

Globalisation and Cultural Conflicts

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There are many ideas and debates on the question of how to define the notion of globalisation. Albrow (1990) argues that "Globalisation refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society". This leads us to consider globalisation as the integration and inter-dependence of countries' economies, societies, technology, cultures, politics and ecology. The many cultures of the world are affected by globalisation in ways we are still to understand. Urza (2000) develops this by suggesting that it is a "dissemination of common cultural values, but also the re-emergence of nationalism, cultural conflict and social movements." The interchange between cultures forms both positive aspirations and negative anxieties, as it converts patterns of sameness and difference across the world or adapts the ways in which cultural expression is created, represented, documented, conserved or renewed (Wieviorka and Ohana 2001). On one hand it be a 'vital step toward both a more stable world and better lives for the people in it' (Rothkop, 1997) or one in which conflict has the capability to instigate internal and eternal battles.

Globalisation has been recognised an integrating force where cultural conflict has become the most widespread form of international violence as globalization has accelerated. In the main these are stimulated by political, economic, ethnic, racial or religious grievances (Marshall, 2005). While some conflicts cease, new struggles emerge, and conflicts continue to predetermine the relationship that different cultural groups encounter with each other. It is these struggles that have been studied to identify what many individuals and groups experience that results in conflict and violence rather than a positive experience that would allow for a celebration of difference and diversity. Many view globalizations as a source of, or contributing factor to, conflict (Attali, 1991; Barber, 1995; Lerche, 1998; Scholte, 1997; Waters, 1995)

This paper argues that there is a link between globalisation and the increase in conflict that we are facing in modern day society. Some of this is the result of discrete and different groups being forced to assimilate in common spaces where politics and economics determine outcomes.

In these situations, difference and diversity become overt and these accelerate the disparities that exist amongst cultures which in turn lead to adopted struggles and uncertainties. As these intensify different cultural groups identify distinct ways in which they experience life in a multicultural society and in many cases, these result in conflicts and collective acts of violence. Understanding of one's self can become violated when different cultures experience conflict. It has been said that violence between social groups can be a means of trying to stabilize ethnic identity amid the uncertainties of globalization. This means that struggles are fated to arise within the groups as they struggle to redefine themselves in a rapidly globalizing world. Castells (1996) argued that globalization is really the globalization of modernity, and modernity is the harbinger of identity. Globalisation has brought about not just a growing understanding of previously exclusive societies and peoples but equally and more significantly an almost intense anxiety in these societies and peoples with regards to the nature of their place and identity in this global world.

Identity is a fundamental aspect of this conflict and plays an integral part in how cultural groups deal with other cultures. According to Rummens (1993) identity is the distinctive character belonging to any given individual or shared by all members of a particular social

category or group. Horowitz (2000) stated that cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one's belonging to a group or culture and which is associated with a geographic area where people share many common traits like language, religion, culture and other traits. Castells (2005) talks of the decline of common identity and how this can be synonymous with a weakening of meaningful social orders, which he says vividly depicts our status.

Defining identity is not something straightforward as there are multiple definitions (Herrigel, 1993; Kowert and Jerrey, 1996; Clifford, 1988; Wendt, 1992; Hall, 1989; Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Identity is shaped by a range of variables that include age, class, gender, culture, profession, religion, sexual orientation, language and race. In political theory, which studies the concepts and principles that people use to describe, explain, and evaluate political events and institutions; authors suggest that identity is composed of a combination of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and class (Young, 2003; Connolly, 1991; Taylor and Moriarty, 1987).

Social identity theorists suggest two general classes of identity which define different types of self (Brewer, 1991; Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Turner, et al, 1987; Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Deaux 1992;) these being: -
personal identity (construed by idiosyncratic personal relationships and traits) and
social identity (defined in terms of group membership)

Personal identity refers to the essence of a self-conscious person; that which makes him or her uniquely what they are and social identity formation includes the development of national and ethnic identities. Tajfel (1978) looks at identity as a social membership which emerges from the context of relationships between various groups. An individual defines oneself by making a (presumably) favourable distinction between 'us' (the group he or she belongs to) and 'them' and through this self-identification acquires a positive social identity. Cast et al (1999) argue that self-esteem is closely tied to the identity "verification" process and that this not only enhances feelings of self-worth but also feelings of control over ones' environment.

Whilst the development of identity is a complex experience for all young people the identification with their own culture is an important aspect of identity development for young people from ethnic minority groups. Phinney and Alipuria (1990) say that ethnic identity can be defined as "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership". Other studies mention identity as a factor in nationalism and ethnic conflict (Horowitz, 1985, Smith, 2011) and multiple analyses of state sovereignty are grounded in "state identity" (Wendt, 1992 and 1999; Katzenstein 1996, Bierstecker and Weber 1996).

Working with young people from several cultural groups through a long-term ethnography study has allowed valuable evidence to be gathered that captures the voices of the young people and their families. Ethnography is one of many research approaches found within social research although it has no clear boundaries and as such is often used interchangeably with other methods like 'qualitative inquiry', 'fieldwork', 'interpretive method', and 'case study'. For the purpose of this study this method involved the researcher participating overtly in people's daily lives for an extended period, watching what was happening, listening to what is said, undertaking group exercises with them as well as asking questions through informal and formal interviews.

Ethnographers typically employ a relatively open-ended approach (Maxwell 2004) and whilst there is a body of criticism linked to this method of research; for the purpose of this study it is aimed at primarily at hearing the voices of the young people and collecting information for the purpose of producing a body of knowledge that assists in identifying the triggers for cultural conflict and to shape service provision. This method of social research was used as

it makes visible lives of those not normally told (Williams, 2000) and understands the point of view from inside the group (McCleverty, 1997).

The aims of the study allowed the research to identify behaviour patterns and present the perspective of those native to the culture studied (Fetterman, 1998) but also as Warren (2004) says, to “understand context, complexity, and politics of social processes”. As such this method has the advantages of in-depth understanding of a culture amongst a group of people, gives a voice to a culture to express their views, which might not otherwise be heard and may reveal rooted cultural values that were not apparent to the group.

Since 1945, immigration to the United Kingdom under British nationality law has been significant, in particular from the Republic of Ireland and from the former British Empire especially India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Caribbean, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Hong Kong, (Hanson 2000). Other immigrants have come as asylum seekers, seeking protection as refugees under the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, or from member states of the European Union, exercising one of the European Union's Four Freedoms. About 70% of the population increase between the 2001 and 2011 censuses was due to foreign-born immigration. 7.5 million people (11.9% of the population at the time) were born overseas, although the census gives no indication of their immigration status or intended length of stay, (ONC 2013)

According to the 2011 Census, the total population of England and Wales was 56.1 million, and 86.0% of the population was White with people from Asian ethnic groups made up the second largest percentage of the population (at 7.5%), followed by Black ethnic groups (at 3.3%), Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (at 2.2%) and Other ethnic groups (at 1.0%) among the specific ethnic groups, people from the White British ethnic group made up the largest percentage of the population (at 80.5%), followed by Other White (4.4%) and Indian (2.5%). This information identified that from the previous census in 2001, the percentage of the population of England and Wales that was White British decreased from 87.4% to 80.5%, while the Other White group saw the largest increase in their share of the population, from 2.6% to 4.4%. The percentage of the population from a Black African background doubled from 0.9% in 2001 to 1.8% in 2011

From April 2013 to April 2014, a total of 560,000 immigrants were estimated to have arrived in the UK, including 81,000 British citizens and 214,000 from other parts of the EU. An estimated 317,000 people left, including 131,000 British citizens and 83,000 other EU citizens. The top countries represented in terms of arrivals were: China, India, Poland, the United States, and Australia, (ONC Migration Statistics 2014)

Looking then to Luton several key demographic data sources such as the 2001 Census are now outdated. Population data on ethnicity is now largely invalidated by subsequent inflows and the underlying demographic composition of the town has undergone a radical shift, as the population has grown. In recent years, Luton has experienced significant in-migration from Eastern Europe (both EU and non-EU countries), West Africa and elsewhere. According to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics, Luton's population is now 214,700, which fell by 1,200 between 2016 and 2017, while the population rose nationally. This fall was driven by an increase of migration out of Luton to other parts of the UK and a slowing of international migration. The population of Luton had previously risen by 12,300 since the 2011 Census. In addition, Luton has a younger population than the national average. There have been significant shifts in the ethnic composition of Luton since the last Census which has identified a general increasing ethnic diversity among the population, a growth in the Asian population from 33,600 to 50,200; the Black population increasing from 11,700 to 19,800 and a decline in the White and 'other' population from 139,000 to 132,000. There is a concentration of different groups across the town.

Looking specifically at the research undertaken with the African Caribbean and the South Asian communities in Luton there is a historical experience that both have encountered. Many respondents commented upon the role of history and its influence on the current conflict. The history they identified as influential was the history of immigration in the town. No respondent made explicit reference to the history of colonialism cited in the literature review but this is not to say that it does not have a powerful influence on contemporary attitudes and events. All those who considered the historical aspect of inter-racial conflict in the town identified the arrival of the South Asian community in the predominately African Caribbean neighbourhood as the pivotal event at a time when African Caribbean communities were starting to feel settled and accepted in the town.

From the research, issues that held historical significance for the African Caribbean community have been part of their lives since they first resided in the town in the late 50's. The town was predominately White with an area referred to as Bury Park having an established Irish migrant population who had settled there in the preceding ten years; taking up jobs at the two main Industrial plants in the town. Bury Park was one of the poorest wards in the town and many lived in council homes in the area; saving to purchase their own homes. Most people moved initially to this area because of social or cheap housing not from choice. Research like that carried out by Sarre et al, (1989) found that,

“ethnic minority groups are 1.5 times more likely than the White group to enter a deprived neighbourhood, 1.2 times more likely to enter an ethnic concentration neighbourhood and 1.6 times more likely to enter a neighbourhood with high levels of deprivation and ethnic concentration”.

During this period the Caribbean community grew and they too secured employment at the two industrial factories in the town. Within about 5 years they started to purchase homes and many African Caribbean families and Irish families worked alongside each other; building what was to become long-lasting friendships. Comments from many Caribbean community members were reflected them saying that many of the Irish people became their best friends, they looked out for each other's children, shared the early shifts and the late shifts at work, often covering for the other was sick. They identified that there was no competition and they all got along well.

Some of the African Caribbean community members opened local shops; mostly barbers, hairdressers or shops selling Caribbean food. In the mid 70's the first wave of immigration from the South Asian continent made its mark in the area. Pakistani and Bengali families came into the area as the housing was cheaper and because the council were housing them there. As the Irish families became financially stable, they bought homes out of the area. Many African Caribbean families found that their neighbours were from Pakistan or Bangladesh but found that they did not socialise with them like the Irish community but built their own family and friendship networks. Some of this could be linked to language as identified by some of the comments made by older members of the South Asian Community.

The self-imposed segregation of the South Asian community was raised several times by those in the research. One community member said, “the Muslims didn't want to integrate they set up their own communities with their own shops so they don't have to mix with other people”, while another stated that, “When the Asians came to live in Luton, they started to run everyone out the area. They made your life difficult so you would go”. The ways in which they did this were identified in the research as purchasing homes and opening both grocery shops and fast food shops in the area. Over several years, the South Asian community then built mosques, opened restaurants and community centres.

Relationships between the African Caribbean and South Asian were “extremely fragile” in the area and many African Caribbean families sold their homes for less than the market value to move out of the area; many believed that they were “pushed out” as a means of

taking over the area. Many felt that the council was supporting this as they would grant licences for numerous fast food outlets and grocery shops selling the same things to assist them in taking control of the area. The African Caribbean community believed that the council had “pampered to the wishes of the Asian community” particularly when it came to granting planning permission. “We have been abused by the council; they have always treated us as second-class citizens... we have always had to struggle to get what we want; everyone walks all over us”.

Relationships were probably at their most tense when the increased number of Asian shops began to infringe on the sales of items that the African Caribbean shops were dependent on. The Asian shopkeepers started selling traditional African Caribbean products like hair products and food items. Many outlet stores were set up selling these products that provided wholesale prices and encouraged the Black community to purchase items from them: Many said that “Even though you didn’t want to buy from them; the things there were so much cheaper and when you struggling you have to go where it’s cheaper”.

The South Asian community members had their own comments about how they were treated. One said: “The Asians were the worst treated when they came here, but they aren’t anymore. What happened is that the young people saw what happened to their parents and they were not going to let themselves get treated that badly so they make sure people know that they are not going to put up with it”. One of the youth workers said: “I remember having bricks thrown through our house by Blacks so we could come out and then they could throw things at us”. Others commented saying that “Lots of Asians have worked hard for what they have; they aren’t going to let no one take anything away from them”.

In analysing the data gathered numerous references were collected that demonstrated how the personal experiences of the first-generation African Caribbean and South Asian elders in Luton remained with them. The positive experiences enabled them to engage with others from different groups as well as service providers but much of this was eroded due to negative experiences and assumptions which were often passed around in not only their peer groups but to their children and whether intentionally or not influenced thoughts about others. It was clear that many of those that were spoken to do not actually realise how influential they were with their children and grandchildren when they made negative and derogatory comments. Through the stories of the older members of the community; those that have I now refer to as culture carriers in both the African Caribbean community and the South Asian community, there was evidence that the older generation could be considered a contributory factor to some of the conflict and violence that occurred between the young people of those two groups.

Throughout the research there is a view that many of the older generation express to each other about the historical underpinning for the conflict but another that they express to the young people to maintain the status quo. Young people are influence by parents in many ways and this is no different with identity; they can instrumental in affecting personal and social identity. Though many adolescents try out different identities; some simply take on their parents' values whilst others take on an identity that conflict with their parents. Before adolescents commit themselves to a value system, they may explore their parents' values; evaluating and comparing them with other ideological alternatives so parental ideas and values may play a major role in identity formation (Marcia, 1966). He goes on to discuss different parent – child relationships and states that those closest to their parents “tend to show unquestioning commitment to the expectations of significant others” and in the relationship with parents says that “their relatively good relations with their parents, identity-achieved adolescents are also likely to accept parental values”. Knafo and Schwartz (2003) say “Acceptance of perceived parental values is greater among adolescents who are close to their parents and identify with them”.

This is particularly important in analysing how the views held by parents can influence how their children think about a range of things and the historical issues discussed from the research. Parents can influence their children during the time of identity formation about values related to another cultural or religious group; about perceived threats, expectations and experiences. Young people then carry these into their relationships with others and without questioning may find themselves embroiled in conflict with other racial groups.

The data gathered a large amount of information about how many young people from the two groups being studied felt about each other. African Caribbean young people talk about stolen identities, meaning that the South Asian young people were trying to be like them and taking away cultural symbols which, they perceived to belong to them. This included primarily music, language and clothes. In the research this was discussed numerous times and this perceived threat expressed by many young people is referred to as 'identity theft' and serves to consolidate that identity along with issues associated with it were instrumental in fuelling violent conflicts between the two groups.

Many of the African Caribbean young people spoke about South Asian young men trying to be "like them". Whilst there are a wider societal impact young people must negotiate themselves around personal threats where they see emulation or admiration as theft of their cultural values. For many of the African Caribbean young men they saw this as negative and not constructive. Sometimes referred to as 'Cultural appropriation' this embracing of elements of one culture by a different cultural group can imply a negative view towards "acculturation from a minority culture by a dominant culture" (Hasty, 2002). He goes on to say that "these elements once removed from their indigenous cultural contexts can take on meanings that are significantly divergent from, or merely less nuanced than those they originally held". Anthropologists like Schneider (2003) have studied the process of cultural appropriation or cultural borrowing as part of cultural change and contact between different cultures. The term has a negative implication due to perceived or actual superficiality and generally is applied when one culture sees the other as in some way inferior in social, political or economic status to the other culture; or when there are other issues involved such as a history of ethnic or racial conflict between the two groups.

The data also brought out issues associated with territorial conflict and where the struggle for ownership and control of geographical space and resources were occurring. In re-visiting the literature review there was a strong indication that the struggle over territory and the struggle for resources were often central to inter-racial youth conflict. The data gathered produced many examples of this being a key component in the conflict taking place.

This struggle for resources affects the whole community and can inevitably become something that is crystallised into identity formation. What seems to happen is that being in opposition can then be regarded as a legitimate expression of unfair treatment and so any conflict that results from this is justifiable. The community and its members validate this conflict because it is about fighting to maintain what they have. This serves only to reinforce the view of what is at the root of the conflict.

There is objective reality of progressive shifting of communities and changing domination of markets – both legitimate and illegitimate. Power and oppression become a daily reality for those who must negotiate social spaces and limited resources. This has an impact on the view that is held by communities of service providers whereby those that feel most disadvantaged by the increasing population of disadvantaged areas feel that they are viewed as a "dumping ground".

The data brought out several suggestions from both the young people and the adults involved in the research. Whilst some of these may be feasible to implement at a local level with the commitment of local people the challenges for sustaining these are complex. On a national level acknowledgement of globalisation and the impact it has on communities is not

fully understood, the combining of cultural groups is more challenging and issues of conflict, violence and disorder associated with these groups is usually sidestepped and discussed within other contexts like riots, guns and weapon crime or national security threats associated with terrorism and far right activity. National media attention in terms of disadvantaged and disassociated groups is not acknowledged until there is a national issue or a drive to build cohesive communities and celebrate difference and diversity.

The research set out to hear the voices of community members and they were keen to put across their views on why conflict exists between different groups. Whilst this paper focuses on only two specific groups the problems exist for other cultural groups. The ideas coming from the young people were primarily aimed at bridging gaps which are all important in their own way but very much isolated from each other. Holistic approaches to tackling inter racial conflict locally need to be taken and as such tackling the issues cannot be done in isolation from an acceptance of the issue, the external influences that exist and the structural challenges. To address these recommendations, we need to consider the role of identity for young people and how this impact on the conflicts that arise with other community groups because of their own personal and social experiences. Identity formation is ever evolving and fragile and can be influenced by these experiences; resulting in different ways of which one addresses conflict with other cultural groups.

There are good examples of work both locally and nationally. In Luton the town has some good community leadership and numerous committed people. With these things already in place the next steps will be to embrace some of the issues identified from this research and to plan local responses to creating safe spaces for those that need to talk, express and share some of the things that have been barriers which enable conflict to take place. If we are to embrace the positive aspects of globalisation and the diversity and breadth of communities they cannot be reduced by observers to 'irrational hatreds. By doing this we fail to recognise the historical, political, economic, cultural and developmental factors that are crucial elements of these conflicts.

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