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Intolerant Britain? Hate, Citizenship and Difference

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ABSTRACT

Intolerant Britain? Hate, Citizenship and Difference is a book written by Derek McGhee. It takes the readers through the varied of existing social complications that exist in the British society. It studies the persisting racism, institutional racism, Islamophobia, Homophobia, asylophobia and community segregation through an array of case studies. The book further examines the various strategic, legislative and political advances that took place so as to confront the social injustices. Throughout the pages of the book, McGhee elaborates upon the necessity to recognize that all of these stratagems are a part of the Government's wider intention which is to revitalize and bring novel meaning to British citizenship.

Keywords: *Intolerant, Britain, Xenophobia, Hate, Difference.*

Intolerant Britain? Hate, citizenship and difference provides an overview of a number of contemporary social problems that persist in the British society. It is a fascinating examination of racism, institutional racism, Islamophobia, Homophobia, asylophobia and community segregation through an array of case studies. Simultaneously, the book analyses the various strategic, legislative and political developments that took place so as to tackle these social injustices such as the battling of institutionalized racism, the enactment of hate crime legislation, as well as community safety and cohesion. Throughout the book, McGhee emphasizes upon the need to acknowledge that all of these strategies are a part of the Government's wider intention which is to revitalize and bring novel meaning to British citizenship. The prominence of the book to students of sociology, politics and cultural studies can be determined from the polemical style of writing that extracts and brings forward more than what lies on the surface.

The central theme of the book circles establishing a connection amongst race, policing, immigration, hate crimes, asylum and Islamophobia post 9/11 with British citizenship. Unlike the book written by Alexandra Walsham - *Charitable hatred: Tolerance and intolerance in England, 1500–1700 (Politics, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain)* which has a rather

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historic approach, McGhee seeks to understand in a greater perspective the problems of intolerance, prejudice and hatred in contemporary Britain through real-life instances, journals and theories of scholars.

The book moves from theme to theme while attempting to drawing parallel between the same and begins by providing an insight into prejudice and tolerance. Importance is placed on the fact that in modern day Britain, the bigotry of the intolerance of so called “other” communities is far more than the actual tolerance of the minority communities.

In the first chapter, McGhee illustrates the maturity of the relationship between the police and the minority African-Caribbean community through two momentous inquiries: the Scarman Inquiry which was published in 1981, analysing the serious disturbances that took place in Brixton between African-Caribbean youths and the police, along with the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry which was published in 1999, around 6 years after the murder of Lawrence by a group young Whites. Regard is given to Lord Scarman’s apparent denial of the existence of institutional racism and is labelled as a historic moment in time which was responsible for shifting the nucleus of the anti-racist struggle from public institutions to individuals. Furthermore, emphasis is laid on the diversion in policing dialogue from racism against the black being administered as a racist episode rather than a “racially aggravated incidence”. The responses of the police and the government, the emergence of hate crime legislation in the UK and the community safety ethos introduced in the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 are contextualised.

The next chapter shifts its focus to Pakistani immigrants residing in Britain, and McGhee endeavours to examine the construe of defence barriers constructed against a spatially adjacent ‘enemy-other’ as well as observes the diffraction and antagonism amid the White and Pakistani community in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, where the “riots” of 2001 occurred. He makes evident the issue with the margins of the culture-centric programmes and severe justice measures taken in post these ‘riots’, which he believes systematically de-emphasize firstly, the magnitude of material deprivation experienced by the minority communities and secondly, the role played by ‘individual’ or ‘community defence’ in these disturbances. The attempt to generate understanding between the dominant and minority communities or a sense of unity among people is admired by McGhee, however it is ascertained that these 'solutions' are not to be considered effective as they disregard elements such as unemployment, poverty, inadequate housing, and religious and racial bigotry and the fact that of deprivation causes communities that are geographically proximate but culturally faint to start becoming antagonized in the struggle for scarce resources.

Additionally, he accentuates upon the fact that though the issues are geographically specific, they are a part of the much larger problematization of British citizenship and the British national identity in general, prevailing under the New Labour government. He elucidates upon the disturbances being concurrent with the Government's explanation for advocating mandatory post-entry integration strategies, where migrant communities are educated in 'Britishness' through citizenship programmes and English classes as a medium to ensure that the novel British citizens have the competency to be active citizens. An immigrant is believed to be antithetical to what constitutes an active citizen, as the former are believed to be non-participating members of the community whose loyalty to Britain is questionable. The initiatives to rebrand "British Citizenship" are thus, presumed to be designed explicitly to upset the courses, whereby avoiding 'cultural apartheid' amid communities.

He takes forward the concept of racism and active British citizens, to weave together and reconnoitre the symbiotic relationship of instituted and societal racism to asylum seekers in Britain. Focus is drawn on the management mechanism practised relative to the amalgamation of immigrants through the adopted citizenship initiatives and the detected 'threat' of asylum seekers. A study is done on the existing relationship with the masses who have migrated to Britain only to demonstrate that the foundation of this precise upsurge of asylophobia is nothing but the general xeno-racism that has been associated with all poor migrants since the turning of the twenty-first century.

A connection is made between the fear of immigrants and the failure of any sort of community cohesion in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford to the inter-community frictions that exist amongst the Pakistani and White communities. More examples are submitted through the case studies of Sighthill, Glasgow where a few weeks prior the 9/11 attacks Firsat Dag, a Kurd from Turkey in was stabbed to death and left to die on the streets and within a couple of hours the entire Sighthill was in an uproar and the Caia Park incident, where violent clashes involving Iraqi Kurd asylum seekers, locals and the police were experienced in Caia Park. Thus, it makes evident that the ascertaining migrants and even asylum seekers as a socially inferior group has been apparent since time immemorial and the fact that insecurity stems from a place of violation of boundaries both practically and metaphorically.

The centre of the fourth chapter is the incitement of religious hatred in contemporary multi-faith Britain and Faith-hate in post-9/11 UK and the emergence of Islamophobia in society where the relationship amongst the White and Muslims had previously felt gross amounts of turbulence, especially with the British Far Right organizations fanning the flames of Islamophobia. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the cited institutional reflexivity taking

into consideration the amelioration of hatred that has been incited against the religious minority.

An assessment is made of the 'social engineering' intents of the enacted 'hate crime' legislation from the approach of the policy makers by observing of the courses of reflexivity in determining not just the need for legislation but also the extent of problems associated with prohibiting undesirable behaviours and practices that have an adverse impact on minority religious communities. The same is illustrated by a study of the growth of international and domestic law in Britain in relation to the protection and non-protection of religious groups. Identification is made of the factors involved in attempting to shield one group from a form of harm while concurrently attempting to safeguard rights such as freedom of speech and expression and recognition is given to the fact that non-protection can lead to inequity amongst groups. The subject concludes through the suggestion of the author, proposing that incitement legislation expanding its to protect other groups in society who are potential victims of hatred, for example the lesbian and gay community.

A paradigm shift is then brought and McGhee eventually turns to the intolerance of sexual minority communities, homophobia and the significance of building confidence in its policing. The social harm of hate is highlighted through the history of oppressive policing alongside the evils associated with institutional homophobia and recurring homophobic incidents. The situation is particularly different in the case of the LGBT community because unlike the migrant status or religious traditions, the status of this group of individuals is indicated by their sexual preferences and gender practices. What is intriguing is the fact that it is believed that transition in the relationship shared by the LGBT community and the police is to be achieved by the application of numerous British citizenship mechanisms. Thus, another prominent connection is established as he states that these mechanisms take form of encouraging the civic participation of marginal communities, and how the State believes that becoming an active citizen will ameliorate the social problems that they face. The experiences of homophobic harassment in Southampton gives due attention to of homophobic violence experienced and the suggested that the same is the cause for the marginalization of the community to secret edges of society. It further throws light on the fact that the official responses to homophobic hate crimes give importance to growing liaison and increasing interaction between the police, partner agencies and the community rather than the curtailing the occurrence and under-reporting of such crime which led to the distrust being established in the first place.

Focus is then brought upon examining the developments when it came to the policing of the LGBT community, and the reforms that have taken place in terms of certain sexual criminal

legislation and the meaning of marginal sexual citizenship in modern day Britain. “Sexual minority citizenship” is studied by taking prominent moments of revolution in Britain into consideration. The first having occurred during the 1950s and 60s which decriminalized private homosexual acts and the second being the current day review of sex offence legislations such as the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 in response to the accusations of institutionalized prejudice against the community. McGhee argues that issues such as empowerment and subjectivity are indeed pertinent to the concepts of ‘active citizenship’ as well as ‘community safety’. He puts forward his concern that the invitation extended to the community to enforce their right to fair and equitable policing and the promises of liberation and ‘inclusion’ made, are accompanied by trade-off responsibilities that are to be borne by the community. Finally, attention is given to the what the recommended reforms of sexual offences might mean for sexual minority citizens (and also heterosexual citizens) with a view to examine the transition from tolerance to the ‘acceptance’ of the LGBT communities.

In the concluding chapter, McGhee develops the themes encountered throughout the book. He contextualizes the problems explored in the preceding chapters, and elaborates on how in a wider sense, they are related to the New Labour’s attempt to paint a picture of a new Britain. Distinction is drawn between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. The former is said to encourage cultural identity and the preservation of ethnic identity while also insisting upon exercising tolerance towards the “other” and the latter is said to have no space for tolerance at all and rather imagines and encourages an innovative and shared identity of a British citizen. The cosmopolitan strategy seeks to disrupt the recourse to defence and establish trust, reciprocity and ‘tolerance through dialogue’. The antagonist when it comes to this emerging model of citizenship is extreme loyalty to communities and commitment to cultures, traditions and identities which are neither open nor flexible and are hostile to ‘others.’ The problem acknowledged here is the fact that the inherent mechanisms of cosmopolitanization are too engrossed in transforming minority communities, that it fails to focus on transforming the hostile and defence boundaries of the ‘host’ groups and communities such as the Whites. The finale to McGhee’s arguments lie in the critique of the policies and practices that are being attempted and he pursues to understand what this will mean for particular sections of the British society who are now finding themselves subjected to compulsory cosmopolitanization. The potential dark side of the process of revitalizing British citizenship and the dream of a future-oriented Britain is examined which he believes in practice, may be experienced more as imposed social engineering than anything else.

“It is essential ‘community’ beyond the multicultural ethos of respecting culture, tradition and

identity remains central to the dream of dialogic, participatory democracy.” This is because communities are never going to be simplistic or homogenous but they are always going to be the location for the inception of the ideal ‘active citizenship’.

The book finds strength in its ability to co-relate diverse themes with the idea of “British Citizenship” level by level after the laying of a strong foundation. McGhee locates and brings to surface several issues while elaborating upon their roots, thus providing a complete understanding and picture before moving onto the associated concepts. By providing distinctions amongst basic terms, he is able to highlight the real object behind every word that is used in reports and legislations which may often go unnoticed. It strongly scrutinises how emotions and the violent expression of hatred and group antagonisms are being interpreted by ‘reflexive institutions’ and other organizations.

It is not to say that McGhee hasn’t received criticism for his findings. Scholars highlight that although he does recognize the negative aspects of cosmopolitanism, he does fail to consider a course, which may evolve into the type of assimilation from where a new blended citizen will emerge, and it would require a high degree of ethnic tolerance as a starting point and it will not succeed with all sorts of ethnic communities.² Yet, it is believed that the merit of this book lies in the fact that it was able to combine diverse and isolated areas of research such as racism, Islamophobia, homophobia and asylophobia in an attempt to provide “*a wider study of institutional reflexivity which takes the form of discourses, policies, programmes and legislation that have been, are planned or are being rolled-out to deal with these diverse social problems and what they are associated with – that is, the crisis in British citizenship.*”

The examination of public documents utilized in this book, provides an exemplary model for the illumination of the unintentional consequences of the best of official intentions, which is one of the most important messages one should grasp from McGhee’s arguments.

² Deutscher, I., 2006. Review of Intolerant Britain?