افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مبـــــاد   بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مـــــباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم   از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com   afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages	زبانهای اروپائی

MAY 30, 2018

by ANTONIO PERRA
31.05.2018

Britain Today: Between State Racism and Ruthless Neoliberalism

Photo by Berit Watkin | CC BY 2.0

Our American counterparts might reasonably be baffled by the news that the royal wedding between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle has sparked a heated debate over Britain's deep-seated racism, yet, never has a subject been more timely and appropriate than the problematization of interracial and interfaith relationships in modern day Britain.

Just weeks ago, the UN special rapporteur on racism and xenophobia, Professor Tendayi Achiume, made the headlines when she expressed concern over the normalisation of hateful, stigmatising discourse against minorities, the alarming spike in racially and religiously motivated hate crimes, and the general political narrative surrounding Brexit Britain's approach to immigration. Pointing at "structural forms of racial discrimination and inequality" and at "policies and practices that have the *effect* of disadvantaging individuals or groups on the basis of their race", she urged the UK government to deploy measures to tackle all forms of "legally prohibited" racial discrimination. Predictably, she attracted harsh criticism from the right wing of the political spectrum, with famously toxic tabloids such as *The Sun* (already known to the UN for "decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion"), calling her "clueless", "nannying", a "penpusher" and "outrageous". Other commentators of the calibre of Douglas Murray, associate director of the Henry Jackson Society (see here), rebutted her accusations of British bigotry by claiming that "no one likes to do themselves out of a job", and pointing at the wedding between a prince and a mixed-race celebrity as a clear sign that Britain embraces diversity. They ignore, of course, that recent pollsshow that 52% of surveyed Britons think "Refugees will increase the likelihood of terrorism in our country", that 46% believe that "Refugees are a burden on our country because they take our jobs and social benefits" and that 28% said "Refugees in our country are more to blame for crime than other groups". This adds to frequent cases of abuse experienced by immigrants, who are often victims of harassment including slogans like "Rapefugees not welcome" or "you don't belong here".

Unhelpfully, weeks before the UN report was made available, the Tory-led British government was engulfed in another controversy, this time involving the so-called 'Windrush Generation', a term indicating Commonwealth migrants from the Caribbean arriving in the UK between 1948 and 1971. As part of the hard-line "hostile environment" policy announced as early as 2012 by former Home Secretary Theresa May, now Prime Minister, the British government had set out a number of measures aimed at creating "a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants". The rationale of the policy was to deprive 'illegal' migrants of vital services such as the NHS, housing, bank accounts etcetera, and make life in Britain so unbearable that they would be forced to choose to emigrate rather than continuing to live in the country (hence the government's very recent shift to the more politically-correct "compliant environment"). Everyone in Whitehall knew, yet ignored, that the Windrush Generation would be disproportionally hit by this

measure since, back in the 1970s, the Home Office did not bother with keeping records of immigrants to whom it granted indefinite leave to remain. Eventually, when Amber Rudd, May's successor as Home Secretary, boasted about "ambitious but deliverable" targets to increase forced deportation in a leaked letter to the government – to then lie about it in front of the Home Affairs Committee – she was forced to resign, uncovering, together with her shame, years of governmental efforts to structurally target minorities.

Keeping into account that these embarrassing events are occurring against the backdrop of the Brexit vote, still leading the country to concerning stances on immigration and integration and incidentally causing an increase of nearly 60% in hate crimes, it is perhaps time to reassess what the government has recently described as Britain's "long history" of multiculturalism. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic, if not blatantly depressing, that just a few months ago the May government published the Green Paper on Integrated Communities, which rather unsettlingly opens with her message to the nation: "I promised to build a country that works for everyone, not just a privileged few. A country in which everyone, whatever their background, *can go as far as their hard work will take them*.[1]Britain is one of the world's most successful multiethnic, multi-faith societies. We can rightly be proud of this diversity, which has contributed so much to our culture and our economy, and has made us the strong, vibrant nation we are today."

I shall ignore the populist undertone of May's language of choice, and focus on one question: is this the case?

Lucy Mayblin has convincingly deconstructed the idea that it is so. A reluctant signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees – opposed by many ministers who did not wish to be bound by human rights conventions that could impact the functioning of the empire – Britain has, if anything, a long history of neglect when it comes to minorities. In the 1930s, British policy-makers ruled that Jewish people and people who had "non-Aryan" traits were to be excluded "as undesirable additions to the British labour market", incidentally leading to a rather lukewarm refugee policy at the onset of the Holocaust; throughout the 1940s and 1950s, non-white populations in the country were treated as sub-humans, with policy-makers increasingly focusing on controlling "coloured" immigration. This resulted in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which drastically reduced the number of immigrants and was designed, in the words of then Deputy Prime Minister Butler, to "operate on coloured people almost exclusively". In the 1970s, riots erupted during the Caribbean carnival in Notting Hill (a prelude to the 1980s riots in Brixton and Toxteth) because, believing that the celebrations were "a form of cultural resistance", the

government had decided to send over 1500 police officers to harass and arrest black people. And in 1993, the unprosecuted murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence led Sir William Macpherson to talk about "institutional racism" in his 1998 public inquiry.

Even today, there is an abundance of evidencewhen it comes to the systematic, structural discrimination against minorities that operates in Britain. For example, Pakistani and Bangladeshi have the lowest employment rate and the highest unemployment rate in the country, while being the most likely to be concentrated in the three lowest-skilled occupation groups, to receive the lowest hourly pay rate, and to suffer from the greatest pay gap. Muslims are three times less likely to be called back for a job interview if they have a Muslim name, and far more likely to experience job refusal and career blockage, as well as to be (illegally) asked about family aspirations during job interviews. They also live in the 10% most deprived districts in England and Wales, and suffer from the highest level of home-overcrowding and of people self-reporting "bad" or "very bad" health. Black minorities are six times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people, are disproportionally represented in the Criminal Justice System, and are far more likely to be placed in high security prisons and to rely on state-supported social housing. White Gypsy and Roma are three times more likely to be excluded from schools, while nine in ten do not reach the expected standards for reading and writing. Finally, virtually none of these ethnic groups has access to managerial positions, with their careers being confined to junior ranks, lower salaries, and less opportunities.

Of course, while the tension between multiculturalism and racial discrimination has a long, historical trajectory in Britain, explaining modern racism requires a broader analysis of the prevalent ideology underpinning the establishment's current policy-thinking and policy-making, that is, the way in which the application of neoliberal principles across all spectrum of British life has led to the further marginalisation of minorities and to the embedment of racist practices that allow the lucky few to increase and retain control of their wealth and privileges.

One of the most fascinating (from a scientific perspective) aspects of neoliberalism, is that it has managed to redefine human relationships as little more than economic transactions, 'marketising' social interactions while simultaneously spreading among all people a dreading sense of continuous competition for prosperity. The 'market-knows-better' paradigm, so dear to many of its hawkish advocates, has resulted in an inexorable process of de-politicisation and de-ideologization whereby human behaviour is controlled, contained and even manipulated through a series of economic incentives – for example

ownership, or private property. This "economisation of the social", as Madraputs it, has in turn led to the exacerbation of individualistic and competitive traits, further propelled by scarce resources and uncertainty about the future, which ultimately prevails over more ethical concerns for social justice and equality, organised protest, and collectivism in general.

Modern British racism develops from this form of ruthless neoliberalism on three key areas.

First, it systematically ignores structural barriers faced by outgroups in, for example, employment, education, social mobility etcetera, because the market naturally optimises the functioning of society by rewardingmerit and punishing inefficiency. As such, concerns or measures aimed at tackling historically ingrained social inequalities are perceived as unfair – especially if they impact the interests of the top few – since meritocracy implies that those who do not make it are solely responsible for their failures. Adding insult to injury, neoliberals claim that disadvantaged people can overturn their odds if they are willing, as May writes, to "go as far as their hard work will take them". What follows is an epidemic of self-blame, loneliness and hopelessness, and it is no surprise that Britain, a country where neoliberalism has been more rigidly applied, ranks among the top most depressed countries in the western world.

Of course, it is highly ironic that concepts such as meritocracy are applied to a country governed by a privately educated cabinet, by the heirs of feudal land owners, and by prime ministers who went to school to some of the most expensive (and less diverse) colleges in the country. Yet, neoliberalism allows the most privileged segments of society to convince themselves that they acquired their wealth through merit and hard work, not through exploitations of accidents of birth. It is little more than a 'cognitive illusion' that further distances the top few from the rest of society, while increasing wealth concentration and socio-economic disparities. Simultaneously, this approach allows the establishment to shift the blame of social failures entirely on the 'self' (i.e. self-segregation, self-exclusion, self-employment, self-sufficiency, etc.) instead of looking at the barriers that minorities face in every aspect of their life. May's latest effort to talk about integrated communities is unsurprisingly filled with references to the 'self'.

Second, it provides legitimation for the deconstruction of public welfare through privatisation. One of the golden rules of neoliberalism is that the state should play virtually no role in the administration of the market, which conversely needs to be liberated from any constraints that could limit free enterprise. Consequently, as the

neoliberal logic goes, the marketization of everything guarantees uninterrupted economic growth and, by extension, it allows the wealth accumulated at the top to trickle down and enrich the rest of society. That is why, taxes and regulations should be minimised because they are constraints to the growth of a company and its profits; trade unions should be abolished because they are distortions that interfere with the market's natural order of winners and losers; the entire public sector should be privatised to make it more performative by providing consumers with more options and stimulating competition.

Little does it matter that massive tax breaks to corporations make the rich richer and the poor poorer; or that freedom from regulation translates into freedom to endanger workers, the environment, or to impose whatever financial rule. And very little attention is paid to the way massive cuts on public sector afflict and destroy the lives of the most vulnerable segments of society.

Britain is at the forefront of privatisation. Rail, energy, water, Royal Mail, the Royal Bank of Scotland, segments of the Criminal Justice System, including probation services, higher education, schools and potentially the NHS, have undergone a process of transformation whereby the sustainability of their service is measured against the amount of revenues they can produce. Of course, ethnic minorities are among the most affected by cuts and privatisation of the public sector. For example, the rise of hate crimes is directly correlated to the massive cuts in police budgets, with police officers numbers falling by more than 20,000 and hate crimenumbers rising by nearly 20,000 in 2106/17. Cuts on the criminal and civil justice system in favour of commercial courts that bring lucrative business into London are undermining the quality of the English justice system, with defence solicitors in criminal cases "in danger of becoming 'extinct'". Cuts on counselling services, particularly for women, is leaving them with no support to treat mental health issues, while redundancies in the public sector continue to disproportionally impact ethnic minorities, which, as noted earlier, occupy more expendable junior positions. There is no mention of these issues in the May government's report.

Third, non-conforming behaviours are perceived as an attack to the status-quo and to the socio-cultural stability of the country, with non-economic forms of agency – cultural, religious and political – being increasingly problematized and, more often than not, challenged as potentially extremist behaviours. In this regard, Britain's current strategy to counter violent and non-violent extremism stems from the application of neoliberal logicsto crime prevention and counter-terror legislations. Discourses and measures aimed at perpetuating a crisis (i.e. the widespread perception of living under constant threat),

justify expropriations needed for capital accumulation; voices of dissent are seen and challenged as 'market' dysfunctionalities, while instruments of crime prevention imply "anticipatory logics of detection" typical of the neoliberal market-thinking; the universality of the threat implies the adoption of transnational military strategies, which simultaneously blur the boundaries between national security and national jurisprudence. And, perhaps even more significantly, the reduction of the being to a mere individualistic economic agent allows the establishment to regulate the distribution of power across society, thus maintaining the status quo by homogenizing socio-cultural agency.

It is not a case that the British government has repeatedly problematized not just people who display clear criminal tendencies, but all "people that are at odds with mainstreammodern British values and laws". This narrative allows the government to sustain controversial decisions of both foreign and domestic policy, by distracting society from the discriminatory nature of the status quo while simultaneously scapegoating minorities by shifting the blame of the system's failures entirely on them.

The royal wedding was perhaps "moving and uplifting", as Douglas Murray puts it, but eradicating racism from Britain requires far more than a little bit of royal gossip.