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# Migration and Social Cohesion in the UK

Mary J. Hickman, Nicola Mai  
and Helen Crowley



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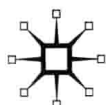
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# Introduction

The relationship between migration and social cohesion in the United Kingdom is a live and divisive political issue featuring regularly in the media and in politicians' speeches. Newspaper headlines have ranged from 'Muslim Europe: The Demographic Time Bomb Transforming our Continent' (*Daily Telegraph* 8 August 2009) to 'Don't listen to the Whingers – London Needs Immigrants' (*Evening Standard* 23 October 2009) to 'Ethnic Minorities to make up 20% of UK Population by 2051' (*Guardian* 14 July 2010). Politicians' comments on the subject have varied from the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears 'White working class feels ignored over immigration' (*Guardian* 2 January 2009), to the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown's 'Immigration is not out of control' (*Irish Times* 1 April 2010) to the current Prime Minister, David Cameron's, 'The challenges of cohesion and integration are among the greatest we face' (*Observer* 13 May, 2007).

All political parties were agreed that immigration was a crucial issue on the doorstep in the 2010 General Election. In that election the Conservatives came to power promising to put a cap on non-European Union immigration; the Liberal Democrats came to power promising to change the immigration system to make it firm and fair so that people could once again put their faith in it; and the New Labour government lost power refusing to put a cap on immigration because it would be detrimental to employers, while insisting that various measures were systematically reducing annual immigration rates. In truth there is little between these statements as the Coalition government's efforts to amend their cap on immigration in the face of protests from business leaders demonstrates.

There is no more febrile issue in British politics than immigration, apart maybe from terrorism (and the two are often linked), and part of



the explanation lies in the widespread acceptance of a taken-for-granted relationship between migration and social cohesion. Migration and the impact of the employment and settlement of immigrants are represented as the key issues to be addressed when discussing cohesion. Social cohesion in this way is constituted as a matter central to nationhood in an uncertain and fast-changing world. So not only national immigration policy but also debates about rights to support from the welfare state, about the acceptability of new citizens and about multiculturalism are framed in terms of assumed relationships between migration, cohesion and society. This book challenges these common sense views and argues for the centrality of discussing, on the one hand, the social forces and socio-economic outcomes of neoliberal restructuring, and on the other hand, the pressures and resiliencies of everyday life, for public debates about social cohesion.

The current hyper-sensitivity about migration and social cohesion in the UK is part of a wider crescendo of critiques of the impact of multiculturalism on society across Europe. Debates about cohesion became dominant throughout Europe in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This formed part of a backlash against multiculturalism in part sparked by the upsurge in global migration since the 1990s and the focus on 'global terrorism' since 11 September 2001. The backlash involves the criticism of multicultural policies developed to accommodate the major immigrations into (western) Europe from the 1950s to 1970s. The main features of the backlash are that multiculturalism fosters accentuated or preserved cultural differences; such differences lead to communal separateness; and separateness intensifies the breakdown of social relations and provides an incubator for extremism and possible terrorism (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010). Part of the purpose of this book is to examine this backlash and mount a critique of it based on research in the UK about what works and what does not work in terms of social cohesion.

A critical feature of European societies is that they do not conceive their national populations as historically constituted by immigration (see Robinson, 1983; Gilroy, 1993), and thus issues of national identity and social cohesion are usually syncopated with debates about immigration and minority ethnic groups. This is in part because Western nation states are characterised by a tension between universalistic liberalism, with its expectation of equal rights and liberties for all its members, and particularistic nationalism, which is predicated upon excluding from these privileges all non-members (Joppe, 2005). Blaming multiculturalism inevitably entails blaming immigrants and long-term settled

minority ethnic groups and masks the existence of a complex class structure and the impact of neoliberal restructuring on cohesive relations. Instead immigrants' desire to maintain their cultural traditions and distinct identities, supported by multiculturalism, is perceived as leading to negative consequences (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2009). Central to the perceptions that inform this backlash against multiculturalism is a perceived 'excess of alterity' (Grillo, 2007), that is, a growth in difference, and the threat it is taken to constitute for social cohesion. The fear underpinning the backlash against multiculturalism is that the homogenising force of industrial-society nationalism has been fatally undermined by the dissipating and heterogenising forces of late-twentieth century globalisation (Hannerz, 1996).

The intrinsic heterogeneities of contemporary societies are often presented as the 'problems' of a plural society and the implicit question becomes: how much, or how little, can people have in common at the cultural level and still retain a sense of solidarity, equality before the law and a sufficient degree of equal opportunity to remain loyal? (Eriksen, 2007). Eriksen (2007) argues that the majority of (west) European societies have always contained considerable cultural variation but this has been accompanied by a high degree of social cohesion. This is because Western individualism has been compatible with great cultural variation in the private sphere and therefore it is so much easier 'for the majorities in Western Europe, to accept immigrant food and immigrant music than immigrant family organization and gender roles' (Eriksen, 2007: 1064). This plus the inevitable tendency of immigrants to adapt, integrate and struggle for equality, combined with varying assimilatory policies, largely delivered the integration of mid-twentieth century immigrants. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, a new crisis was perceived. This was seen to stem from: fears of political violence, at a time when nation states were increasingly porous; from second- and third-generation descendants of the immigrants of the 1950s–1970s who were problematised; and from new globalised migratory flows passing into, within and through Europe.

Immigrants were and still are typically understood to hail from beyond the naturalised boundaries of the nation. There continues to be therefore an understanding of social and geographical space as the natural home of a native population (defined in terms of biology or culture) and possessed of finite social and material resources (Pitcher, 2009). Vertovec and Wessendorf (2009) argue that the backlash against multiculturalism has been accompanied everywhere by a re-emphasis on the integration of immigrants and minority ethnic groups. Their examination of these

policies leads them to the conclusion that apart from the avoidance of the word multicultural in policy documents there has arguably not been a massive change. They note the growing use of the term 'diversity' and that minority cultural recognition remains prevalent within public policy. The implication of their analysis is that policies and programmes once deemed multicultural continue everywhere under another name. This is true in one sense because the official discourses of multiculturalism implied that differences could be reconciled through the legislative framework, which has historically defined Western values as neutral and universal. This use of difference as a form of reconciliation is possible because 'differences' have been set up as expressive, private or a matter of appearance and are not defined in terms of difference in values or ways of being (Ahmed, 2000). However, as Ahmed (2000) points out this leads to a disavowal of differences deemed incommensurable. The 'problem of difference', as opposed to diversity, is a problem of power: who decides what amount of difference is too much?

The lens of difference, unlike that of diversity, observes how persistent power structures unevenly shape lives but also complicates the picture by spotlighting the ways in which such structures in turn are shaped by the contingent circumstances of specific groups in specific settings (Jacobs and Fincher, 1998). Society is irrevocably heterogeneous and 'difference' is a useful lens with which to uncover how any given set of power relations constitutes the phenomenon of 'sameness' and therefore of 'difference'. The concept of diversity is used as a signifier of the difference of immigrants, of minority ethnic groups, in other words of a national community that includes 'Others'. Encapsulated in the term 'diversity' is a form of cultural fundamentalism.

To accept that which is different from the 'standard' is already, in some sense, to accept difference *into* the standard. Those who do not fit into a standardised pattern must still fit into the nation: they fit, not by being the standard, but by being defined in terms of their difference. The nation still constructs itself as a 'we', not by requiring that 'they' fit into a 'standardised pattern', but by the very requirement that they 'be' culturally different.

(Ahmed, 2000: 96)

In other words 'diversity' is always already speaking of a 'host' or core constituency that is being subject to diversification and (re)constructs itself by identifying that difference. Underlying this notion is the assumption that formal political equality presupposes cultural identity

and hence cultural sameness becomes the essential prerequisite for access to citizenship rights (Stolcke, 1995).

In the research project that informs this book most of the places we explore are urban, although they range from inner city areas in large cities to small rural towns. One thing that urban spaces share in common is that difference is a sustained feature. Cities, in particular, represent the being together of strangers and city life is structured around relations between 'both seen and unseen strangers' (Young, 1990: 237). The point we want to stress here is that it is important not to constitute city life as 'community' but as 'a site structured around the actual, not imagined, "being together of strangers" joined through uneven power relations (Jacobs and Fincher, 1998: 17). Jacobs and Fincher (1998: 2) conceptualise the interlinking of power and identity in this context as a 'located politics of difference'. From the perspective of the argument being developed here the key point is that to aim at a transcendence of group difference is missing the point. Mutual empathy is not possible across all strangers in urban localities especially as urbanisation may reinforce group solidarity and differentiation (Young, 1990). Consequently our research addressed the question: do people have to get on well together? We also asked: how do people live together? This entails addressing 'the multicultural question' (Hall, 2001) rather than multiculturalism. Answering these questions is what will help us explore and understand the dynamics of social cohesion.

In this book we bring together many issues often addressed separately. We combine an examination of how people relate or interconnect together with the key structural forces and processes relevant when considering the social cohesion of societies. The impact of the social and economic transformations embedded in neoliberal restructuring of the state and economy and the resulting widening gap between rich and poor are critical for discussing the rhythms and realities of everyday life and cohesive social relations. We focus attention both on the specificities of place when exploring the significance of identifications in a globalised world and on the historical particularities of ethnic and national belongings. We bring together an examination of the contemporary backlash against multiculturalism, exploring its relationship to strategies for the management of community relations, and a macro-perspective on the social and economic transformations that are changing home, work and belonging for everyone.

Our analysis of migration, cohesion and society is based on in-depth research in six places which represent the heterogeneous contexts of social cohesion across the United Kingdom today. In these places we

explore the everyday lives and practices of both new immigrants and the long-term settled population. Our findings fall into three main areas: those concerning the pressures and resiliences of the rhythms and realities of everyday life; those that reveal how people get along, or do not get along, in this context; and those relating to the narratives of responsibility regarding social cohesion. First, everyday realities are under pressure from the forces of individualisation, globalisation and post-industrialism in two main ways that connect with social cohesion. Social and economic transformations are experienced by everyone and have a strong impact on social cohesion in general because of the changes in work/life balance they bring about and by producing conflicting demands between family and work. Also these transformations produce winners and losers; and they have specific impacts in places where people do not see themselves benefiting from globalisation. In these places it is possible to chart varying responses to these pressures. Second, we found a *de facto* recognition that Britain today is multi-ethnic and multicultural and therefore social cohesion was not perceived as being about expecting consensus on values and priorities. The majority of long-term settled residents understood social cohesion to be about a willingness and ability to be able to negotiate a difficult line between commonality and separation. The dominant 'consensualist' sensibility informing social cohesion policies implies that immigration threatens a shared national identity. Its emphasis on identifying processes that can foster commonalities overlooks the way conflicts also underpin cohesive rhythms and realities of everyday life. Third, we did find differences, in particular these were about who was perceived as responsible for social cohesion and were rooted in the local and national narratives of history, immigration and belongings that characterise particular places and frame the understanding of immigrants; these narratives are a key part of the complexity that underpins the relationship between migration and cohesion.

In this introduction we first examine what is meant by social cohesion and draw a distinction between social cohesion and the policy agenda of community cohesion. The following section focuses on a number of themes that are threaded throughout the book: the impact of macro socio-economic changes on the lives of the long-term settled and new immigrants alike; the specificity of place for determining the rhythms and realities of everyday life; the relationship between sustaining the welfare state and notions of entitlement; and the importance of an historical analysis of immigration and national belonging. Finally we discuss the main features of the research we undertook and describe the structure and organisation of the rest of the book.

## What is social cohesion?

Perceptions of a crisis in social cohesion are hardly new. Pahl (1991: 346) logs the way in which arguments about individualism, mass society, and a central value system are constantly reappearing, old issues in new and fashionable clothing. At the most basic level social cohesion is about social order, what holds societies together and what sustains them (Jeannotte, 2003). Posed in this way it is clear that much social science, especially in sociology and anthropology, is concerned with social cohesion. From Durkheim onwards the analysis of order and disorder, that is, social integration, was the foundation of sociology as a subject. Social integration refers to 'the more or less orderly or conflicting relationships between actors of a society' whereas 'system integration refers to the more or less functional or contradictory relationships between its institutional subsystems' (Lockwood, 1992: 377). Solidarity based on shared values and beliefs is the aspect of social integration that is given greatest emphasis in Durkheimian and normative functionalist sociology. Durkheim believed that solidarity was the normal condition of society. He acknowledged that as society changes (for example, industrialisation) social cohesion becomes more complex. The complexity was rooted in the mutual interdependence produced by the division of labour in industrialised societies. The fact that industrialism also wrought turmoil and social change was largely understood within Durkheimian Sociology as amounting to insufficient normative regulation, resulting from individuals losing sight of their shared interests based on mutual dependence. The conflicting interests embedded in the economic system are completely obscured in this formulation. Durkheim's notion of 'mechanistic' solidarity is that individual members of society resemble each other because they cherish the same values and hold the same things sacred, and it is this that renders societies coherent (Fanning, 2011). This perspective is powerfully present in what we have termed the taken-for-granted relationship between migration and social cohesion that exists in most public debate. This bounded, homogenising characterisation of society is the predominant one and is strongly linked to a nation state container view of society.

Ulrich Beck a few years ago recognised that 'new realities are arising' and called for 'a new mapping of space and time' and for social science to be 're-established as a transnational science of the reality of de-nationalization, transnationalization and "re-ethnification" in a global age', because otherwise it runs the risk of 'becoming a museum of antiquated ideas' (Beck, 2002: 53–4). The dangers of methodological

nationalism, that is the tendency to accept the nation state and its boundaries as a given in social analysis, are obvious but nevertheless, we argue, everything is not about denationalisation, transnationalisation and re-ethnification; it is about those processes *and* their relationship to countervailing processes and social forces. Brenner (2004: 45) points out in a reflection on globalisation debates that although 'previous rounds of deterritorialization and reterritorialization occurred largely within the geographical framework of national state territoriality' and the current round of socio-spatial restructuring has decentred the role of the national scale, nevertheless 'national states continue to operate as essential political and institutional sites for, and mediators of, the territorialisation of social, political and economic relations' (47). And nationalism has remained a key mechanism for ensuring citizen loyalty despite it running counter to neoliberalism's concern with market freedoms (Harvey, 2007).

Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) argue that we need a reformulation of the concept of society in order to rethink the boundaries of social life because of the complex interconnectedness of contemporary reality. From their perspective, integration for immigrants and enduring diasporic ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites. Equally, we argue, for social scientists there is no contradiction, between simultaneous engagement with the national unit of analysis and a concerted endeavour to contribute to and interrogate wider theoretical and comparative horizons. This approach is also appropriate as a lens for the analysis of the long-term settled because as we outline below they are often in place because of previous immigrations, whether remembered or forgotten, and 'only a minority of people are born, live their lives and die in the same community or settlement' (King, 2002: 94). The seemingly most rooted of populations (for example, white British working-class people living on inner city estates) are also frequently embedded in transnational networks (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009).

Part of the appeal of cosmopolitanism has been its provision of a framework to understand these pluralisations. It offers new perspectives relevant to 'our culturally criss-crossed, media bombarded, information rich, capitalist dominated, politically plural times' (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002: 4). Cosmopolitanism assumes and legitimates plural loyalties and refers to a way of living based on 'openness to all forms of otherness' (Hiebert, 2002); but it also understands belonging. There is no inconsistency between affirming the cosmopolitan ideal and recognising the importance of particular attachments and the commitments they carry (Poole, 1999). For Hollinger (2002: 230) a new cosmopolitanism has developed that focuses on the universalist insight that even the least



chauvinistic national project may inhibit any transnational interests of a wider human population. This is an insight that nationalists tend to deny. The new cosmopolitanism also focuses on a nationalist insight that a primal need for belonging is poorly satisfied by solidarities large enough to act effectively on challenges that are global in scope. And this he emphasises is an insight that universalists tend to deny.

Thus cosmopolitanism shares with universalism a suspicion of enclosures, but the cosmopolitan understands the necessity of enclosures in their capacity as contingent and provisionally bounded domains in which people can form intimate and sustaining relationships (Hollinger, 2002: 231). Vertovec and Cohen (2002) observe that there are few recipes for fostering cosmopolitanism. In this book we chart and analyse how forms of cosmopolitanism are embedded and generated in the social relations characterising some places compared with others.

This leaves us with the question of how to rethink society if we do not take national boundaries for granted as the definitive unit of analysis but we simultaneously register their importance. Or to paraphrase Ong (1999) if we recognise that national borders are both 'spaces of possibility' as well as spaces of control. We are already familiar with terms like 'the global city' (Sassen, 2001) and with thinking about the contemporary connectedness of societies as centring on flows of media, capital and people but although these notions capture the porosity of the nation state and the relative autonomy of certain urban spaces within them they do not offer a fully satisfactory way of locating the individual and her/his everyday activities and relationships within an understanding of how society operates. In an effort to neither privilege the national nor the transnational dimensions Levitt and Glick Schiller propose a view of society and social membership utilising Bourdieu's concept of social field.

Bourdieu used the concept of social field to call attention to the ways in which social relationships are structured by power. The boundaries of a field are fluid and the field itself is created by the participants who are joined in struggle for social position. Society for Bourdieu is the intersection of various fields within a structure of politics.

(Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004: 1008)

They define a social field as a set of multiple interlocking networks of relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organised, and transformed. Conceptualising society in this way entails tracing the dynamics of social cohesion



within a social space, 'in essence, a macro-version of Bourdieu's fields' (Jeannotte, 2003: 46). Glick-Schiller (2009) defines transnational social fields as networks of networks that link individuals directly or indirectly to institutions located in more than one nation state as part of the power dynamics through which institutionalised social relations delineate social spaces. The term is used as a means of situating individual migrants within various unequal social relationships that connect them to various specific places and their socially organised relationships.

In order to account for the complexity of the political, spatial and socio-economic dimensions underpinning social cohesion the phenomenon needs to be distinguished from its discursive construction (i.e. the way social cohesion is represented and understood by policymakers, politicians, the media and some academics). This is a fundamental premise of our approach. The phenomenon of social cohesion is embedded within social relations that are perceived as positive by most individuals and groups living in a place defined by the unequal exchange of discourses, practices and material resources. The tension between the positive quality ascribed to social relations and the structural inequality of the exchange informing them points to the most defining aspect of social cohesion: its intrinsically dynamic and contested status. We will return to this key aspect later in this chapter, when we will attempt to formulate a definition of social cohesion. Right now, by emphasising the dynamic and contested status of social cohesion, we underline the way it is the product of competing forces, resources, and discourses.

We argue that the cohesiveness of social relations depends on the prevalence of a positive appreciation of their quality; cultural constructions of what positive social relations 'are about' play a pivotal role therefore in the unfolding of social cohesion. For instance, our analysis shows that local hierarchies of social entitlement and mobility, the acknowledgement of transnational affiliations, belongings and histories of diversity and/or homogeneity are all constitutive of social cohesion. The phenomenon of social cohesion needs to be distinguished from normative and functionalist models of social cohesion, which are embedded in pre-digested and essentialist understandings of what 'a good society' should be about. Rather than understanding the socio-economic dynamics according to which places experience the social relations underpinning them in either predominantly positive or negative terms, normative and functionalist approaches evaluate places as cohesive or not according to criteria and standards which are not drawn from the realities they examine. In doing so, they risk adding pre-digested notions of social cohesiveness/uncohesiveness to