people. Can the idea that younger people are generally more open to ideas and more inclusive still now be taken for granted?

Challenging myths and misinformation is very different from 21 years ago. There are many more sources of information and many more unregulated and partial outlets. The free market in news organisations may have some economic benefit, but the freer opportunities for myth-making may have greater consequences for cohesion.

Social Media - a Cause for Concern

Social media was simply not on the cohesion agenda 21 years ago and played no part in the northern riots. Information available to communities was largely derived from the national and local press, radio and TV, and informal networks. From its inception, social media was widely seen as an opportunity to promote inter-connections at many different levels and to enable global exchange. It promised to break down barriers between different communities and nations and enable almost every conceivable personal and professional interest to flourish on an entirely new scale. And so it has.

The sheer scale of social media now means that its impact - for good or ill - cannot be underestimated. Facebook has 2.7 billion users, Instagram 1.5 billion and Tik Tok and WeChat over 1 billion. Twitter has around 400 million.

There are, however, very many concerns about the way in which social media has been used; the abusive trolling, incitement of hatred and violence, promotion of self-harm, sexual exploitation of minors, the dissemination of conspiracy theories, more racist hatred, and a misogynistic pornography culture being examples.

But in terms of cohesion, there are some very particular and insidious threats:

> Firstly the open nature of social media has enabled an abusive and extremist narrative to be created on a global scale, with such behaviour becoming normalised. The provision of a megaphone for anyone prepared to express intolerant, discriminatory and malevolent views has created a toxic culture. Rather than condemn such abuse and steer a more considerate view, political and community leaders - including the former President of the United States - have been seen to condone and foster this climate.
>
> Secondly the prevalence of misinformation (or fake news) in social media, which as noted earlier is a major source of news, creates ever greater difficulties. As Winston Churchill once noted well before the advent of social media, ‘a lie gets round the world before the truth has got its pants on’. The question for cohesion is whether to advocate for more control (such as removing anonymous accounts and greater intervention and regulation of content) or trying to build community resilience

42 OFCOM (2018) News consumption in the UK. (London: OFCOM)

to ensure that false and irresponsible claims are seen for what they are and dismissed by users. Or possibly to do both.

Thirdly, and of even greater concern, is the way in which social media has led to the development of virtual 'echo chambers', which not only reinforce but also heighten the initial fears and prejudices expressed. Rather than open our minds to wider views, social media directs us into a reinforcing milieu by the use of algorithms to channel our engagement and selection of information. This then creates a process of in-group support and out-group distance. It has the ability to create a Manichean view of our world - we are either woke or anti-woke, a 'remainer' or a 'leaver' or, a supporter or opponent of migration - the middle ground is squeezed out, along with nuanced and agnostic views. More worryingly this trend towards virtual segregation is shared by our political leaders who are also content to have their own view of the world reinforced by supporters and followers. According to research by Sky News, MPs follow just 10 colleagues or less from other parties[43]. In addition, the 'Westminster bubble' means MPs also tend to follow the media and commentators that are known to support their own partisan views[44]. As Sky News wryly observed, this is all despite the fact that most politicians claim that they wish to unite the country.

The challenge for cohesion is to find ways to break down the virtual segregation and create more varied contacts and viewpoints, or at least, to find ways in which the virtual segregation is compensated for by other forms of contact. Bearing in mind that the virtual segregation of politicians is only a part of their separation within their tightly knit circles, having MPs lead by example would be helpful.

We also have to recognise that the impact of social media will be very variable. It is segmented and targeted at particular groups and will have a disproportionate impact upon different communities and demographics. This means that cohesion programmes must be prioritised to those least able to recognise misinformation, most confined to in-group perspectives and most vulnerable to the lure of extremism.

Social media also helps to set the tone for much of our public discourse and must therefore be considered in a wider context, as More in Common explains:

> 'In our public debates, it seems that we no longer just disagree. We reject each other's premises and doubt each other's motives. We question each other's character. We block our ears to diverse perspectives. Social media has become a hotbed of outrage, takedowns and cruelty - often targeting total strangers.'[45]

This has to change. The wider impact on democratic traditions and political trust also raises some very worrying concerns, as evidenced by a new worldwide review.[46]

43 Sky News 31.10.19 **https://news.sky.com/story/revealed-the-digital-divide-between-our-politicians-11832327**

44 Politico (5th April 2019) **https://www.politico.eu/article/westminster-twitter-bubble-illustrated-guide-graphics/**

45 More in Common (2020) 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain - Summary Report' More in Common: London

46 Lorenz-Spreen et al (2022) 'A systematic review of worldwide causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy' Nature Human Behaviour Online 07 November 2022

Segregation and polarisation of communities has remained

Social media provides a new and additional form of segregation, in which our prejudices are likely to go unchallenged and our stereotypes reinforced by the clusters we either choose or selected for us by algorithms.

At the same time, the physical separation evident 21 years ago remains the same for many sections of society. This is especially true for both housing and schooling, but also extends to many areas of social, sporting, cultural and faith settings. Some areas of employment are also segregated. Irrespective of whether segregation is underpinned by socio-economic position, it embeds the idea of 'otherness' in which stereotypes and prejudices remain unchallenged by life experience. And without direct contact with the other, there is also very little opportunity to become resilient to those who seek to portray others as a threat, inferior, or undesirable.

The British Integration Survey[47] very clearly indicated the extent of the challenge:

- Whilst a majority (53%) of Britons have some contact with people from different ethnic backgrounds in their wider social network, 44% have none.
- Nine out of ten white British people say that all or most of their social contacts are also White.
- There is a correlation between social mixing along the lines of socio-economic background and ethnicity. 72% of people who reported having no close contacts from a different socio-economic background also had no ethnic diversity in their friendship circle.
- People with no contacts from different socioeconomic backgrounds were 42% less likely than those who did to think that it is difficult for those at the bottom of society to do well.
- Lower levels of contact across difference was associated with lower levels of positive feeling and sympathy for out-groups in society.

This is a quite remarkable - and disturbing - finding. After 70 years of multiculturalism, the divides remain such that it will be very difficult for the majority of citizens to challenge their own perceptions of 'others'. For those that believe that they have actually succeeded in dealing with prejudice and stereotypes, we need to remind ourselves just how deeply they are ingrained as part of our socialisation process and recognise the tendency to fall back on learned reactions when our prejudices are challenged.

The discussion of segregation has not been easy, because again, it has been seen in some quarters as a means of undermining migrant communities and the peddling of 'myths'[48]. No doubt some claims have been exaggerated and establishing the level of segregation has always proved problematic as results depend upon the measurement technique involved. A paper by Cantle and Kaufmann (2016)[49] examined the different approaches and came to the 'clear view that that whilst many areas have become more mixed, segregation is increasing in a number of very particular respects, especially the growing isolation of the White majority from minorities in urban zones'. In the same year the Casey Review found that half of all ethnic minorities live in just three cities - Manchester, Birmingham and London[50].

47 The Challenge (2019) 'British Integration Survey 2019. London: The Challenge

48 See for example, Finney N. and Simpson L. (2009) 'Sleepwalking into Segregation? Bristol: Policy Press

49 Cantle, T and Kaufmann, E (2016) 'Is Segregation Increasing in the UK?' Open Democracy

50 Casey L (2016) 'The Casey Review: Opportunity and Integration'. HMSO

The Casey Review[51] also went on to point out that school segregation was even more profound:

> 'The school age population is even more segregated when compared to residential patterns of living. A Demos study found that, in 2013, more than 50% of ethnic minority students were in schools where ethnic minorities were the majority, and that school segregation was highest among students from Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds relative to other ethnic groups.'

The segregation of schools between 2011 and 2016 was also examined by The Challenge et al[52] and found that 'Across all schools in 2016, 26% of primary schools and 40.6% of secondary schools were found to be ethnically segregated or potentially contributing to segregation by our measure'. However, this was very variable and those areas with high levels of residential segregation were found to have around 90% segregation of secondaries and 60% of primaries.

Policies promoting 'integration' had also been a contested area, with concerns that it entailed 'assimilation' in which the identity of minorities might be undermined and diminished. However, the concept of 'parallel lives' established in the 2001 Community Cohesion Review[53] had attempted to avoid blaming either side for the polarisation and recognise that prejudices would flow in both directions as a result of the lack of meaningful contact and exchange.

Cohesion has then re-defined the 'problem' of segregation as one in which segregated and polarised communities lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudice, in which 'otherness' goes unchallenged by real life experience. Eric Kaufmann in his book White Shift[54], also tried to portray segregation as the result of the demographic movement of more than one community. He showed how the movement of the majority white population out of cities, notably London, has had a profound impact on polarisation. He coins the term 'white avoidance' to suggest that the white British decline in some areas is less to do with 'White flight' and more to do with their avoidance of dense urban areas.

The most recent assessment[55] found a similar trend in residential segregation: 'since 2011 there has been a gentle overall fall in the level of segregation in the UK, apart from the White English' - though this is the most significant group numerically. Again, the picture is highly variable with many areas maintaining very high levels of segregation, and this does not only apply along the White/Not White divide: there are also significant levels of separation between Bangladeshi/Pakistani, Black/South Asian and Muslim and Hindu communities.

Politicians do seem to accept segregation as problematic, but instead have apparently put this in the 'too difficult' box. In a series of interviews with senior politicians, the *Policy Exchange* found that politicians were simply unwilling to address this issue[56] and found that 'politics was complicit in this neglect':

51 ibid. p 11

52 The Challenge, et al (2016) 'Understanding School Segregation in England 2011 - 2016 London: The Challenge

53 Community Cohesion Review Team 2001. Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team (The Cantle Report) Home Office: London

54 Kaufmann, E (2018) 'White Shift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities' UK:Allen Lane

55 Policy Exchange (2022) 'Whatever Happened to Integration?' London: Policy Exchange

56 Policy Exchange (2022) 'Whatever Happened to Integration?' London: Policy Exchange

> 'The research for this study found a huge amount of consensus, more than expected. At the most basic level there was a shared view that the loss of connection in so many communities was of huge importance and that our politics was complicit in neglect of a growing problem. The explanations for this neglect were partly definitional and semantic, about long timelines and limited evidence. These were exacerbated by ideological and political barriers and obscured by dominant distorting prisms. Meanwhile the countervailing forces, those arguing for focus and action have been too weak and disorganised to provide the impetus needed. There was a shared view that wider community cohesion and debates about integration were inseparable and that to try to address one without the other would be unsuccessful.'[57]

This 'neglect' would be less of a concern if government were willing to commit to a wide range of cohesion programmes that brought people together across divides so as to negate the way in which segregated environments limit contact to our own in-groups. Unfortunately, this has not been the case over the last twenty years, with the initial flurry of support for cohesion programmes being transferred to counter-terrorism schemes (and confusing the two), and then having to be reinvented at various points, following a disturbance or riot. With social media now providing another 'layer' of segregation, this is even more urgent.

57 ibid, page 20

Building on the Foundations

The cohesion agenda has laid some foundations upon which to build, but much more work needs to be done to ensure that we can rise to future challenges.

A Shared Society

Shared events foster notions of 'us' rather than 'them'. Those that seem to live on in our collective memory include the death of Princess Diana, the London Olympics 2012, the England women's football team winning the Euros and, of course, the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. But such events are few and far between and are inevitably transitory in nature.

The idea of shared values is of course also seen as fundamental to a shared society. But as noted in the Casey Review, views about the values of democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, liberty, equality and mutual respect and tolerance, were found to be mixed and both 'supported and rejected by many'[58].

As has already been mentioned, our press and media are now less shared and more fragmented than ever before. We do not share the same information or narrative. The time has long gone when virtually everyone would have sat round a TV to watch just one or two programmes that became the topic of national conversation the next day.

Similarly, national institutions that reach across entire communities are few and far between. The Church of England now shares its influence with many other faith bodies; the NHS, once a source of national of pride and a symbol of fair society struggles to maintain its position; cultural organisations have slipped from the zenith of 'Cool Britannia', even if over-hyped; and the BBC is apparently under threat. The trade union battalions that were once regarded as 'the voice of the working man' have lost influence and membership, with the network of community-based working-class institutions all but disappeared. Many household company names that once reached across the nation have now given way to global entities with little or no national ownership. The monarchy perhaps has succeeded in bringing people together, even if this has been most recently through the death of a much loved and admired head of state and with some notable bumps along the road.

There are many simple and 'everyday' ways in which people can engage with those different from themselves. It is true that they do have to be 'engineered' but this is generally only because the separation we encounter is the result of the barriers that have been constructed for us. Jon Yates, in his new book *Fractured*[59], sets out a number of proposals for a 'strengthened society'. Drawing upon international examples, Yates' proposals include a month-long national service for secondary school students which would bring together teenagers from all walks of life. The 'service' bears no relation to military service and is based on understanding and supporting various projects in the wider community. It is similar to the successful, though much more costly scheme for older children provided by the National Citizen Service[60]

58 Casey L. (2016) 'The Casey Review: Opportunity and Integration' p.66. HMSO

59 Yates J (2022) 'Fractured: How We Learn to Live Together' Harper North: Manchester

60 For details see https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/national-citizen-service

which has a proven track record. Yates' second proposal is to bring parents of very young children together to learn about the development process on a mixed basis and with an extended social and bonding programme to create lasting patterns of friendship. His third proposal is for a national retirement service. This would be a three-month programme of learning, but again with the emphasis on social bonding activities that create new friendship patterns.

Yates' proposals may not provide the best, or only, options - and many others could no doubt be proposed. But the point is that we need to think much more constructively about whether our local and national institutions are actually still able to create a shared society. We also need to critically examine our existing public services and consider whether they are contributing to a shared society or facilitating divisions. This applies in particular to the role of our education system which has failed in several respects to promote common understandings - this is discussed below.

The question of 'what binds us together' is a crucial one for cohesion. It is one where we might be expected to look to our political organisations and institutions. Perhaps more surprisingly, then, national political parties also no longer command mass membership, nor indeed, little by way of trust nor identity. More than two-thirds of electors in the UK say none of the political parties represent them and describe themselves as politically 'homeless'; and the level of trust in politicians and political institutions is at an all-time low[61]. This is a most worrying development as it seems to be linked to a wider loss of political consensus and identity.

There are no doubt many reasons for this, including the advance of populism and the unfortunate and growing belief in the need for a strong leader: 54% of people would now support a strong leader who was willing to break the rules[62] - in other words, an imposed, rather than shared, attempt at unity. This is unsurprising in the sense that the development of identity politics inevitably militates against shared interests, but it is extremely concerning in an established democracy.

The obsession with ever finer-grained identities unfortunately reinforces what Amartya Sen described as 'the illusion of a unique identity'[63] in which people are 'miniaturised' and reduced to one-dimensional beings. The huge sum of what we have in common is trumped by one aspect of our difference, which is a very minor part of what constitutes our identity as 'human'. The name of the organisation *More in Common* was clearly chosen with a purpose!

It is indeed ironic that we have only just evolved the necessary science to demonstrate that the eugenicists were completely wrong - it is clear that there is only one human race - only to have ethnic, faith and other differences represented as primordial. The reality is that people do have 'layers of complementary identities'[64], a fusion of national, regional, faith, gender, ethnicity and many more. However, these identities can be all too easily instrumentalised on a reductive and singular basis to advance particular interests, whereas little is being done to emphasise our sameness, or what we hold in common.

Part of this change may have emerged as a result of new demographic profiling techniques now used by businesses that of course see huge benefit in being able to specifically target customers. This has become

61 The Hansard Society (2019) 'Audit of Political Engagement' **https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/publications/articles/the-public-think-politics-is-broken-and-are-willing-to-entertain-radical**

62 ibid

63 Sen, A. (2006) 'Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny' (New York: W.W. Norton)

64 More in Common (2020) 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s'p.15 More in Common: London

increasingly sophisticated and goes well beyond the simple divide of social class - and has also benefited from the new horizons opened up by the proliferation of social media.

Unfortunately, political parties have been all too willing to adopt the same techniques without recognising the impact on cohesion. They now have the ability to focus only on their core supporters, often not even bothering to canvass groups and areas where they think they will have little appeal. The UK is particularly vulnerable to the targeting of minority support due to the first-past-the-post electoral system. This only requires political parties to gain around 40% of votes to obtain power and tempts politicians to narrow their appeals rather than try to attract a wider electorate.

Our idea of a shared society of course also depends upon our objective reality and whether people believe that their interests are considered and responded to with fairness. With the current levels of inequality and poverty, this is a significant challenge. The IFS has been measuring poverty and inequality over the last twenty years[65]: In 2020, immediately prior to the pandemic, they found that both relative and absolute poverty (after housing costs were deducted) had hardly changed over the previous two decades but that relative child poverty had increased by three percentage points - the most sustained rise since the 1990s. They also found that while pensioner household income had improved, the benefits system had provided less support for workless households[66].

In terms of inequality, the pattern of growth in higher incomes outpaced that of lower incomes and was even more pronounced after deducting housing costs. 'On this measure, the tenth percentile was, for the first time in the decade, further behind the 90th percentile than it was before the Great Recession'[67], with the tenth percentile being the lowest and the 90th percentile being the highest income band. This of course varies according to ethnic group. The House of Commons Library found that[68] people from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani ethnic groups are around twice as likely to be in the bottom fifth of incomes than average and have the lowest median household income. They were closely followed by the Black African/Caribbean/British group. The Indian group had the highest weekly household income, closely followed by the White group.

However, the perception of fairness is heavily impacted by the extent of discrimination, harassment and abuse. This has been well documented and will not be fully restated here, but what matters is the way in which this is perceived by those that experience it, their perception of fairness and whether society really is 'shared'. The most recent research by the Belong Network through eighteen months of Covid found that four-fifths of Black respondents (81%) and three-quarters of Muslim respondents (73%)[69] reported having experienced some form of discrimination against themselves in the last month, compared with 53% of White respondents[70].

65 IFS (2002-2022) 'Living Standards, Poverty, and Inequality in the UK' Annual Report series. (With slightly different titles) London IFS

66 ibid 2020 Report p4/5

67 ibid p13

68 House of Commons Library (2020) 'Which ethnic groups are most affected by income inequality? London: HoC 10th August 2020

69 More in Common (2020) 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain' p23/24. More in Common: London

70 Belong - The Cohesion and Integration Network et al (2021) 'Beyond Us and Them - Societal Cohesion in Britain through eighteen months of Covid. Belong: Manchester

Even the controversial *Sewell Report*[71] also picked up this theme and connected it to the role of social media discussed above:

> 'One of the most concerning side effects of social media is that it enormously amplifies racist views and online commentary. Almost every day the newspapers report racist abuse of celebrities, and polling by the *British Future* think tank for the Commission finds that while 13% of White people say they have been subject to racist or prejudiced insults on social media, the figure rises to 19% for people from the Pakistani ethnic group and 22% for Black people.'

In terms of the potential for change, however, *More in Common* found that inequality is widely now accepted as a serious problem and as many as 77% of people saw racism in the same terms[72].

The Cohesion Support Infrastructure

In the 21 years since the introduction of cohesion and its acceptance and adoption by government the support structure remains fragile. After an encouraging start and a flurry of guidance, the commitment to cohesion has been episodic. The absence of a strategic approach and the continuation of the cycle of 'disturbances-reports-action-withdrawal', has been frustrating and allowed divisions to develop still further.

There has also been a loss of personnel who were skilled in devising and delivering cohesion programmes, having been unable to see a continuing role or career path. Some of the good practice developed over the years has also been lost and needed to be constantly re-invented. This includes the tension monitoring programmes which had been adopted by all major local authorities and police services but have since fallen into disuse in some areas.

The current *Integrated Communities* approach, commenced in 2018, was limited to five pilot areas and developed into an Action Plan, embracing some more general proposals[73]. These have been helpful, but do not yet amount to a comprehensive strategy, supported by the necessary practical and financial resources.

Many of the voluntary and community organisations that are the backbone of civil society have also been lost or diminished as a result of changes in the way we live and work and especially because of local authority expenditure reductions. This also applies to membership organisations[74] and particularly in the north of England where working class organisations were built around industry. This is, therefore, particularly relevant to the 'levelling up' agenda where the importance of social capital is often ignored. A report by *OnwardUK*[75] has set out to estimate the changing nature of community over time and in different parts of the UK, introducing a new *Social Fabric Index* to measure the strength of the social fabric in place over five threads: relationships, civic institutions, norms and behaviours, physical infrastructure and economic value. This does have some potential to highlight weaknesses and strengths.

71 Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 'The Sewell Report' (2021) drawing upon Katwala, S., (2021), 'Race and Opportunity in Britain: How can we Find Common Ground?', British Future, UK.

72 More in Common (2022) 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain P23/24. More in Common: London

73 HMG (2019). 'Integrated Communities Action Plan' London: HMG

74 Yates J. (2022) 'Fractured - How We Learn to Live Together' p89 Harper North: Manchester

75 Onward UK (2020) https://www.ukonward.com/reports/the-state-of-our-social-fabric/

Community networks take a long time to build; tensions and crises cannot be responded to in any sort of effective way unless community networks are already in place. Collaboration agreements and good communications must also have been established, along with the necessary organisational competences. Once local networks have been set-up on the basis of agreed priorities, the level of investment required to build cohesion is actually quite modest as the Belong Network has recently demonstrated[76] and certainly compare very favourably with the costs that result from the failure to contain tensions, in both financial and human terms. To support local delivery, a network for shared information and resources, together with the provision of training, development and advocacy, needs to be properly resourced as part of a clear and compelling longer-term commitment.

However, the support depends fundamentally on having a clear and compelling vision, supported by a comprehensive action plan. This needs to be maintained over the longer term and closely aligned with measures to tackle inequality and with enforcement action to deliver against performance measures.

But the vision needs to be wider than that developed two decades ago and to recognise the need to go beyond a problem-focused agenda in order to provide a positive view of how we should live together:

> 'In order to build a kinder, fairer and more cohesive British society, we need to strengthen the ties that bind us and in particular those ties that bridge between different groups, communities, and regions… We also have to build on the appetite for compassion, social connectedness and community spirit in society'[77]

The vision should also recognise the need to embrace the full range of partners and engage their areas of responsibility, again as suggested by the Belong Network[78]. This includes all local agencies working alongside local government 'as a co-producer, convener and enabler.' Health, education, housing and other services can reorientate their services to ensure that they are promoting cohesion in the course of their everyday activities. Business also has a strong role to play [see below]. Civil society organisations are particularly important to reach into the community and promote active engagement across boundaries.

This wider vision of cohesion has also been embraced in the British Academy's Cohesive Societies Programme, chaired by Abrams[79] and the Academy's subsequent analysis of community cohesion through the pandemic[80] both of which elaborate the multi-layered and complex forms in which cohesion plays a central role in addressing a wide set of societal challenges. The commitment must also be a shared one, not the preserve of one department or agency, nor dependent on specialists. Cohesion is everyone's responsibility and all partners need to develop an understanding of the agenda and be prepared to contribute.

Education, education, education

The fundamental role of schools in this agenda has neither been fully understood nor accepted. As discussed above, many schools remain segregated and children do not have the opportunity to meet and

76 *Belong et al* (2021) 'Beyond Us and Them: Policy and Practice for Strengthening Policy and Practice in Local Areas'. Belong; Manchester

77 ibid

78 ibid p7

79 *The British Academy 2019* Cohesive Societies: Scoping Concepts and Priorities. The British Academy: London

80 *The British Academy 2022* COVID-19 and Society: Shaping the COVID Decade. The British Academy: London

engage with others to challenge their own stereotypes and prejudices. In the age of social media and online news, used extensively by younger people, this has become more urgent.

The removal of the 'duty to promote community cohesion' from the Ofsted regime in 2010 was a mistake. This had required schools to reconsider their admissions policies and had also created a framework for challenging students' beliefs through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. It could also be used to involve parents and communities in the recognition and acceptance of diversity.

Even though the duty remains in place, it is not actively pursued by schools as there is no policy support or enforcement. The Government did come to recognise the importance of the role of schools in this area, but this was mostly couched as a response to the new emphasis on preventing violent extremism. The *Prevent Duty* guidance was largely aimed at the identification of children that may become vulnerable to extremist influence. This was devised to attempt to build children's resilience through the promotion of fundamental British values - defined in *Prevent Duty* guidance[81] a 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs'. While this included the promotion of 'tolerance', it has largely been seen in the context of counter-terrorism, rather than tackling prejudice, stereotypes and community resilience.

Valiant efforts have been made of course, by some schools, often in partnership with voluntary organisations like The Linking Network, referred to earlier. Some schools have also attempted to develop students' capacity to recognise and reject misinformation, fake news and conspiracy theories. But this is far from comprehensive and effective. It is now essential to impose a clear, inspected duty on schools, with extensive support and guidance so that schools use the opportunity, when young peoples' views are being formed, to ensure that resilience is more widely developed.

In order that schools do not have to constantly engineer contact with children who are different to them, it is now also essential that the segregation of schools is reduced. Governments have been ambivalent on this point, with the previous Labour government introducing 'parental choice' and the Conservative government supporting this approach but then appearing to understand the difficulty it creates and showing a willingness to introduce a 50% limit of any one faith in new faith schools. A clear statement by David Cameron as Prime Minister in 2016 reflected this position:

> 'It cannot be right... that people can grow up and go to school and hardly ever come into meaningful contact with people from other backgrounds and faiths. That doesn't foster a sense of shared belonging and understanding - it can drive people apart.'

However, Cameron's commitment was immediately reversed by the successive Conservative administration. The issue is not, of course, simply limited to that of faith schools. Segregation is much more endemic across the education sector.

Action needs to be more wide-ranging and embrace all types of schools and learning environments. This should clearly extend to include segregated non-faith schools, but also to the hundreds of unregistered - and unregulated - schools, and the home-schooling sector which can also be used to inculcate a very partial view of the world. It should also be extended to both higher and further education students, as there is also evidence of a lack of respect for 'others' and, accusations of the unwillingness to even listen to opposing

81 Department for Education (2015). 'The Prevent Duty: Departmental Advice for Schools and Childcare Providers'. HMG: London

and controversial views.[82] More worrying still, is the extent of segregation in university intakes and the way in which subjects are 'colour coded'[83]. Friendship networks in universities are not necessarily diverse and students may simply pass through both their schools and further and higher education and into the workplace with little or no means to acquire intercultural knowledge and understanding.

Our formal education system now needs to focus on actively developing critical thinking skills, to enable students to become more resilient and be able to resist misinformation and conspiracy theories, or just simply to negotiate social media. However, because of their admission patterns, they have also lost the opportunity to assist the development of a 'strengthened society' through the bridging and sharing approach described above by Jon Yates[84].

The Workplace

The workplace provides the opportunity to bring together a diverse range of talent and by creating a shared ethos and business goal, can ensure that there is common purpose that, in theory at least, will trump stereotypes and cross divides. However, this of course depends upon the business being willing and able to create a diverse workforce in the first instance and create a culture in which racist, misogynistic and other discriminatory views are rejected. Given the business advantage, it is hard to see why this should not be readily embraced.

There is also a wider appetite for change and overwhelming support from consumers for a more responsible form of business in which they repay the support provided to them by Government. This includes a limit on executive pay, fair wages and a reduction in carbon footprints.[85]

The Belong Network has recently issued guidance for businesses, with the support of the Intercultural Cities Network[86], which goes beyond the workplace and recognises the wider impact that business can have on their communities. The guidance sets out eight ways in which businesses can build a more cohesive environment for themselves and wider society. These are:

- Recruiting a diverse body of staff
- Promoting an inclusive culture through cohesion-aware management
- Enabling minorities and diverse groups to lead innovation
- Investing in social infrastructure in the local community
- Partnering with a local community group or charity
- Providing direct support through employee volunteering
- Localising their supply chain
- Evaluating their cohesion impact

82 https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-is-cancel-culture-affecting-uk-universities-9zqlwn8ws

83 IPR (2017) 'Diverse Places of Learning? Home Neighbourhood Ethnic Diversity and the Ethnic composition of Universities. IPR: London

84 Yates J. (2022)'Fractured: How We learn to Live Together' Harper North: Manchester

85 More in Common (2020) 'Britain's Choice: Common Ground and Division in 2020s Britain' p190 More in Common: London

86 *Belong et al* (2022) Everybody's Business: The role That Business Can Play in Supporting Community Cohesion Belong: Manchester

The 'workplace' of course includes all private and public service organisations and voluntary agencies. Large public service employers, such as health, housing, the armed forces, transport and the police in particular, should consider their management and operations. Public service organisations also need to recognise their statutory duties and that they have more extensive opportunities to use their service delivery programmes to bring communities together and challenge segregation and polarisation. They need to ensure equality of access, fairness at all times and have a duty to protect the most vulnerable and safeguard all under-represented interests, for example in respect of minorities and women and girls.

As discussed earlier, the development of workplace equality, diversity and training schemes is to be applauded, but their efficacy has been questioned and their objectives, methodology and approach does need to be reviewed.

Changing the Narrative

Cohesion policy has recognised from the outset that behaviours are determined by our underlying attitudes. We can attempt to control and constrain divisive behaviours through the use of law, by regulation and by attempting to curtail hate speech and abuse. But while cohesion supports the use of legal process to prevent incitement of violence and hatred, it also attempts to fundamentally change attitudes and values through more open engagement and dialogue. These are not always easy processes, but suppressing offensive views will not succeed in countering them and, indeed, may also create victims out of those promoting hatred of 'others'.

In the real world, at an interpersonal level, we also have to recognise that people who live in their own virtual bubble - or 'parallel lives' - have little or no opportunity to question and confront their stereotypes and prejudices. There are now many forms of experiential learning which bring people together across divides, some of which were mentioned earlier. Perhaps the most successful are those that revolve around an activity that is already accepted by different communities such as sports programmes and those in the creative sector. These have been developed to a sophisticated level in some cases[87], but now do need to be more widely shared and universally adopted.

However, perhaps the more difficult question is why communities and individuals are susceptible to hateful and divisive narratives, conspiracy stories and fake news. The answer, to a large extent, is that both the lived experience and the formal education processes have failed to equip communities with the necessary resilience - especially in respect of social media.

This can only be addressed by establishing a continuous process at the local level to both monitor tensions and the resilience of those involved. This also needs to recognise the dynamic nature of communities and that the challenges can quickly change. An effective measurement process needs to be re-introduced to understand and guide responses to low community resilience and rising levels of tension. More particularly, very specific attention now needs to be given to monitoring social media and responding to the fake news, conspiracy theories, abuse and hate-filled postings which are clearly driving new tensions and conflicts.

Changing attitudes requires very deliberative and carefully designed programmes - there are no quick fixes. In terms of in-person contact, the emphasis must be on meaningful contact. The quality and nature of

87 See for example 'The Power of Sport' toolkit developed by Belong, Spirit 2012 and sport England **https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/toolkits/power-of-sport-toolkit/**

contact is crucial - simply seeing 'others' on the bus, or exchanging pleasantries, is completely insufficient. Our 'unconscious biases' are deeply ingrained from our early years. It is therefore essential that well-crafted community-based cohesion schemes are supported by the work of the education sector, workplaces and national and local institutions, as discussed above.

Much of our experience of 'others' is now determined online and this plays a crucial role in the way we see the world - and each other. This was discussed earlier. Change is clearly needed but responses to this challenge are not yet evident.

A possible area of agreement is that people should be held to account for their social media abuse, defamatory and discriminatory views and incitement to criminal behaviour. This could be addressed by tackling anonymous accounts. This does not mean revealing account holders' identity to the users, just that their identity is known to, and validated by, the social media company. In addition, social media users could be given a choice as to whether to limit those that engage with them to accounts where identity has been verified. This could help to reduce division and abuse and could also provide an option for anxious parents and guardians. An age limit could also be imposed for younger users, as has been suggested by others.

More far-reaching proposals are being apparently developed in other countries such as Iceland, Estonia, Mexico and Taiwan and could be investigated for use in the UK. These are in the form of: 'democracy affirming technologies' to address the way in which 'social media and artificial intelligence (AI) especially have contributed to frenzies of fear and intolerance; desecrations of truth; echo chambers and mob behaviour; the amplification of extreme views… Illicit interference which can penetrate the democratic system'. The proposals allow citizens themselves to organise rapid responses to misinformation and divisive AI activity[88]. Creating citizen-based responses would also appear to remove the charge of political interference.

We also have to address the divisive and more political narrative that has succeeded in gaining credibility nationally and internationally. The populist tendency to offer simplistic and strident views, often dependent upon pitting 'us' against 'them' also has to be addressed. As discussed earlier, politicians in the UK are not blameless in this regard, not only because of the structure and nature of the political process, but also by the apparent willingness to adopt a less civil and more intolerant tone towards others. Kindness, consideration and empathy matter. Leadership that embodies this tone is crucial for cohesion.

The Belong Network has shown the importance of a supportive national narrative and identified four critical factors through its attitudinal research following the Covid-19 pandemic. These include a sense of national and local unity, the perception of divisions and also the perception of the media's role in promoting division[89]. Politicians now need to consider how they address this and how their structures, processes and behaviours contribute. Their narrative about who 'we' are and who they actually represent needs to change. Most of all, they need to rebuild trust in their own political class.

For cohesion to succeed, we need a compelling vision and widely shared commitment that stretches across national and local government, voluntary and private sectors. There is now ample evidence that people are exhausted by division and yearn for a greater sense of unity in a more compassionate, fairer and kinder society - this opportunity should be grasped.

88 Cliffe J. 'Technology has eroded liberal democracy, But it could be used to restore it ' *New Statesman* 1st September 2022

89 *Belong et al* (2021) 'Beyond Us and Them: Policy and Practice for Strengthening Policy and Practice in Local Areas'. Belong; Manchester

Recommendations

1. Government needs to develop a vision of 'how we live together' in a shared society. This needs to be based on the values of open dialogue, expecting and allowing disagreement, but avoiding the disrespectful and divisive behaviours that have unfortunately become part of the public narrative. This needs to be owned by the business and voluntary sectors as well as government departments and agencies.
2. For this vision to be realised, political parties should recognise that they have become part of the problem and need to review their structures, processes, policies and practices to try to restore trust in the political class. They also need to model exemplary behaviours.
3. Government must move away from the reactive approach to cohesion and provide sufficient, but relatively modest, support to ensure that individuals and organisations involved in the work have longer-term resources to build national and local infrastructure, including training and development and professional guidance. This is especially true of civil society organisations that are often at the front line.
4. Government should also issue guidance to education, housing and other public service providers to ensure that they are paying due regard to cohesion, especially in respect of segregated services. They need to demonstrate that they are creating the opportunities for people from different backgrounds to meet and break down prejudice and stereotypes. This is especially true of education providers.
5. Education providers - including all schools and universities - require a fundamental review to create more inclusive admissions policies and to develop creative thinking skills to build students' resilience to misinformation, fake news and extremism. This should be part of a regulated regime and should include unregistered schools and home schooling.
6. Government need to recognise that social media is adding a new layer of segregation to previous physical divides. Social media now has very significant power to shape popular views without any real controls. Urgent attention needs to be given to the methods of social media companies, as well as the potential for creating a safe environment in which anonymous accounts can be disregarded. This approach needs to be extended to considering new processes to ensure that the anti-democratic narratives are countered.
7. Both business and public sector employers need to reconsider EDI schemes to ensure that they are succeeding in changing attitudes and contributing to cohesion in the workplace and local community.
8. It is the government's role to determine migration levels as part of economic policy, but whatever level they set, they also need to understand the wider concerns about migration impacts and provide more substantial support than is currently available through the Controlling Migration Fund. This should explicitly link public service provision to population growth and provide sufficient regulation of employment practices.
9. Government and local government should seek to develop a clearer strategy of shared institutions and activities, to replace those that have been lost, but also recognise the evident popular desire to end divisions and build upon what we hold in common.