

'The mission of integration', repression, subjugation and discipline in civic nationalist education policy and practice

The geopolitical transformations that took place in the wake of the 9/11 al Qaeda attacks have been marked by the end of multi culturalism in many western democracies and the emergence of a defensive, exclusionary politics of national identity. Political debates have pivoted around the incompatibility of Islam with democratic values and widespread anxiety about refugees and asylum seekers, 'bearers of alien customs' (Virdee and McGeever, 2018, 7) crossing the borders of the 'Western citadel' (Beck, 2002, 49). In Europe and the UK, the immigration debate has led to the introduction of citizenship tests, language and civic values exams and other tests of naturalization and compatibility with Western liberal values.

In the UK this hardening of national discourse has shaped educational policy and practice effectively making education a securitized site of the domestic war on terror. In 2012 the introduction of fundamental British values as a requirement of the regulatory framework of the teachers professional standards (DfE, 2014) and the imposition of the Prevent duty (2015) on teachers to give due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism have altered the relationship between teachers and students so that teachers have become the de facto instruments of state security. Significantly there has been no public democratic debate about what makes these values British or indeed what Britishness is. Instead, the definition was taken from government counter terrorist legislation which also defines extremism as opposition to fundamental British values (HM Government, 2015).

These developments are part of a wider civic nationalist (Ignatieff, 1993) turn in education policy that opposes those who adhere to state sanctioned civic values to those who are positioned as suspect because of cultural difference.

In 2018 OfSTED Chief, Amanda Spielman, stated that young people in Britain are vulnerable to exploitation by extremists and therefore require the teaching of British values, because, 'if we leave these topics to the likes of the EDL and BNP on the one hand and Islamists on the other, then the mission of integration will fail' (Spielman, in Weale, 2018).

In her 2019 speech at the Wellington Festival of Education, she reiterated this message stating that 'it is so important that all these values are taught, understood and lived' and that 'school is how and where we make sure that every young British citizen ends up with the same level of understanding' (Spielman, in Weale, 2018).

The new civic nationalism represents an exclusionary liberalism, demonstrated by Spielman's insistence that OfSTED inspectors question female Muslim primary school children about the Muslim veil and her warning that religious minorities cannot expect 'cultural entitlements' (Weale, 2018).

In summary, what these policy developments amount to are an intensification of the State's gaze upon non-Christian, primarily Muslim students and faith schools. Since Tony Blair's premiership (1997-2007), UK government policy making has focussed on shared national values and community cohesion to address the problems of communities characterised as living 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001). In his 2011 Munich speech Conservative Prime Minister

David Cameron argued for 'muscular liberalism' in place of the 'passive tolerance' of multiculturalism (Cameron, Gov.uk, 2011). This policy discourse portrays the UK as under attack by fundamentalist unreason, but from a critical perspective it translates as the racialization of Islam and disavowal of pluralism. The role of the State has shifted from 'care taker' to 'traffic cop' (Goldberg in Kapoor et al, 2013). From my Foucauldian point of view, what I see at work is biopolitical power that displaces responsibility from the State onto certain target groups that it seeks to regulate, and discipline for its own political purposes. The riots in northern towns and cities in 2001 that gave us community cohesion policy had their roots in decades of structural racism and underinvestment, not in ethnic or cultural difference. Similarly the war in Iraq created a sectarian conflict that in the words of former MI5 Chief, Lady Manningham Buller 'radicalised...a whole generation of young people' (Norton-Taylor, 2010).

The message conveyed by fundamental British values is integrationist, 'become one of us', your crime is 'not to be like us' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, 2008). What is required now is a sea change in education policy that abandons strategies that exacerbate racial and religious inequalities. Critical multicultural pedagogical approaches are required that acknowledge students' lived experiences and their political agency. Such change is unlikely any time soon¹, but this should not preclude the formation of anti-racist educational alliances between students, teachers and researchers at the micro political level in order to report on the effects of racialising education policy and to foreground the experiences of minoritized groups. As Foucault argues, this is the task of critical scholarship, to unmask the effects of power as it operates obscurely, invisibly through the working of policies that appear neutral, independent and benign (Foucault, in Chomsky and Foucault, 2006).

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¹ It is worth noting the controversial government counter terrorist Prevent strategy is currently under review and due to report to Parliament in August 2020. The review has been dogged by delays and setbacks, only recently appointing a Chair after the previous reviewer was compelled to stand down due to concerns about bias.

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