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## **Immigration, social cohesion and social capital: A critical review**

### *Abstract*

In recent years, there has been an intense public and policy debate about ethnic diversity, community cohesion, and immigration in Britain and other societies worldwide. In addition, there has been a growing pre-occupation with the possible dangers to social cohesion represented by growing immigration flows and ethnic diversity. This paper proposes a critical framework for assessing the links between immigration, social cohesion, and social capital. It argues that the concept of social capital is episodic, socially constructed and value-based, depending on the prevailing ideological climate. Considerations of social capital as a public policy tool to achieve social cohesion need to incorporate an appreciation of alternative conceptions of social capital rooted in a textured understanding of immigrant processes and migration contexts.

**Key words:** community, diversity, ethnic relations, migration, solidarity

### **Introduction**

Britain has always been a multi-ethnic society, but in recent years there has been an intense public and policy debate about ethnic diversity, community cohesion and immigration. Attention to this set of interrelated issues has been focused around several real and mediated circumstances, including changing patterns of immigration, the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees, and the civil disturbances in Northern

England in the summer of 2001. In addition, there has been a growing preoccupation in Britain, along with other societies worldwide, with the possible dangers to social cohesion represented by growing immigration flows and ethnic diversity. These concerns have been exacerbated in the aftermath of the terrorist bombings of the London transport system in July 2005 and the Paris *banlieues*' protest riots in November 2005.

While processes of immigrant integration and management of diversity have been of long-standing interest dating back to the post-1945 period, attention has only recently been turned to the role that social capital may play in the promotion of social cohesion. This paper proposes a critical framework for assessing the posited links between immigration, social cohesion and social capital. We use the notion of social capital to encompass a range of thinking around norms and networks; the values and resources that both result in, and are the product of, socially negotiated ties and relationships (Edwards, 2003, 2004). In this paper we first discuss the resurgent discourse on integration and social cohesion as the backdrop for social capital promotion in the United Kingdom and abroad. Following that, we present alternative perspectives on social capital and social cohesion. We argue that the concept of social capital is dynamic and itself value-based. Categories of good or bad social capital are socially constructed; which ethnic groups fill each of them changes over time and is dependent on the prevailing ideological climate. Indeed, the current debate in Britain illustrates how social capital activities within certain ethnic groups that were once viewed as positive for social integration are now perceived in a negative light. The meanings of solidarity and integration are often loaded and sometimes ambiguous, and in this context we conclude our discussion with the need for caution in seeing social capital as an unalloyed positive resource for new immigrants, and in assuming that consensus should be the main goal for social cohesion.

### **The policy pendulum: Multiculturalism and a return to assimilation**

Since the 1960s, policies addressing the social integration of migrants in the United Kingdom have been based on a complex range of ideologies, including 'assimilation', 'integration' and 'multiculturalism'.

The language of multiculturalism gained dominance in public policy discourses in the period from the 1980s onwards, particularly in relation to issues such as education, health and social services. In the current decade, however, we have seen more of a critical stance towards multiculturalism and at least a partial return to an assimilationist perspective, particularly in the context of the 'war on terror' and outbreaks of urban unrest. As we discuss below in relation to the focus on social capital, the language of assimilation and monoculturalism focuses attention away from economic inequalities on to the values and mores of minorities.

In the wake of the civil unrest during the late summer of 2001 in the northern cities of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, the tone of the debates and policy initiatives on immigration and asylum shifted away from multiculturalism to the assimilationist and monoculturalist ideology of the 1960s (Back et al., 2002; Schuster and Solomos, 2004). There have been a 'plethora of initiatives' and policy announcements from both central government and local authorities that centre on the potential threats to social and community cohesion and their solution (Cantle, 2001). The rhetoric and rationale deployed in these developments focus on 'social cohesion' among people of different races and ethnicities around shared values (Schuster and Solomos, 2004). In June 2004, for example, the Home Office published the *Strength in Diversity* consultation document, which argues the need for a government-wide 'community cohesion and race equality strategy' to achieve its vision of a 'successfully integrated society'. Other significant government documents in recent years include *Building Cohesive Communities*, a report produced by the ministerial group on public order and community cohesion (Denham, 2001) and the Cantle report on *Community Cohesion* (Cantle, 2001). Certainly, as the influential report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain argued, Britain is a society grappling with the complex social, cultural and political realities of becoming multicultural, or a 'community of communities' (Parekh, 2000). Nationhood practices, such as citizenship courses and ceremonies, have been newly institutionalized to incorporate non-British Others (Home Office, 2002). The setting up of the advisory group on citizenship education under the chairmanship of Bernard Crick and the publication of the report on *Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 1998), have influenced the establishment of citizenship education as a statutory component of the compulsory

school national curriculum in England. Central to citizenship education is the idea of 'active citizenship' to be achieved by voluntary community partnership and the inculcation of knowledge of socially acceptable norms as part of a broader moralizing agenda to socialize young people into a national community. Section 11 funding that was once provided for the learning of mother tongue languages among ethnic minority communities has been replaced by a focus on English language education classes and citizenship education in a bid to promote the learning of a 'common' language, and supposedly 'core' values and culture among newer immigrants. In addition to Home Office initiatives, as a part of the recent manifestation of interest in ethnicity and social cohesion in the UK, there are dedicated research programmes in the voluntary and charitable sectors, including those from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Heritage Lottery Fund (Goulbourne et al., 2004), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Nuffield Foundation, and Runnymede Trust.

In this environment it has become clear that there is an ongoing concern about what commentators across the political spectrum see as the dangers of too much ethnic and cultural diversity, with diversity and difference posed in opposition to unity and solidarity (Arneil, forthcoming; Shukra et al., 2004). Although the concepts of race and ethnicity are central to political discourse on integration, immigration is an important subtext that has been more or less explicit at various times. In some ways, this is an unresolved debate that has been going on in British society for a number of decades (Katz, 2004), stemming from the arrival of New Commonwealth and other groups of migrants from the 1940s onwards. Fears about the social and cultural consequences of immigration helped to shape the politicization of immigration and race from the 1960s onwards. In the past few years the public debate about immigration and asylum has given added life to these fears and concerns. As evident in the run-up to the 2005 General Election, there is a fear that newer migrants, who are increasingly coming from outside the post-colonial countries, including Eastern Europe and the Middle East, pose a threat to the strength of the social fabric and prosperity of Britain. Such fears are expressed from a variety of perspectives.

Two examples will serve to illustrate the point here. First, David Goodhart, editor of *Prospect* magazine, a forum for 'new left' and liberal opinion, published an article in February 2004 that controversially but also forcefully argued that British society ran the risk of becoming 'too

diverse'. Goodhart posed a negative association between immigration/ethnic diversity, social cohesion and common values, and the viability of the British welfare state (Goodhart, 2004).

Second, there is also evidence that among some opinion formers there is a fear that multiculturalism has perhaps gone too far, and is posing a potential threat to social cohesion and national identity. Indeed, Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), helped to reinvigorate these concerns when he argued that there was a need to hold on to 'a core of Britishness'. By implication at least, Phillips argued that multiculturalism has gone too far and could undermine the common values that hold British society together (Baldwin and Rozenberg, 2004). Multiculturalism and ethnic diversity are posed as challenges that need to be overcome and transcended to achieve a national core of values.

Thus a key consequence of these expressed positions is that the language of social cohesion has become an important element of public debate and policy discourses. There has been a palpable shift away from the (at least rhetorical) valuing of multicultural diversity that tended to prevail in policy terms when New Labour took power in 1997. This pendulum swing forms the context in which current initiatives promoting social cohesion through social capital building activities are envisaged and implemented. Indeed, as we discuss below, although some of the language with regard to social and cultural resources utilized in contemporary political debates has changed, abiding dichotomies constructed relating to the links between immigration, integration and the management of diversity remain.

The pendulum swings in social debate and policy show how issues of integration and social cohesion symbolically represent a complex set of issues, shaped by the historical and contemporary socio-economic and political realities of what used to be described as the 'immigrant' and 'host' situation. Social cohesion is used generally to refer to common values and purpose in a society, including a sense of belonging and solidarity for people from diverse backgrounds. However, this is an amorphous construct, and may not necessarily be an unmitigated good towards which to strive. First, a focus on social capital assumes that everyone counts the same as everyone else without regard for the diversity of social context and economic inequalities (Gamarnikow and Green, 1999; Skocpol, 1996). It links to a communitarian agenda, adopted by New Labour, that privileges homogeneity, cohesion and consensus over approaches that emphasize material and cultural

difference, and responsibilities to society rather than rights. In this way, the shift away from multiculturalism and the concomitant adoption of social capital as an assimilationist framework for policy development serves to sideline economic, material and structural inequalities and the interventions needed to mitigate them. Secondly, the integration strategies of various migrant communities may be viewed differently in different contexts at different times. In this way, social capital and its links to diversity and immigration are and have been constituted according to dominant discourse and ideology.

### **The dominant form of social capital/social cohesion linkages**

In the dominant view, social cohesion is founded on social capital (as discussed in Forrest and Kearns, 2001). Robert Putnam's research in the United States, and his proposition that the social capital that is built through encouraging voluntary associations is the cure for social inequality and lack of cohesive social trust associated with ethnic diversity, has been influential in Britain (for example, Putnam, 2003; Leigh and Putnam, 2002). In particular, he highlights the different roles of 'bridging' and 'bonding' social capital. Bridging social capital concerns voluntary associations and horizontal ties based on common interests that transcend heterogeneous differences of ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status. In contrast, bonding social capital refers to exclusive social ties that people build around homogeneity (Putnam, 1993, 2003; Leigh and Putnam, 2002). Bridging social capital is considered more valuable for social cohesion, since there is a fear that minority ethnic groups may bond too much within their communities at the expense of integration into wider society – as, for example, in Goodhart's thesis for the UK; and see also Uslander and Conley's (2003) more empiricist arguments regarding ethnic Chinese in Southern California.

As a refinement to Putnam's work, a third form of 'linking' social capital has also been proposed. Linking social capital refers to the vertical relations that help individuals gain access to resources from formal institutions for social and economic development (Woolcock, 1998; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). With regard to immigration, and in contrast to the stress on voluntarism, this form of social capital implies the need for government intervention to implement policies to

grant new immigrants citizenship and help them access formal resources (Woolcock, 2003).

To date, Putnam's thesis has been influential in policy initiatives and academic research in the United Kingdom and abroad, with its promise that increased voluntary associations between people will lead them to transcend difference and 'come together' as a cohesive citizenry. There have been efforts to develop key indicative measures of the 'amount' of social capital in a nation-state, regionally and at neighbourhood level, and to investigate the mechanisms of social capital. Applications of the concept are evident in initiatives in a range of countries, including Australia (Institute of Policy Studies), Canada (Policy Research Institute) and Singapore (National Youth Council), resulting in a growing harmonization or copying of approaches within the policy prescriptions of a variety of individual nation-states. In the UK, the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit has taken an interest in the perceived potential of bridging social capital in encouraging formal and informal interactions across ethnic communities, using Putnam's arguments to buttress local community building initiatives (Aldridge, Halpern and Fitzpatrick, 2003). A growing and significant body of work on multicultural democracy and political integration of migrant communities in European countries has also been inspired by Putnam's research (Jacobs and Tillie, 2004).

The mainstream model linking social cohesion and social capital is normative and functionalist, taking hold in the shadow of political thinking and research in the US context (Arneil, forthcoming). The dominant model associates immigration with ethnic diversity, and sees this as resulting in social fractures in values and obligations in wider society. Social capital building, through informal or formal mechanisms, is then posited as alleviating the resulting disruption. In the light of the present political context where cohesion and accompanying practices such as English language and citizenship courses are promoted, bridging social capital by new immigrant groups is perceived as a positive resource whilst bonding social capital among minority ethnic communities is seen as less desirable.

### **A crisis of social cohesion? An assessment of the social capital cure**

In many ways, the recent focus on social capital as the cure for social

cohesion is a new spin on earlier debates about the complex consequences of diversity, in part brought about by immigration flows. Earlier literatures utilized a different vocabulary of 'assimilation' and 'integration' to express similar concerns about new minority ethnic groups' adaptation to dominant British society (Ben-Tovim, 2002). The present interest in the possession of, access to, and utilization of 'social capital' resources for the building of social cohesion has absorbed earlier concepts of 'cultural strengths' and 'networks' (Goulbourne, 2005). For example, John Rex and Sally Tomlinson's 1979 work, *Colonial Immigrants in a British City: A Class Analysis*, illustrates the concerns of earlier scholars with the problem of integration of different migrant groups into a social structure that was treated as homogeneous in terms of race/ethnicity, and accompanying norms, values and practices. An analysis of their text shows the passing of particular value-based judgements on the cultural resources and networks of migrant groups, as one group of marginalized people is compared with another. A cultural superiority of Asians over the White working-class over West Indians was asserted in the text (Goulbourne, 2005). West Indians are regarded as at the bottom of the socially integrated hierarchy 'because of the strength of the Asian culture' as well as the 'white working class, who, despite their cultural differences from their teachers, nonetheless do share with those teachers the fact of being English' (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979: 29). West Indian activities are nearly all viewed as representing 'withdrawal' from society and societal norms (p. 247). In contrast, the 'withdrawal' alternative in the case of Asian groups was posed as meaning that 'kin ties are strengthened as a defensive measure against external threat' (p. 246). In this way, a hierarchy of cultural strengths and integration strategies is projected on to trajectories of success in immigrant adaptation to British society, a theme evident in the work of other scholars (e.g. Patterson, 1963; Dench, 1986).

Thus, underpinning the current debate on immigration and diversity are enduring issues of integration, identity and citizenship that are influenced by political ideology. Ideological positions on these issues have shifted over the years, affecting the perception and constitution of 'good' social capital. The superior cultural and familial strengths of Asians that enabled successful social integration in Rex and Tomlinson's work – in other words, 'good' social capital – is no longer regarded positively. Indeed, it has become posed as 'bad' social capital. In the current context, bonding or within group



segregation, especially among Asian Muslim groups, is cast in a negative light. Cultural and religious enclaves that were once perceived positively to contribute to integration are now seen as threatening solidarity and social cohesion.

Young Asian Muslims specifically, for example, have been the object of political scrutiny and have become the target for media discourses and policy interventions aimed at socializing them into 'democratic' forms of political participation and community involvement (Gifford, 2004). In this way, particular forms of race and religion emerge as distinguishing characteristics of new immigrants and their position in the cohesive nation envisioned under New Labour policy making. As Claire Worley (2005) notes, under the framework of 'community cohesion', the concept of 'community' is hazy as it avoids the use of racialized language. Yet, slippages in language within and around the discourse of 'community cohesion' show how reference points to race, particularly British Asian communities, are clear in key narratives of British race relations policy, which highlight Asian minorities as a destructive force and a burden to the creation of positive social capital.

Closely related to race is religion, which has also surfaced as a contentious factor differentiating community acceptance or exclusion of immigrants. An analysis of key legislation with regard to earlier Immigration Acts and British Nationality Acts has highlighted how exclusion on the basis of religion and ethnicity has historically been central to the construction of the British national identity, and to the rights enjoyed by British citizens (Williams, 1989). With regard to religion, the construction of Britishness has been on the basis of a Christian identity, predominantly Protestantism tied to the Church of England (Sales, 2005). Recent events have amplified the religious outsider mentality and the heightened religious visibility of Muslim immigrants via the well-publicized 'control orders' (house arrests) and deportation charges against Muslim religious leaders, for example in the recent case of the deportation of Jordanian cleric Abu Qatada and nine foreign nationals believed by the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, to 'pose a threat to national security' (BBC News, 2005). Consequently, in line with the current political ideology, a community cohesion emphasis has led to more, rather than less attention on integrating Muslim immigrants to become more British, while issues pertaining to the problematic construction of White

identities remain out of the spotlight of the government's approach to managing new immigrants. Furthermore, implementing the social capital cure may overlook the complexity of immigration processes and context of the reception experience. The politics and practices of racism and discrimination are often underplayed in initiatives promoting bonding and bridging social capital. The presence of oppressive conditions for relationship building amongst new immigrants and between newer and older immigrant groups may deter the social participation that is crucial for the formation of bonding and bridging forms of social capital. International research on immigration and race relations has highlighted the challenges that new immigrants face in their adaptation and integration into their new host societies. Abdelmalek Sayad (2004) examined the particular kinds of suffering experienced by new immigrants. He argues that immigrants are constantly negotiating multiple contradictions stemming from their displaced existence and being a victim of exclusion, where they are often merely viewed as another member of the workforce in their new society. Although a significant proportion of people migrate with visions of experiencing better political and economic circumstances, many find growing ghettoization, isolation and cultural antipathies in their new settings (Cheong, 2006; Laws, 1997). Mary Waters and Karl Eschbach (1995) argued that this disjuncture in migrant visions and realities was the plight of new immigrants to the United States, where employers used racial and ethnic queues in hiring, thus impeding economic participation and equality for immigrants. Similarly, Roger Waldinger's (1996) investigation of the social and physical well-being of new immigrants in the United States shows in many ways how the new setting is 'not the promised land'. The majority of new immigrants experienced discrimination, extreme poverty, oppressive living conditions, crime and lack of access to basic services. Recent research into the new immigrant Hispanic communities in Los Angeles has also revealed the multiple difficulties they face in obtaining access to community and health information and services (Cheong, in press). Similar outcomes have been found among refugee immigrants in the United Kingdom where their health and living conditions sometimes are worse than in their home countries (Sherlock, 2004).

Indeed, a critique of the politics of race, immigration and multiculturalism under the current New Labour government reveals several

contradictions with regard to issues of multiculturalism and racial justice (Back et al., 2002). This produces a clash between the management of diversity and the context of integration that is rooted in an archaic sense and mirage of British uniformity, exemplified by the insistence of the Home Secretary that 'we' should be 'secure within our sense of belonging' (Home Office, 2002). As a result, minority communities and political representatives have been careful to keep their dialogue within the boundary markers of 'moderation' defined by New Labour. A second tension concerns the now explicit immigration debate amidst the necessity for inward migration in the context of an ageing British population. Attention is not focused on promoting multicultural democracy; instead initiatives have focused on the creation of new citizenship practices via the promotion of the English language, common values and national identity. According to Jock Young (2003), as a reaction to the 2001 riots, this policy is counter-productive since it mistakenly assumes that the civil disturbances were sparked by immigrant youths who lacked assimilation. In reality, the problem lies in a 'citizenship thwarted' among second generation migrants (i.e. British-born citizens), with a gap between these young people's expectations of economic and legal equality and the realities of racism and exclusion that they experience in their everyday lives. In this light, as Phoebe Griffith and Mark Leonard (2003) argue, it is especially problematic that the incidences of discrimination or inequality that define the experience of ethnic minorities are left aside in statistical analyses that purport to show whether levels of trust or community involvement are higher or lower in ethnically diverse communities.

Minority ethnic immigrant populations have been traditionally perceived as ominous and invading Others, threatening social norms and violating economic principles. As Gregory Feldman (2005) notes, the 'crisis' of immigration is sustained under practices that produce and reproduce binary oppositions of citizen/alien, domestic/foreign under the performative approach of the nation-state as sovereign space, where 'immigrants constitute an inherent national security risk insofar as they wedge themselves between the nation and the state' (p. 213). In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and international concerns over national security, migration is increasingly framed in relation to terrorism, crime, unemployment and religious fundamentalism rather than offering new opportunities for European societies in relation to cosmopolitanism and national economic development (Bigo, 2002).

Immigration is increasingly interpreted as a security problem and the practice of prejudice and suspicion in relation to new immigrants has been exacerbated by new policies and practices. For example, the immigration approach expressed in the British government's White Paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity* (Home Office, 2002), reinforces various exclusionary practices and policies towards certain groups of new immigrants and refugees. More recent legislature, including the Asylum and Immigration Act 2004 and the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Bill introduced in June 2005 (and passed as an Act on March 2006), implements further controls on immigrants via an integrated pre-entry and in-country security 'E-borders' and Border Management Programme. New measures launched include biometric collection at borders, fingerprinting of all visa applicants, collection of passenger information from airlines, and the use of various surveillance technologies to track and monitor the entry and exit of immigrants and visitors arriving in and departing from the UK. The implementation of the 'New Asylum model' by the Home Office in 2005 also involves a fast track, tightly managed asylum process with an emphasis on removing applicants whose claims have been rejected. According to Rosemary Sales (2005), exclusion is practised at the levels of punitive policies, public discourses of threat denigrating new immigrants, and entry controls that discriminate between those who are perceived to be 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. A case in point is the government's five-year strategy for Asylum and Immigration as detailed in *Controlling our Borders: Making Migration Work for Britain* (Home Office, 2005). This describes a four-tiered system whereby 'highly skilled' English speaking migrants are ranked above 'low-skilled', non-English speaking workers in an Australian style points system aimed at curtailing unskilled migration and imposing 'quota systems' on those perceived to be less able to contribute to the UK economy. Specifically, under the scheme, only migrant workers in the top two tiers, skilled and highly skilled workers, will be allowed to settle in the UK after five years (increased from four). Such practices play on ideas that the social capital that produces homogeneous social cohesion requires sanctions to be enforced if it is to function (Arneil, forthcoming). Such discrimination, however, may affect a sense of belonging and reduce the levels of trust that immigrants have in the civic sphere of the host country, thereby enervating social capital building processes. Various studies illustrate the presence and effect of perceptions of threat and negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Research conducted in Canada and the United States shows that perceived competition for resources between groups, whether situationally induced or due to belief in zero-sum relations among groups, is strongly implicated in negative immigration attitudes (Esses et al., 2001). Another study exploring the attitudes of Germans toward Turkish immigrants showed that ethnocentric acculturation attitudes were positively correlated with a perceived threat from immigrants. Stronger ethnocentric attitudes were also found to be negatively correlated with the perceived legitimacy of newer immigrants and perceived ability of immigrants to assimilate to the host community. A follow-up study illustrated how different mediated representations of immigrants produced parallel responses of self-reported attitudes toward new immigrants. Exposure to threatening versus enriching or irrelevant content of magazine articles was associated with a higher proportion of negative perceptions with regards to immigration and immigrants (Florack et al., 2003).

Collectively, these and other studies highlight how racism and threat perceptions may mediate the bridging relationships that are deemed to be important for building a cohesive society. Communicative exchanges, norms and trust (all framed as components of social capital building) are facilitated or constrained by the context of the host country. Social capital cannot be switched on or off to produce social cohesion since it is only one element operating in the larger social context surrounding new and old immigrant groups. Empirical evidence shows how socialization experiences are fettered by real and mediated perceptions of immigration and immigrants. In this way, the dominant view of social capital as reparative of the fractured social cohesion created by ethnic diversity and immigration seems simplistic. It fails to consider significant intervening factors that may thwart the more positively viewed bridging form of social capital and its supposed effects of promoting social cohesion through common values and practices. The proposal to (re)create cohesive communities via social capital building may therefore be interpreted as a diversion from the fundamental injustices and inequalities that have always characterized British race relations (Ben-Tovim, 2002).

There are alternative perspectives that offer a challenge to the dominant model linking social capital to social cohesion. Indeed, some commentators regard social capital as both an outcome and exacerbation of social and ethnic inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Fine, 2001; Morrow, 1999; Portes, 2001).

Others highlight validity and reliability problems with measurements developed around the concept (Deth, 2003). Some propose redefinitions of the constitution and sites of social capital to account for the new ways in which it is flourishing in late modernity (Giddens, 1991; Weeks, 1995). The next section discusses some of the critical alternative understandings of social capital that have been proposed, with implications for immigration and social cohesion.

### Alternative views of social capital and social cohesion

Commentators such as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and, more recently, Alejandro Portes (Portes, 2001; Portes and Landolt, 1996) provide a critical stance toward social capital, and by implication its relationship to social cohesion. They regard social capital as the outcome of social and ethnic inequalities, rather than a solution to them, and provide a challenge to the dominant normative, functionalist version of social capital.

For example, Bourdieu's pioneering work on social and other capitals emphasized the plastic nature of social capital and its roots in economic capital. Importantly, as Barbara Arneil (forthcoming) notes, Bourdieu conceptually breaks the dominant link between social capital and social cohesion, casting loose the preoccupation with shared values and unified national identity, and focusing on access to resources. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to the resources that individuals have access to as a result of their membership or connections to particular groups. Continuous material and symbolic exchanges produce obligations and mutual recognition of group membership. The concept of capital is contextual, 'polymorphic, supple and adaptive, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 23). This is because social capital is conceived as a fungible resource for individual social mobility that works in tandem with other capitals to reproduce social inequalities in various class-specific forms. Research led by Bourdieu using interviews and ethnographic observations showed the daily sufferings of the powerless, denied the means to adapt to the changing conditions of their lives and to find a socially dignified existence in France. For example, one case study described a new immigrant family from Algeria, living in a housing tract on the outskirts of Paris (one of the *banlieues* recently experiencing protest riots), who had to cope with pervasive forms of

racism (Bourdieu, 1999). This grounded understanding of the forms and operation of various capital resources is in contrast to the dominant model that assumes a clean slate, where newer immigrants have both the proclivity and ability to form bridging ties to others in their new countries of settlement. By taking into account the social distinctions and class structure in contemporary society, critical research highlights how social capital building is rooted in the uneven and harsh realities of the reception experience of immigration. Bonding, bridging and linking social capital building does not occur *tabula rasa*. To appropriate the title of one of Bourdieu's books, the disenfranchised and various new immigrant populations are often made to bear 'the weight of the world', bringing their social and cultural 'baggages' into established societies and communities (Bourdieu, 1999). The point is that particular forms of capital brought by immigrants from their land of emigration can become another basis, rather than cure, for imposed social inequality.

Victor Nee and Jimmy Sanders (2001) used the concept of forms of capital as the foundation for a model of immigrant incorporation. Their event history analysis based on field research among Asian immigrants in the greater Los Angeles area in the United States shows that the mix of capitals that immigrants arrive with, and subsequently accumulate, shapes their occupation and trajectory of participation in the host society. For example, immigrants arriving with low stocks of financial and human capital were most likely to find employment in the minority ethnic enclave economy, whereas immigrants with human-cultural capital that is fungible in the host society gained employment in the broader mainstream economy.

Furthermore, depending on the circumstances, some forms of capital are more important and salient for immigrant participation in the countries of reception than are others. Janet Salaff and Siu-Lun Wong (1998) uncovered the different ways in which working and middle class professionals from Hong Kong utilized their interpersonal contacts and connections during their emigration decision-making process. Although the sample of working professionals were amply endowed with property and educational qualifications, they also tapped social capital as they viewed it as a resource for generating economic returns. In contrast, research among new immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada with business and managerial skills showed that they relied more on their human capital than on their social capital in the form of

co-ethnic networks and family ties, to establish and operate their businesses (Marger, 2001).

Other studies illustrate how social capital is class-specific and that the actual mechanisms of social capital formation between the classes differ, giving rise to a diversity of community participation patterns. Using data on membership participation in voluntary organizations over two decades, Yaojun Li and colleagues (2003) show that, in contrast to Putnam's thesis of a uniform decline in social capital in society, significant socio-cultural-gender differences influence civic participation in England and Wales. In particular, men and those in higher socio-cultural positions are more likely to take part in civic associations. Class differences between those of the service professionals, intermediate and working classes are most pronounced, while differences associated with educational qualifications, mobility trajectories and social networks are declining. An analysis of the data over time revealed falling levels of social capital for the working classes (e.g. trade union membership and working men's clubs) whilst social capital levels remained relatively unchanged for the service professional class. The authors express concern for social exclusion since their findings show an increasing polarization between a well-connected, financially well-off and highly active citizenry with those who lack these various forms of capital and thereby are less involved in political associational life.

### **Social cohesion: A matter of contention**

In the dominant discourse, social cohesion is taken to mean a common national identity built via the development of common values, shared symbols, shared ceremonies, and so on. There are, however, alternative, albeit more muted, perspectives on social cohesion. Rather than lauding integration and shared values, some commentators have identified underlying issues of power at stake, and the positive potential of debate and contestation (Amin, 2002; Arneil, forthcoming; Ben-Tovim, 2002; Forrest and Kearns, 2001; Salmon, 2002). Ash Amin (2002) suggests the paramountcy of an agnostic, over the collective, politics of ethnicity and identity. He refers to research by urban youth anthropologists who have illustrated the daily negotiations of ethnic differences by immigrants in mixed neighbourhoods marked by strong ethnic polarities and socio-economic deprivation, to contend that:



The distinctive feature of mixed neighbourhoods is that they are communities without community, each marked by multiple and hybrid affiliations of varying social and geographical reach, and each intersecting momentarily (or not) with another one for common local resources and amenities . . . This blunts any idea of an integrated community with substantial overlap, mutuality, and common interest between its resident groups. Mixed neighbourhoods need to be accepted as the spatially open, culturally heterogeneous, and socially variegated spaces that they are, not imagined as future cohesive or integrated communities. (Amin, 2002: 972)

In this view, active citizenship is built not only on social solidarity and order but also through a local public sphere that supports open-ended engagement, vibrant opposition and negotiation. The key challenge is 'to strike a balance between cultural autonomy and social solidarity, so that the former does not lapse into separatist and essentialised identities and so that the latter does not slide into minority cultural assimilation and Western conformity' (Amin, 2002: 974). Indeed, research among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK documents how their own view of social cohesion and safety in a diverse society, at a basic level and as an aim, is to be able to live peacefully with other communities while each holding on to their own values and beliefs (Temple and Moran, 2005).

Nira Yuval-Davis and colleagues (2005) stress the multi-dimensionality of notions of belonging and social cohesion. They argue that the recent adoption of the social cohesion vocabulary re-asserts a particular allegiance to central, hegemonic so-called British values. This core, monoculturalist conception negates the complexity and intersectionality of belonging identities that are context-dependent, tied to differing anchors of nation-state, ethnicity, religion and culture. Thus, ironically, social cohesion may be achieved at the expense of the social alienation of Others who have not adopted the language and culture of the dominant mainstream.

Other commentators have also voiced scepticism about the assumptions and priorities of the community cohesion through social capital building approach. Gideon Ben-Tovim's historical analysis of earlier debates over race relations in Britain highlighted 'the naïve assumptions of harmonious community relations when the key current political and policy emphasis should be on tackling the longstanding and deep problems of overt and institutional racism' (Ben-Tovim, 2002:

46). A focus on assimilationist and monoculturalist policies becomes problematic when attention is directed away from the institutional structures and practices of racism that have created inequalities in opportunity and outcome for Britain's minority ethnic groups in the first place. According to Harry Salmon (2002), it is unrealistic to expect self-help and community programmes to regenerate local communities since the conditions in deprived neighbourhoods and conflicting interests of residents are not conducive to community involvement and partnership. Residents in deprived neighbourhoods are often more concerned about access to jobs, decent housing and public services, rather than engaging in the shared, time-consuming project of community building. Hence, the contribution of social capital building may be marginal when applied to diverse and deprived neighbourhoods. Finally, Ray Forrest and Ade Kearns (2001) question the applicability of social capital and social cohesion to the locale of the neighbourhood since 'neighbourhood' may refer to local community, social context or a commodified version of a lifestyle enclave where internal cohesion is achieved at the expense of wider social relations.

Barbara Arneil (forthcoming), however, argues that it is possible to retain a positive focus on social capital in relation to multiculturalism and to reject its dominant association with shared values and common identity. She cites the Canadian government's explicit adoption of a Bourdieuan emphasis on networks and resources – albeit without also adopting his wider critical conceptualization of power and inequality. As she remarks, '... the challenge will be not simply to build up some networks but also to break down or challenge other kinds of associations or networks'.

## Conclusion and insights for policy

Immigrant integration and management of diversity is a current pre-occupation of policy makers. This paper has explored the various analytical models that have been proposed to describe broadly the mechanisms linking social capital and social cohesion in this context. Understanding the connections between immigration, social cohesion and social capital is particularly challenging since these concepts are related to issues of power, class and racism in both the country of origin and host nations. The vocabulary and concept of 'social capital'

have changed over time alongside the demographic growth of different immigrant groups as well as the shifting contours of the social and political climate. 'Good' and 'bad' social capital is pliable and politically constituted in the context of perceptions of the threat of the 'Other'. In the aftermath of 11 September 2001 immigration has come to symbolize the possible dangers to social cohesion posed by increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Immigration has been framed as a security risk, igniting xenophobia and the fear of the Other. Increasingly stringent surveillance strategies employed by the Home Office directorate also reinforce the notion of 'invading migrants' and may increase distrust between all levels of society, especially among new immigrants processed under the E-border programme with control measures typically associated with deviance and punishable criminality.

Furthermore, contrary to the popular conception that all social connections contribute to social capital, various studies have shown differing compositions and effects in relation to social participation and cohesion. A review of related research has shown that context matters when it comes to social capital and policy. Social capital networks are value-based and context specific. Social capital is not a cure-all. Particular manifestations of social capital may be highly useful in achieving certain outcomes, while of limited value or even counter-productive in achieving others or in different contexts. More social capital will not necessarily lead to better outcomes and social cohesion. The potential impact of social capital on social cohesion will vary depending on the ways in which its effects are enhanced or diminished by the wider social, political, economic and cultural environment. In the present climate, part of the danger is that policy initiatives seem to be based on the belief that community cohesion can be built by imposing a 'majority' agenda on the 'minority' communities. Yet this emphasis fails to address the realities of an increasingly multicultural society that needs to develop forms of identity and belonging that respect both individual rights and the identities of particular groups and communities. Under the aegis of New Labour policy, 'managed migration' policy is operationalized through the enforcement of reduced quotas, visas and surveillance administration that are aimed particularly at certain immigrant groups, including those who are non-English speaking and perceived to be 'low-skilled' and 'unskilled'. These measures may be seen as rendering an illiberal top-down attempt to socially engineer democracy and community cohesion. As

a result, the enhancement of immigration controls signalled by the five-year Asylum and Immigration policy may influence the conditions governing immigrant integration in the domestic labour market, as well as the social conditions in related home, family and community contexts that serve as social capital building crucibles. More specifically, the short-term migration policy imposed on perceived low-skilled or unskilled migrant workers may negatively affect vulnerable immigrants, prevent them from having opportunities to develop belonging, and further cast them as threats to social cohesion.

Moreover, as we have argued, what is considered to be social cohesion is a movable feast, aligned with the political and ideological positions of policy makers, practitioners and academics. Therefore, social capital requires careful inspection if the concept is to be applied to contemporary race and immigration issues in Britain. A social capital lens in policy and programme development is only one element in the wider world of complex social processes. Alternative, bottom-up processes of social capital need to be further explored, alongside a shift from a preoccupation with social cohesion towards an understanding of the nature of connections between people with respect to inequalities, and acceptance of the importance of contestation in raising and rectifying them.

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