Rebranding Britain?

Ideological Dilemmas in Political Appeals to "British Multiculturalism"[1].

Susan Condor

Lancaster University, UK

For: Martyn Barrett, Chris Flood and John Eade (Eds) *Nationalism*, *Ethnicity*,

Citizenship: Multidisciplinary Perspectives

Summary

In this chapter I consider some dilemmatic tensions within contemporary attempts to (re)brand Britain a "multicultural society". I start out by considering two political speeches in which Labour Party ministers associated British Multiculturalism with the general liberal values of social inclusion, tolerance, human rights, progressive change and cosmopolitan moral and political sensibility. Analysis of the text of these speeches reveals tensions within these arguments. First, the rhetorical formulations that the speakers used to justify the political project of British Multiculturalism tacitly presupposed a natural order in which nations are normally populated by a racially and culturally homogenous folk. Second, British Multiculturalism is presented as a form of brand distinctiveness, differentiating the United Kingdom from other polities, and endowing the British state with commercial and military advantage in the international arena. Finally, far from constituting a post-Anglocentric, post-colonial re-formulation of national identity, the specific narratives used to legitimate the construct of British Multiculturalism closely echo the discursive tropes previously used to promote British Imperialism.

Contesting the Categories of Nation, Citizenship and Ethnicity

The categories of nation and nationalism, race and racism, culture, ethnicity, and citizenship constitute essential components of political debate in contemporary Western democracies. Despite, or perhaps due to, the commonplace nature of these concepts, they are liable to be interpreted in a variety of ways. Conceptual fuzziness may facilitate flexibility and enhance accuracy in everyday reasoning (e.g. Jucker, Smith & Ludge, 2003). However, vague concepts are typically treated as anathema to rigorous social scientific practice. Consequently, it is common for social scientists to

attempt to clarify the distinction between nationality and citizenship (e.g. Connor, 1978; Walby, 2003; McCrone & Kiely, 2000), and to propose typologies of ways in which the constructs of nation and State may be related to categories of race, culture and ethnicity. The most common form of classification distinguishes between "exclusive"[2] ethnic formulations (according to which nationality or citizenship status are determined by descent) and "inclusive" civic formulations (in which nationality and citizenship are construed as racially neutral)[3]. The assumption that ethnic and civic constructions constitute "rival" versions of social and political membership (Máiz, 2003) in turn informs research which seeks to classify either bureaucratic procedures (e.g. Brubaker, 1992; Greenfield, 1992) or individual social actors in terms of their endorsement of particular criteria for the ascription of national identity or citizenship (for examples from a UK context. see Bond, 2006; Kiely, Bechhofer & McCrone, 2005; McCrone & Bechhofer, 2008; Tilley, Exley & Heath, 2004).

Of course, the practice of establishing academic definitions, distinctions or typologies does not result in harmonious agreement. On the contrary, academics are inclined to treat any proposed lexical or classificatory scheme as the subject of further contestation. For example, the idea that nationhood and citizenship can ever in practice be distinguished from the constructs of race and ethnicity has been

---

[2] Although it has become conventional to equate ethnic formulations with exclusiveness and civic formulations with inclusiveness, this is also open to debate (see, e.g. Gans, 2003; Yack, 1999). Morris (1996), for example, argued that "cultures of descent" have the potential to be inherently pluralistic in so far as membership is not contingent upon an individual's acceptance on the part of any particular practices or institutions but is "vouchsafed by ancestry alone".

[3] In their turn, the precise meaning of the terms "ethnic" and "civic" are highly debateable (Eriksen, 1993; Thomas, 1999). For example, within assimilationist models of citizenship (of which public discourses in France are often taken to represent an exemplary case, see Bryant, 1997; Favell, 1998) the construct of "civic" tends to be treated as synonymous with "cultural", and the construct of "ethnic" is understood to refer merely to the use of ancestral (racial or genetic) criteria to determine citizenship. In contrast, multiculturalist models of citizenship often presume that "civic" polities are both racially and culturally neutral. In such cases, the construct of "ethnic" nationalism is understood to embrace situations in which citizenship status is contingent upon the adoption of particular cultural practices (Kymlicka, 1995; cf. Alexander, 2002; Barker, 1981).

questioned by those like Gilroy (1987, p. 56) who argued that the construct of nationhood is "saturated with racial connotations", and Goldberg (2002, p. 11) who argued that the formation of contemporary liberal States was "racially predicated". Similarly, attempts to classify forms of nationalism or citizenship into civic and ethnic varieties have been questioned on various grounds (e.g. Calhoun, 1999; Thomas, 2002).

In this chapter, I shall consider how a dualistic model, which pits "inclusive" versus "exclusive" forms of national representation, can be employed rhetorically to manage the tension between national-specific political practices and general liberal frames of political reference (cf. Beiner, 2003). Specifically, I will focus on how the distinction between ethnic and civic forms of citizenship may be mobilsed by UK politicians in their attempts to brand Britain as an essentially, and distinctively, multicultural society.

British identity as an essentially contested construct

In his monograph, *Banal Nationalism*, Billig (1995) argued that appeals to British identity in the mass media and political rhetoric illustrated the status of the construct of British society as "a topos beyond argumentation". However, whilst at the time that Billig was writing some politicians and some sections of the media may have been inclined to treat the category as if it were unproblematic, in fact the meaning and legitimacy of the term "British" has always constituted the subject of social and political contestation (Cohen, 1994; Davies, 1999; Samuel, 1998). Since the publication of *Banal Nationalism*, a number of explicit public debates have taken place concerning the most appropriate way in which to represent British society, identity and polity. In England, these debates have tended to centre on issues relating

to immigration, race relations and multiculturalism (e.g. Alibhai Brown, 2000; Parekh 2000a, 2000b; cf. Fortier, 2005). However, the British identity problematic is also regularly raised in relation to European Union membership (e.g. Redwood, 1999) and devolved governance (see Bechhofer & McCrone, 2009). Consequently, far from constituting an unambiguous category of discourse, the term British might – like nation, citizenship and ethnicity – be better understood as an example of what Gallie (1956) termed an essentially contested construct, characterized by continual disputes about its proper use, which are not settled by "appeal to empirical evidence, linguistic usage, or the canons of logic alone" (Gray, 1978, p. 344).

Cultural theorists regularly distinguish two competing versions of British identity, reflecting the ideal types of ethno-cultural nationalism and civic citizenship:

> One is Anglo-centric, frequently conservative, backward-looking, and increasingly located in a frozen and largely stereotyped idea of the national culture. The other is ex-centric, open-ended, and multi-ethnic. (Chambers, 1989 p. 94).

In this chapter I consider some of the strategies used by members of the Liberal-Left political elite to promote a supposedly progressive, ex-centric, multi-ethnic image of British society in contrast to a supposedly conservative, Anglo-centric, mono-ethnic alternative. I shall suggest that although these two versions of British identity are treated as antithetical, in practice, attempts to (re)brand Britain as a multicultural society can tacitly rely upon the very values of ethnic, insular, nationalism that the speaker purports to be rejecting.

Ideological dilemmas in political reasoning

In considering the implicit counter themes apparent in formal appeals to British multiculturalism, I shall be employing the social psychological construct of ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988). Developed from Billig's (1987, 1991) rhetorical approach to the process of thinking and attitude formulation, the ideological dilemmas perspective emphasizes how both formal and common-sense ideologies contain contrary, and on occasions explicitly contradictory or dilemmatic, themes. These contradictions are not necessarily explicit. Rather, Billig et al. (1988) noted how arguments often possess implicitly dilemmatic properties which "can go beyond the…intentions of the communicator", and may include contradictions "contained within the semantic structure of the discourse itself" (p.22). By way of exemplification, Billig et al. (1988) reported a series of case studies illustrating how tensions within liberal ideology (e.g., between the competing values of equality versus authority, of individuality versus common human nature) could be identified in everyday debates concerning gender, education, prejudice, health and expertise. Subsequently, the ideological dilemmas approach has been used to highlight tensions within formal and everyday discourses concerning ethnicity, nationality and citizenship in contemporary liberal democracies (e.g. Bozatzis, 2009; Condor, 2000; 2006; 2008; Condor & Gibson, 2007; Sapountzis, 2008).

In this chapter I will apply the ideological dilemmas perspective to two formal political speeches in which the speaker argues in favour of the idea of Britain as a "multicultural society". Both of these speeches were delivered by UK Labour Party ministers during the first quarter of 2001. UK politicians regularly deliver speeches on the subject of multiculturalism and/or British identity. In the past few years, elite perspectives on multiculturalism have become increasingly ambivalent (Joppke, 2004;

Parvin, 2009). In contrast, the particular speeches that I shall be considering in this chapter involve relatively unequivocal appeals to the fact and value of British multiculturalism. As such, they provide a useful test case (cf. Flyvbjerg, 2004) through which to explore conceptual tensions that can lie beneath the rhetorical surface of political appeals to the fact and value of multicultural nationality or citizenship.

The first speech was delivered in February 2001 by Keith Vaz, an Indian-born MP, who was at the time was the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State. This speech was entitled, *Citizenship, identity and ethnicity in Britain and Europe*, and was presented at the Diplomatic Academy, Vienna. The second speech was delivered two months later by Robin Cook, who was at the time a Labour MP representing the seat of Livingston, and acting as Foreign Secretary. This speech, entitled *British Identity*, was presented to the Centre for the Open Society in London. These two speeches were targeted at different audiences and consequently focused on rather different issues. However, the ways in which the speakers constructed arguments against ethnic, and in favour of multicultural, versions of British identity and society shared many features in common, and for present purposes we may deal with them together without any significant loss of information. I shall start out by briefly outlining the way in which Cook and Vaz formulated their arguments in favour of a reconceptualization of Britain as a multicultural society. I shall then go on to consider some implicit dilemmatic properties of these arguments.

Arguments in Support of Britain as a "Multicultural Society"

Constructing multiculturalism's rhetorical Other

The first thing to note is that (*pace* Billig) in neither of these speeches did Vaz

or Cook presuppose that the constructs of British society or British identity represented topi "beyond argumentation". On the contrary, both speakers adopted a polemical stance, defining their own (and by extension their Party's and the Government's) brand of British identity precisely in opposition to a putative rival construction. Like Chambers (quoted on page xx above), both Vaz and Cook associated the idea of Britain as a "multicultural society" with a cluster of liberal symbols such as progressive change, inclusiveness, anti-racism, internationalism and support for the EU. In the following extract, for example, we see Vaz equating multiculturalism with values of inclusion, fairness and equality:

Extract 1 (KV)

1   The British Government's policies on multiculturalism are clear. We

2   see strength and enrichment in diversity. And we believe that one

3   of the greatest responsibilities we have is to try to make Britain a

4   fairer place; a place where people of every race and religion feel

5   themselves to be an equal part of the whole; a society which

6   makes a celebration out of the fact that we are multicultural,

7   multi-religious and multi-racial; one which not just assimilates

8   people but celebrates people's differences.

In the course of their speeches, both Vaz and Cook invoked a categorical distinction between their own utopian visions and their anti-logoi (Billig, 2003): ethnic nationalist versions of British identity and society. Multiculturalism and ethnic understandings of British identity were construed as alternative forms of attitude, reliably endorsed by particular individuals and, by implication, the representatives of particular political parties[4]. For example, Vaz presented his own (and the *British*

---

[4] It is relatively common for the liberal left in the UK to attribute The Conservative Party with the stigma of ethnic nationalism (as illustrated by the quotation from Chambers). However, although individual ministers and the main political parties may adopt distinctive positions concerning race, immigration and (multi)culture, there nevertheless exists what Favell (1998) has termed a general "consensual logic" (p. 103) on the part of the UK political establishment against explicitly racial or

Government's) preferred version of British identity with the views of *different people*:

Extract 2 (KV)

1   On the issue of identity, there has been quite a bit of debate in Britain
2   about just what it means to be British. It is clear that the term embraces
3   different things for different people. For some, it is a narrow term
4   suggesting white, English and Empire – thus excluding millions of British
5   citizens. For others, it conveys a much wider range of images reflecting
6   the whole of our society…

Billig (1989) distinguished between two different ways in which individuals may be understood to "hold a view". The first, which he termed the "multi-subjective" position, treats an individual's (or group's) views as expressions of essentially differing, and possibly idiosyncratic, attitudes. The second form of representation, which Billig termed "intersubjectivity", presents "views" as pertaining to a singular, and ultimately discernable empirical reality, such that agreement between perceivers is ultimately possible and ideally desirable. In the case of the stretch of talk presented in extract 2, Vaz is apparently displaying an even-handed approach to differences of opinion concerning *what it means to be British*. However, at the outset of his speech he made it clear that the multicultural position did not simply represent one point of view amongst many equally legitimate alternatives, but rather represented the only position which adequately reflected the objective facts of contemporary social reality:

Extract 3 (KV)

1   The first point I would like to get across is that Britain is without
2   doubt a multicultural society.

---

cultural definitions of British identity and citizenship.

Robin Cook similarly referred to *some people* who assume *the homogeneity of British identity … to be the norm* (see extract 12, line 2, below), but presented the multicultural alternative as a project that the British people in general need to *come to terms with*, not simply because it more accurately reflected the nature of British society, but also for pragmatic reasons:

Extract 4 (RC)

1   Coming to terms with multiculturalism as a positive force for our
2   economy and society will have significant implications for our
3   understanding of Britishness

More specifically, in so far as Vaz and Cook suggested that their own view of Britain as a multicultural society might be at odds with current public opinion, this necessarily posed questions of democratic accountability. As Sacks (1992: 1.33) noted, in contemporary Western democracies, "one of the characteristics of opinion is that it's something lay people are entitled to have", that is, in Billig's terms, there is a norm of multi-subjectivity. In the speeches that I am considering here, Vaz and Cook managed the problem of prioritizing their own version of British identity over putative rival versions by employing a particular form of discursive psychology (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1995). Notably, both speakers avoided casting *debate* about British identity as a reflection of differing opinions. Rather, the different stances that individuals might adopt in this debate were attributed to current differences in *understanding* (cast as varied, unstable, and ultimately resolvable with reference to empirical reality). The psychological category of *understanding* was, in turn, distinguished from the constructs of *ideals* and *values*, both of which were invested with connotations of consensus and permanence:

Extract 5 (KV)

1   underpinning the word [British] must be a shared understanding

2   of core British values such as respect for human rights, tolerance,

3   fair play, creativity and an outward approach to the world. This is

4   essential to maintain a cohesive and stable society. In general there

5   are few conflicts between sharing these values and accepting cultural

6   differences.

With respect to my earlier comment concerning the ways in which Vaz and Cook

linked ethno-cultural understandings of British society with insular nationalism, we

may note how, in extract 5, Vaz presented *core British values* not only as compatible

with an acceptance of domestic *cultural differences*, but also as necessarily entailing

an outward approach to the world.

In extract 6, Robin Cook employs a slightly different form of argument,

according to which the current status of Britain as a *successful multi-ethnic society* is

attributed to unspecified *British values*:

Extract 6 (RC)

1   We should be proud that those British values have made Britain

2   a successful multi-ethnic society. We should welcome that

3   pluralism as a unique asset for Britain in a modern world where

4   our prosperity, our security and our influence depend on the health

5   of our relations with other peoples around the globe.

Once again we can see how *British values* are associated not only with the

endorsement of multiculturalism in the domestic arena, but also with a concern over

our relations with other peoples around the globe.

Imagining polycultural polity

The endorsement of values of cultural diversity might appear to preclude

appeals to a singular and enduring "national character" (cf. Billig, 1995; Reicher &

Hopkins, 2001). Once again, we may note how Vaz and Cook managed to recover an image of a singular national psyche by adopting a particular psychological lexicon. As we have seen, they invested *values* and *ideals* with the connotations of homogeneity and permanence typically associated with the idea of national character. In addition, it is interesting to note how both speakers used the term *British identity* as a substitute for references to substantive national culture or character.

Vaz and Cook used two additional rhetorical strategies by which to render images of a polycultural British society, and multiculturalism as a socio-political process, concrete and imaginable. First, they regularly slipped between the language of polity and the idiom of geography, re-presenting *British society* in non-social terms, as *the island/s* (cf. Abell et al., 2006)[5]. For example, Vaz (see extract 13, below), elided the constructs of *British society* and *island status,* and Cook (see extract 12, below) employed anthropomorphic imagery to attribute enduring historical experience not to the British people but British territory: *The diversity of modern Britain expressed through devolution and multiculturalism is more consistent with the historical experience of our islands*.

The second strategy involved reifying the construct of *culture/s* through culinary imagery. The capacity for abstract constructs and values to be conveyed through images of food has been documented in other contexts, (e.g. Jovchelovitch & Gervais, 1999), as has the specific use of culinary imagery in the context of accounts of British multiculturalism (Cook, Crang, & Thorpe, 1999).

---

[5] Vaz's use of the singular "island" and Cook's use of the plural "islands" parallels differences in formulation in England and Scotland noted by Abell et al (2006). The complexities and contradictions that run through political arguments are also evidenced at the more basic level of lexical choice: the singular "island" may be regarded as problematic since it omits part of the territory of the UK State. On the other hand, the plural "our islands" may be regarded as overly-inclusive, in so far as it is often used by people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland as a reference to the geographical region of the British Isles as opposed to the territory of the UK State. Note how the BNP – who generally espouse an ideology of national integrity and support policies of intra-UK national self-governance – also use the plural form "these islands" (see extracts 17 and 18).

In extracts 1 and 2, we saw Keith Vaz argue in favour of a racially and culturally inclusive version of Britishness. In the course of working up this account, Vaz switched from using the term *British* as a social or political referent (a *society* of *citizens*) to relaying images of cultural pluralism through references to cuisine:

Extract 7 (KV)

1   For some, it is a narrow term suggesting white, English and Empire – thus
2   excluding millions of British citizens. For others, it conveys a much wider range of
3   images reflecting the whole of our society – not just fish and chips, but also sweet
4   and sour pork and chicken tikka masala. In fact, the last dish was
5   actually invented in Britain by Indian restaurateurs, but I digress!

Two months later Cook took up Vaz's *digressive* narrative concerning chicken tikka masala and raised it to exemplificatory status[6]:

Extract 8 (RC)

1   Chicken Tikka Masala is now a true British national dish, not
2   only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect
3   illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external
4   influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Masala sauce
5   was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat
6   served in gravy.

The uses of history

Temporal imagery is often used by elites and by ordinary social actors to naturalize national and State boundaries, to establish the value of national culture or artifacts (variously through discourses of heritage or progressive narratives of change), and to establish positive distinctiveness *vis a vis* various categories of

---

[6] Vaz's original reference to chicken tikka masala appears to have been ignored by the news media. Cook's recycling of chicken tikka masala as a metaphor for British cultural hybridity, on the other hand, was widely reported – and generally ridiculed - in the media in England. In Scotland, media emphasis was more inclined to be placed on the question of whether chicken tikka masala could be claimed as a distinctively Scottish invention (Rosie et al., 2004).

national Other (Condor, 1997; 2006; Condor & Abell, 2006). Both Vaz and Cook

drew heavily on historical narratives when presenting their vision of Multicultural

Britain, and it is worth considering these accounts in a little detail.

Multicultural Britain as a brand-update

Both Vaz and Cook employed references to time and history to differentiate

their own multicultural conceptions of British identity from its ethnic nationalist rival.

For example, Vaz argued that multicultural versions of British identity more

accurately reflected contemporary, post-imperial, political realities than alternative

more exclusive formulations:

Extract 9 (KV)

1   the term 'British' is not a static one but one that has to take

2   account of the changes in our society over the last thirty years,

3   including devolution, globalization, the end of Empire and

4   Britain's much closer involvement in Europe. It needs to include

5   all our citizens.

Cook similarly treated ethno-cultural constructions as antithetical to a *modern*

notion of national identity:

Extract 10 (RC)

1   The modern notion of national identity cannot be based on race and

2   ethnicity, but must be based on shared ideals and aspirations. Some

3   of the most successful countries in the modern world, such as the United

4   States and Canada, are immigrant societies. Their experience shows

5   how cultural diversity, allied to a shared concept of equal citizenship, can

6   be a source of enormous strength.

At the same time, however, Cook used historical imagery to support the argument that

representations of an indigenous British race or culture had never, in fact, been valid:

Extract 11 (RC)

1   The idea that Britain was a 'pure' Anglo-Saxon society before the arrival of

2   communities from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa is fantasy. But if

3   this view of British identity is false to our past, it is false to our future too.

4   The global era has produced population movements of a breadth and

5   richness without parallel in history.

Towards the end of his speech, Cook attempted to manage the potential contradiction in his line of argument by suggesting that mono-cultural representations of Britishness had once been true, but only *from the Victorian era of imperial expansion to the aftermath of the Second World War*, a period that he effectively bracketed from the longue duree of British history by labeling this as an *extraordinary* moment[7]:

Extract 12 (RC)

1   In our thousand years of history, the homogeneity of British

2   identity that some people assume to be the norm was confined to a

3   relatively brief period. It lasted from the Victorian era of imperial

4   expansion to the aftermath of the Second World War and depended

5   on the unifying force of those two extraordinary experiences. The

6   diversity of modern Britain expressed through devolution and

7   multiculturalism is more consistent with the historical experience

8   of our islands.

British ethnic diversification as gradual evolutionary process

One common historical formulation often used by ordinary social actors in England involves a "narrative of national diversification" (Condor, 2006), according to which repeated waves of foreign influence have contributed to an historical process through which Britain gradually transformed from an original condition of ethnic

---

[7] This kind of historical periodisation - whereby the age of empire and the Second World War are separated off from the otherwise ongoing flow of history - tends to be more common among speakers from Scotland than England (Condor & Abell, 2006).

nationhood to a contemporary state of cultural diversity. In their speeches, both Vaz and Cook used this form of historical representation to normalize and to legitimate post-colonial immigration. In extract 13, Vaz describes the ongoing process by which *British society* developed into a *nation of island people from diverse origins*:

Extract 13 (KV)

1   British society, on the other hand, has been deeply marked by its island

2   status of four nations and its history of an overseas rather than a

3   continental empire. It has always been a nation of island people from

4   diverse origins - by 1066, when we were invaded for the last time by the

5   Normans, we had already been subject to invasion and settlement by the

6   Romans, Angles, Saxons, Danes, Vikings, and Norse. Immigrants arrived in

7   significant numbers from Europe during the late 19th century and in the

8   first half of the last century. And after the war, we encouraged immigration

9   to Britain from our colonies and former colonies to help rebuild our

10   shattered economy. The first group of Jamaicans arrived in 1948 and were

11   followed by tens of thousands more, from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan

12   and Bangladesh. The 70s and 80s also saw the arrival of the Hong Kong

13   Chinese and refugees from Vietnam.

Robin Cook employed a similar trope when he represented the present condition of racial heterogeneity and cultural pluralism as the most recent stage in the open-ended evolution of British identity:

Extract 14 (RC)

1   The first element in the debate about the future of Britishness is

2   the changing ethnic composition of the British people themselves.

3   The British are not a race, but a gathering of countless different

4   races and communities, the vast majority of which were not

5   indigenous to these islands.

Later in his speech, he extemporized upon this theme:

Extract 15 (RC)

1   London was first established as the capital of a Celtic Britain by Romans

2   from Italy. They were in turn driven out by Saxons and Angles from

3   Germany. The great cathedrals of this land were built mostly by Norman

4   Bishops, but the religion practiced in them was secured by the succession

5   of a Dutch Prince. Outside our Parliament, Richard the Lionheart proudly

6   sits astride his steed. A symbol of British courage and defiance. Yet he

7   spoke French much of his life and depended on the Jewish community of

8   England to put up the ransom that freed him from prison.

British ethnic diversification as ecological crisis

In the next section of this chapter I shall be considering some of the tensions, oppositional themes and paradoxes that may be identified within Vaz and Cook's arguments in favour of British Multiculturalism. Before we move on, however, it is worth noting the capacity for speakers to mobilize similar conventionalized narratives to support rival political arguments. Social psychologists have pointed to the ways in which the same propositions may be invoked to support both racist and anti-racist arguments (Verkuyten, 1993; Verkuyten de Jong & Masson, 1994). In the case of the speeches considered here, we have seen how both Vaz and Cook relied heavily on the narrative device of progressive waves of foreign influence to undermine claims concerning the ethnic basis of British identity, to naturalize the status of contemporary Britain as a multicultural society and to legitimate postcolonial immigration. It is, then, interesting to note that precisely the same narrative could be employed by the far right British National Party (BNP) to support a racialized version of British identity, to denaturalize multiculturalism and to oppose postcolonial immigration.

In a speech entitled *The Reality of Race*, Nick Griffin (BNP chairman) started out by explicitly endorsing an ethno-racial conceptualization of nationality:

Extract 16 (BNP)

1   Mankind is divided into races, and those races, while sharing many common

2   features of humanity, are innately different in many ways beyond mere colour.

3   […] The most important first consequence of our acceptance of innate human

4   differences is our recognition that nationality, while it is influenced by many

5   factors including shared loyalties, common history, religious heritage and

6   personal identification is first and foremost decided by ethnicity.

Although in their public rhetoric the BNP maintain a commitment to an ethnic version of nationhood, in formal statements BNP spokespeople do not treat *indigenous* or *native* British peoples as a primordial folk. Rather, BNP ideologues combine the "waves of foreign settlement" narrative with a notion of Western Europeans as *kindred peoples* (extract 17, line 7) of *almost identical stock* (extract 18, line 7)[8], to present an image of the white British people as a distinctive, hybrid, strain that evolved over thousands of years:

Extract 17 (BNP)

1   The British National Party exists to secure a future for the

2   indigenous peoples of these islands in the North Atlantic which have

3   been our homeland for millennia. We use the term indigenous to

4   describe the people whose ancestors were the earliest settlers here

5   after the last great Ice Age and which have been complemented by the historic

6   migrations from mainland Europe. The migrations of the Celts, Anglo-Saxons,

7   Danes, Norse and closely related kindred peoples have been, over the past few

8   thousands years, instrumental in defining the character of our family of nations.

      BNP Mission Statement (http://www.bnp.org.uk/mission.htm).

Extract 18 (BNP)

1   Q: When you talk about being "British" what do you mean?

2   A: We mean the bonds of culture, race, identity and roots of the native British

---

[8] The attribution of the "kindred" nature of the Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Norse, Romans and Normans to their common racial "stock" is spelled out in an article which clarifies the claim that the Indigenous British constitute a collectivity of Caucasian peoples originating in Northern and Western Europe. See http://www.bnp.org.uk/articles/british_mongrel.htm

3   peoples of the British Isles. We have lived in these islands near on 40,000 years!

4   We were made by these islands, and these islands are our home. When we in the

5   BNP talk about being British, we talk about the native peoples who have lived in

6   these islands since before the Stone Age, and the relatively small numbers of

7   peoples of almost identical stock, such as the Saxons, Vikings and Normans, and

8   the Irish, who have come here and assimilated.

BNP website FAQs (http://www.bnp.org.uk).

The presumption that British culture in general, and British democratic values in particular, represent the distinctive historical product of *the peoples of Western Europe* (extract 19, line 3) is used by the BNP as a basis for resisting immigration on the part of Central and Eastern Europeans, and people with ancestral origins outside Europe, on the grounds that they have *genetically pre-determined* (line 6) limitations to their ability to accommodate *European* values of democratic citizenship:

Extract 19 (BNP)

1   Taking these facts into account, we believe that it is far more likely than not that

2   the historically established tendency (and we do not claim that it is any more than

3   that) of the peoples of Western Europe in general - and of these islands in

4   particular - to create and sustain social and political structures in which individual

5   freedom, equality before the law, private property and popular participation in

6   decision-making, is to some extent at least genetically pre-determined. Such

7   tendencies would, naturally, both shape our culture around such institutions, and

8   in turn tend to be reinforced by that culture.

9   If this is the case, then the idea that it is possible to allow large numbers of people

10   from very different ethnic groups and cultures to settle here, on the assumption

11   that it is just something about our bracing sea air that tends to make us natural

12   born democrats, is fatally flawed. Just as is the idea that we can export our

13   enthusiasm for representative government to other peoples, either by example or

14   by carpet-bombing their countries into giving up their penchant for strong

15   government or theocracy.

16   Hence, in order to guarantee the continued existence of our British democracy, we

17   also intend to take long-term steps to guarantee the continued existence, as the

18   clearly dominant ethnic, cultural and political group, of the native peoples of these

19   islands – the English, Scots, Irish and Welsh – together with the limited numbers

20   of peoples of European descent, who arrived as refugees or economic immigrants

21   centuries or decades ago, and who have fully integrated into our society.

(From: *Rebuilding British Democracy*, BNP General Election Manifesto, 2005).

The Return of the Repressed: Some Dilemmatic Elements of Appeals to "British Multiculturalism"

In this section of the chapter I turn to consider some tensions within Vaz's and Cook's attempts to (re)brand Britain as a multicultural society, and their claims that an endorsement of British multiculturalism entails opposition to Anglocentrism, a rejection of the "outdated" ideology of ethnic nationalism, and the adoption of an outward approach to the world.

Implicit Anglocentrism

We have seen how Vaz and Cook – in common with many contemporary commentators – treated presumptions of British monoculture as part of an ideological package that also included Anglocentrism. For these speakers, concerns to avoid Anglocentric forms of accounting had an immediate political significance in the light of recent changes to the UK constitution. In extracts 9 and 12 the speakers made passing reference to devolution. Robin Cook, who represented a constituency in Scotland, dedicated a section of his speech to the issue of *British identity* in relation to devolution. Although Keith Vaz did not discuss the issue of devolution at any length, he nevertheless acknowledged multi-national as well as poly-ethnic constructions of British diversity by his reference to how *British society…has been deeply marked by its island status of four nations…* (extract 13), and by distinguishing his preferred

("inclusive") representation of British identity from those Other formulations which equate the terms British and English (see extract 2).

However, attention to the details of these accounts reveals how these statements of intent were belied by the speakers' actual rhetorical practice. In particular, we may note that the kinds of historiography that the speakers used to naturalise "British" polyculture neglected the different histories of the component nations of the UK (cf. Davies, 1999; Kearney, 1989). The UK has only existed in its present form since 1922, and the political union between England and Scotland dates from 1707. However, both Cook and Vaz took 1066 (the date of the Norman conquest of *England*) as the canonical landmark in the history of Britain. Cook, for example, referred to *our thousand years of history* (extract 12), and Vaz referred explicitly to 1066, *when we were invaded for the last time by the Normans* (extract 13). More generally, both Vaz and Cook employed Anglocentric historiographies of Britain, universalising not only the experience of the Norman Conquest (of England), but also the rule of King Richard (of England), and the Roman occupation (of Britannia Major, but not of Caledonia)[9]. In contrast, it is instructive to note how the BNP history of *our family of nations* (reported in extract 17) studiously avoids this form of Anglocentric narrative.

Presupposing an ethnic basis to nationhood

Although both Vaz and Cook were concerned to resist ethno-cultural representations of British society, neither of these speakers challenged ethnic nationalism as a general ideological principle. On the contrary, the strategies that Vaz

---

[9] A very similar Anglocentric version of the "British" history of immigration was later presented by Gordon Brown (2007) in his speech on Britishness, which was much less supportive of the politics of multiculturalism (see Lee, 2007).

and Cook used to promote the fact and value of *British* multiculturalism presupposed a natural order in which nations (and in particular, other European nations) are generally populated by an original folk possessing a common ancestral heritage and a homogeneous and distinctive culture.

The assumption that nations are normally characterized by racial and cultural homogeneity constitutes an unstated bridging assumption in Vaz's and Cook's arguments concerning the importance of non-ethnic understandings of nationhood for the *modern world,* which implicitly presuppose a pre-modern world, in relation to which (by implication) ethnic formulations would have been appropriate. In addition, these politicians' attribution of British racial and cultural pluralism to *external influence* (e.g. extract 21, line 3) in general, and to trans-*national* migration in particular, fails entirely to acknowledge the presence of indigenous cultural heterogeneity within the territories of extant or historically emergent nations or States. Neither Vaz nor Cook entertained the possibility that the inhabitants of the British Isles (or, in extract 10, of Canada or the USA) might have been characterized by ethnic diversity before the waves of foreigners arrived at their shores. Similarly, they did not entertain the possibility that the European peoples that they cite as cultural brokers (Saxons, Danes, Vikings, Norse, etc.) might themselves have been characterized by various, or hybrid, cultural forms. Finally, their presumption that different cultures were originally the property of distinctive *national* peoples inhabiting *national* territories is apparent in their anachronistic application of contemporary frames of European geopolitical reference, whereby imperial Rome is located in *Italy*, and the Angles are said to hail from *Germany* (extract 15).

Limits to the imagination of British polyculture

Although both Cook and Vaz started out by characterizing their arguments as attempts to defend and promote the political project of British Multiculturalism, analysis of the content of their accounts points to the occurrence of topic drift (Hobbs, 1990). In practice, the gist of their arguments actually tended to endorse values of *racial* diversity and cultural *hybridity*. For example, although Vaz prefaced his speech with the proclamation, *Britain is without doubt a multicultural society* (extract 20), the specific evidence that he offered to back up this assertion actually involved images of racial, rather than cultural, diversity *(White, Black, Asian…*line 8):

Extract 20 (KV)

1   The first point I would like to get across is that Britain is without doubt a
2   multicultural society. This strikes you as soon as you arrive in the UK.
3   Switch on the television and you will see ethnic minority newsreaders,
4   political commentators and writers; comedians, soap opera stars and opera
5   singers; fashion designers and models, footballers and dancers. Watch any
6   arts programme and you will increasingly find that much of contemporary
7   British culture is a hybrid, born of the talents creativity and styles of many
8   different groups – White, Black, Asian and other minorities. The result is a
9   unique proof of how diversity enriches our society and our lives.

Note also how Vaz also slips between the proposition that Britain is *without doubt a multi-cultural society* in lines 1-2, and the assertion on line 7 that *British culture is a hybrid*. A similar shift can also be noted in Cook's account, in which he sought to exemplify the construct of British (multi)culture through metaphorical reference to the melting pot image of chicken tikka masala.

This slip between an in-principle insistence on the recognition of polyculture for a civic construction of Britishness, to the characterisation of British society in terms of a melting pot image of cultural hybridity has two important implications. First, this rhetorical move effectively retrieves a presumption of the essential

singularity of British culture. Note, for example, the use of the singular in Vaz's statement in extract 20, *British culture is a hybrid*. Similarly, although Cook explicitly endorsed an image of Anglo British society as a multicultural community of communities, in extract 8 he rhetorically juxtaposes the categories of *Indian* origin and *British people* in such a manner as to imply that the two constructs are mutually exclusive. Similarly, in extract 15 the formulation of his account presupposes that *the Jewish community* of twelfth century London was essentially something other than English or British.

Second, the move from emphasising cultural diversity to celebrating cultural hybridity enables Vaz and Cook to construct an image of British distinctiveness. In so far as Britain's cultural diversity is understood to result from the practice of importing peoples, ideas, languages, goods and lifestyles from other countries, it would follow that there may be little to distinguish the particular cultural forms and artefacts existing in the UK from those existing in other parts of the globe. References to hybridity, in contrast, afford images of British cultural uniqueness: the iconic value of chicken tikka masala lies precisely in the fact that it is not also eaten in India.

Polyculture and Multiculturalism as British brand distinctiveness

It is a social scientific cliché that all identities – including national identities - are constructed *vis a vis* some category of Other. As Bechhofer and McCrone (2009, p.65) recently put it, "Having a sense of who you are in national identity terms involving knowing who you are not". An extensive body of social psychological research has considered the general processes involved in distinguishing ingroups from outgroups. One early contribution to these debates (Turner, 1975) contrasted the process of "social competition" (distinctions between in- and outgroup formulated

simply with the aim of enhancing ingroup identity and esteem) from "realistic competition" (forms of intergroup differentiation designed to enhance the material status of the ingroup relative to outgroups).

In the case of the political speeches that I am considering here, it is interesting to consider the forms of international differentiation that come into play when Vaz and Cook couple values of multiculturalism to the construct of *British identity*. Significantly, these speakers did not simply cast cultural diversity as a central and enduring aspect of British society. They also cast multiculturalism as a value and commodity that positively distinguished the British people from Others.

At the time that Vaz and Cook were making their speeches in support and celebration of British Multiculturalism, similar debates concerning the value of cultural diversity were taking place within most Western Democracies. At one stage, Cook alluded, somewhat in passing, to Canada and the USA as successful multicultural societies. However, neither he nor Vaz acknowledged the extent to which political discourse on multiculturalism in the UK was, at the time, drawing directly upon Canadian formulations. In particular, it is worth noting that Vaz and Cook were delivering their speeches shortly after the EU (2000) had selected the motto, Unity in Diversity, and the publication of the 1999 EC Millennium declaration[10] which opened with the following statement:

> The Union's citizens are bound together by common values such as freedom, tolerance, equality, solidarity and cultural diversity.'

Despite the clear parallels between their own accounts of the multicultural ideal and

---

[10] The full text is available at:
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/ACFA4C.htm

the EU formulation, and despite their assertion that a commitment to multiculturalism

was in part necessarily in the light of *Britain's much closer involvement with Europe,*

both Vaz and Cook treated multiculturalism as distinctively British.

Ethnic diversity as British exceptionalism

As I noted above, the accounts that Cook and Vaz formulated in favour of

the poly-ethnic character of British society did not reject the ideology of ethnic

nationalism *per se*. On the contrary, the crux of their arguments was that ideologies of

cultural and racial purity are false specifically of Britain:

Extract 21 (RC)

1   In the pre-industrial era, when transport and communications were
2   often easier by sea than by land, Britain was unusually open to
3   external influence; first through foreign invasion, then, after Britain
4   achieved naval supremacy, through commerce and imperial
5   expansion. It is not their purity that makes the British unique, but
6   the sheer pluralism of their ancestry.

Extract 21 is particularly interesting in view of the fact that Cook had earlier

justified the UK's membership of the EU on the grounds of the existence of a

common *European identity* based on shared geography and history:

Extract 22 (RC)

1   To deny that Britain is European is to deny both our geography and our
2   history. Our culture, our security, and our prosperity, are inseparable
3   from the continent of Europe.

In extract 21, however, the idea that *Britain* (here equated with the territory of the

contemporary UK State) had, in the past, been <u>*uniquely*</u> *open to external influence*

involves a sense of absolute geographical distinctiveness, together with a strategic

bracketing of historical population flows throughout Europe as well as elsewhere across the globe (see extract 24 for a similar account). Similarly, in extract 13, we may note how Vaz neglects to consider the non-continental imperial histories of the Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese, and overlooks the Roman occupation of any other European (or, for that matter, Asian or African) territories[11]

We have already seen how, when treating multiculturalism as a timely and expedient political project, both Vaz and Cook alluded to historically emergent trans-national forces, including globalisation *(The global era has produced population movements of a breadth and richness without parallel in history*, extract 11, lines 4-5) and the EU. It is, then, instructive to note that the same historical forces to which Vaz and Cook attributed British cultural diversity and the urgency of multiculturalism as a British political imperative, are seen in contrast to strengthen other countries' indigenous national cultures. Extract 23 was taken from a stretch of talk during which Robin Cook was attempting to counter opposition to EU integration. In the course of working up the argument that EU membership posed no threat to *British identity*, he mobilised the exemplary case of Ireland, and in so doing used the terms *national identity* and *culture* as synonyms:

Extract 23 (RC)

1   Ireland joined [the EU] at the same time as Britain. […] The result has

2   been a new assertiveness of national identity, and confidence in their

3   culture. We can see that for ourselves in Britain through the new affection

4   for Irish music and dance, and the attachment to Irish pubs.

---

[11] Again, it is instructive to note how the BNP's explicitly racialized version of British identity is paradoxically more able to accommodate the idea of a pan-European experience based on a common geographical location and a common history.

Note how Cook not only projected onto Ireland the kind of singular, indigenous national culture that he disclaimed on behalf of Britain, but also cast the strengthening of *their* Irish *culture* as a commodity for *ourselves in Britain*, who benefit in so far as *we* are able to consume these cultural forms as part of our multicultural experience.

British branding of liberal values

We have already seen how Vaz and Cook both represented British multiculturalism as the instantiation of general liberal values such as progressive change, equality, tolerance and internationalism. Consequently, in the process of constructing multiculturalism as a distinctively British condition, they also implied that the liberal values underpinning multiculturalism should be construed as distinctively British (cf. Laegaard, 2007).

Keith Vaz was addressing an EU audience in Vienna, and at the start of his speech he displayed a tactful concern to respect the different approaches adopted towards national integration adopted by governments in Austria and the UK:

Extract 24 (KV)

1   Austria's approach to multiculturalism, given our different histories and
2   geographical positions, is different from ours. You tend to focus more on
3   integration in the sense of assimilation. But it would be strange if we
4   viewed these issues in the same way.

Despite this attempted to deflect potential charges of ethnocentrism by adopting a multi-subjective approach, treating differences in the *view*s adopted in the UK and Austria as natural and inevitable (lines 3-4), Vaz also made it clear that the values he attributed to the British government are ultimately morally superior to those policies he attributed to the Austrian government. In extract 1 we saw Vaz treating *fairness* as

28

necessarily entailing government policy that *not just assimilates people but celebrates people's difference*. Consequently, to paraphrase a formulation from Meertens and Pettigrew (1997 p. 56), whilst Vaz did not treat the Austrian approach to integration as inferior to the British approach, he presented the British approach as superior to the Austrian.

More generally, we may note how Vaz and Cook presented multiculturalism, internationalism and even democracy not as general liberal values, or as pan-European values, but as specifically and distinctively British virtues. Vaz, for example, described *respect for human rights*, *tolerance*, *fair play* and *an outward approach to the world* as *core British values* (see extract 5).

Again, it is interesting to note how the BNP version – in which respect for human rights, tolerance, fair play and so forth are attributed to the distinctive DNA of Western European Caucasians – is, for all its exclusionary character, paradoxically more open to the possibility that liberal democratic may not be uniquely British.

British Multiculturalism and "realistic" international competition

In these speeches, the formulation of multiculturalism as a uniquely British virtue is not simply used to construct a distinctive corporate identity. There are also significant practical ramifications of this kind of representation.

First, this nationalization of multiculturalism involves a form of moral exclusion (Opotow, 1995).   Both Vaz and Cook tacitly equated the boundaries of ethical concern and legitimate political action (*the whole of our society*) with boundaries of the British State. Hence, far from entailing the antithesis of insular nationalism, Vaz and Cook's arguments against racially or culturally delimited forms of social inclusion were strictly delimited in their domain of application to the population of

29

the UK. When Vaz described to his EU audience how *diversity enriches our society and our lives* he was using "our" to pertain specifically to Britain. Similarly, when Cook described multiculturalism as *a positive force for our economy and society*, the pronominal *our* and the nominal *economy* and *society* did not refer to a generic category of humanity, or even to an imagined community of EU citizens, but specifically to Britain.

It could be argued that this delimitation of the realm within which multicultural policies are pursued in the interests of social justice and welfare involved a form of discrimination through omission (cf. Deutsch, 1995). However, on occasions both Vaz and Cook quite explicitly advocated British Multiculturalism as a means by which to pursue the UK's material interests in competition with those of other nations or States. Cook, who was addressing a group of business people in London, used a three part list (cf. Jefferson, 1990) that justified the multicultural project with reference to British economic and military imperatives, *our prosperity, our security, our influence* (cf. Hay & Rosamond, 2002), casting the rest of the world as a potential threat or resource rather than a category of common identity or interest[12]. Later in his speech, Cook went on to cast cultural pluralism as a resource in an essentially competitive international arena (*an immense asset [for]…our nation*) and he enjoined his audience to appreciate the extent to which the existence of (by implication distinctive) ethnic diversity enhances the human capital of the Capital, such that London may be represented as the *hub of the globe*:

Extract 25 (RC)

1   Today's London is a perfect hub of the globe. It is home to over 30 ethnic
2   communities of at least 10,000 residents each. In this city tonight, over

---

[12] The representation of emergent global events and processes as constraints and opportunities for specifically British interests and policies is common to New Labour rhetoric (Smith, 2000).

3   300 languages will be spoken by families over their evening meal at home.

4   This pluralism is not a burden we must reluctantly accept. It is an immense

5   asset that contributes to the cultural and economic vitality of our nation.

Imperial echos

In view of the fact that both Vaz and Cook advertised the essentially modern –

and specifically Post-Imperial – character of their rebranded formulation of British

identity, it is interesting to consider the parallels between the lines of argument that

these speakers employed and the kinds of accounts of British cultural hybridity and

diversity that were communicated to the British public in didactic texts between the

Victorian era of Imperial expansion and the second world war.

Celebrating Anglo/British hybridity

Vaz's and Cook's narrative of the evolution of the British population from an

amalgam of different peoples and cultures echoes earlier formulations of the English

as a "mongrel race", or, in Defoe's (1703) words, "That het'rogeneous thing, an

Englishman". Images of the Anglo British as an historical hybrid of different peoples

was regularly employed in nineteenth century history texts produced for children,

such as Dickens's (1853) *A Child's History of England*:

> Little by little, strangers became mixed with the Islanders,
> and the savage Britons grew into a wild, bold people (p.8).

The idea of historically-evolved national cultural hybridity could be used to

support a range of rhetorical projects. Defoe's own references to the "het'rogeneous"

heritage of the population of England were being used to parody contemporary forms

of anti-French sentiment based on appeals to a supposedly distinctive and enduring

English character. In the nineteenth century, images of national diversity and

hybridity were used to positively differentiate England and the English people from nations whose claims to identity emphasized the existence of cultural homogeneity (as was emerging in France) or a common genetic "stock" (as was emerging in Germany) (Young, 1995).

In the first half of the twentieth century, images of Anglo/British ancestral and cultural hybridity and territorial diversity were still current. The example below, taken from Dixon's book *The Englishman* published in 1938, has evident parallels with the kind of account presented above (e.g. extract 21) in which contemporary politicians celebrate the uniquely plural ancestry of the population of the UK:

> The island, the geographical unit, bound its inhabitants
> together, made of the various tribes a common people, a group,
> a community, and finally a nation, living and working together
> to common ends. This, then, is England's peculiarity, a firm
> island unity imposed upon and embracing the most extreme
> racial variety anywhere to be found within such limits in all
> the world. (p. 101).

By the nineteen thirties, this type of representation was not being used to cast Anglo British chauvinism as fundamentally irrational, nor simply to present "our" nation as superior to others (although such arguments were still current). Significantly, in the run-up to the second world war, arguments concerning national racial and cultural diversity were also inclined to be granted a quasi-universal status, in a manner which contrasts markedly with their use by Vaz and by Cook at the start of the twenty-first century. Although contemporary authors pointed to the peculiarity of the Anglo British condition of cultural hybridity and diversity, the difference between "our" country and others could be treated as one of degree rather than kind. For example, Dixon noted that:

> The peoples and races we know, the inhabitants of the world

today, are without exception, mixed races and peoples (p. 19)

Unlike Vaz and Cook, Dixon specifically emphasized how the especial diversity of

England and the English represented part and parcel of a more generic, pan-

European, condition:

> Overlook this ethnic complex and we shall certainly be at a
>
> loss to understand England and the English. It has been said
>
> of Europe in general, and particularly of Western Europe, that
>
> it constituted a cul-de-sac, in which masses of immigrants
>
> succeeded or were heaped upon each other. So with our own
>
> country (p. 88)

Unlike Vaz and Cook, Dixon also suggested that the Angles and Saxons were not an

ethnically singular or indigenous people. This is not, of course, to say that Dixon's

account of the fictive nature of all appeals to ethnic nationalism was devoid of

connotations of Anglo British chauvinism. On the contrary the very act of flagging an

awareness of the racially and culturally diverse heritages of national populations was

clearly designed to display the comparative moral and intellectual superiority of

Anglo British consciousness over the irredentist politics of Nazi Germany.

Celebrating British Imperial cultural diversity

In extract 2 Keith Vaz presented Imperial constructions of British

identity as comparatively narrow, and as racially and culturally exclusive. Although

this kind of representation is commonly found in lay historiography (Condor, 2006),

Imperial Britain was in fact typically valorized as a multi-racial and multi-

cultural as well as a multi-national, polity. In fact, it is only since the break-up of the

Empire (and the substitution of the legal status of British imperial subject with that of

British State citizen) that increasingly restrictive bureaucratic criteria of membership have come to be formulated.

Favell (1998) noted how concerns on the part of successive UK governments over the value of a racially and culturally neutral understanding of Britishness within the domestic sphere may be traced to the distinctive strategies of British Imperial governance, and in particular to the policy of indirect rule whereby colonial governance was effected by bolstering indigenous cultures and supporting indigenous rulers. A good deal of the self-celebratory rhetoric of British Imperialism emphasized the moral, aesthetic, economic and military advantages of a multi-racial polity characterized by seeming infinite cultural variety (Cannadine, 2001). Examples of the valorization of the racial and cultural diversity of the Empire's subjects may readily be identified in didactic texts, as illustrated by the following extract from Newland and Donald's (1923) school primer, *The Model Citizen*:

> The British Empire is one of the marvels of the world […] a
> dominion composed of widely scattered parts, separated by […]
> differences of religion, customs, traditions, race, and colour;
> and yet united under one king, one flag, and one empire. This
> vast domain, more than eleven millions of square miles in
> extent, has been built up by the pluck, enterprise, and tact of
> our forefathers, and it has been handed down to us as a
> heritage of which we are rightly proud' (p. 185).

We have seen how Robin Cook in 2001 used references to statistical facts to emphasize the extent and distinctiveness of UK ethnic diversity. Similarly, the cultural and racial diversity of the populations of British Imperial possessions was frequently calibrated for rhetorical effect. The following extract from Cooper's (1921) text for children, *How the Empire Grew,* is notably similar to Robin Cook's metropolitan version of London as the *hub of the globe*:

> In this empire of ours there are nearly as many blacks as there
> are whites, and three times as many browns … the British empire
> includes as many Chinese as there are in Peking, and six times
> as many Arabs as there are in all Arabia (p. 132).

I noted above how Keith Vaz implicitly treated UK government policies of multiculturalism as superior to the strategies of social integration used in many other EU member States, which *just assimilat[e] people*. It is interesting, then, to note that during the age of Imperialism, authors regularly asserted the superiority of the British policy of indirect rule as compared to the French Imperial policy that "just" involved the cultural assimilation of subject peoples. In the following extract, Newland and Donald (1923, p. 205) are stressing how British subjects of French origin benefited from the comparatively liberal form of British imperial governance:

> When the English conquered Quebec, they did not inflict
> indignity upon the vanquished people by imposing upon them
> another language and another religion. They not only left the
> French all the liberty which they had previously enjoyed, but
> gave them more.

Just as contemporary politicians may conceal their celebratory accounts of the superiority of the form of citizenship adopted in the UK beneath a tactful recognition of national differences, Newland and Donald (p. 238) encouraged their young readers to display the British virtue of tact when faced with alternative forms of citizenship characteristic of less fortunate or enlightened foreigners:

> There are people in every land who love freedom and justice,
> who have their citizen rights and perform their citizen duties,
> although such rights and duties may not be so many or quite the
> same as ours. We should always remember, then, to do justice to
> foreigners, as we should like them to do justice to us.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter I have considered some of the rhetorical strategies used by UK politicians advocating a contemporary, civic version of Britain as "multicultural society" in contrast to an imagined outdated, Anglocentric, ethnic nationalist alternative. Close analysis of the text of these speeches suggested that the ability of the speakers to maintain their initial line of reasoning was in practice constrained by their adoption of a banal nationalist frame of reference. In both of the speeches that I considered, the speakers invoked images of British exceptionalism, which rested on the tacit presumption that societies, virtues, races and cultures normally come neatly and unambiguously packaged within the boundaries of distinct nation-states. In constructing progressive narratives of the development of Britain as an essentially and distinctively multicultural society, both speakers employed tacitly Anglocentric forms of historiography, designed in particular to positively differentiate their own country from other European nations and States. Paradoxically, the speakers' supposedly post-colonial re-formulations of British society and identity as composed of a diverse people enjoying the material, aesthetic and moral advantages of a multi-racial, multicultural polity, in practice closely echoed the very discourses of British Imperial governance which the speakers claimed to be supplanting.

In their accounts, both politicians equated multicultural ("inclusive") domestic policies with a commitment to internationalism, thereby presenting their own position as the exemplification of what Billig (1995 p. 49) termed "reasonable … point-zero nationalism". In practice, however, the global context in which the speakers located their new, improved, version of British identity was not a world of universal human rights, nor a cosmopolitan world of trans-national cultures, nor even the more circumscribed political universe of the European Union. Rather, their imagined world

36

comprised a hierarchical "order of nations" (cf. Spurr, 2001), in the context of which British Multiculturalism was treated both as evidence of "our" distinctive liberal virtue, and as strategically advantageous for the pursuit of "our" (specifically national) interests.

Clearly, it could be argued that, as British Government ministers, the politicians whose speeches I have been considering were working with a severely restricted rhetorical remit. It is, then, instructive to note how the normative nationalization of multicultural values can also be identified amongst social actors who are not operating under the same kinds of institutional constraints. For example, Asari et al. (2008, p. 2) have recently asserted that "a strong national identity … is a prerequisite to a stable and functioning multicultural society". The problem is that arguments in favour of a specifically national (for example *British*) multiculturalism may do nothing to challenge ethnic nationalism as a general ideology. Moreover, in so far as multiculturalism is cast as an inherent, distinctive and valued aspect of any specific national or state identity, the politics of multiculturalism may in practice be functionally antithetical to the development of cosmopolitan social and political solidarities.

References

Abell, J., Condor, S. & Stevenson, C. (2006). "We are an island": The use of geographical imagery to manage national identity, civility and citizenship in Scotland and in England. *Political Psychology 27*, 191-217.

Alibhai Brown, Y. (2000). *Who Do We Think We Are?: Imagining the New Britain*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Alexander, C. (2002). Beyond black: re-thinking the colour/culture divide. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 20*, 552-571.

Asari, E-M., Halikiopoulou, D. and Mock, S. (2008). British national identity and the dilemmas of multiculturalism. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, 14*, 1-28.

Bechhofer, F. and McCrone, D. (Eds.) (2009). *National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beiner, R. (2003). *Liberalism, Nationalism, Citizenship*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Berbrier, M. (2004). Assimilationism and pluralism as cultural tools. *Sociological Forum, 19*, 29–61.

Billig, M. (1987). *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M. (1989). The argumentative nature of holding strong views: A case study. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 9*, 203-223.

Billig, M. (1991). *Ideology and Opinions*. London: Sage.

Billig, M. (1995). *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.

Billig, M. (2003). Political rhetoric. In D.O. Sears, L. Huddy and R. Jervis (Eds.), *Handbook of Political Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D. & Radley, A. (1988). *Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking*. London:

Sage.

Bond, R. (2006). becoming and belonging: national identity and exclusion. *Sociology, 40*, 609-626.

Bozatzis, N. (2009). Occidentalism and accountability: constructing culture and cultural difference in majority Greek talk about the minority in Western Thrace. *Discourse and Society, 20*, 431-453

Brubaker, R. (1992). *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Bryant, C.G.A. (1997). Citizenship, national identity and the accommodation of difference: Reflections on the German, French, Dutch and British cases. *New Community, 24*, 157-172.

Calhoun, C. (1999). Nationalism, political community and the representation of society. *European Journal of Social Theory, 2*, 217–231.

Cannadine, D. (2001). *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire*. London: Penguin.

Chambers, I. (1989). Narratives of nationalism: Being British. *New Formations, 7*, 83-103.

Cohen, R. (1994). *Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others*. London: Longman.

Condor, S. (1997). Having history. In C.C. Barfoot (Ed.), *Beyond Pug's Tour*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Condor, S. (2000). Pride and prejudice: Identity management in English people's talk about 'this country'. *Discourse and Society, 11*, 163-193.

Condor, S. (2006). Temporality and collectivity: Diversity, history and the rhetorical construction of national entitativity. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*,

657-682.

Condor, S. (2008). Multiculturalism, liberal fundamentalism and banal nationalism. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 17, 369-374.

Condor, S. (in press). Sense and sensibility: The conversational etiquette of English national self-identification. In A. Aughey & C. Berberich (Eds.), *These Englands: A Conversation on National Identity*. Manchester University Press.

Condor, S. & Abell, J. (2006). Romantic Scotland, tragic England, ambiguous Britain: Versions of 'the Empire' in post-devolution national accounting. *Nations and Nationalism*, *12*, 453-472.

Condor, S. & Gibson, S. (2007). 'Everybody's entitled to their own opinion': Ideological dilemmas of liberal individualism and active citizenship. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*.

Connor, W. (1978). A nation is a nation, is a state, is an ethnic group is a... *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 1*, 377–400.

Cooper, H. (1921). *How the Empire Grew: The Story of British Colonisation*. London: RTS.

Cook, I., Crang, P. & Thorpe, M. (1999). Eating into Britishness. In S. Roseneil & J. Seymour (Eds.), *Practicing Identities: Power and Resistance* (pp 213-238). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Davies, N. (1999). *The Isles: A History*. London: Macmillan.

Defoe, D. (1701). The true-born Englishman. Reprinted in H. Morley (1889 ed.) *The Earlier Life and the Chief Earlier Works of Daniel Defoe*. London: Routledge.

Dickens, C. (1853). *A Child's History of England*. New York: Lupton.

Dixon, W.M. (1938). *The Englishman*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Edwards, D. & Potter, J. (2005). Discursive psychology, mental states and descriptions. In H. te Molder & J. Potter (Eds.), *Conversation and Cognition* (pp. 241-259). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eriksen, T.H. (1993). *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.

Favell, A. (1998). *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain*. Basingstoke; Palgrave.

Fortier, A-M. (2005). Pride, politics and multiculturalist citizenship. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 28*, 559-578.

Gallie, W.B. (1956). Essentially contested concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 56*, 167-198.

Gans, C. (2003). *The Limits of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gray, J. (1978). On Liberty, Liberalism and Essential Contestability. *British Journal of Political Science*, *8*, 385-402.

Greenfield, L. (1992). *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, P. (1987). *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack*. London: Hutchinson.

Goldberg, D.T. (2002). *The Racial State*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hay, C. & Rosamond, B. (2002). Globalisation, European integration and the discursive construction of economic imperatives. *Journal of European Public Policy, 9*, 147-167.

Hewstone, M. and Greenland, K. (2000). Intergroup Conflict. *International Journal of Psychology, 35*, 136-44.

Hobbs, J. (1990). Topic drift. In B. Dorval (Ed.), *Conversational Organization and its Development* (pp. 3-22). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Jefferson, G. (1990). List construction as a task and as a resource. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Interaction Competence* (pp. 63-92). Lanham MD: University Press of America.

Joppke, C. (2004). The retreat of multiculturalism in the liberal state. *British Journal of Sociology, 55*, 237-257.

Jovchelovitch, S. & Gervais, M-C. (1999). Social representations of health and illness: The case of the Chinese community in England. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 9*, 237-270.

Jucker, A., Smith, S. Ludge, T. (2003). Interactive aspects of vagueness in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics, 35*, 1737-69.

Kearney, H. (1989). *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kiely, R. Bechhofer, F., & McCrone, D. (2005). Birth, blood and belonging: Identity claims in post-devolution Scotland. *The Sociological Review, 53*, 150–172.

Kymlicka, W. (1995). *Multicultural Citizenship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lee, S. (2007). *Best for Britain? The Politics and Legacy of Gordon Brown*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

Máiz, R. (2003). Framing the nation: three rival versions of contemporary nationalist Ideology. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 8*, 251-267.

McCrone, D. & Bechhofer, F. (2008). National identity and social inclusion. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 31*, 1245-1266.

McCrone, D. & Kiely, R. (2000). Nationalism and citizenship. *Sociology, 34*, 19-34.

Meertens, R.W. & Pettigrew, T.F. (1997). Is subtle prejudice really prejudice? *Public Opinion Quarterly, 61*, 54-71.

Morris, P. (1996). Community beyond tradition. In P. Heelas, S. Lash & P. Morris

(Eds.), *Detraditionalization*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Newland, H.O. & Donald, T.H. (1923). *The Model Citizen: A Simple Exposition of Civic Rights and Duties and a Descriptive Account of British Institutions Local, National, and Imperial*. London: Pitman.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2004). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. Gubrium & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice* (420-434). London: Sage.

Parekh, B. (2000a). *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*. London: Profile.

Parekh, B. (2000b). Defining British national identity. *Political Quarterly, 71*, 4-14.

Parvin, P. (2009). Integration and identity in an international context: Problems and ambiguities in the new politics of multiculturalism. *Political Studies Review*, 351-363.

Redwood, J. (1999). *The Death of Britain? The UK's Constitutional Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reicher, S. & Hopkins, N. (2001). *Self and Nation*. London: Sage.

Rosie, M., MacInnes, J., Petersoo, P., Condor, S. & Kennedy, J. (2004). Nation speaking unto nation? National identity and the Press in the devolved UK. *Sociological Review, 52*, 437-458.

Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on Conversation* (edited by G. Jefferson). Oxford: Blackwell.

Samuel, R. (1998). *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain*. London: Verso.

Sapountzis, A. (2008). Towards a critical social psychological account of national sentiments: Patriotism and nationalism revisited. *Social Psychology Compass, 2*, 34-50.

Smith, M.J. (2000). The complexity of New Labour. In S. Ludlam & M.J. Smith

(Eds.), *New Labour in Power*. London: Macmillan.

Spurr, D. (2001). *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Thomas, E.R. (2002). Who belongs? Competing conceptions of political membership. *European Journal of Social Theory, 5,* 322-349.

Tilley, J., Exley, S. and Heath, A. (2004). Dimensions of British identity. In A. Park, J. Curtice, K. Thomson, C. Bromley & M. Phillips (Eds.), *British Social Attitudes: The 21st Report* (147-165). London: Sage.

Turner, J. (1975). Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 54*, 101-114.

Verkuyten, M. (2003). Ethnic group (de-)essentialism: Oppressive and progressive aspects. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 42,* 371-391.

Verkuyten, M., de Jong, W. and Masson, K. (1994). Similarities in anti-racist and racist discourse: Dutch local residents talking about ethnic minorities. *New Community, 22*, 253-267.

Walby, S. (2003). The myth of the nation-state. *Sociology, 37*, 529-546.

Wolton, S. (2006). Immigration policy and the "crisis of British values". *Citizenship Studies, 10*, 453-467.

Yack, B. (1999). The myth of the civic nation. In R. Beiner (Ed.), *Theorizing Nationalism* (pp. 103-118). Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Young, R. (1995). *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge.