Politics used to be about Left and Right. But identity is reshaping the landscape of political ideas and parties. . .

DEMOS

Multiple identities

Living with the new politics of identity

Vincent Cable

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Contents

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction: the politics of identity revisited

The terrorism which hit Britain in July has produced deep soul searching about the fundamentals of identity: What does it mean to be British or Muslim or both? In May, identity came to the fore in a different way, when the referendums on the European constitution posed the question: What is it to be European, as distinct from British, Dutch or French?

These identity issues are redefining the way we talk about politics. Politics used to be about Left and Right. And, while parties and politicians still use the same vocabulary to define themselves, the meaning has become distorted beyond recognition. The British Conservatives have just fought a general election campaign – characterised as right-wing – centring on immigration with policies which, inter alia, involved suppressing labour markets and engaging in state manpower planning. Hostility to asylum seekers was used, more successfully, to achieve a transfer of power to the Right in Australia. Last year, an American presidential election was won by the Right, campaigning essentially on the religious beliefs of its core supporters. France has been deeply divided over its role within Europe and its response to 'Anglo Saxon' global capitalism, with Left and Right often aligned on the same side of the debate. These forces coalesced around the successful 'no' vote in the referendum on the European constitution. In a country with very different and more outward-looking values – the Netherlands – a crisis of identity, and

fear of European Union (EU) enlargement to incorporate Islamic Turkey, also produced a 'no' vote from politically disparate groups across the Left–Right spectrum.

From Chinese Communists of the far Left who have embraced globalisation and capitalism to Indian pro-business, right-wing, religious nationalists who have rejected free trade and foreign investment, there is a bewildering cacophony of political tunes being played. If there is any unifying melody to this, it lies in its attempts to express, in political form, issues of religious, ethnic and national identity.

In 1994 I argued in a Demos pamphlet called *The World's New Fissures*,[1] in essence, that the traditional Left–Right dichotomy – which pitted Socialism, Communism or Social Democracy against their equivalents on the Right – was disappearing as a central organising principle in political life. It was written in the aftermath of the Cold War, amid the upheavals taking place in Eastern Europe and the USSR and at a time when Western democracies and other societies were evolving a response to these cataclysmic changes. It was also written before 9/11 and the London bombings focused attention on Islam and its extreme manifestations, which were, a decade ago, merely one example of a wider concern with identity.

The pamphlet argued that a new organising principle was emerging which could be called the 'politics of identity'. The manifestations would differ from place to place but parties and movements were appearing and gaining strength, deriving their support from a collective, exclusive appeal to religion, race, language, regional or national identity. And they, in turn, were being opposed by political forces comfortable with multiple identities and the inclusive, outward-looking, demands of modernity and global economic integration.

A decade on, this argument has been largely vindicated. Mainstream politics now needs to find more convincing long-term responses to this fundamental change in the political landscape. It is difficult to find many countries where the 'politics of identity' is not a major concern. For that reason I have revisited the earlier text (and

Table 1 Manifestations of identity politics

China	Taiwan
	Territorial claims
	Anti-Japanese riots
	Energy nationalism
		Russia	Chechnya and Caucasus
			National champions and
			  foreign investors
			Putin's nationalist revival
			Fascism and anti-
			  Semitism

France	'Anti-globalisation'
	National Front
	EU constitutional
	  referendum
	Headscarves and
	  Islamicists
	Foreign takeovers
		UK	Immigration
			The EU debate
			Faith schools
			Radical Islam
			Ulster
			SNP and PC

Germany	Turkey and EU
	  enlargement
	National champions and
	  foreign takeovers
	The extreme Right and
	  aliens
		USA	The Christian Right:
			  'Faith, Family and Flag'
			Abortion
			Stem cell research
			Race and political
			  correctness

India	BJP
	Language, regional and
	  caste parties
	Islamic radicalism
	Kashmir
	The North East
			The Middle East and
			  Israel
			NAFTA and CAFTA
			China as a 'threat':
			  CNOOC

Japan	Koizumi and war guilt
	Territorial disputes
	Ishihara (Governor of
	  Tokyo)
	Doketsusha ('same
	  blood organisation')		

Table 1 summarises in an updated form some of the various manifestations of the politics of identity). In this pamphlet I set out a framework for understanding the new fault lines, an argument about

the implications for British politics and parties, and a set of general principles for how to respond to the urgent challenges in key areas of policy.

Identity then and now

Some of the individuals and parties which seemed to me of great importance as carriers of 'identity' ten years ago have largely disappeared. The violent racism and extreme nationalism of parts of the former Soviet bloc – Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democrats in Russia, Meciar in Slovakia, anti-Russian Baltic nationalism – have been softened or marginalised, except in the Caucasus where the position has deteriorated and the former Yugoslavia where ethnic hatreds still transcend other political forces. In the United States, I attached importance to an emerging economic nationalism articulated by the likes of Perot and Buchanan, but it has become more selective (as when a Chinese company sought to take over the US oil company UNOCAL). The tribal and racial tensions which threatened to tear apart the new South Africa have been defused, at least for now, though Zimbabwe – then reasonably successful – has seen racial and tribal prejudices unleashed.

A deeper meaning, however, has been clearly established over the last ten years. In the world's remaining superpower, the polarity of Left and Right, which was never extreme, has largely disappeared with the emergence of 'New' Democrats and the decline of organised labour. But US political analysts frequently note that their electorate is more bitterly divided and polarised than at any time in living memory. Identity, specifically religion, through the intervention of politically radical Christians on issues affecting family life and morality, such as abortion and gay 'marriage', has played a major role in this (though other forms of identity have become less important as Bush Republicans have sought to embrace black Americans, Hispanics and Jews). The events of 9/11 have powerfully reinforced a shared sense of religious identity by focusing national security concerns on new enemies – Islamic fundamentalists and – through the politics of the Middle East – on old friends, the Israel of the Old

Testament. Huntington's prediction of a clash of civilisations (based on religion) has been widely criticised for its gloomy and divisive implications but has undoubtedly had a major influence in shaping US foreign policy as well as popular discourse.[2] It would be premature and simplistic to attach overriding significance to religious identity as the new dividing line in US politics but it is clear that it now matters to voters more than 'class' and it fuels the ideological zealotory of many activists.

By contrast, religion has played a minimal role in the politics of Europe except, to a degree, in Ireland, Poland and the former Yugoslavia. But, even in secular Europe, the Islamic minority in Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands has become a serious political force (and perceived threat with the use of terrorism involving home-grown Muslim militants). The new Pope Benedict has struck a chord with Europeans, way beyond the confines of the Catholic Church, in his publicly declared hostility to Muslim Turkey's membership of the EU. And those who drafted the new European Constitution were clearly quite innocent of the potentially deep emotions which still underlie the tensions between national and European identity in many countries, not only Britain.

Other manifestations of the politics of identity have gained in importance as the politics of Left and Right has declined. The Austrian Freedom Party demonstrated, albeit temporarily, the latent appeal of xenophobia and hostility to immigrants. The French National Front's overt racism appeals, perhaps, to no more than 20 per cent of the French electorate but was sufficient to displace the traditional Left in the Presidential election of 2003. Ten years ago I praised the Dutch model of multiculturalism as a guarantee of tolerance and respect for minorities; but Pym Fortyn demonstrated that even the Dutch can be swayed by anti-immigrant xenophobia. His assassination, and that of Theo van Gogh, has stretched their tolerance to its limits and prompted deep anxiety about the Dutch social model. The traffic is not, however, solely in one direction. In Germany, where a decade ago extreme nationalist and racist groups were colonising the disaffected, the Socialist and ex-Communist left

has re-emerged as a powerful force for protest (albeit by attacking alien, Anglo Saxon, un-German forms of capitalism).

In the UK, hostility to asylum seekers and other immigrants, and suspicion of the EU, have a powerful appeal to English nationalists. In two successive general elections the Conservatives have chosen to focus on these issues rather than the traditional right-wing agenda of tax cutting and privatisation. While it has not paid them much by way of political dividends, they undoubtedly identified grievances which had troubled many voters. Indeed, the future of British politics may well revolve around the question of whether these expressions of identity come to dominate the traditional Right, the Conservatives, or are channelled through parties like UKIP or the BNP. Ten years ago, I also highlighted the political significance of regional identity – in Belgium, Britain, Italy and Spain – and this remains important but has proved easier to accommodate and manage than the deeper passions aroused by the immigration of foreigners especially from the Islamic world.

Indeed, I underestimated the central role in the politics of identity of revived Islamic sentiment both in predominantly Muslim countries and among Muslim minorities elsewhere. The Iraq War and the enduring bitterness of the conflict in Palestine have added to the tension, though neither are predominantly religious issues. In Muslim countries which enjoy democratic or semi-democratic government, the dominant political issue is the tension between secularism and Islam (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Pakistan and Turkey), between more or less fundamentalist forms of Islam (Iran and potentially Iraq) or between Muslims and Christians (Nigeria and the Philippines). And where democratic politics are suppressed it is largely for fear that Islamic fundamentalists will emerge as a major political force (the former Communist countries of Central Asia; Libya; the Mahgreb countries, notably Algeria; and Saudi Arabia). Where Muslims are a minority, virulently anti-Islamic forces have emerged among the majority as with the BJP in India and extremist parties in Europe, like the French National Front or the British BNP (neo-Fascist European parties are these days anxious,

however implausibly, to distance themselves from crude racism and anti-Semitism, concentrating instead on the 'threat of Islam').

But the 'politics of identity' has found expression in all the world's major religions, not just Islam, and not least in evangelical Christianity. Moreover, some of the most extreme, pathological expressions of identity have had little to do with religious affiliation: the horrific genocide in Rwanda (spilling over into Burundi and the Congo) cut across religious lines; in the Sudan, Arab Muslims have massacred black African Muslims; the bloodletting in Sri Lanka over attempted Tamil secession involves complex alignments among Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Muslims; the Palestine conflict pits secular and religious Jews against each other and against Christian and Muslim Palestinians; while one of the potentially most dangerous sources of political polarisation between Christians and Muslims, in Nigeria, has proved no more divisive in practice than tribal and regional affiliations.

Building a positive politics of identity

In the rest of this pamphlet I argue that identity will help to reshape the landscape of parties and political ideas in Britain and that we face a shared challenge in finding ways to live with identity politics which preserve open and inclusive approaches to politics and society.

Domestically, the shift to identity politics makes it far less likely that Britain will return to a two-party, Left–Right status quo. New Labour, while successfully assembling a grand coalition of forces around a Centrist political ideology, has pushed fringe political groupings, which previously resided within Britain's two main parties, out into the open. After New Labour it is unlikely that this array of cultural types will fit neatly back into a two-party solution. This presents opportunities for renewal and reinvention among parties, but also major threats, especially to the Conservatives.

Beyond these changes we need workable approaches to a series of issues and principles that will help us to live successfully with identity politics. I argue that we should focus on multiple identities and on individuals rather than on obsolete models of multiculturalism, and

that we need to address a series of issues, from immigration and Europe to localism and strengthening global institutions, in ways which draw the sting from the dangerous, exclusive forms of identity politics which are now presenting a direct challenge to our shared public life.

2. New dividing lines

The weakening of Left and Right

Politics is organised around movements based on competing ideas which could, in a rough and ready way, be broadly characterised as Left and Right. The Left encompasses Socialists, Communists, Social Democrats, Liberals (in North America) with many profound differences but some unifying ideological glue: a relatively benign view of public ownership and publicly financed services, a belief in greater equality of wealth and income and redistributive taxation, identification with the interest of organised labour, a preference for more planning and state regulation rather than unrestricted capitalism. The Right would be variously described as 'conservative' or 'liberal' (in continental Europe) and take the opposite polarity.

The vocabulary of Left and Right has often been stretched to encompass movements with quite different motivation including nationalist, anti-colonial and anti-Western parties, the extreme nationalism of inter-war fascism, and religious groupings like European Christian Democracy. But, for the most part, political ideas fitted, or could be made to fit, within a Left–Right framework.

The concepts of Left and Right probably date from the French Revolution but have been common currency for most of the twentieth century. But the end of the Cold War has fundamentally changed the way we look at politics and political ideas. The Western capitalist world and its model of economic organisation – advocated

by the Right – comprehensively won. The Soviet Empire may have been based on a corrupted, brutal and inefficient form of Socialism but its sudden collapse destroyed the idea that there was a sustainable alternative means of organising technically advanced societies to democratically regulated capitalism. But, even before then, the overall economic success of post-war capitalism in Japan and Western Europe, and later the newly industrialising countries, had narrowed the spectrum of political alternatives in those countries. A few brief unsuccessful Socialist experiments – such as the 1974 Portuguese revolution and the Mitterrand–Communist coalition in France in 1981 – reinforced the sense of failure on the Left.

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a global 'liberalisation revolution' was in full swing rolling back state ownership and controls and rejecting many of the ideas of the democratic as well as the authoritarian Left. Britain was at the epicentre of that revolution of ideas. In Brazil, China, India, Mexico and the former Communist world there is now a broad consensus that private ownership and competitive markets should prevail. And even where there has been some retreat – as with the entrenchment of state ownership in the oil industry in the Middle East and Russia – it has been for nationalistic rather than socialistic reasons (Venezuela's Chavez, exceptionally, has strong elements of both). Even when the consequences of radical liberalisation have been brutally painful and not obviously successful – as in Argentina or Russia – there has been little nostalgia for the ideas of the Left.

There is, of course, still, a wide variety of types of capitalism and some parties of the Left – like the Scandinavian Social Democrats – retain some political and intellectual self-confidence. But the spectrum of alternatives is now perceptibly narrower than a generation ago. And while parties of the Left have come to power, the more politically successful – like New Labour and Clinton's US Democrats or former Communists in Eastern Europe – have largely abandoned traditional beliefs and loyalties.

There were, and remain, important debates around the size of the public sector, the balance to be struck between the freedoms accorded

to capitalist enterprises and regulation, and the desirability of more or less income and wealth redistribution. But, almost everywhere, these arguments have been drained of much of their passion and content and are conducted across a fairly narrow political spectrum.

Paradoxically some of the main casualties of the victory of the Right have been the mainstream parties of the Right – like the British and Canadian Conservatives or German and Italian Christian Democrats who have fragmented or faced long periods in opposition. It is no longer self-evident what they exist for. Like winners of a tug of war they have collapsed in a heap now that the tension has gone from the rope which they were pulling so successfully.

The politics of dissatisfaction

The end of the Cold War produced, in some quarters, an optimistic sense of hubris – captured in Fukuyama's phrase: 'the end of history'.[3] It was assumed that, in future, politics would be essentially consensual and drained of divisive ideological content. In essentially contented societies, Tweedledum and Tweedledee would compete for power offering minor variants of the same successful recipe, thereby satisfying voters' appetites for choice and the system's need for stability. The need for politicians to appeal to swing voters rather than the extremes would pull wayward politicians back to the 'sensible, middle ground' and, in open competition, good ideas would drive out bad.

But while some of this story is recognisable much is not. Parties and politicians also build support by exaggerating and exploiting grievances and divisions. And the potential for dissatisfaction is also very large. The 'liberalisation revolution' may have signalled the defeat of the Left as a political force but it is producing many casualties. Privatisation and deregulation resulting in more rapid economic and technological change can be devastating to individuals or communities too inflexible, uneducated or old to adapt, creating many resentful ex-employees. Protected agricultural and industrial interests or state employees, threatened by loss of livelihood, can fight back by creating disruption or through political mobilisation and in

some countries – France, Germany and India, for example – liberalisation has slowed to a snail's pace as a result. In cases where the rule of law has been weak, the process of privatisation and deregulation has unleashed a 'wild west', 'cowboy capitalist' culture in which gangsterism and entrepreneurship have been difficult to distinguish and fortunes have been made from the virtual theft of state assets. Russia is the most obvious case but also in China, many former Communist, developing and some developed countries – notably Italy – the 'liberalisation revolution' has become associated with corruption, enormous inequalities and the abuse of power for private gain. Even where economies have performed better in aggregate there has accumulated a deep pool of dissatisfaction looking for an outlet. In some cases electorates have turned back to traditional parties of the Left – in Brazil, India and Poland, for example – but they have been unable to change direction fundamentally.

'Globalisation' – that is, the development of global communications systems spreading information and ideas very rapidly, global capital markets, easier trade and travel and the organisation of business corporations on a global scale[4] – accounts for much of the economic success of modern capitalism. For numerous individuals in rich and poor countries the opportunity to sell their skills, products and services in global markets and achieve greater freedom and choice has enormous attraction. But others feel threatened: organised labour seeing jobs disappearing into offshore 'outsourcing'; small farmers and small businesses unable to compete; and those whose traditional values and way of life, their identity, seems to be at risk as in white, working-class communities infiltrated by people who sound and look different and do not defer to local traditions.

There is, as a consequence, strong antagonism to globalisation. In some cases the focus of concern is the loss of economic control over events by national governments and the growing influence of international rule-setting bodies like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the EU; in others the concern is cultural; in others it is directed against foreigners whose migration is part of the

globalisation process. Their hostility brings together people who in other contexts would be described as Greens or Anarchists, Conservatives or Socialists: Right and Left together. Some of those engaged in opposition to globalisation have used the internet and other tools of communication to build cross-border networks. Perhaps the most formidable challenge to the Western version of globalisation is the emergence of militant versions of Islam using to the full the opportunities of modern communications and the powerful sense of identity provided by a global belief system. What is clear is that there is a lot of dissatisfaction looking for a political home.

Identity: a new fault line

The 'end of history' is not the end of politics. In some cases – Britain, France, Germany, Spain, even the US – politics has continued to operate within the traditional parties and the language of Left and Right though the traditional ideological content has diminished. In others, notably in the new democratic countries of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, a succession of populist leaders has emerged promising more competence and honesty than their predecessors but with an eclectic, non-dogmatic approach to policy.

It could be argued that there is nothing further to be said: that there is no overall shape or structure to politics, no underlying dialectic, just a tacit acceptance of a capitalist system – except in a few holdouts like Cuba or North Korea or in 'failed states' – and the need to accommodate the forces of liberalisation and globalisation. Protest, anger and dissatisfaction express themselves in totally random ways.

I take a different view, however: the new politics brings with it a new set of issues associated with cultural values and national, racial and religious identity which do not fit within the Left–Right framework at all comfortably. Many of these issues challenge the capabilities of governments and the organisation of parties and their policies into Left and Right.

An issue such as freedom of immigration might be seen as a classic right-wing issue of economic freedom and, by and large, in the US

the Republicans have taken that position. But in Australia and Europe it is the parties of the Right that have opposed immigration on the basis that it threatens national identity and cultural homogeneity. Free trade similarly should be an economic liberal cause close to the hearts of the Right but in practice it has been championed by left-of-centre Social Democrats in Australia, Canada, Scandinavia and the UK (though not by mainstream US Democrats), and opposed by French Gaullists with Bush Republicans ambivalent. Challenges to national sovereignty from supranational institutions or rules, as with the EU and the WTO, often see alliances between conservatives on the Right and groups on the far Left concerned about loss of national, state control.

A whole raft of non-economic issues has, moreover, come to the centre of political debate: minority rights and laws against discrimination; women in the workforce; the wearing of religious symbols at school; pro-life issues; 'gay marriage'; overseas ethnic conflicts as in Kashmir, Palestine and the former Yugoslavia. The Left–Right alignments are largely irrelevant to these issues which usually involve taking a view on cultural values and group identity (see figure 1).

While the issues are diverse, they are not random. New fault lines are opening up which, while they may differ from place to place, are broadly aligned and suggest a different 'organising principle' from the politics of Left and Right.

Identity is a broad concept and, to a degree, personal and uncontroversial. Sociological surveys which ask individuals, in an open-ended way, how they define their identity, will come up with answers like 'family', 'work', 'interests' or 'age'. But in some contexts, group or cultural identity becomes very important. Michael Ignatieff captures this point as follows: 'The more evident our common needs become, the more brutal becomes the human insistence on the claims of difference. The centripetal forces of need, labour and science which are pulling us together are counterbalanced by centrifugal forces, the claims of tribe, race, section, region and nation, pulling us apart.'[5]

Figure 1 Political agendas

Left vs Right

Income distribution
State vs private ownership
Labour protection
Property rights
Markets vs controls

Politics of
identity

Religion and secularism
Ethnic groups vs the individual
Minorities and self-determination
National sovereignty
Free trade vs protectionism
Immigration
Family and moral values
Authoritarian vs liberal
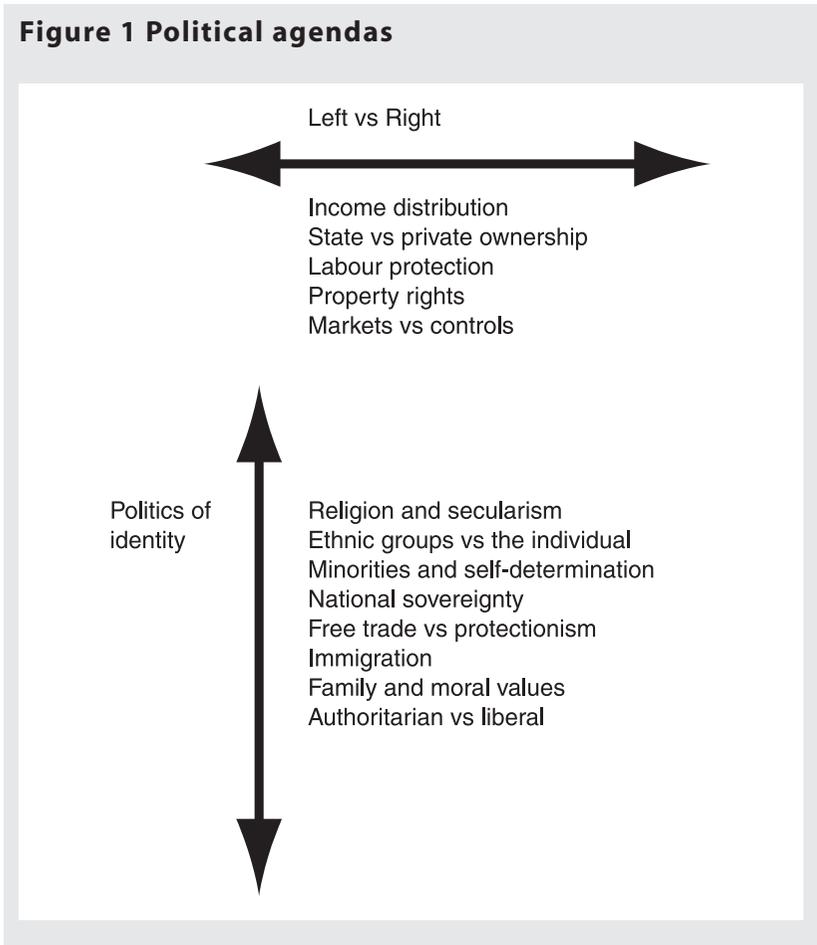
The 'politics of identity' is expressed in a semi-formal way in figure 2. It contrasts the traditional dialectic of Left and Right with another based on cultural identity. At one pole people define their own and others' identity in an exclusive, closed way. For racialists, religious fundamentalists or extreme nationalists, identity is the crucial, all-embracing imperative which defines 'us' and 'them', 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

Figure 2 The role of identity in politics
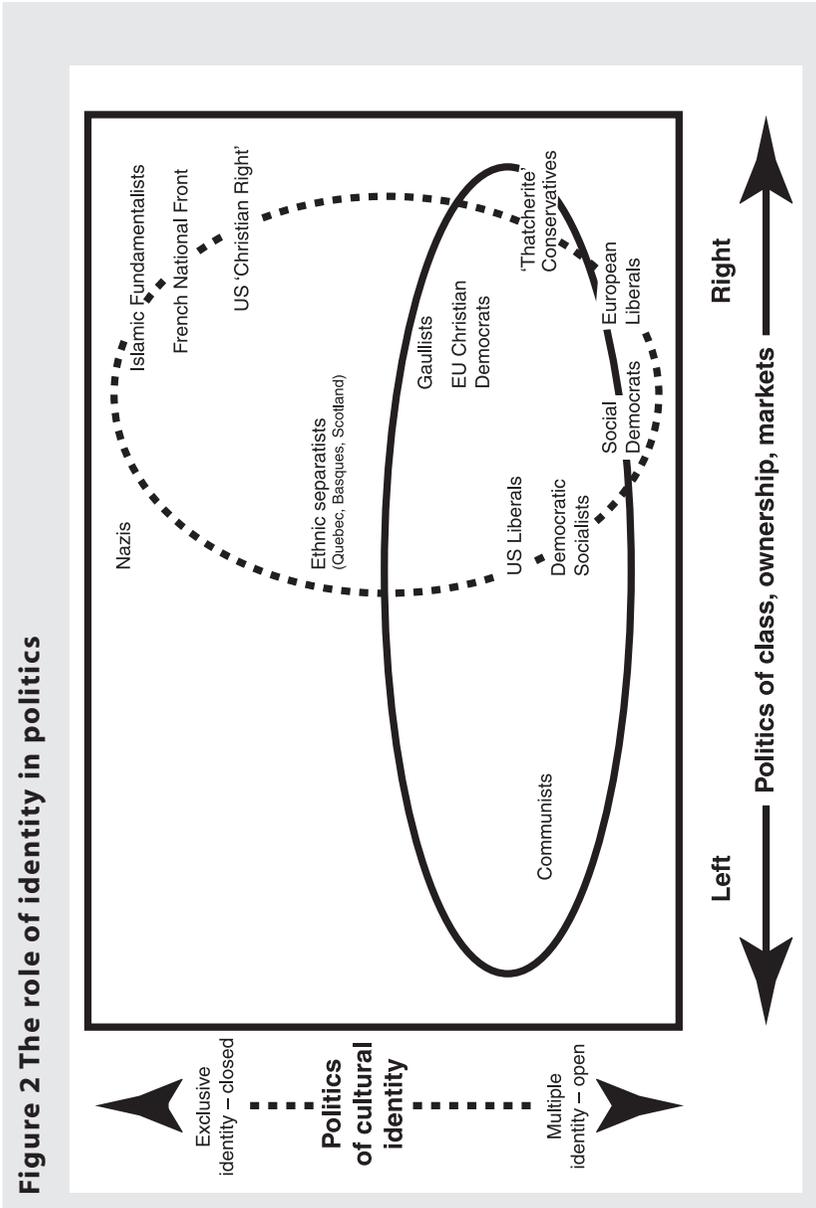
Figure 3 Political archetypes
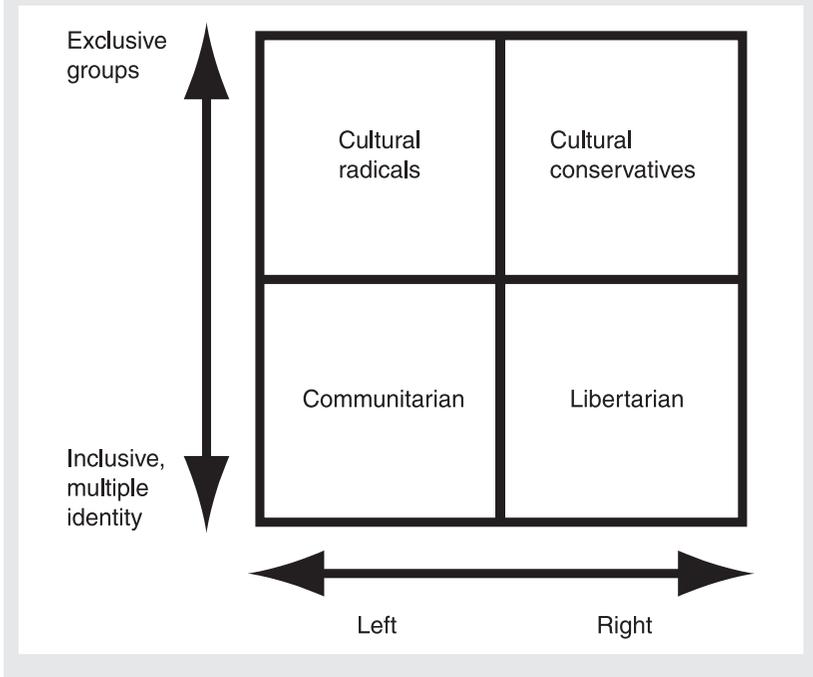
At the other pole are those who treat identity in an inclusive, liberal manner either because they regard such group loyalties as relatively unimportant or irrelevant or because they are consciously tolerant.

Both these two descriptions are stereotypes, caricatures. Religious fundamentalism may coexist with a high level of tolerance of people or other races or nationality; Christian evangelists and Muslim militants are often colour blind, however uncompromising their religious beliefs. What matters is that identity, in whatever form, is a sufficiently powerful force to create issues which the political process has to address and, indeed, these issues may come to dominate the political agenda.

In practice Left–Right politics and the politics of identity coexist

and interact. And political ideas and movements are best understood in terms of these two dimensions rather than one. Figure 3 describes these. My argument is that these dimensions of identity are reshaping the political landscape, and that the identity of parties, or of alliances between them, will increasingly reflect them.

First, there are the *communitarians* who have a left-wing approach to economic and social policy with an inclusive and outward-looking view of cultural identity. They are democratic and essentially anti-authoritarian. European Social Democrats, democratic Socialists and US Democrats – also, groups like the Brazilian Workers' Party, the Indian Congress and the South African ANC embody communitarian values. New Labour may be less left-wing than Old Labour but both fit within the communitarian tradition.

A second archetype is the *libertarians* who champion individual liberties and choice across the board. Support for free markets and economic freedom puts them on the Right, but they are also committed to personal freedoms and choice and cultural tolerance. They are open and outward-looking and anti-authoritarian. West European (as opposed to Anglo Saxon) liberalism – like the Dutch (VVD) Liberals or the German FDP – approximates most closely to this archetype and some of the new Liberal parties of Eastern Europe (like the – now marginalised – Russian reform parties of Yavlinsky and others) are strongly libertarian.

A third group is what I call the *cultural conservatives*. In the economic sphere they are on the Right but this is combined with strong religious identity or a strong nationalistic streak. Many of the established parties of the Right are of this kind or have strong elements of it: the French Gaullists, core elements of the new Italian Right especially the post-fascist MSI, the Spanish Peoples' Party, Christian Democrats in Western Europe (though they have also taken on many left-wing positions on social justice issues reflecting the views of the Vatican), and outside Europe the Australian Liberals, Indian BJP, Japanese 'Liberal Democrats', some of the emerging Islamic parties like the ruling AK Party in Turkey, and the Republican Party in the US. At the extreme, such parties can be very authoritarian

since they have a single unquestioned source of authority be it state or church – but most have adapted to the more pluralistic environment of democracy.

The fourth archetype could be described as 'national socialist' which has unappealing connotations both historically (Nazism) and contemporaneously (Serbia's Milosovic and Saddam Hussein's Baath Party). Such parties are often highly authoritarian with un-questioning faith in the state. But there are genuinely democratic parties of the Left which also have a powerful sense of national and cultural identity: Scottish and Welsh nationalists in the UK, the democratic wings of Basque and Irish nationalism, the Mexican PRD and arguably some Christian Democrat parties, as in Chile. Perhaps a non-pejorative term such as '*cultural radicals*' might best capture the spirit of this group.

Archetypes of this kind are necessarily simplifying. Environ-mentalists might complain that there are fundamentally important environmental issues, global and local, which could come to dominate political debate. But while these are undoubtedly important issues they have yet to form the main political dividing line anywhere, even in countries with 'green' parties, all of which remain small. The archetypes are crude but, broadly, they fit.

The impact of identity on political ideas and structures

What impact will these changes have? The specific effects depend in particular on how the issues and ideas interact with political structures from country to country.

Politics has been discussed hitherto largely in terms of a compe-tition between ideas as expressed through parties and elections. There are, of course, important societies where there is no competition – China and Saudi Arabia for example. In Saudi Arabia, the identity issue of balancing religious and secular influences is almost certainly key, reflected in the barely disguised alignments of competing factions of the royal family. The Chinese Communist Party has tried to mobilise a strong sense of Chinese national or racial identity, as in the recently orchestrated protests over Japanese wartime atrocities.

But in most countries, elections are the prism through which political forces and identities are refracted. Voting systems are relevant here since proportional representation (PR) more easily allows new parties representing new concerns to succeed. Small new parties exploiting threats to cultural identity have emerged to exercise a pivotal influence in Austria (the Freedom Party), Belgium (the Vlams Blok), Israel (both religious parities and extreme nationalist parties) and the Netherlands (the Pym Fortyn Party). Such parties also have a voice in the parliaments of Denmark and Norway and form an increasingly important set of groups within the European Parliament including UKIP, the French National Front and Polish 'anti-European' nationalists.

Voting thresholds have, so far, kept nationalist parties out of the German parliament. 'First past the post' (or similar systems like the Australian 'alternative vote') create the most formidable obstacles to such parties, but do not eliminate the 'politics of identity'. Rather, they transfer the tensions to within existing parties as we have seen with US Republicans, the UK Conservatives and the Australian Liberals. But the tensions in a two-party system can become so large that they destroy traditional parties, as occurred with the Canadian Progressives (conservatives) in the face of resurgent language-based parties. In practice, tactical voting provides a means of accommodating multiple parties reflecting both traditional Left–Right and identity concerns; there is effectively a four-party system (at least) in Ulster and in parts of Scotland and Wales. In India, where tactical voting is well understood and widely used, numerous parties reflecting the immense diversity of linguistic, regional, religious and caste identity within India coexist and compete within a British 'first past the post' system.

The emerging forces of identity could be accommodated within traditional parties or through coalitions between parties. In either case, identity politics is asserting itself in ways which are demanding political responses. In the next chapter I address the implications for British politics.

3. British experience and prospects

A decade ago, most conventional political discourse focused on the issues of Left and Right and the inevitability of a swing to the Left, to Labour – then led by John Smith. One of the more successful features of *The World's New Fissures* was that it also highlighted the seemingly growing importance of 'identity' issues which cut across the traditional Left–Right dividing lines: immigration and asylum, Europe – an issue which was to precipitate a virtual civil war within the Conservatives, questions related to tradition and 'family values', and the management of more or less violent expressions of nationalist feeling in Scotland, Wales and Ulster. As it turned out, these issues loomed very large in the political landscape over the next decade.

Now, as then, much of the conventional wisdom suggests that the future involves a return to the 'normality' which many political commentators experienced in their formative years: a two-party system (with a few 'fringe' or 'protest' parties) and a political dialogue structured around the staple diet of Left–Right politics: public spending and taxation; the privatisation, or not, of public services. Clearly these are major issues which will preoccupy many of us over the coming years. But there are some powerful trends at work which suggest that it is, at best, only a partial story.

It is not possible to predict the future. But two scenarios are sketched out. In one – Pendulum – the pendulum effect asserts itself

but in the context of a substantial and growing third party, the Lib Dems, ushering in a period of minority government and/or coalitions. In the other – Kaleidoscope – a multiparty system emerges facilitated by PR but not necessarily caused by it.

There are implications for Britain's parties. The Conservatives face some major structural problems, deeper than the problems of leadership and organisation. Just as the Liberals, a century ago, were torn apart by the new challenge of an organised, radical working-class movement, the Conservatives risk being slowly torn apart by an inability to hold together the old right-wing coalition of libertarians and the cultural conservatives who are preoccupied with race, nation and cultural identity.

The Labour Party may well have a long-term role as a traditional, but modernised, communitarian party in the tradition of European social democrats, but risks losing its more radical supporters to other parties of the Left especially where there is a 'cultural' theme around which to coalesce, as with the Celtic nationalists and possibly Respect.

There is a major role in both scenarios for a party that is open and inclusive, which is comfortable with the increasingly complex world of mixed identities, and which can combine personal and economic liberalism with some of the social justice agenda of the moderate Left. The Conservatives have long since ceased to resemble such a party and have become preoccupied by issues of identity, however hard their leadership tries to move on to an agenda of 'modernisation'. New Labour under Blair has tried to fill this role but its long-term future is almost certainly as a communitarian party of the Left. There is a gap and the Lib Dems are well placed to fill it.

Underlying these future scenarios are major factors taking us away from the traditional two-party hegemony. Even ignoring the growing abstention rate in national and other elections, the share of Labour and Conservative in the national vote is falling in national elections to the benefit of the Liberal Democrats, mainly, but also Scottish and Welsh nationalists and smaller parties and independents. In elections where the constraints of 'first past the post' do not apply – in PR-based Euro and regional assembly elections – the share of the two

traditionally major parties has fallen to barely half the total. This shift is not caused in any obvious way by a major sense of national failure – the economy has been growing steadily for over a decade – but by a weakening of the traditional tribal attachments to Left and Right. The government's acceptance – however reluctant – of constitutional change will be taken further by PR in local authorities, starting in Scotland, and this in turn will add to the sense of a party political plurality with – in England – three rather than two major parties and growing influence from Greens, English nationalist parties like UKIP and possibly others, like Respect.

Second, the Left–Right debate has an increasingly ritualistic quality devoid of much real substance. Each of the three major, decisively elected, left-wing governments of the twentieth century – the Liberals in 1906, Labour in 1945 and again in 1964/66 – had, for better or worse, a major agenda of social and economic reform underpinned by a well-developed philosophy – social liberalism, then socialism – of public intervention and redistribution. The New Labour government never had any such ambition. It set out to demonstrate economic competence, which it has largely done. It had no commitment to reverse privatisation and has extended it (except, covertly, on the railways). It has raised taxes moderately, but in significant part by stealth. It has remained committed to maintaining the level of standard and upper rate income tax. Research suggests that income and wealth distributions have remained largely unchanged from Conservative days and may even have worsened.[6] Looking forward, the future policy 'debate' is being structured around the themes of 'choice in public services' and 'fighting waste' on which almost all agree in principle.[7] Nuances will be fought over, with exaggerated passion, but the truth is that the great issues of Left and Right which divided British politics for a century or more have largely disappeared. In this, the UK is not much different from other democracies, though the ritual fight and the pretence that nothing has changed are particularly strong in Britain. If these political routines continue it is hard to see how national politics can command the respect or participation of most citizens for much longer.

Third, the issues which have created, and will create in future, the greatest passion and division, do not fit easily within the Left–Right frame of reference and frequently cut across party lines. All are, in different ways, manifestations of identity politics as we have described it above.

The emerging identity issues

The Iraq war proved to be a major issue in the 2005 election and has had far-reaching implications, some of which are only now becoming apparent. Wars have been politically very divisive before – notably Suez and the Boer War – but, whatever the merits of the arguments for and against the war and whatever the outcome, this one has struck a very powerful chord. Beyond the issues of legality and political judgement is emerging a bigger question of how the West, in general, and the UK, in particular, relate to the Islamic world and to the identity of Muslim minorities in our midst. Saddam Hussein was scarcely a Muslim icon and his regime had nothing to do with the Islamic extremists who attacked the US on 9/11 but the issues have now become hopelessly intertwined, not least among UK Muslims.

The war has also opened up a debate which is at the heart of Britons' uncertainties about their identity: are we essentially 'European' and thereby constrained by the interests and attitudes of other European countries or are we essentially still tied more closely, culturally as well as politically, to the United States?

That point leads to the wider issue of Europe, which helped to precipitate a civil war in the Labour Party in the 1980s and equally bitter and unresolved divisions inside the Conservative Party today. It will loom large in UK politics for a long time and while the collapse of the Constitutional Treaty, to great relief in government circles, has removed the EU from the list of big, divisive issues for the moment, the relief is almost certainly temporary. The question of how much 'subsidiarity' to nation states is compatible with effective cooperation on economic – or political – matters will be debated for decades in the EU. On these issues, there is no clear Left and Right position. Some economic liberals and socialists support closer union and

others oppose it, albeit for different reasons. Where Europe has been a deeply divisive issue, as in Denmark, France and the UK, traditional Left and Right parties have been torn apart. The one clearly predictable political dividing line is between those who fear loss of their national identity and national sovereignty to the EU and those who are more relaxed about having a multiple identity and about the idea of sharing sovereignty. The current difficulties in the Conservative Party internally and its rivalry with smaller parties like UKIP are not trivial or short term but are the surface manifestations of a deep political fault line.

Roughly the same fault line affects attitudes towards immigration and asylum. Racists and extreme nationalists with their xenophobic reaction to foreigners, especially those who are conspicuously different, has in part been expressed through extremist parties (Australia, Austria, Belgium, France and the Netherlands,) but has also heavily influenced mainstream parties of the Right (Australia, the UK). Although parties of the Right normally espouse 'economic' liberalism, it has not been applied to immigration except, to a degree, in the US Republican Party.

Just as national governments are seeking, or are being obliged, to share sovereignty with international institutions at a European level or globally, there is a parallel debate about the degree of devolution within countries. This is partly a technical issue of how to manage institutions in the most efficient and responsive way and there is a growing acceptance that greater decentralisation is the only way to manage public services. But decentralisation also touches deeper chords of identity when it also coincides with the assertion of regional identity based on language (Belgium, Canada, Spain, Switzerland) or other forms of 'regional nationalism' (Italy, the UK and, on a grand scale, in India). For the UK, which has evolved one of the most centralised systems of government in the democratic world, the counter-pull of local and regional attachment will loom large and – again – the Left–Right agenda has little relevance.

Figure 4 Mapping British political parties
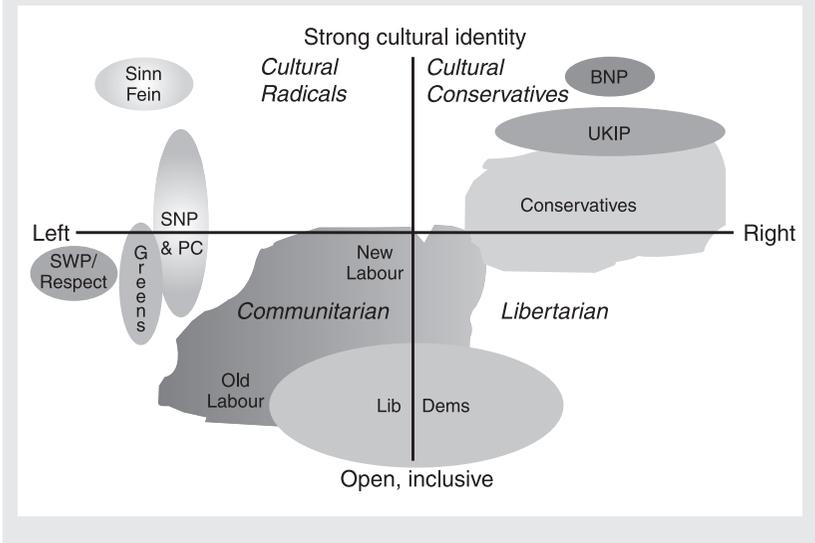
Archetypes and stereotypes

In figure 3 I distinguished three main categories which seemed relevant to the UK: the communitarian, the cultural conservative and the libertarian. In figure 4 I try to map where the main political parties are.

The Labour Party, whether New or Old, is communitarian on the definitions employed here, although its leader is ideologically footloose and could be placed almost anywhere in the centre of public opinion. Although the Left–Right divide has narrowed and become blurred, the centre of gravity of the party is firmly identified with statist solutions, and with an emphasis on 'social justice' and with institutional links to the 'labour movement'. But the British Labour Party, New and Old, has coped much better than the Conservatives (or sister parties of the Left in the EU or the USA) with issues of identity and has broadly maintained a consistent defence of openness

to trade and overseas investment, a relatively liberal approach to immigration (albeit with retreat under pressure), and an inclusive approach to diversity.

The Conservatives have tried historically to cover a wide ideological spectrum, priding themselves on eclecticism and pragmatism. But distance from power has made it difficult to sustain this coalition. The 'one nation' Conservatism of Butler and Macmillan with its communitarian overtones, like the Christian Democrat parties of Western Europe, is virtually extinct. Indeed, the alienation from anything which sounds at all European, as well as instinctive sympathy for modern US Republicanism, keeps pulling many Conservatives back to 'family, faith and flag' as their central set of values. There is a libertarian tradition, too, which each of the last four leaders has dallied with briefly – identifying with gay Conservatives, embracing cultural and ethnic minorities – but this was soon overwhelmed by the intolerance and xenophobia of the Party's grassroots and media supporters, and the leadership has had to retreat into what I call 'cultural conservatism'. Moreover, the Party has faced the threat of a haemorrhage of support to the nationalist UKIP and the racist BNP and has been trying to retain that support; hence the repeated use of asylum and immigration as an issue.

For other parties too, the Left–Right split is increasingly devoid of meaning. The Scottish and Welsh (and Irish) Nationalists position themselves on the left on most economic and social issues except the one which matters most to them: appealing to national consciousness and identity. The Greens are even more difficult to place in the old political language. They have, as yet, an underdeveloped political programme but they too seem to want to position themselves on what would be called the Left but with an appeal, nonetheless, to those who want to retreat from the globalising world into more closed, inward-looking communities.

In earlier eras this combination of identity politics and socialist ideas took the malignant form of 'national socialism'. But in the UK – except in the Irish Sinn Fein – a gentler form has emerged. Less gentle is the bizarre fusion of Trotskyism and Muslim radicalism in Respect

but it is significant that a Marxist party can flourish only by allying itself to religious identity.

The Liberals historically, and the Liberal Democrats today, represent the strongest antithesis to those exploiting the politics of identity: internationalist (from opposition to the Boer War to today's support for European integration and the authority of the UN system in matters of peace and war); defenders of different lifestyles and minorities; anti-authoritarian, upholding civil liberties; and supporters of regional and local devolution. At the same time, the old stereotypes of Left and Right do not fit; there is both a communitarian tradition, reaching back to the 1906 government or earlier, of support for strong public services and re-distributive taxation, and also a Libertarian tradition of choice, both in economics and social policy. Such a range on the Left–Right spectrum clearly infuriates some commentators who feel parties must be pigeon-holed as Left or Right. But in terms of the emerging dialectic based on the politics of identity the Liberal Democrats have the greatest clarity of any of the three major parties.

Political expression is in a high state of flux as parties try to redefine themselves in response to external events and to secure advantage. What is clear at present is that the Conservatives, not necessarily through choice – but to reflect the mood of their political base and potential competition from smaller parties – are firmly in the 'cultural conservative' box. This is leaving a large, mostly unoccupied space in the Libertarian area – a combination of economic and social liberalism. An important issue for the next few years will be whether the Conservatives or the Liberal Democrats can most effectively colonise it. Inclusive, outward-looking thinking is, however, deeply repellent to many of the Conservatives' core supporters, and the Cornerstone group of MPs has recently surfaced to express its revulsion at liberal values. But British politics needs a party which can more consistently defend individual economic and social rights than either communitarians or cultural conservatives.

Scenarios for the future

One way of looking at the future, first developed in Shell Group

Planning, is scenario planning.[8] This technique starts from the question: 'What could happen?' rather than 'What will happen?' or 'What might happen?'. There are numerous possible stories about the future but there are usually one or two pathways that seem particularly plausible or interesting. Here I shall sketch out two.

Pendulum

In this story, there are powerful forces of inertia pulling the British system back to an approximation of the old model where power moves backwards and forwards between a party, loosely of the Left and Right, however much these concepts are stretched and strained. The American Presidential and Congressional system embodies this duality and is deeply tribal – perhaps more than ever – and, after the Clinton New Democrat years, the American Republicans have successfully reinvented themselves based on cultural conservatism, drawing on both religion and nationalism. They have side-stepped the Left–Right issues by promoting both 'big government' (in the interests of national security) and tax cuts. The Australian conservatives ('Liberals') also won back power from a New Labourite government, co-opting the voters who would otherwise have supported the racism of Pauline Hansen's nationalist party.

It is possible that in a different context the Conservatives could, in time, be the beneficiaries of a similar swing in the pendulum as people become disillusioned with Labour and take refuge in the party which, under the current 'first past the post' system and parliamentary conventions, offers the easiest route to a change of government.

Much of Conservative thinking post-1997 has been based on the assumption that this will automatically happen. It might, though the small swing obtained in 2005 netted less than a quarter of the number of seats needed to form a Conservative government. The process may continue and eventually, possibly in another decade, the Conservatives could be back in power. But for the pendulum to swing in this way would require a high degree of patience, leadership and discipline, which the Conservatives have not been good at.

It will also require a skilful exercise in political positioning, preventing excessive haemorrhage to fringe parties like UKIP – in other words capturing the 'cultural conservative' constituency – while re-establishing support among people of a libertarian outlook among professionals, entrepreneurs and intellectuals and perhaps 'communitarians' – old 'one-nation' Tories. This optimistic scenario could happen if the fringe parties fail to make a serious breakthrough and fragment as such parties often do. It is possible – though perhaps unlikely – that UKIP, and like-minded groups, could simply fade away as a serious organised force, an angry voice on the fringe (like the fragmented far Left), leaving the Conservatives free to rebuild broader support, reassembling the coalition of supporters and interest groups that Mrs Thatcher had at her disposal.

For this to happen, however, requires considerable, perhaps implausible, optimism. There is another problem with this scenario. Unlike the Australia and the US, where the pendulum has been made to swing, Britain has a substantial third party, the Liberal Democrats, whose support in the 2005 General Election reached 23 per cent. If the pendulum effect were in evidence, the Conservatives would be winning back most of those seats lost to the Lib Dems in 1997 and 2001 but, in the event, only three were retrieved out of 30 and two more were lost. The more that the Lib Dems distance themselves from the Labour government, as over the Iraq War, the less likely it is that they will be hit by a pendulum effect.

It is possible that, in coming years, there could be a growing disillusionment and animosity towards Labour. But it may now be too late for a party of the Right – squeezed between 'cultural conservative' and 'libertarian' forces – to re-emerge as an undisputed voice of opposition. If the pendulum swings, it may swing to a combination of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats and, thus, to a period of minority government or coalition, in some form.

But such a configuration would pose the question: What next? Earlier experience – in the early twentieth century – of three-party politics within a system based on a two-party pendulum principle suggests that, in time, one of the three is relegated to minority status.

Then it was the Liberals, who could not adapt quickly enough to the demands for political representation of the organised working class and split. Now, perhaps, it might be the party that cannot adapt to the competing demands of the politics of identity and is pulled apart by disputes over Europe, race, immigration and cultural values. Or perhaps the Labour Party, faced with the prospect of another long period in opposition will revert to conflict between Old and New Labour. A point might well come in which, fearing for their future, one or other of Labour or the Conservatives might embrace electoral reform, in which case a different type of future beckons.

Kaleidoscope

There is an alternative version of the future in which new parties and new configurations emerge. In Canada and New Zealand, parties stressing national or cultural identity emerged as key players splitting from the traditional Right, despite the inhibitions of the 'first past the post' system. Elsewhere, the disciplines of 'first past the post' have forced parties into pre-election or post-election coalitions which nonetheless contain combinations of parties (Indian coalitions of BJP nationalists and leftist groups or the secular centre-left Congress and various language and caste-based parties; the Italian government's alliance of Forza Italia, the ex-fascist MSI and Bossi's Northern League). In this kind of world there is no 'pendulum' but a shifting set of alliances between a variety of parties.

PR systems make the preference for variety of parties, reflecting traditional Left–Right concerns and concerns about identity, easier to express politically. France has four major parties (Gaullists, National Front, Socialists, UDF) and many splinter groups. Germany now has five major parties including the new Left alliance (plus the Bavarian CSU). Spain's two major parties have to coexist with regional parties.

The kaleidoscope scenario is one in which the more complex political forces at work cannot be contained within a traditional two-party system, even under 'first past the post'. The signs are already there. The Scottish Highlands have evolved a system of four parties, reasonably well balanced, competing under 'first past the post'. With

PR, the Scottish Assembly has legitimised a four-party system more widely and also created space for Greens and far-left Scottish Socialists. England has now become a three-party system under 'first past the post' but one in which Conservatives have largely disappeared from the cities, except London, and Labour from suburban and rural areas. The gross imbalance in seats and votes will in due course build up demands for PR, which would legitimise and give a role to smaller parties as now happens in European elections, the London Assembly and, in due course, local elections. It is not yet clear precisely how a shift to parliamentary PR would occur but it is entirely plausible that a period of minority government or the self-interest of one of the two traditional major parties could trigger it.

In a kaleidoscope scenario, Britain would evolve, through a combination of electoral reform and the emergence of new parties, to reflect identity and other concerns, in a multiparty system. However, just as a kaleidoscope produces recognisable patterns, a kaleidoscope scenario does not produce a chaotic multiplication of parties, but – perhaps – four, which reflect the broad structure of our archetypes.

In such a world there would be scope for a traditional communitarian party, like the Labour Party; a party for cultural conservatives – representing the quarter, or thereabouts, of the electorate who are, loosely, on the Right but respond positively to appeals to their cultural identity; regional parties; one or more of the leftist, radical parties like the Greens or Respect; and a broadly libertarian party, for which the Liberal Democrats are the more plausible candidate, filling a role in a multiparty system similar to that occupied in Germany by the FDP and by Liberal parties in the Netherlands or Sweden, but with a stronger and broader base of support.

In practice, personalities, traditions, national quirks and accidents would produce a pattern that was unique to Britain.

4. Living with the politics of identity

Whichever party political pattern emerges from the uncertain future sketched out in the scenarios described above, what is certain is that for politicians and other public policy-makers operating in a world where identity is of central importance, the rules of the game have changed.

In the previous chapter I focused on political differences between parties. But for a tolerant, open politics to succeed in this new environment, we also need to strengthen the overall framework within which politics is conducted. This is most obvious in the areas where national politics needs to respond to the visible effects of globalisation, like immigration and Europe. In this final chapter I set out a series of issues, and some approaches to them, which will be especially important over the next decade.

A failure to anticipate identity issues and respond positively to them, or to play them for narrow party advantage, can provide fertile ground in which populist extremists can flourish, appealing to people over and above the traditional party structures. Enoch Powell was the nearest Britain got to a leader who could articulate these concerns and he simultaneously embraced the three main identity issues in the UK: race and immigration, Unionism, and Europe. Although his arguments were framed with scholarly elegance as well as a coherent, emotional appeal to (white) Britishness, he failed to achieve a sustained breakthrough. But others have tried and will try again.

Faced with a populist upsurge, mainstream politicians have hitherto tended either to panic (like the Callaghan government over the Kenyan Asians) or hope for the best (like Blair, saved from likely defeat in a European referendum) or have tried to improvise off-the-cuff philosophies at times of crisis (like the present government's attempt to 'rebrand' minorities in response to Islamic terrorism).

A more positive approach is to give more thought and attention to how issues of cultural identity should be approached and managed. After all, vast creative energy has been devoted to the issue of how to manage 'mixed economies' to secure the optimum mix of markets and government intervention. Much less sustained attention has been devoted to the question of how cultural identity can be reunited with powerful competing claims of local identity, and wider, cross-border or global identities.

In the 1994 pamphlet I tried to set out some guiding principles and also to describe some of the societies from which lessons could be learnt. One which I highlighted – the Netherlands – has recently been shaken by the realisation that its carefully crafted mixture of diversity and liberal tolerance could not accommodate Islamic militancy and the popular Dutch reaction to it. Indeed, it was the Dutch Liberal Party (VVD) which became the epicentre of this conflict by upholding an individualistic defence of gay and women's rights in the face of fundamentalism. British politics today faces not dissimilar dilemmas and there is a similar process of reaction and re-examination. What follows is an attempt to update the broad normative principles suggested a decade ago, in the light of experience, which can be re-established as part of a broader public consensus.

Multiple identity, minorities and multiculturalism

There are hardly any countries in the world which could be described as ethnically homogenous in any meaningful sense: possibly Botswana, Iceland and Uruguay might qualify. But a large majority have distinct racial, tribal, religious or linguistic minorities. Britain is simply one of many.

All societies need some sense of direction, a set of values relating to how they should deal with diversity in their midst. A useful starting point for the UK is to debunk the myth that before the arrival of black and Asian migrants in the decades after the Second World War, Britain was a homogenous and harmonious unicultural society.[9] Quite apart from deep historical differences of region, class and religion, there had in fact been previous waves of immigrants – Huguenots in the seventeenth century, freed slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Lascars from the Indian subcontinent and other groups in the port cities and East European Jews at the turn of the twentieth century, and the Irish throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many simply disappeared into the host population through intermarriage and assimilation, recognisable now only by names and, sometimes, physiognomy, though there remain churches and synagogues and distinct communities which reflect that past. The British experience of managing identity had its successes – notably the 300-year United Kingdom with Scotland, and the Scots' distinct but essentially positive role within it, and the (relative) absence of anti-Semitism, at least in modern times – but it had its failures, in Ireland and specifically in Ulster.

Many societies have approached identity issues through a grand design or blueprint, ranging from full assimilation in a racial melting pot, as in Brazil (even if the reality is somewhat different); assimilation to a common set of national standards and values, as attempted in France; looser integration with cultural 'pillars', as formalised in the Netherlands or on a bigger scale in India; or in the 'salad bowl' of the United States; exclusion and marginalisation of the 'foreigner' minority, as in Japan; and then the extreme and pathological excesses of South African 'separate development' and 'ethnic cleansing'. It is possible to construct a spectrum which reflects that diversity of experience (figure 5).

In Britain there was no blueprint or grand design. Things happened. Minorities made their own distinctive way in British society when they arrived and the indigenous population variously welcomed them or grumbled but largely adapted. The identifiable,

Figure 5 Integration and separation

Cultural separation (vertical axis)

Physical separation (horizontal axis)

'Ethnic cleansing'

Multiculturalism   (Northern mill towns)

(French *banlieux*)   Apartheid

Multiple identity

(London)   US 'salad bowl'

Melting pot
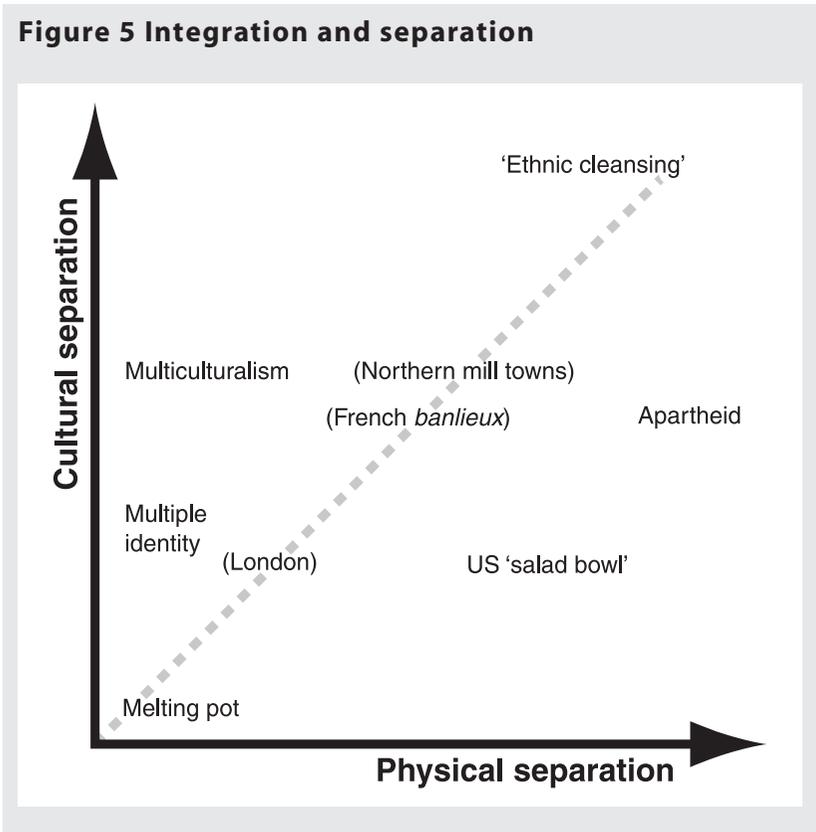
ethnically distinct, non-white, part of the population – now roughly 4.2 million – has doubled between 1981 and 2001 but at 8.5 per cent of the total is not large in relation to other Western countries.

There is now a wide variety of experience. Some ethnic minorities are being physically assimilated as were the freed slaves and itinerant sailors of past centuries. A high percentage of Afro Caribbeans have white partners and, while they may face prejudice and discrimination, they are not a physically segregated community like many Afro Americans; similarly, a high proportion of British Jews have intermarried or have become secular. Some minorities have proved

exceptionally successful in the education system, the professions and business – for example East African Asians, Indians, and Chinese like the Jews before them – while other minorities, from Bangladesh and Pakistan particularly, are at the opposite end of the scale (albeit with many individual exceptions).[10] Black people of African origin appear to have had markedly different experiences from black people from the Caribbean. Based on educational and economic success, immigrant minorities have now moved into formerly white suburbs (though, rarely, the countryside) and in London – and to a lesser degree in Birmingham, Manchester or Leeds – there is a high level of residential, and increasingly social, integration among the professional and business middle class. But in the former mill towns of northern England, and in pockets of all our big cities, are virtual ghettos of largely segregated, mainly Muslim Asian, people only tenuously integrated with the rest of British society.

This is an unplanned, very diverse and complex experience. It calls for a sophisticated response. What has been forthcoming is some-times called multiculturalism: the belief that there are distinct, largely homogenous, communities living side-by-side, equal but different. While often well intentioned, multiculturalism is often a poor description of what exists and a poor guide to how the politics of identity can and should evolve.

Virtual communities

It is, for a start, no more meaningful to talk about concepts like the 'Muslim community' than the 'white community' or 'the Asian community'.[11] In a world where people often feel awkward expressing language about identity – for fear of appearing prejudiced or insensitive – it may be felt to be polite to add the word 'community' to soften crude racial or religious labelling. Beyond that it has very limited value. Britain's 'Muslim community', for example, encompasses overall 50 recognisable ethnicities from Kurds, Somalis and Yemenis to Albanians, Bosnians and Turks, each with different languages and traditions. There are cross-cutting confessional differences between Sunnis and Shias; and between those influenced

by austere, uncompromising 'fundamentalist' values – like the Arab Wahabis – and gentler, more accommodating, Sufi traditions. Liberal-minded groups like the Ahmadis or Ismaelis have as much in common with extreme fundamentalist strains of Islam as Quakers have with Pentecostal sects or Opus Dei. The Pakistani Muslim minority, which has attracted particular attention for its militancy, contains not only groups like the Ahmadis (whom others reject as heretics) but different strands loosely described as the Barelvi majority – more tolerant, and often worshippers of local saints – and the Deobandis, a group which also spawned the Taliban. These distinctions are in turn cut across by regional and tribal affiliations. And, of course, no less than among Christians, Jews, Hindus and Sikhs there are large numbers among the one and a half million British Muslims whose religious affiliation is largely token and who have adopted a secular way of life.

Each of the 'communities' envisaged by proponents of multi-culturalism has a much more complex sense of identity than first appears. Take for example a tiny minority like the Goans (into which I married). At first sight this is simply a small 'community' of – mainly – Catholic Indians. But within it are people whose sense of geographic identity relates to Britain, India, Portugal or East Africa; whose first language is English, Portuguese or Konkani; and whose social relations are subtly shaped by a sense of Indian caste which has endured through 500 years of colonial rule and Catholic immersion.

Multiple identity, not multiculturalism

While 'multiculturalism' may have played a positive role in encouraging respect for other faiths and traditions it has had the negative effects of stereotyping, of encouraging exaggerated deference to unrepresentative 'community leaders' and creating in the political world the dangerous – and erroneous – idea that Britain's ethnic minorities are 'vote banks' rather than aggregations of individuals. And as Trevor Phillips among others has argued, it also detracts from the important task of creating a sense of shared identity called

'Britishness', and allows racialism to flourish behind an outward veneer of politeness and respect for different ways of life.[12]

A more accurate picture of where we are, and also a more positive picture of where we ought to be, is based on the concept of 'multiple identity': the recognition that most of us 'belong' in different ways to different real, or virtual, communities. Thus many Scots will see themselves simultaneously as Scots and British (also Catholic or Presbyterian; or Highlander or Lowlander or as Glaswegians or Aberdonians; possibly, also as European). A similar awareness is growing among many British Asians. The film *Bend it Like Beckham* captures eloquently and wittily the multiple identity of the young heroine who is simultaneously – and not without tension – British, Indian, Punjabi and Sikh, growing up in a middle-class, west London suburb. Anecdote is reinforced by fact: census data confirms that a significant majority of non-white ethnic groups living in Britain regard themselves as British or British in conjunction with other identities.[13]

The threat to harmonious social relations in Britain comes from those who insist that multiple identity, including Britishness, is not possible: white supremacists, English nationalists, Islamic fundamentalists. This is the opposition and they have to be confronted. An important element in that confrontation is the assertion of a sense of Britishness. British patriotism went out of fashion with people of more liberal disposition when it was associated with imperial arrogance and racial superiority. Those days have long gone and there is now an important national component of our identity, within an open and diverse society, in which we should take pride.

Concretely, institutionalising multiple identity involves two steps. One is a set of principles which elevates individual over group rights and, as part of that set of rights, protects individuals from discrimination and physical attack on the basis of race or religion (or gender) with effective sanctions. The other relates to responsibilities rather than rights: an obligation on everyone to subscribe to core elements of British identity, notably the law of the land. This is why a separate system of Islamic law for British Muslims cannot and should

not be ceded (though there are other more inclusive ways in which distinct Islamic concepts, such as Sharia financial products, can widen choice within the British system of law and regulation). The new citizenship requirements, including a language test, are a welcome contribution to the affirmation of Britishness. Other countries, such as Australia, Canada and the USA, have gone further than the UK in promoting language classes to ensure that immigrant groups are neither at an unnecessary disadvantage nor culturally isolated.

Linking the rights and responsibilities is a deep commitment to law and order. In the politics of identity, where emotions can easily degenerate into communal passions and prejudice, nothing is more important than a common commitment to upholding the authority of the police and the judiciary to enforce a commonly shared body of law. A cavalier approach to law enforcement sometimes adopted by those on the traditional Left – who see the forces of law and order as the handmaiden of capitalism – is potentially disastrous. From terrorism by religious fanatics to the fire bombing of immigrants' homes and riots against controversial books and plays: an uncompromising assertion of public order and applications of the sanctions of the law is essential to maintaining mutual trust in a diverse society.

The implication is that we need to do more to both strengthen public support for the role of law and ensure that the experience of law and order is one which engenders trust and respect for public institutions among minorities as well as the majority.

Family, faith and flag

It is possible to establish legal rights and obligations, and an approach to citizenship, at a superficial level of integration. Cultural identity often becomes most important politically when it touches deeper nerves linked to underlying values associated with the family, different religious faiths and the question of how far multiple identity can coexist with loyalty to non-British flags.

Family

The issues involved in so-called 'family values' have come to dominate political debate in the USA largely because they overlap with issues of faith, and are of some, but lesser, importance in more secular Europe, including the UK. There are, however, contexts in which questions of identity bear directly on family policy. One is adoption. There has been strong opposition to interracial adoption among many social workers and, until recently, this dominated official adoption policy. It has been based on the view that a black child's sense of self-esteem deriving from racial identity should take precedence over the psychological damage which may occur as a result of prolonged institutional care. The evidence base for this preference is somewhat shaky and in some cases the best has been made the enemy of the good. Recent legislation has gone some way to correct the previous bias in favour of identity as an adoption criterion but it still remains the case that the welfare and happiness of the individual child can be compromised by officially imposed insistence on the claims of identity, especially where overseas adoption is concerned.

Faith

It is where issues of faith and family coincide that the tensions are greatest. Over the last half century there has emerged a broad liberal and secular consensus on moral issues in the UK as in other Western countries – even in the increasingly religious USA. In matters of legislation governing personal morality involving consenting adults – be it divorce, abortion or homosexuality – it is accepted that the choices of individuals should not be overridden by religious taboos, though there are qualifications in what are, in each case, complex moral arguments. But for many who derive a strong part of their identity from a religious faith, and especially from a global religion like Christianity or Islam, it is not acceptable to settle for a society dominated by secular values. Consequently, the boundaries of laws governing 'family values', or personal morality, will continue to be fought over.

Moreover there are several areas where there is a growing dissonance of views. One relates to faith schools. Here, individual choice and identity derived from faith are on the same side of the argument. The liberal view is that families should have the freedom to choose a state or private school that has an ethos which reflects their values. However, even before the arrival of South Asians of non-Christian faiths, there was concern about the virtual segregation of state education in Northern Ireland and even mainland cities like Glasgow, and the role which this plays in allegedly fostering sectarian bigotry. But the issue has gained considerable traction with the emergence of Islamic schools and, also, of Christian schools established by evangelicals of a particularly uncompromising hue.

It surely must be right, nonetheless, to uphold the principle of choice and not just for those parents who can afford to pay private fees. Worries that Islamic schools will indoctrinate children in militant, Jihadi teaching or that Christian education will promote creationism can be met by the disciplines imposed by a national syllabus, the requirement for teachers to be professionally trained and by regular Ofsted inspections. Faith-based schooling does not necessarily lead to deep social division, let alone violent conflict. The experience of Catholic schooling has been that it has given immigrant minorities – overwhelmingly Irish – the opportunity gradually to develop a British identity while retaining the confidence which derives from a sense of community, tradition and belief. There is no reason why Muslims, and others, should not enjoy a parallel experience.

Offence and tolerance

An even more difficult issue is where the lifestyles of different cultures and faiths knowingly or accidentally cause deep offence to others. Britons first became aware of the Islamic fundamentalists in their midst when there were riots in Bradford against Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and in support of the 'fatwa' against him. Christian groups have also at various times protested strongly against films and plays which offend religious sensibilities from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* to *Jerry Springer – The Opera*, and have sought

to have them banned. The recent Sikh demonstrations in Birmingham against a play involving lesbianism in the context of the Sikh religion showed that it is not only the evangelical religions which can take violent objection to material that can be deemed offensive and blasphemous.

The basic underlying principle here is that legally there must not be censorship of artistic creation or publication and politicians must be ready to defend those who exercise their freedom, even if the content is unfashionable. The government's current proposal to try to outlaw incitement to religious (as opposed to racial) hatred endeavours to put limits on that freedom and the impossibility in practice of isolating ridicule and righteous, religious anger from cynical incitement makes such legislation highly questionable. But to make it clear that double standards are not being applied, those who defend a liberal approach have to campaign for removal of existing legislation against blasphemy which defends (albeit theoretically) only one religion from verbal assault.

The law is one thing; good manners, sensitivity – and the much maligned 'political correctness' – are another. All societies that have potential conflicts of identity require some self-regulating discipline which discourages gratuitously offensive behaviour. Over a generation, Britain has advanced a great deal in that respect. A generation ago it would have been inconceivable that a Conservative leader would have sacked a colleague for telling a racist joke. But good manners can't, and should not be, the subject of legal sanctions.

Offence to identity can be caused in other ways. A woman dressed top to toe in a black chador can be as offensive to a non-Muslim neighbour – or a radical feminist – as a nude woman on page 3 of the *Sun* newspaper could be to a devout Muslim – or a feminist, too! But provided consent is involved, there is no role for the state to interfere. The state only becomes involved in the case of the dress codes of official bodies be they the armed forces, police, hospitals or schools, and these bodies will often have good reason to insist on uniformity and should be supported when they do so. Often the issue is one of allowing managers scope for pragmatism and common sense in

particular cases rather than enforcing centralised rules in all cases, as in French schools.

But there are instances where the demands of identity conflict directly with the demands of an essentially liberal and secular society, even one that is flexible and pragmatic about displays of different-ness, and where a stand has to be taken against fundamentalists of all kinds. There can be no toleration of child abuse by Christian religious sects, seeking to drive out evil spirits, or other groups imposing genital mutilation on their daughters. And if women are physically abused for not complying with some religious or ethnic taboo, then British law protecting them from domestic violence, or threats of it, must prevail and be seen to prevail.

There are numerous, genuinely tricky, ethical dilemmas where different identities and interests collide. For many years there have been campaigns to stop the inhumane ritual slaughter of animals. While this was initially regarded, perhaps with some justice, as a disguised form of anti-Semitism, the debate has now widened to include Muslim 'halal'; and the gradual growth of public concern about animal welfare – not just foxes – has ensured that the issue will not go away. Some of us would defer to religious sensitivities in this matter but there is no unambiguous ethical position. Concern for animal welfare is also one of the factors, together with noise 'pollu-tion', leading to a tightening of regulations governing the use of fireworks. This increasingly conflicts not just with the traditional British celebration of the execution of treasonable Catholic heretics but also the Hindu Diwali festival. With combinations of time restric-tions and equal treatment of different traditions, this is a relatively minor problem which can be managed, though others are less tractable.

Flags in conflict

Most of these issues can be resolved by recognising that many people enjoy a multiple identity; Britishness is one of several. There are occasions when these identities come directly into conflict. The infamous Tebbit test – centring on the affront caused to Britishness by British Indians and Pakistanis waving Indian and Pakistani flags at

test matches – raises important issues which have not gone away. Indeed, Lord Tebbit has recently returned to the theme.

It has long been accepted that liberal, democratic societies should accommodate different 'flags'. Cuban, Greek, Irish, Italian and Jewish Americans often express passionate support for their country of origin and identity and few would question the right of their British equivalents to identify in a similar way. Few at a Greek or Italian or Turkish restaurant in London watching a football match against England would be surprised – or seriously offended – to discover that sporting loyalty is to the country of origin. But there are contexts where literal or metaphysical flag waving can be, and is designed to be, seriously provocative and to bring different loyalties into conflict. No one who has attended Celtic vs Rangers football matches would be naïve enough to believe that the Irish tricolour and the Union Jack are waved as innocent fun. The provocation is one step removed from the Orange march through a Catholic neighbourhood in Ulster or, for that matter, a 'patriotic' march by a gang of skinheads in Muslim areas of Burnley. But as a society we should be big enough to accommodate such displays, however tense and difficult. It is a strength rather than a weakness of British society that Orangemen were able to march, albeit with route restrictions, during the 'troubles'.

We should be equally grown up in accepting that, provided the law is fully respected, and there is no violence or threat of it, some British Muslims will wish to identify with some deeply obnoxious and reactionary regimes and individuals. Where war, or near war, exist, tolerance will be strained, perhaps to breaking point. But it is a tribute to the maturity and stability of Indian democracy that, despite three recent wars and the threat of nuclear confrontation, some Indian Muslims feel able to fly a green flag at Indo–Pakistan cricket matches (while others support India). Britain should do no worse.

Managing a liberal immigration policy

In the politics of identity, immigration is an important, even defining, issue. It makes the politics of Left and Right look singularly bereft of meaning. As noted above, Reagan and (within the constraints of

heightened security concerns) Bush have seen liberal immigration as a good right-wing issue which embodies freedom at its heart. In Australia, the UK and many parts of Europe, however, the Right has made the political running in attacking liberal immigration, politicians of the Centre and Left in defending it.

Yet in a more open, integrated world a liberal approach to the movement of people is both inevitable and to be welcomed. The idea that goods, services, capital, news and information should flow freely across frontiers while people remain sealed in nation states is absurd and untenable. Yet totally unrestricted freedom of movement seriously threatens the identity of settled populations. No one outside a Communist dictatorship has seriously tried to stop people leaving their countries of origin, so the burden of policy falls on immigration: to provide a liberal framework which is also managed and respects the sense of identity of host populations.

UK immigration policy has never been argued from first principles but reflects a series of ad hoc responses to economic forces, refugee movements and political panics. The system of immigration control, like the issues themselves, is exceedingly complex, with different rules and principles for refugees and immigrants, primary immigration and dependants, different categories of foreigners subject to visa restrictions of various kinds, different entitlements to settle or stay for different lengths of time and diverse links between migration and ethnicity.[14] Nonetheless, Britain's experience is not greatly out of line with other Western countries. As noted above, the foreign-born population – around 9 per cent of the total, 4.5 million – is pretty much the same proportionately as the US (12.5 per cent), Germany (12.5 per cent), Sweden (12 per cent) and France (10 per cent).

Public concern has nonetheless erupted from time to time in a succession of immigration 'scares' centring on the first wave of Commonwealth immigration in the 1950s and early 1960s; the arrival of East African Asians in 1968 and then again in 1971 interspersed with the impact of the Powell 'rivers of blood' speech in 1968; inner city violence in Toxteth (1981) and several northern cities in 2001; and more recent scares about asylum and about illegal immigration

in the run-up to the 2005 general election. The rhetoric and arguments – the fears of 'swamping' our 'overcrowded island', the association of immigrants with crime and disease, concern over the pressure on jobs and housing, and underlying fears about loss of identity – recur again and again and have echoes in earlier times. The alarm over East European (mainly Jewish) refugees in the run-up to the 1905 Aliens Act was expressed in language that would be easily recognised today.

Even the new and potentially destabilising element of a disaffected minority of British Muslims linked to international terrorism has many precedents: the presence of 'anarchists' and other violent groups among the pre-1914 refugees, as in the Sidney Street siege; the presence of IRA sympathisers among the immigrant Irish populations of British (and US) cities; the Dutch Moluccans who, for a while, resorted to hijackings and other violence in the Netherlands amid a generally successful programme of assimilating Indonesians after independence; and the spill-over into France of the violent struggle between Islamic militants and the Algerian military authorities. The underlying story is that periods of globalisation – global economic integration and cooperation – such as occurred before the First World War and after the Second World War have been associated with substantial movements of people, often leading to a clash of identities.

Benefits and costs

What has given a new dynamic (and virulence) to the debate on immigration is that net flows have undoubtedly increased. Until the mid-1990s immigration was roughly balanced by emigration of British people, so the question was essentially one of the changing composition of the UK population. But with gross immigration of 200,000 a year or more in recent years and net immigration of over 100,000 there clearly is an immigration issue.

At present, UK policies on immigration, as well as being very complex, are in danger of becoming the worst of all worlds. Apart from a broad belief that some immigration is good for the economy,

there is little sense that immigration is being managed effectively to provide reassurance to the host population, not least because the authorities have only a hazy idea of the numbers involved. But, at the same time, a highly bureaucratic and inefficient system of entry clearance and of work permit allocation results in the exclusion of large numbers of bona fide (non-migrant) visitors and a failure to match manpower shortages with the potential contribution of temporary migrants and refugees.

One important requirement is an honest and transparent debate on the economic and social impact of continued (net) immigration. At present, the debate is seriously polarised and the costs and benefits are often exaggerated. Immigration – at least of people of working age – undoubtedly adds to UK economic growth but not necessarily to rising living standards or growth per head. That may well happen, however, as a result of immigrants being adaptable, mobile and entrepreneurial. The dynamism of London testifies to the positive impact of immigration (though the stagnation of some northern mill towns shows that immigration is not a sufficient condition for dynamism). The Governor of the Bank of England, no less, has argued that immigration plays a key role in raising the growth of output, and employment, at which it is possible to operate without triggering inflation and higher interest rates.

A longer-term argument is that a relatively young immigrant population, by working and paying taxes, helps to sustain an increasingly elderly indigenous population, though, to the extent that it is true, the benefits are necessarily temporary until the migrant population grows older. Set alongside the undoubted economic benefits are some distributional effects and social costs. Other things being equal, migrant workers will depress real wages (relative to profits) and raise demand, and prices, for low-cost affordable housing. This is not the place to argue the issues in full but there is a sceptical literature emerging from both the political Right (like Peter Lilley)[15] and Left (like David Goodhart and Bob Rowthorn),[16] who are concerned that immigration and ethnic diversity will break down the sense of solidarity necessary to support the welfare state and

combat inequality. While the arguments for a liberal approach are strong, there are undoubtedly costs and the case has to be made, politically and intellectually, not just assumed.

Guiding principles

What are the basic principles which should govern a managed but liberal approach? There is a clear legal and moral distinction between asylum and immigration. There are practical problems surrounding the definition of asylum in the case of people fleeing political persecution, of determining asylum claims, and of dealing humanely but firmly with failed claims; but the principle of granting asylum should not be an issue. It is, however, both reasonable and sensible to require that, while decisions are being made, asylum seekers should work, where they are fit, to make a contribution and for their own self-respect. Another useful change of emphasis would be on refugee resettlement for those whose claims have been clearly established.

Immigration is different. The level of immigration must be decided by representatives of the host country according to their definition of national interest, economic and social, and encompassing legitimate concerns about matters of identity. There has to be some form of regular, objective assessment about what the overall level of immigration should be, taking into account the state of the economy and social impacts. The model of the Low Pay Commission, setting a reasonable level for the minimum wage, is a plausible one. The fact that employers have unmet demand is relevant but not decisive; they are a sectional interest and their concerns are not overriding.

On the basis of the above assessment, temporary work permits could then be allocated on market principles. The fashionable idea of a 'points system', under which governments presume to second-guess the labour market, is inferior to the kind of system, described by Martin Wolf, which would involve auctioning quotas to individuals or employers.[17] Such systems have operated in relation to wireless spectrum, oil exploration and, elsewhere, for import licences. Suffice to say that permission to work has a scarcity value (depending on the

job and the state of the economic cycle) and those who benefit – employer or employee – should pay. A further advantage of using economic mechanisms of this kind is that it would be race blind. At present, the level of administrative discretion is such as to permit all manner of subjective judgements. Nor does it prejudge the issue of whether highly skilled or less skilled workers are desirable. There are, of course, many detailed issues such as how long permits are for, whether they are renewable, when they can be converted into the right to bring family to stay indefinitely and acquire citizenship, and what entitlements there are to public services. The temptation to use work permits as a route to a Swiss/German 'gastarbeiter' system should be resisted in favour of an American-style Green Card approach which acknowledges from the outset the probability of settlement and incorporates that assumption in the overall limit.

The system of immigration and asylum has to be effectively policed, and seen to be so, not just to reassure the host population but for the benefit of recent immigrants whose status, especially those who have assumed citizenship, is otherwise devalued. If the system is effectively policed, and that means targeting racketeers, it then becomes easier to adopt a liberal approach to temporary visitors – be they tourists or students – who bring genuine benefits to the UK and who, especially if they originate in countries like India, currently face major obstacles.

In practice, the movements of people to and from uncontrolled sources like the EU, periodic flows of genuine refugees, intermarriage, some legal workers and students staying on to become long-term residents and citizens, all contribute to a more diverse population. But those who wish to defend this diversity have to be willing to accept the need for managed rather than uncontrolled immigration and for the tough disciplines involved in policing it.

Localism and identity

Localism has become a fashionable new mantra, often without much content. But it can relate to something very real: the often intense feeling of loyalty and identity which many people have towards their

local community. Any MP can relate stories of mass meetings and emotionally charged petitions centred on controversial planning applications or threats to local parks or hospitals. NIMBYism is a force not to be trifled with. It also has a creative dimension since the emotional energy channelled into stopping threatening developments can also be channelled into school PTAs, local sports clubs, online communities, summer charity fairs and self-help schemes.

In a world where globalisation can render people powerless and anonymous, and national institutions are remote, a strong sense of identity and belonging can come from an urban or suburban (or real) village. While 'localism' and decentralisation are being embraced to promote more efficient management or political accountability, it can also fill an emotional vacuum. It is, however, perhaps best not to be too romantic about localism which can be parochial, selfish and – occasionally – thoroughly nasty. Nothing sets the pulse of many a local community racing faster than the sight of a gypsy caravan. But, in general, the latent energy of local identity is a force to be harnessed. Local identity is part of the multiple identity which will keep a diverse society together. Particularly in those towns and cities where ethnic identity has become divisive, there is more likely to be common ground in trying to improve a neighbourhood, a ward or a borough than in an abstract appeal to common nationality.[18]

Translating localism into concrete forms of governance involves the broad principle of subsidiarity: the idea that decisions should take place at the lowest level possible. In the UK, centralisation has reached dangerous levels with the steady atrophy of the powers of local government, from big unitary authorities to parish councils. A major task of reformers should be to repatriate powers to local authorities, including revenue-raising powers, with all the attendant risks. There are complex practical arguments, pursued elsewhere, about the optimum balance between national (and supranational) institutions, regions and localities but a good operational principle is: when in doubt, devolve.

A shared sense of equity

One of the consequences of globalisation is that it has blurred the point of reference when it comes to establishing a 'fair' distribution of income, wealth or opportunity. On the one hand there is a growing, but far from complete, sense that poverty and injustice overseas are our problem as well as others'.[19] The Make Poverty History and debt campaigns embody that sense of universal values and solidarity.

On the other hand, international integration may widen divisions within societies and undermine their sense of cohesion and common identity. Less skilled workers in rich countries face competition from migrant workers, from competing imports and 'off-shoring', potentially depressing real wages. Less successful immigrants can find themselves trapped in an underclass, unable to progress and largely unwanted in their host country. By contrast the rich can deploy their capital globally to get the best return. The highly educated – what Reich called the 'symbolic analysts' – have more opportunities to migrate than the less skilled.[20] Intellectual property rights can command a scarcity premium globally. Top executives, entertainers, scientific specialists and others can operate in a global market. All of these factors can contribute to widening pre-tax income differentials (and post-tax differentials to the extent that governments worry about tax arbitrage).

There are, however, many other contributory factors and it would be conceding too much to accept that 'globalisation' inevitably promotes greater inequality. As it happens, the least unequal societies – like the Scandinavian countries – are among the most open to trade and wider integration while relatively unequal societies like Brazil, South Africa and the US are so for largely domestic reasons.

In a world divided by identity politics, however, a sense of grievance over inequalities in income and opportunity can be corrosive of a sense of social cohesion. Minorities make good scapegoats and disadvantaged minorities can in turn align themselves with co-religionists or related ethnic groups overseas rather than their fellow countrymen. It is altogether too facile to attribute breakdowns

in ethnic relations, where they occur, let alone terrorism, to poverty and inequality. But in Ulster, in some Muslim groups in Britain and France, and among black minorities in the US and the UK, inequality, real and perceived, is an issue reinforcing other forms of alienation.

One of the differences between a liberal and laissez-faire approach to globalisation is that, for the former, issues of equality of opportunity, 'fairness' and social justice matter both within borders and, to a growing extent, across them. They matter both for their own sake and because neglect of them can be seriously dysfunctional, allowing identity to become a divisive force. But this leads, in turn, into the wider question of how far these issues can be meaningfully discussed outside a purely national context.

Practical globalism

One of the key elements contributing to the emergence of a politics of identity has been the perceived threat from different aspects of globalisation. 'Domestic' and 'foreign' issues merge increasingly. We are very far from a world in which borders no longer matter. Clearly they matter enormously in framing concepts of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' for migration and citizenship purposes, for example. But identity often has a cross-border dimension through religion, migrant flows, a sense of pan-ethnicity among scattered groups like Armenians, Jews and Kurds, and a growing sense of shared values in relation to human rights or democracy. The recent UK scare over asylum was triggered in substantial part by the arrival of refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo and a policy of intervention in the former Yugoslavia flowed from that interaction. Through immigrant minorities and visitors, Britain, like other major Western countries, is now directly embroiled in the struggle within Islam and the war of its militant elements against 'Jews and Crusaders'.

One of the dangers of the politics of identity is that it brings to the fore political forces which wish to build barricades against the outside world. Within the EU and the US there are people who dream of a 'fortress' from which external 'threats' – economic as well as military – can be excluded.

A positive alternative is what could be called practical globalism: engaging with the issues thrown up by global integration. The Blair government deserves credit for having done this – taking a lead within the G8 on issues of debt and development and global warming, and, within the EU, on enlargement and the reform of EU institutions. There are many complex foreign policy issues involved and this is not the place to debate them. There are, however, several points to be made.

The economic dimension

The first relates to international economic policy. From several points of the ideological compass there are now negative voices calling for a retreat from liberal trade, capital movements (and immigration). The 'anti-globalisation' movement barely qualifies for the description of a 'movement', but, however disparate and incoherent, some of its messages have struck a chord: that trade, especially when deriving competitive advantage from 'cheap labour', 'destroys jobs'; that liberalisation in developing countries 'creates poverty'; that welfare states cannot co-exist with high levels of economic integration; that multinational companies have accumulated vast supranational powers; that trade (and economic integration more generally) is a 'zero sum game' in which successful exporters 'win' and others 'lose'. The opposite case for globalisation – that economic integration is actually and potentially beneficial to rich and poor countries alike and that governments retain substantial discretion to manage their economies, redistribute income, promote public services and regulate capital – has been well made in a recent government white paper as well as by the present author and others.[21] But it has to be endlessly remade. Historical experience, notably in the inter-war period, illustrates the great economic cost when barriers are raised and the enormous potential for destruction when nationalism and racialism are let off the leash as part of a reaction to integration with the rest of the world.

Rules-based systems

Second, there is the issue of how far sovereignty should be pooled to manage closer cross-border integration. Globalisation requires rules, and a framework of law, to help resolve inter-state disputes and permit the orderly, mutually agreed dismantling of barriers. The WTO is a good example. Small countries – Costa Rica or Uruguay – can take on, and win, cases against the most powerful – the USA – over discriminatory trade barriers, invoking the international rule of law before dispute panels. Reflecting the deepening of integration internationally, these rules are expanding to include the discriminatory use of agricultural and industrial subsidies; government procurement; barriers to trade in services including discrimination against foreign investors in the services sector; and product, health and safety standards applied in a discriminatory and protectionist way. Key new players such as China are being brought within the rule-making process (in favourable contrast to the treatment of Japan when it emerged into modernity). There are fewer more misguided campaigns than those directed against the WTO and other multilateral bodies. Whether from the Left or Right they amount to little more than political and intellectual vandalism and profoundly underestimate the importance of the rule of law internationally as well as nationally.

The development of a set of rules to govern trade in goods and services, with a quasi judicial enforcement mechanism, is but one part of a slowly evolving international order underpinned by rules. There is an embryonic set of rules governing business corruption. There is something approaching agreed rules governing the standards to be applied to international banking and securities houses and accounting conventions for companies. Numerous informal official and business groups are defining global standards to ensure interoperability of communications or product quality and safety. While there is much frustration over the lack of consensus over binding rules to govern global warming emissions, there is already a considerable edifice of international environmental agreements like

the Montreal and Kyoto Protocol agreements governing fishing, the management of Antarctica and oceanic dumping. In all of these areas it is possible to point to non-compliance and maverick behaviour – especially by the most powerful countries – but there is now an expectation that what is required for cross-border relationships is a strengthening set of rules: 'global governance'.

The expansion of global governance from economics into security and foreign affairs is more difficult but not less important. The rules governing nuclear non-proliferation may be one-sided (to favour existing nuclear powers) but they provide the only alternative to the anarchic spread of weapons of mass destruction. There are, so far, limited but growing disciplines on arms exports and their sub-sidisation. The slow accretion of accepted norms of human rights, the outlawing of genocide and war crimes and the International Criminal Court, protection of threatened minorities, rules governing inter-vention in failed states: these are the building blocks of a rules-based global system which, however flawed, now exists in skeletal form.

Institutions

This point leads to a third conclusion, which is the crucial importance of strong global institutions. By this, I do not mean big bureaucracies with armies of international civil servants. Some of the most effective work in 'practical globalism' at present is carried out by networks of people working under the umbrella of a tiny, non-government body based in Maastricht called the International Standards Organisation. The development of common norms for human rights or corruption is being advanced by NGOs like Amnesty and Transparency Inter-national. The most effective global rule-making bodies are modest in scale like the WTO in Geneva and the Basle Club defining banking rules.

But the apex multilateral bodies, notably the UN, are important since they provide a framework of argued general principles within which the various bits and pieces of global governance can fit. And on the crucial issues surrounding military intervention, the UN is the primary source of international legitimacy. The most important

single argument against the invasion of Iraq (at least, at the time and in the form that it took) was that it drove a coach and horses through the rather fragile set of rules governing the use of military force – in contrast to the earlier attack on Afghanistan which had clear legitimacy.

There is a role for informal as well as formal institutions, regional as well as global, which is why the G8 and the EU are valuable. Such organisations need to adapt and reform and both are in danger of atrophy through living off past glories rather than addressing current and future needs. While Mr Blair's efforts in the G8 to mobilise support for initiatives on debt and global warming have been admirable and partially successful, it is not credible for a body to aspire to strategic oversight of the world economy when the second and fifth largest economies (China and India) are excluded from it. A group that excludes the country which, alongside the USA, arguably now bears most heavily on global wage levels, profits, prices, interest rates, security concerns and environmental emissions cannot expect to be taken seriously for much longer unless it reforms.

Europe

Similar doubts are emerging about the future of the EU and those of us who have spent much of our political lives arguing the case for the EU are now being forced to acknowledge an emerging crisis. For half a century the EU has been a pre-eminent example of 'practical globalism', albeit on a regional level: stripping away barriers to trade, capital and labour flows in a customs union, then common market, then single market, then (for most members) common currency area; eliminating political enmity and the risk of war between historical enemies; and diffusing support for democracy and human rights through enlargement to southern and, then, eastern Europe. These are massive achievements and too easily taken for granted.

But it is now clear that those in the vanguard of the European project have over-reached themselves. The failure to gain support for the new European constitution has exposed several major failings. One is that a popular sense of European identity is weak, even in countries supposedly most committed to the European project. A

sense of European identity is gradually emerging as part of our multiple identity and in some smaller countries, like Belgium, Ireland and Luxembourg or those with a profound sense of national failure, like Italy, or historic guilt, like Germany, a sense of European identity is palpable. But those working in the 'bubble' of Brussels' politics and bureaucracy have overestimated it. Second, the principle of subsidiarity, or decentralisation, was largely disregarded in what has appeared to be a steady accretion and centralisation of functions. Indeed the central question facing the Union has not been properly addressed: What are those activities which need to be tackled at a European level because they are too big to tackle locally or nationally but cannot be dealt with globally?

Third, the support of some liberal, globally minded people, especially but not only in the Anglo Saxon world, has weakened because of those aspects of the Union which are inward-looking or economically irrational, like the barely reforming Common Agriculture Policy or the imposed harmonisation of tax and social legislation. There are worrying signs of protectionist policies emerging, like the recent trade restrictions imposed on Chinese textiles. And there is strong resistance to the historically important task of enlargement to incorporate Muslim Turkey.

It is profoundly to be hoped that necessary reforms will take place quickly. There is a danger that, otherwise, a project of enormous achievement and potential will start to unravel. And, if it does, the issue which has been at the heart of Britain's politics of identity for a generation will re-ignite, dangerously.

Conclusion

On all these issues, the recognition of multiple identities should inform a practical approach to policy and politics which seeks robust, positive responses to globalisation in ways that make the politics of identity inclusive, open and mainstream. This will be challenging for politicians and citizens alike, but it is necessary. Politics as usual is not an adequate response to the deep changes we have already seen, or to those that we can confidently expect.

5. Conclusion

A decade ago when I wrote *The World's New Fissures* I was struck by the way in which a new kind of politics was emerging. In the former Communist bloc, politics had only a little to do with the Left–Right arguments which had dominated the Cold War era. It harked back to earlier times, to what has been called 'the politics of the soil', in which nationalism, race and religion loomed large. In Western Europe, there was a commitment to deepening European political as well as economic integration through the Maastricht Treaty, which in turn triggered a profound crisis in the British Conservative Party about British identity and its own underlying values and purpose. Furthermore, for the first time since the Second World War, openly racist parties were making serious inroads in Belgium, France and Germany. Dormant nationalism in the Basque country, Catalonia, northern Italy and Scotland was resurfacing. In Canada and New Zealand long-established major parties were being torn apart by disputes over language and race. What I called the politics of identity was least evident in Clinton's USA but a perceptive observer would have noticed the steady advance of evangelical Christians into the political domain.

Outside Europe, the world's largest democracy saw the emergence, to a position of strength, of a major party redefining India in terms of its Hindu identity and in opposition to other religions, especially Islam. Amid numerous political struggles elsewhere – whether based

on religious, racial or national identity – I did not, however, see the full significance of what was happening in Afghanistan. A warlord of the anti-Soviet resistance, originally backed by both Saudi Arabia and the USA, was fighting for power on a platform of puritanical Islamic practice which, inter alia, involved throwing acid in the faces of unveiled women; and he, in turn, was losing ground to a shadowy but even more extreme group called the Taliban.

Scrolling forward a decade to today, Britain has been through a general election in which parties sought to differentiate themselves in traditional Left–Right terms, albeit through tax and spending commitments which involved small sums in relation to the economy as a whole. Issues of identity, particularly as expressed through immigration policy and the UK's relationship with Europe, aroused more passion but were not, in the event, decisive.

Within days of the UK election, France and the Netherlands rejected the proposed European Constitution, re-opening, in a quite fundamental way, the relationship between nation states and the emerging European entity. Then the most contentious items on the post-election UK parliamentary agenda included identity cards, immigration and laws relating to religious incitement. To be sure, there were the familiar Left–Right debates and mock indignation across the Commons chamber but, more than ever, these appeared like a choreographed exhibition of tribal dancing by tribesmen who had long since abandoned their traditions but donned grass skirts and spears for the tourists.

A few days before the parliamentary recess there was the series of terrorist atrocities in London carried out by British Islamic militants and a failed attempt by others. The idea of suicide bombers killing themselves and many other innocent people of all races and religions as a political expression of religious identity had, of course, occurred in a much larger and more dramatic way on 9/11. This particular terrorist technique can probably be traced back to the Tamil Tigers in the secessionist war in Sri Lanka and was used as well as by conventional armies in the Iran–Iraq war and, earlier, by the Japanese. Indiscriminate terrorism has been used widely to promote nationalist

objectives most recently by the IRA and ETA and nationalists allied to religious extremists in Palestine and Iraq. The most lethal terrorist attack in the US before 9/11 was perpetrated by a group which (through somewhat obscure logic) sought to promote white racial supremacy by blowing up many white people in Oklahoma. An equally fanatical group in Japan – Aum – pioneered terrorist attacks on the underground system invoking Buddhism, however implausibly. The knowledge that there are significant numbers of people who will kill and die for their religious or ethnic identity has become a central fact of political life.

The ensuing debate in the UK has developed from the – important – practicalities of policing and counter-terrorism to the deeper issue of why concerns over identity could help to incubate in British society a clutch of potential suicide bombers with the necessary support. The pursuit of answers to that question is clearly not a simple task, but in this pamphlet I have tried to sketch out how multiple identities can be reconciled.

Notes

1   V Cable, *The World's New Fissures: Identities in crisis* (London: Demos Paper 6, 1994). That paper in turn drew on parts of a wide literature on ethnicity summarised in the references cited in the 1994 pamphlet including: E Balibar and I Wallerstein (eds), *Race, Nation Class: Ambiguous identities* (London: Verso, 1992); B Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); W Connor, 'The politics of ethno-nationalism', *Journal of International Affairs* 1 (1993); N Gardels, 'Two concepts of nationalism: an interview with Isaiah Berlin', *New York Review of Books* (Nov 1991); HL Gates, 'Races, religions and nations: the future surveyed', *The Economist*, 11 Sep 1993; P Hassner, 'Beyond nationalism and internationalism: ethnicity and world order', *Survival* 35 no 2 (1993); D Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: US Press, 1985); M Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers* (London: Hogarth, 1984); R de Nevers, 'Democratisation and ethnic conflict', *Survival* 35 no 2 (1993); A Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York: Blackwell, 1986); D Welsh, 'Domestic politics and ethnic conflict', *Survival* 35 no 1 (1993).
2   S Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations', *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993);
3   F Fukuyama, *The End of History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).
4   R O'Brien, *Global Financial Integration: The end of geography* (London: RIIA, Chatham House/Pinter, 1992).
5   M Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging* (London: BBC/Chatto, 1993).
6   M Brewer et al, *Poverty and Inequality in Britain: 2005* (London: Institute of Fiscal Studies, March 2005); Geoff Mulgan argues, however, that the polarisation at the extremes masks greater equalisation across most of the income range. See: G Mulgan, *Going With the Grain in Social Justice: Building a fairer Britain* (London: ippr/Politicos, 2005).
7   V Cable, *Public Services: Reform with a purpose* (London: Centre for Policy Reform, Sep 2005).
8   Best described in P Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Paths to strategic insight for yourself and your company* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).
9   P Fryer, *Staying Power: The history of black people in Britain* (London: Pluto,

1986); J Walvin, *Passage to Britain: Immigration in British history and politics* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1984).

10   G Bhattacharyya, L Ison and M Blair, *Minority Ethnic Attainment and Participation in Education and Training: The evidence* (London: TSO, 2003).

11   B Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

12   T Phillips, 'Multiculturalism's legacy is "have a nice day" racism', *Guardian* 28 May 2004.

13   Office of National Statistics, *Focus on Ethnicity* (London: ONS, 2004); A Thomson, *Asian 'Britishness'* (London: ippr, 2005).

14   Well summarised in D Sriskandarajah, 'Outsiders on the inside: towards socially just migration policies' in N Pearce and W Paxton (eds), *Social Justice: Building a fairer Britain* (London: ippr, 2005).

15   P Lilley, 'The case for setting a limit on foreign workers', *Financial Times*, May 2005; see also A Brown, *Do We Need Mass Immigration?* (London: Civitax, Nov 2002).

16   D Goodhart, 'Too diverse?', *Prospect* 95 (2004); and P Toynbee, 'The next reason why we should fear immigration', *Guardian* 11 Feb 2004.

17   M Wolf, 'Auction the right to work in the UK', *Financial Times*, 25 Feb 2005.

18   G Dench, M Young and K Govan, *Race, Community and Conflict* (London: Institute for Community Studies, 2005).

19   There is an important philosophical debate around this question of whether there can be a meaningful sense of global social justice. The traditional view – that principles of distributive justice can only apply democratically – is set out in T Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1999); and D Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). The opposite position is taken by D Held and S Koenig-Archibegi, in *Taming Globalisation: Functions of governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003). There is a good summary of the arguments in D Mepham, 'Social justice in a shrinking world' in Pearce and Paxton, *Social Justice*.

20   R Reich, *The Work of Nations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1991).

21   V Cable, *Globalisation and Global Governance* (London: RIIA, Chatham House, Pinter, 1999).

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