

STATEMENT SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF
THE BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (BSA) RACE FORUM

In preparing this statement for the Commission we have organised our submission into four areas that each relate to the first question posed by the Commission – the meaning of integration and cohesion. We make inter-linked points about the obstacles to an integrated and cohesive society, and suggest some ways in which that might be addressed, under four headings:

1. The political context of race and multicultural issues in the UK today.
2. The importance of socio-economic inequalities and life chances on social cohesion.
3. The need to consider both material and symbolic forms of inclusion and exclusion.
4. The importance of the local settlement and local definition of cohesion and integration.

1. The political context of race and multicultural issues in the UK today

A pervasive sense of fear and mistrust has cast a shadow on multicultural life in Britain. The Commission in our view needs to connect the concerns around integration and cohesion with a context of what might be termed a politics of misrecognition. There has been much discussion and debate about the notion of recognition in discussions of multiculturalism, principally focusing on Charles Taylor's pronouncements on the matter.

One of the consequences of the 7th July, 2005 London bombings is the creation of a climate where it is difficult to distinguish between the ebb and flow of multicultural and palpable dangers, where mistakes and errors of identification have become routine. The shooting at Stockwell tube station of young Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes by the police is an example of deadly misrecognition. There are numerous examples to support this claim. The shooting of Mohammed Abdul Kahar on spurious intelligence is another example. Mohammed Abdul Kahar, 23, and Abul Koyair, 20, were arrested in the 2 June, 2006 raid on their home in Forest Gate, east London, involving 250 officers. After his release Mohammed Abdul Kahar wrote of the ways in which he and his family had been terrorised: "I feel the only crime I have done, in their eyes, is being an Asian with a long-length beard." London's transport police stopped 6,747 people between July and August 2005 under anti-terrorism laws. The ethnic profiling of these stops is very stark: 2,390 stops were Asian people (35% of the total) and 2,168 of white people (32% of the total). In London Asian people comprise 12% of the population, while white people are 63%. Asians were five times more likely to be stopped than whites.

A politics of misrecognition damages the choreography of British life. It undermines not just our ability to coexist and share the public space of the bus or underground carriage, it also inhibits the ability to identify risk and danger. The politics of misrecognition also creates a licence for racism that extends beyond the politics of the BNP; the anxieties produced do not observe the binaries of the colour line and no-one is completely free of them. The maintenance of these boundaries results in comic as well as tragic affects, moments of almost pure absurdity. Anti-terrorist police escorted a man from a plane London-bound from Durham because he had been listening to the Clash's 1979 punk rock anthem "London Calling". The story was reported widely in the popular press. During the taxi ride from Hartlepool in north east England to Teeside airport twenty five year old Harraj "Rab" Mann listened to his MP3 player through a portable stereo packed full of rock classics from pantheon of British music including Procul Harem, Led

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Zeppelin, Ocean Colour Scene, the Beatles and The Clash. It was Clash lyrics that raised suspicion in the airport police's mind:

"London calling to the faraway towns.
Now war is declared –
and battle comes down.
London calling to the underworld.
Come out of the cupboards,
you boys and girls."

The clarion call was interpreted not as a retro-incitement to youth cultural rebellion but as suspiciously jihadist in nature. Rab's story is far from the only example of this syndrome. On 19 April, 2004 the police announced that they had seized a terrorist gang just as it prepared to launch a suicide bombing attack on Manchester United's Old Trafford Stadium. The police arrested eight men, one woman and a 16-year old youth. No charges were ever made. The journalist, Peter Osborne interviewed one of the suspects, a Kurdish asylum seeker, who said that in the context of the police interrogation the young man had revealed that he was a Manchester United fan. The police search of his flat revealed football paraphernalia including a poster of Old Trafford, ticket stubs that the suspect had kept as a souvenir when he had visited the ground to see his team play Arsenal the year before. Osborne concluded: "The Kurds I spoke to had come to Britain in order to escape the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime. Perhaps their most meaningful emotional connection with Britain was a love for Manchester United, which was why they kept the souvenirs in their flat... Nevertheless the police probably viewed the Manchester United souvenirs as potential evidence of a bomb plot." The results were that, branded as criminals, the falsely accused lost their homes, jobs and friends." A Clash song or a Manchester United programme in the "wrong hands" is terrorism incognito rather than evidence of British attachments or multiculturalism. This is resonant with sociologist Paul Gilroy's observation that racism's ire is now "turned toward the greater menace of the half different and the partially familiar."

2. The importance of socio-economic inequalities and life chances on social cohesion

The existence of particular social inequalities impinges on social cohesion and has to be taken account of. These mean that some do not have the same life chances as others. Research has revealed inequalities in such areas as employment, education, health, housing and wealth as well as providing powerful arguments for the existence of institutional racial and religious discrimination. These present obstacles to the establishment of a socially cohesive society.

The Department of Health has acknowledged ethnic inequalities affecting a range of minority ethnic groups in areas including mental health, sexual health and unintended conceptions partly on the basis of research it has commissioned, while other studies describe racial discrimination in healthcare provision affecting these groups and those enforcing their legal rights to apply for asylum. Research has also concluded that people from minority ethnic groups are more likely to live in deprived areas and in poor quality whilst also paying a higher proportion of their household income to occupy that property. This is despite significant differences within and between minority ethnic groups. Further, Bangladeshi, Black African and African Caribbean populations are disproportionately concentrated in social housing. Particular inequalities exist for Gypsy and Traveller populations experiencing added pressures and racial harassment to leave

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sites where some are living. The system of dispersing asylum seekers to different parts of the countries has resulted in their concentration in areas of high unemployment and poverty adding to racism and social pressures. In education, research highlights stereotyping of African and African Caribbean pupils which is a factor in lower educational attainment although there are geographical areas where their performance is higher than white peers. Analysis of census data shows that whilst people from minority ethnic groups have overcome significant barriers to socio-economic success, continuing inequalities of wealth exist with Bangladeshis and Pakistanis being particularly adversely affected. The socio-economic situation of asylum seekers, those who have been refused asylum and undocumented migrants is particularly worrying with one important factor being their often reduced and sometimes absent legal rights to employment, health, welfare and social support. Minors amongst them separated from parents are reported to experience significant barriers to their material needs being met and sometimes face additional dangers including homelessness and sexual exploitation.

While work and the labour market may offer some ways of addressing issues of inequality, we highlight the difficulty faced by the Chinese community. Concentration in a 'racialised small business sector' and working some of the longest hours per week in Europe impose huge constraints on family life and on integration and cohesion in local and national communities. Linked and key difficulties experienced by Chinese people in the UK including concern over financial hardship and pensions, communication difficulties with health professionals, racial discrimination and racial attacks, the pressures of long working hours and related problems in providing family care.

The fact that people, and some communities, experience fewer opportunities raises questions about the possible cohesiveness in society that can be achieved unless attention is paid to inequalities in education, health, housing, wealth and institutional racial and religious discrimination.

3. The need to consider both material and symbolic forms of inclusion and exclusion

In drawing attention to life chances we have stressed what we believe to be a need for the Commission to take account of the material basis of inclusion and exclusion. A markedly unequal society is unlikely to be a cohesive one; communities will not feel integrated while significant disparities in material well-being persist. When such inequalities are organized on ethnic or racial grounds, their consequences have been apparent in various ways across the UK over at least 30 years. It is important to add that the inequalities we refer to are not *only* those that can be measured objectively or quantitatively – though there are important differences in educational attainment and health and quality of life that can be assessed in these ways. We also draw attention to the felt senses of inequality and injustice that can not and should not be dismissed as just differences of perception. Particular communities may feel the object of attention in ways that enhance their sense of marginality and exclusion. Muslims in the post 9/11 world are an obvious example of such a community, though we would suggest that the roots of this sense of marginality are much deeper and date back at least to *The Satanic Verses* affair of the late 1980s.

In addition to socio-economic factors, we also urge the Commission to consider various *symbolic* forms of exclusion that militate against community cohesion and integration. Because symbols of supposed separateness – faith schools, the veil, ghettos and parallel lives – have been so controversial in recent years, this aspect needs to be thought

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through particularly carefully. In the case of faith schools, for example, it is legitimate for any faith to feel discriminated against if it is denied the ability to have faith schools, as long as other faiths are. Such a denial amounts to clear exclusion even though it can – paradoxically – be argued for in terms of inclusion in terms of mainstreaming. A policy that forbids or discourages the wearing of religious symbols might seem as if it treats everyone equally, but would still have to make allowances for the fact that some symbols – the Sikh turban for example – cannot be treated in this way. While symbols are more important to some communities than others, this is clearly a difficult issue in terms of community cohesion and integration. An argument for treating everyone in the same way is just as untenable as an assumption that a particular group or community is fundamentally different from other communities.

There is no one size fits all solution to this, nor can any settlement around such matters be regarded as the final word, as communities and circumstances change. In making these points, the distinction between material and cultural or symbolic issues has been stressed for presentational issues. In political and policy terms (as well as theoretically) they are closely linked. We encourage the Commission to bear these connections in mind in its discussions.

4. The importance of the local settlement and local definition of cohesion and integration

The demographic, economic and cultural dynamics of the United Kingdom create increasing differences between the regions of the country. Standard economic data highlights the growing disparity in rates of economic growth between the South East and the rest of the country. The growing affluence and long economic boom of London contrasts with the more nuanced patterns of economic growth and continued deindustrialisation and disinvestment in other parts of the country. These changes are taking place at a time when natural increase in population has steadily diminished, particularly among populations of various ‘white ethnicities’. Migration to the United Kingdom, increasingly significant throughout the 1990s and early years of the new century, is related to these demographic and economic changes but has (as in past decades) focused on particular streams of labour supply. ‘Replacement’ casualised labour migration in rural economies ties to a different skills base from the construction related boom migrations to London and the south-east. The degree to which new migrations from EC accession countries will be permanent or temporary is at present unclear. Simultaneously, the children and grandchildren of British (mostly Black and Asian) citizens that were part of the post war waves of migration experience differential patterns of labour market success and failure, in a social context still marked by mutating patterns of racism and discrimination. All of this means that to speak generally about multiculturalism and a ‘multicultural settlement’ in Britain can simplify complexities – and mask patterns – that make the realisation of cohesion quite different in localities around the country. While we recognise the Commission’s brief extends only to England, the differential settlement of the welfare state (not least around health expenditure, tuition fees and the regulation of education) means that this complexity is amplified in understanding the pluralism of Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales.

This complexity of setting is mirrored by the complexity of diasporic sensibilities in migrant communities; the traumas of the horn of Africa over the last decade, the dangers of communalism in India and the economic challenges of the Caribbean all echo in the UK, but do so differentially so in different parts of the country and the varied neighbourhoods of the big metropolises according to the cultural routing of multicultural

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settlement. Histories of empire are implicated in the roots of the wealth of the present. All of this means that the issues of cohesion need to be defined distinctively in different parts of the country. It implies that if the government is to take cohesion seriously it must recognise that these configurations of multiculturalism are the corollary of globalisation. Cohesion and integration consequently need to be debated, defined and addressed between all communities. Cohesion must not become a euphemism for the multicultural; it needs to be a part of an ongoing debate that is within localities but also includes dialogue with sentiments that identify both locally and to a sense of global diaspora and an understanding of the centrality of British history and empire in framing the present. The debate we are urging must address the manner in which global economy and global culture configure the past and the future of the places that people live in. A sense of solidarity and cohesion must begin from a consideration of the manner in which these dynamics are mediated by local institutions; local government and a local civic sphere.

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