Has multiculturalism failed in Britain?

Abstract

It could be argued that today, the world has become a global community. The expansion of globalisation and the subsequent impetus for increased migration has meant that different countries around the world are becoming home to a wide range of new communities from varying ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Countries around the world, including the UK, are responding to an ever-changing demographic dynamic, comprising different communities that have brought with them a bounty of cultural perspectives and understandings. Undoubtedly, this brings forward new challenges for states as to how to accommodate their increasingly heterogeneous populations.

Sociological study has observed and contrasted the different approaches taken by different countries and from this have derived different models of integration. These models include assimilation (which seeks to fully integrate new communities into the respective country’s ‘culture’), the two-way system (which expects integration but also holds respect for primary culture) and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism as an approach seeks to create an environment and political framework that embraces plurality of culture, and this is the approach initially favoured by the UK. In recent years, however, the usefulness of multiculturalism as a social structure has come under question. Events such as the London bombings and tensions between communities in the country have led the media and the government to question the effectiveness of multiculturalism as a system, with even the Prime Minister David Cameron claiming that multiculturalism has failed.

Whether this claim is salient, however, is questionable. This essay argues that the question of whether ‘multiculturalism’ has failed in Britain is redundant and misleading, and reifies the notion of ‘culture’ and therefore the multitude of cultures as an inflexible and unresponsive to changing social dynamics. The notion of culture that is discussed and employed in discourses surrounding multiculturalism often depicts a rigid normative framework that does not allow for social change. However, anthropological and sociological study into the experiences of different migrant communities in Britain has clearly exemplified the contextual relativity of cultural behaviour.

Therefore, by surveying experiences of the Muslim, Asian and Black community in Britain over the years, this essay concludes that it is not useful to come to an overarching conclusion determining whether ‘multiculturalism’ as a system has failed, as ‘multiculturalism’ as the system and political framework envisaged by those at the top does not paint an accurate picture of how culture experienced and lived out in everyday life for those at the grassroots.
One of my most vivid confrontations with the notion of culture and multiculturalism was during my last year of secondary education. I attended a comprehensive school in the ethnically diverse area of Tottenham, North London, and was very excited for the forthcoming end of year ‘prom’ ceremony. It was the focus of gossip amongst my friends, who were all too keen to purchase glamorous ‘prom’ dresses as advertised by the countless magazines and television programmes depicting an ‘Americanised’ fantasy of the perfect prom. You can therefore imagine my horror when provided with the ultimatum by my Kurdish-Iranian parents: either attend the prom wearing a traditional, more conservative Kurdish dress or do not attend at all. I was faced with a conflict: was I confident enough to bring into this ‘prom setting’ a completely alien form of attire? Would I be excluded from the ‘prom’ culture? Was it worth going at all? Despite a growing temptation to avoid the prom and any potential embarrassment, I decided that I would ‘brave’ the dress and attend the prom anyway. I was overwhelmingly surprised and proud to find that, while my Kurdish dress was a novel concept, it was admired by my peers, who in turn gleaned new information about Kurdish traditional attire. More importantly, I found that I was not alone in wearing traditional clothing; many African and Asian students were also clad with traditional attire. For me this really brought home, and made me proud of the fact that I was part of a community with a multitude of prominent ‘cultures’ appreciated by all. Some would attribute my sense of comfort within such an amalgam of different cultures to the success of ‘multiculturalism’ in Britain, a framework which attempts to accommodate through policies and laws the culturally diverse society we live in. Equally, others would claim that I was in fact experiencing what Paul Gilroy (2004:xi) calls the convivial culture or ‘multiculture’ that has flourished from within different communities in Britain, making”
nonsense of closed, fixed and reified identity” often insinuated in multicultural discussion, and turning “attention toward the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identity”, paying tribute to the fluidity of the concept of culture, and the importance of context and situation when culture is defined.

Why has multiculturalism even been introduced into Britain’s societal structure? Primarily, it is that developments in modern society today have allowed for the migration of many different groups or individuals away from their countries of origin, to begin, for a multitude of reasons, new lives elsewhere. Nation states are increasingly faced with new members and groups in their societies, who perhaps may not share the same language, religion or general characteristics associated to the nation states, but are beginning to establish themselves in the country: “Migration since 1945 has led to growing cultural diversity and the formation of new ethnic groups in many countries. Such groups are visible through the presence of different-looking people speaking their own languages, the development of ethnic neighbourhoods, and the establishment of ethnic associations and institutions” (Castles, Miller 2009:245). These differences are not limited only to first-generation migrants; children of migrants often also are brought up with their parents enforcing their own cultural norms through socialisation; this then becomes apparent in public environments and institutions: “the manifest cultural differences visible in school, originate and are reproduced in private – in black families.” (Gilroy ,1987:61) For nation states, these differences bring to the forefront an important question; what is the most effective way of facilitating such diversity?
There have been many different approaches to this issue, with different nations adopting varying methods. In his book titled *Multiculturalism*, Tariq Modood establishes the most renowned methods of accommodating migrant cultures into nation states. Some states prefer to adopt ‘assimilation methods’, namely “where the processes affecting the relationship between newly settled social groups are seen as one-way, and where the desired outcome for society as a whole is seen as involving least change in the ways of doing things for the majority of the country... the preferred result is one where the newcomers do little to disturb the society they are settling in and become as much like their new compatriots as possible” (Modood, 2007:48). Nation states such as France are recognized for adopting such a practice; “while France has a long tradition of welcoming immigration and of extending full citizenship to the immigrants and their children, this egalitarianism is presumed on an unashamed assimilationism” (Modood, Werbner 1997:5). Modood (2007) also describes the method of ‘integration’: a two-way effort on the part of both the host nation and immigrants, where the host nation facilitates the accommodation of the new cultures while the immigrants also endeavor to accustom themselves and begin to adopt elements of the host nation’s culture. The strategy adopted by a great number of states including Britain, however, is multiculturalism. For Castles and Miller (2009:247), multiculturalism suggests that “immigrants should be able to participate as equals in all spheres of society, without being expected to give up their own culture, religion and language, although usually with an expectation of conformity to certain key values.” In practice, this commands recognition of cultural differences and diversity by the government and political institutions in the creation of laws and policies. For multiculturalism to be successful, an element of reciprocity on the part of the nation state and the immigrating
cultures groups is required, whereby through mutual respect, one can have an effect upon the other. Amin Maalouf (2000:36) argues that:

“If I try to belong to my country of adoption, if I now regard it as my own country and consider it part of me and myself part of it, and if I act accordingly, then I have the right to criticize every aspect of it. Similarly, if it respects me, if it recognizes what I bring to it and regards me and my characteristics as now being part of itself, then it has the right to reject aspects of my culture that might be incompatible with its own way of life or with the spirit of its own institutions”.

Britain’s initial fervor towards multiculturalism was evident, with politicians such as Robin Cook branding Britain as a “chicken tikka masala eating nation” (Modood 2007:10). Multicultural policies were developed, with “minority religious groups able to apply for state funding to finance denominational schools, wide ranging accommodation of dress codes and diets in schools, colleges and places of work, and a significant number of laws or legal judgments that exempt members of certain ethnocultural groups from requirements that are at odds with their religion or culture” (Phillips, 2007:4). Several consequent events that occurred both internationally and in Britain however, began to shed doubt on the success of multiculturalism. The 9/11 bombings in the US became a real impetus for debate on multicultural societies; this was further exacerbated by local protests such as the “civil unrest in spring and summer 2004 in the towns of Burnley, Oldham, and Bradford, where young British Asians fought in the streets with white racists, and police and property were attacked” (Phillips, 2007:5). Tariq Modood (2007:11) claims that the ultimate event which really brought Britain’s robust concept of multiculturalism into question was the London bombings of 2005: “the fact that most of the individuals involved were born and/or brought up in Britain, a country that had afforded them or their parents refuge from persecution, poverty and freedom of worship, led many to conclude that multiculturalism had failed, or worse, was to blame for the bombings”. As a result, the British government began to adopt
a more reluctant stance on multiculturalism, based on the idea that, instead of creating a
generating a more integrated society where different communities live harmoniously, “a politically
correct multiculturalism had fostered fragmentation rather than integration”
(Modood, 2007:11) and had failed its purpose.

But can we really deduce that multiculturalism in Britain has ‘failed’; is it a reasonable
question to ask? It seems that hitherto the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ itself has not been
much criticized; it could be argued that it is not a reasonable structure to use to describe the
dynamic of society in Britain today, hence rendering assessment of its success or failure
redundant. Multiculturalism in Britain became prominent with the increase of immigration
and new groups settling; does this mean that Britain had a unified ‘culture’ beforehand? It
is quite farfetched and, if anything, reductionist to assume that the English, Welsh, Scottish
and Irish have all shared ‘one culture’ when differences go as far as even language between
these groups.

We can delve even deeper and criticize the large underlying assumption that acts as the
foundation of multiculturalism; the assumption that ‘culture’ is a single bound unity.
Multiculturalism as a structure and a base for policy-making tends to essentialise the notion
of culture and overlook its fluidity and contextual relativity; (Modood, 2007:89) claims that
the way that culture is perceived in multicultural discussion and policy making in Britain
“appeals to the view that cultures are discrete, frozen in time, impervious to external
influences, homogeneous and without internal dissent”. Culture is even often reduced to
ethnicity, portraying the two very different concepts as one: “the tendencies to reify the
cultures of ethnic minorities, to stylize pseudo-biological conceptions into communities, and to appeal to popular biological conceptions of culture are not difficult to substantiate in British politics and media” (Baumann, 1996:20).

This depiction of culture could not be further from reality. The definition of ‘culture’ for a particular group or individual differs in accordance with a wide range of factors such as time, environment and context, and can be altered to be apt for the given situation. As Amin Maalouf (2000:11) describes, one can draw on and emphasize different parts of their cultural identity, even depicting their religion as their culture, in order to fit the appropriate context: “let us observe a man of about 50 (in Sarajevo) whom we see in the street. In 1980...he might have said proudly and without hesitation “I’m a Yugoslavian!”...If you met the same man when the war was at its height he might have answered automatically... “I’m a Muslim!” This is a clear example of the way in which individuals and groups can deliberately manipulate their definitions and affinities to set ‘cultures’ when it is of benefit for them, or in order to realize a certain objective. I will draw on the experiences of Asian–Muslim citizens in the areas of Bradford and Southall (London) in order to highlight this effectivley. Such relativity in the definition of culture makes it difficult to assess a model of multiculturalism that only incorporates reified, essentialised cultures, and for this reason, it is questionable whether one is able to make a generalized assessment on its success.

Even if we were to assume that bound cultures within multiculturalism did exist; by attempting to create an overarching analysis of whether multiculturalism has been successful we are downplaying, if not ignoring the differences in experiences that different cultures have had with multiculturalism. Differing groups and communities have had
contrasting problems adjusting within a ‘multicultural’ society, some integrating with more ease than others in particular areas, and different groups becoming associated with varying stereotypical images and connotations within British society. The experiences of the ‘Black’ community in London in comparison to other groups portrays how experiences of multiculturalism vary for different groups (I will develop this later). For this reason also, I question the plausibility of making a general assertion whether multiculturalism in Britain has failed or succeeded in general.

“There is considerable qualitative research evidence for the view that many ethnic minority people today do not understand themselves as having singular group identities, or merely in terms of differences and otherness” (Modood, 2007:104); undermining preconceived depictions of bound cultural frameworks. Baumann’s research on the experience of Asian residents in Southall, London expounds how, for these people, culture is a concept that fluctuates with context and situation. Baumann (1996:5) found that ‘Southalians’ “regarded themselves as members of several communities at once, each with its own culture. Making one’s life meant ranging across them.” This ‘ranging’ would depend on which part of their cultural identity would be most fitting for the given environment. For example: “the same person could speak and act as a member of the Muslim community in one context, in another take sides against other Muslims as a member of the Pakistani community, and in a third count himself part of the Punjabi community that excluded other Muslims but included Hindus, Sikhs, and even Christians” (Baumann, 1996:5). ¹

¹ The inclusion of religion into the definition of culture is contentious, with the two concepts often argued not to be analogous; yet this could further illustrate the malleability of the definition of
Although the Southalians acknowledged the fluidity of ‘culture’, they were also seen to reify ‘bound’ notions of culture when suitable. This does not support arguments that cultures are constricted and unchangeable, but indeed conveys how even ‘reification’ is manipulated to suit the appropriate context: In his work, Baumann discovered that Southalians made use of two different discourses to describe their ‘cultural’ belonging. Baumann (1996:10) identified the use of a ‘dominant’ discourse of culture portraying a commonly-recognised, reified notion of culture within ethnic minorities, and also a demotic discourse which “denied the congruence between culture and community that was the hallmark of the dominant discourse”. Which discourse was used by the Southalians was dependent on its relevance and appropriateness for the given context: “the fact remains that Southalians, and other people elsewhere, subscribe to this useful fiction when they see fit. In tune with the dominant discourse, Southalians find it useful and plausible, in some contexts, to reify culture at the same time as making, remaking and thus changing it” (Baumann, 1996:13). Baumann (1996:204) concludes that, with regard to defining culture, Southalians “develop their discursive competences in close connection with the social facts of everyday life, and they cultivate fine judgments of when to use what discourse in which situation.” The Southalian approach to defining culture demonstrates the difficulty of making a straightforward judgment on whether multiculturalism has failed; culture is moulded and adapted to suit various situations, hence undermining multiculturalism as a culture; when appropriate, religion is incorporated to adopt a form of culture by a particular group; I will develop this further through the discussion of the experience of Bradford Asians).
‘collection of bound cultural entities’ and consequently bringing attempts at an analysis of the general success of multiculturalism into question.

The malleable attitude to culture demonstrated by Southalians is not a unique one, as shown by Phillip Lewis’ research on the experience of Muslim Asians living in Bradford. The grouping of Asians may be criticized as an excessively generalised one, ignoring the multitude of ethnicities or cultures that exist along with this general description; however, this general grouping on the basis of a common religion has been shown to be an active decision by these Asians themselves. In order to exert their presence in a British society, they, in some cases, put aside regional linguistic differences and draw upon their shared religion as a common ‘culture’. Once again, we are shown that in this respect, culture has been manipulated to take the shape of a concept that is most beneficial for the circumstance. Lewis portrays how this manifests in the political realm in Bradford:

“Bradford exemplifies how a shared Muslim identity can cut across regional and linguistic particularities. By 1992, although the city had twelve Asian councilors, with the exception of one Sikh all were Muslims... Eight were from Azad Kashmir, the numerically dominant Muslim community, the other included a Bangladeshi, elected in 1991, and a Gujarati woman, elected in 1992. These last two indicate that a new generation of young politicians was beginning to develop tactical alliances across regional and linguistic divisions on the basis of a common Muslim background, since both were elected in wards with a Pakistani majority amongst the ‘Asian’ electors. The concentration of Muslim communities in inner city wards has thus provided a useful launch pad for their entry into local politics” (Lewis, 1997:131)

This shared Muslim culture was also employed by the Asian community to put forward and advocate other shared interests, and collaborate to ensure these interests were incorporated into public institutions. there were, for example, campaigns for the recognition and the accommodation of the needs of Muslim students in the school setting: “a series of measures was taken that won widespread support within all the Asian communities:
flexibility was to be shown in relation to Muslim dress codes for girls, single-sex swimming, physical education, and extended visits to South Asia. Halal meat would be introduced in key schools” (Lewis, 1997:135). Again, differences within the Asian communities were sidelined and the common Muslim religion became a yardstick through which the Asian community recognised their unified culture, in order to ensure that their collective Muslim interests were realised.

However, when other priorities grew in importance, the Asian community in Bradford effectively downplayed their ‘Muslim’ group identity, as it proved to inhibit further aims. This proved particularly significant in the realm of education and educational achievement of Asian children in ‘all Muslim’ schools which were consequently argued to be segregating students and keeping them from the best forms of education:

“In 1992... It was evident that in Bradford, as elsewhere in the country, children from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds were underachieving in schools compared to white, Afro-Caribbean and Indian children. In 1993, Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents in one area of the city concluded that their children were being excluded – whether intentionally or unintentionally- from the best schools in the city...the important point here is that these Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents made it quite clear that they do not wish to remain encapsulated within local all-Muslim inner city schools” (Lewis, 1997:138).

In this case, it became quite apparent for Asian parents that the Muslim environment that they were becoming ‘encapsulated’ in was proving to be detrimental for their children’s education, and as a result, being Muslim and studying at a Muslim school became much less important, and integration within a mixed school with better education prospects was prioritised. Lewis demonstrates how the Bradford Asians constantly made use of different notions of ‘culture’ and cultural identity in accordance with their objectives and aims. Contextual significance showed itself to be paramount when defining what culture means to
them; restraining them within the reified multicultural structure we are trying to assess would seem senseless. Again, multiculturalism as a collection of closed cultures shows itself to be an unreliable framework to assess.

As aforementioned, multiculturalism has been accused of essentialising cultures, and research has shown just how false a description of culture it truly portrays. Indeed, defining culture as unified entities can even be conducive to negative and restricting consequences. Many sociologists have worried about the implications of confining individuals to restrictive cultural structures, particularly with regards to the influence that it may have on their decisions and actions. The ‘cultural’ norms and expectations appropriated to such unified cultures may possibly act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby the individual adheres to the given norms in order to create for themselves or reaffirm an identity: “it is this that Appiah regards as the real danger of multiculturalism. He argues that the collective dimensions of identity provide people with narratives of personhood – with life scripts of how a proper subject of that collectivity ought to behave” (Caglar,1997:179). This may, in effect, constrain their individual will and dictate decisions they make about the way they conduct themselves in society. Essentially, the idea that members of bound cultures live according to given norms and expectations fundamentally denies the individual of the ability to make informed, rational decisions influenced by the particular context and situation. Therefore, all actions of the individual are supposedly argued to stem from cultural motivations, and this can potentially appropriate cultures with set stereotypes and labels: “culture is now widely employed in a discourse that denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture, and treating culture as the explanation for virtually everything they say or do”
(Phillips, 2007:9). Phillips (2007:9) cites marriage as an example of how such a stereotyped generalisation is often made: “When for example European governments decide that the best way to protect young Moroccan, Turkish or Bangladeshi women from being forced into unwanted marriages with anyone under the age of eighteen, twenty one or twenty four, they represent young women from these strangers from their parent’s country of origin is to band marriages with overseas partners for groups as incapable of agency”. These women, therefore, are seen only as marrying as a result of cultural pressure, completely ignoring the possibility of free will. It is for these reasons that we are often urged to dismiss, or at least downplay preconceived notions of bound cultures, in order to prevent individuals from being trapped within the normative frameworks associated to such cultures.

But does this mean we should completely refute the notion of a ‘unified culture’? Ideally, it would seem liberating for the individual; yet realistically, it would not prove helpful. The idea of a ‘reified’ culture is so reinforced and prevalent today that it is employed by even those who are most flexible with their interpretations of their cultural identity. Baumann’s study of the Southalian Asian community aforementioned suggested that they consciously manipulated their cultural identity, in order to adapt to the appropriate context and reap the most beneficial consequences; yet solid, reified culture still remained prominent as a way of expressing and reifying identity, when doing so was advantageous. The prominence of ‘reified culture’ even as an tool to manipulate means that it remains a foundation focal to our understanding of cultures, and thus must not be dismissed as inapplicable to descriptions of society in Britain today.
With this in mind, let us assume that Britain is a multicultural society, comprising a multitude of different but more or less bound cultures. It is still difficult, and somewhat redundant to make an overall judgment on whether multiculturalism has failed. Even within such a multicultural society, the underlying cultures are still very different from each other, and have different experiences of adjusting to a multicultural society. They may encounter different problems, and have different stereotypes and issues associated to their group. The experience of what became known as the Black community in Britain, for example, highlights issues that are specifically associated to their own group, but may not necessarily apply to other groups. The black community, for example, in Britain have previously had to contend with a violent, criminal stereotype, which effectively appropriated all blame for individual actions and opposition against public institutions such as the police force upon the ‘black culture’: “the idea that blacks are a high crime group and the related notion that their criminality is an expression of their distinctive culture have become integral to British racism in the period since the ‘rivers of blood’ speech” (Gilroy,1987:109). This impression of a violent black culture was further expounded through social gatherings known as ‘black parties’: “the black party had become such an entrenched sign of disorder and criminality, of a hedonistic and vicious black culture which was no recognizingly British, that it had become fundamentally incompatible with the representation of black life and experience in any other form” (Gilroy,1987:104). To try and understand the reasons behind the supposedly violent and deviant nature of the black culture, explanations went as far as linking familial structures to ‘black culture’ and explaining why these structures have played a part in cultivating a violent black culture. The Brixton riots of 1981 triggered the publication of the Scarman report which endeavoured to focus and detect problems which
may have been conducive to the riots. In this report, Scarman analysed the familial structure ‘typical’ of Black families explaining why it may be potentially problematic: “Scarman’s discussion of the black community is the Brixton area begins with a section on the family which reproduces the stereotyped image of black households beset by generational conflict and torn asunder by antagonism between authoritarian parents, who are inclined towards Victorian style discipline and their British Born children who operate with a more permissive set of mores” (Gilroy, 1987:104).

The stereotypes of violent criminality or tensions in familial structure and parenting styles are issues particularly assigned to black culture; that is, they may not be as prominent in other cultures. While these issues may have rendered integration difficult for the Black community they may have had less of a problem in areas such as religion, which was an important issue to take into consideration for Asian community in Bradford, for example. We can see from this, then, that different groups within multicultural Britain integrate and adjust to ‘multiculturalism’ in varying ways. This means that it would be more useful to make judgments regarding multiculturalism in Britain by focusing on issues individually, contextually and with consideration of the separate problems experienced by different communities. By making general and broad assertions concerning the success of multiculturalism, one would effectively be neglecting the intricate, more individual issues that constitute successful or unsuccessful integration for specific groups at specific times.

Are there any alternatives to multiculturalism that are more considerate with these issues? The concept of cosmopolitanism, developed by Anthony Appiah is an interesting one.
Essentially, cosmopolitan rests on two principles: “One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (Appiah, 2007:xiii). In practice, this would mean that “we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life” (Appiah, 2007:xiii). While Appiah’s approach gives more way to individual agency and flexibility, I believe that it focuses perhaps too little on the reified notion of culture and ‘mode of life’ which does indeed still exist in our society, and that is recognised by many, if not, all groups and individuals today. This is why the notion of multiculturalism is still relevant in defining our social construct in Britain today, for it takes into consideration the importance of ‘reified culture’ even today.

Looking back at my own prom experience, I genuinely felt, by the end of the night, that I was integrated in a culture full of cultures, where diversity was respected and admired. Many of us were wearing cultural attire, in an American-style prom, dancing to music from the UK – this amalgam of different cultural influences that we had created for ourselves now reminds me more of the contextual ‘multiculture’ described by Gilroy than a multicultural environment created as a direct result of multicultural policies. This is because I realize just how much that my notion of multiculturalism that night was subject to the context, and that particular situation. Indeed, I entered the prom with mixed feelings including apprehension and reluctance about my cultural attire; perhaps a testament to the many different issues and reactions that are at hand when contrasting cultures are amalgamated. However,
because of the flexibility of the situation, and the fact that each student had come to the
prom bringing with them a part of themselves and what they considered, we all became
slightly more confident about the ‘multiculture’ we had created.

What I am attempting to explain is the contextual relativity of culture. As I have
endeavoured to show throughout this essay, the definition of culture is very much
dependent on what is the best form for it to take given a certain situation. Anthropological
and sociological research has found individuals to effectively manipulate and reify or dismiss
reified notions of culture, in accordance with situation and circumstance. There never really
has existed a concrete culture that does not change over time or with setting. For this
reason, some would argue that the reified, essentialised idea of culture that forms the basis
of multicultural policies mean that they do not cater to how culture is really perceived in
society, suggesting that multiculturalism as a policy framework has failed. However, we
have seen above that reified culture is not an irrelevant phenomenon, and is still employed
by groups when relevant; some of these ‘essentialised’ multicultural policies, therefore, may
be applicable and conducive to successful multiculturalism in different contexts. It is for this
reason that we should not assess whether multiculturalism in Britain has failed in general,
for that would neglect such situational changes and variations.

Even if we were to perceive multiculturalism as the collection of permanently reified
cultures that it has often been taken to resemble, it would again not be fair to assess its
success broadly. If one ‘culture group’ has ‘failed’ to integrate in a particular area or the
state has failed to accommodate the requirements of a particular culture, is this conducive
to the complete failure of multiculturalism in Britain? I argue that this is not a very accurate or useful explanation of the way that multiculturalism functions. I believe that it is a system that can and should take into consideration both notions of reified culture as well as its contextual flexibility, as long as we do not attempt to broadly assess its success by grouping all cultures and situations collectively. It is important for policy makers to also consider the importance of contextual relativity in the interpretation of culture, and reflect this in their general policies for multiculturalism, by not restricting cultures, allowing individuals and groups the choice to take whatever stance to culture they feel is appropriate in different contexts. This would allow political multiculturalism to truly mirror the ‘multiculture’ that communities create for themselves in different environments. In sum, I argue that the question ‘has multicultural failed in Britain does not beg a yes or no response; the appropriate answer would be to demand a more elaborate question: for who has multiculturalism failed in Britain and in what particular context and situation has it done so.

Bibliography


