

BELONGING IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

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June 2007

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The Commission on Integration and Cohesion

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Introduction

In 2005, an estimated 565,000 migrants arrived to live in the UK for at least a year. In the same period, 380,000 people emigrated from the UK for a year or more, and over half of these were British citizens. As travel becomes within the reach of most people and communication technologies enable people to be immersed in cultures located elsewhere, and to cultivate multiple identities, the question of belonging becomes more complex and more central to the debate on how we live together.

As a result, over the two past decades, much of the discussion on belonging in both academic and policy literature has focused specifically on how to live in multicultural societies with high degrees of social mobility, diversity and migration, and where identities are multiple and shifting. In the UK, there are five million people who belong to a black minority ethnic (BME) community (many of whom were born here) and in London alone there are 42 communities of foreign heritage with more than 10,000 members each. Over 300 languages are spoken by London's schoolchildren. In this context, debates on multiculturalism, citizenship, integration and cohesion have largely dominated discussions on what belonging to a community should be about.

This report argues that the question of belonging should be much wider than these debates. Communities in Britain today are characterised by powerful interconnections of loyalties, social and economic status, traditions, historical legacies and culture. In order to capture what it means to 'belong' in contemporary Britain this report suggests the need for **a new frame of reference** – which goes beyond more top down concepts of Britishness, diversity or multiculturalism – and instead takes a wider approach aimed at unlocking the need for people to find recognition, comfort and feel at home around others where they live, where they work or where they interact.

Achieving a society where people find recognition and belonging from different groups, communities and institutions can be challenging and requires considerable effort. As studies show:

- An increasing number of BME communities feel they do not identify with Britain and according to the pollsters MORI, 32 per cent of white British people over 65 do not mix with others of a different ethnic origin and 15 per cent of people in this group equate whiteness with Britishness (Mulgan, Buonfino & Geissendorfer, 2006).
- In areas experiencing a fast pace of change, white working class groups have also expressed feelings of dislocation and powerlessness (Ali & Buonfino, forthcoming).
- In 2006, nine million people had experienced feeling lonely at week-ends and 18% of people age 55 and over admitted going a full day without speaking to anyone. One in 50 people (2%) said they had no one to turn to in a personal crisis (Mulgan, Buonfino & Geissendorfer, 2006).

- High mobility, longer working hours and more private lifestyles mean that an increasing number of people in Britain do not know their neighbours. This is not surprising as one in ten of all households in Great Britain had been resident for less than 12 months (ONS, 2001).

Belonging is a different language to culture, identity and rights. It is a basic frame of reference which relates to human need, and encompasses the many ways in which people find points of recognition in their lives. As Abraham Maslow (1943) argued in the *Theory of Human Motivation*, the need for happiness, recognition and self esteem are seen to be at the very base of human need. Belonging is as complex as it is intuitive: in day-to-day life, people exhibit a need to belong in their desires to have a family, be a part of a community, a member of a church, a player in a team, a part of a gang. Belonging can connect people to others around them, as well as leading to a sense of being valued, recognised and listened to.

Belonging is not an issue unique to race, and the key to understanding its dynamics in contemporary society is that it relates to every single member of society. Weak belonging or lack of belonging can explain the way newcomers may fail to feel at 'home' in a new place; it can explain why many people experience loneliness or isolation; and why some traditional white working class communities in areas like Barking and Dagenham or Stoke-on-Trent may feel that they have lost something important to them. For a large proportion of the British population today, belonging comes from a range of spheres including personal relationships, institutions and groups. Yet as sociologists and geographers have suggested, in the context of modernity and globalisation, the need for a sense of belonging in the local sphere may be taking on a greater sense of importance in a world of growing uncertainty (Castells, 1996; Bauman, 2000; Amin, 2001). Our analysis suggests that for some groups in society finding recognition and affirming their identity in wider society is becoming increasingly difficult. It is possible to identify at least three reasons why this may be the case:

1. Strong local ties which have traditionally provided the foundation for close and straightforward belonging amongst family, friends and neighbours have been eroded or dispersed as people's mobility has increased.
2. Competition from alternative activities and social spheres has squeezed out some locally based activities: participation in the local church; cultural celebrations with extended family; nursing clubs and local volunteering. This reduces the opportunity for closer interactions and wider forms of recognition.
3. Inequality and residential segregation can affect the capability of some groups to find recognition from more than one source. Some groups in Britain are still falling through the cracks – they suffer from poor economic opportunities and prospects; voicelessness and low aspirations. As a result, they experience economic and socio-cultural barriers to belonging.

Most of the issues above relate to what 21st century Britain has become – where lifestyle choices are important, and society is characterised by diversity and fast change. However, some of the elements may be particularly susceptible to change through design and collective action, although greater research is needed to understand the impact of removing barriers or putting various social innovations into practice. It is nonetheless clear that groups which only find recognition and belonging from one source may be the most vulnerable to isolation, change and tensions, especially if and when that one source becomes divisive or unsustainable. This applies to many groups irrespective of race or social status – from groups who find sole recognition and support from the local community which can be eroded by mobility and change; from those who find it from cultural and religious identity when living in a very diverse society; to those groups who find recognition from work and careers when these may become vulnerable.

Reinforcing practical pathways through which people can find recognition in the wider society through their place in the economy, in their neighbourhood or through politics can go a long way towards addressing negative personal effects (such as loneliness, anxiety, depression) as well as more far reaching social effects (such as alienation, segregation or extremism).

This think piece is organised into three parts:

Section 1 explores the conceptual issues and the psychological importance of belonging and recognition. It provides a framework for understanding its inevitability and importance.

Section II breaks down ‘belonging’ into eight elements and spheres – ranging from the very local (social capital and neighbouring) to the national and the global level (multiple identities and citizenship). The section highlights the ways in which belonging and recognition can help individuals to address negative personal effects and assist society to achieve integration, mutual support and cohesion.

Section III concludes the think piece with an analysis of policy and practice implications, and makes recommendations that may help to influence people’s sense of belonging in contemporary Britain.

Section 1: The meaning of belonging

"Few articles in the economist's creed (sic) outrage non-economists more than the pure, imperturbable belief that human wants are insatiable. Yet that belief has long been shared by other disciples. Man's pre-eminence over the brutes lies solely in the number and in the fantastic and unnecessary character of his wants, physical, moral aesthetic and intellectual. Had his whole life not been a quest for the superfluous he would never have established himself as inexpugnably as he does" (William James)

"One becomes an individual subject only by virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject" (Hegel)

Humans need a number of essentials to survive. According to the renowned psychologist Abraham Maslow and the conflict scholar John Burton, these essentials go beyond just food, water, and shelter. They include both physical and non-physical elements (needed for human growth and development), as well as all the things humans are innately driven to attain, such as safety, belonging, self esteem and personal achievement.

In this context, survival can depend on relationships with others. Steven Mithen's (2006) work suggests that the Neanderthals, who lived in Europe from around 200,000 to 35,000 BC, were required to develop complex emotional communication and inter-group cooperation – largely due to their physically difficult environment, large body size, and dependent infants. They built up a "music-like communication system that was more complex and more sophisticated than that found in any of the previous species of Homo" (2006: 234), and that included iconic gestures, dance, onomatopoeia, vocal imitation and sound synaesthesia.

At least since the time of the Neanderthals, doing things together has been part of a human need for belonging and identity. As Hegel argues, in order to develop a personal identity, an individual is dependent upon recognition from different concrete and generalised others.

This is echoed by *Social Identity Theory* which states that a person has not one "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel and act on the basis of his/her personal, family or national "level of self" (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Alongside the "level of self", an individual has multiple "social identities" to be worn according to their surroundings. Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership of social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002).

Social Identity Theory asserts that group membership creates in-group self-categorisation and enhancement in ways that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group. Tajfel and Turner (1986) showed that the mere act of individuals categorising themselves as group members was sufficient to lead them to display in-group favouritism. After being categorised as group members, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem

by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparison with the out-group. This quest for distinctiveness means that people's sense of who they are is defined in terms of 'we' rather than 'I'. For example, during the Cold War, an important aspect of American identity for many people in the United States was to be anti-Communist.

Differentiation and comparison with other groups can often change, leading to different dynamics at individual, local or national level. For example, in the 1950s and 1960s many people living in what was then Yugoslavia felt pride in having stood up to the Soviet Union in 1948 and in creating a new economic system. Yet in the 1990s, most people in Yugoslavia felt that their identities as Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims, or Bosnians were more salient than their identity as Yugoslavs. On a different level, finding recognition through group membership can also in some cases transcend territories. The survival of Jews as an ethnic group, even without a single territorial base, has derived from socialization within the community about Jewish religious and cultural qualities and from external threats such as anti-Semitism.

Worn lightly, identities can provide the basis for recognition, for finding a voice, for defining a place in society, and for social relations. However, identity becomes central in the event of a crisis, where individuals and groups are forced into a 'revolution of awareness'. This process happened after 9/11, the Madrid bombings and 7/7 where groups struggled to negotiate their identity against one another. At the state level, self-awareness is transformed into a collective nation awareness, usually evolving into nationalism, which can be defined as the loyalty individuals feel towards their nation. At its most positive, nationalism can be a driving force for pride and innovation, but, in negative terms, nationalism can increase the perception of exclusion by non-members. If leaders capitalise on these feelings of exclusion by appealing to their own nationalistic cause, tensions can easily escalate. This is much the same if applied to the local level – when a crisis starts (tensions between groups, or an incident like a murder or an attack), identities are renegotiated against one another and belonging is strengthened – triggering divisions, segregation and conflict.

This fluid dynamism of belonging and identity is explained by the anthropologist Mary Douglas' grid and group theory (1966; 1970). According to Douglas, people can be grouped along a **horizontal** axis that measures the strength of group norms such as family values or local community, and along a **vertical** axis that measures the strength of the grid – the less intimate mechanisms of control such as laws, religious authority, economic forces and institutional disciplines. The strength of grid and group gives rise to different types of grouping and forms of organisations which can characterise societies and can coexist at any one point in time. In a **hierarchical** system characterised by high values and a strong reliance on the legal system, people are likely to shape belonging within the acceptable boundaries of law, and society (i.e. social class). In an **individualist** system, people act as competitive free riders, and nothing is set in stone. Recognition is found through success in new ventures or ideas. Entrepreneurs and political leaders starting a new movement or a venture may fit into this category. Belonging is certainly

more complex for those living in a **fatalistic** or isolated system – these people cannot easily belong as they are excluded from society by society itself, either because of their legal status, or due to a form of discrimination or poverty. Many of the people in this category may then be recruited as followers in **‘enclaves’** – generally led by an individualist with charismatic ideas. Enclaves can vary but in general they tend to have a strong sense of belonging based on an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division, often leading to some degree of hostility towards the outside world.

Figure 1: Mary Douglas’ grid and group diagram

High grid	<p>Fatalistic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detached from society • Apathy, risk averse • Excluded by the system (i.e. asylum seekers; the poor) <p>E.g. white working class communities in depressed areas around the UK – feeling voiceless in a fast changing society.</p>	<p>Hierarchy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tightly ordered societies in which tradition/ order is very important • decisions from above • blame deviants <p>E.g. Class society</p>
	<p>Individualists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entrepreneurial, adaptive to constant change • competition • Dominant in the UK and the US <p>E.g. Political entrepreneurs – Le Pen or Pym Fortuyn</p>	<p>Enclave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of detachment from the outside world; blame the system • Fear of defection • Strong sense of moral purity • Can develop hostility towards the system and ‘others’ <p>E.g. Islamic fundamentalist groups; gangs</p>
Low grid	Low group	High group

Depending on the systems people live in, the way they will experience belonging may vary. In an orderly world characterised by tradition and a top down structure, people will find recognition through clearly pre-defined sources and categories: the state, schools, religion etc. This was relatively straightforward in the past when aspirations and opportunities were often determined by specific boundaries and social expectations. Today, as economic and social mobility is more of a reality for many, hierarchies can often result in people experiencing severe feelings of injustice. If recognition makes the social world intelligible, it often does so by stratifying it, subordinating some people and elevating others to positions of privilege or dominance. Apathetic non voters, the invisible migrants, the silent poor can still fall through the cracks of an orderly system. In many instances it only takes an individualist and charismatic leader to transform these masses of ‘isolates’ into enclaves, and turn them into supporters. Douglas’ analysis suggests that the movement of the isolates from low group to high group (see table above) can

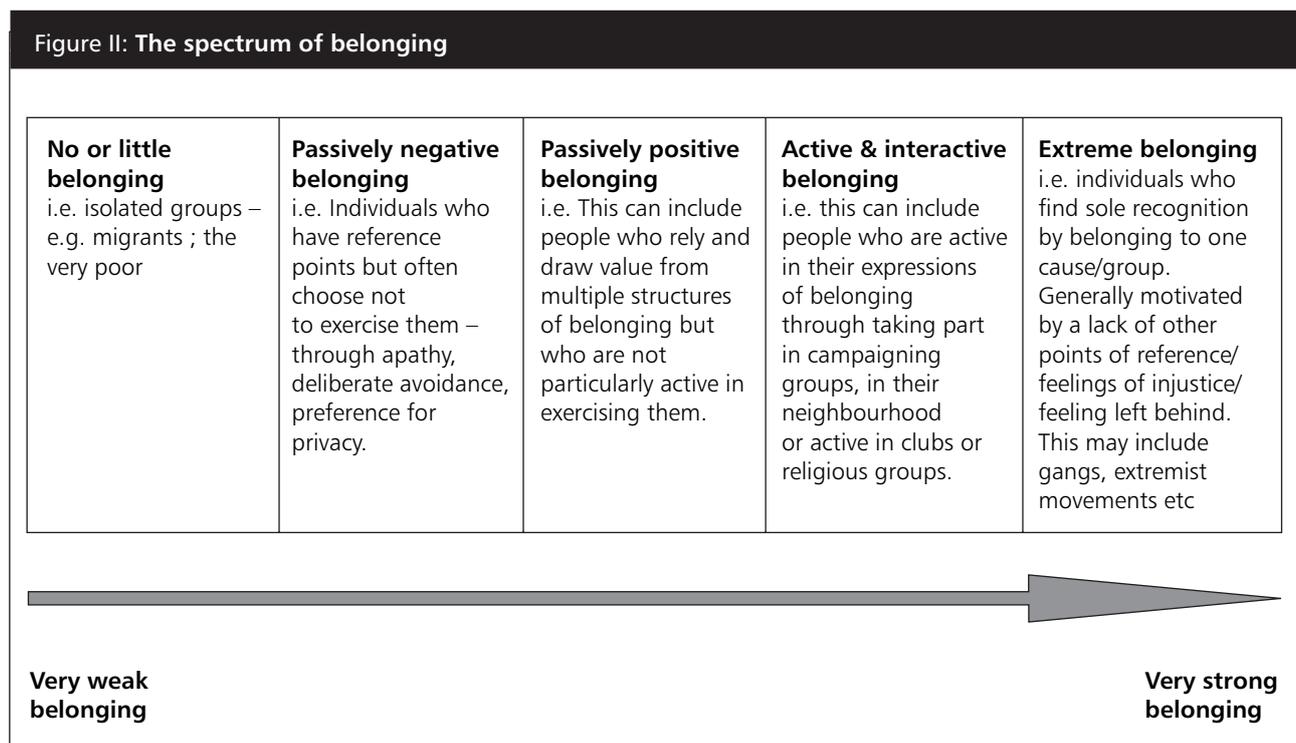
in certain circumstances account for the popularity of far right or religious extremism amongst groups who feel 'left out' and in search for new forms of belonging.

The nuances of belonging

According to Mary Douglas, different types of group belonging can co-exist within the same society, the same social group and even the same family. Some people will tend towards more orderly and prescribed forms of society – perhaps living in families where gender or religious norms determine their sources of recognition (as a wife and mother in a patriarchal society, or as a Muslim woman for example); and some people will instead find that while their structures of support and reference points have declined, they can channel their feelings of injustice and rediscover their identity by becoming members of 'enclaves', gangs, extremist groups.

The subjectivity of the concept of 'good belonging' has not only prevented scholars from reaching clear agreement on definitions but also generates a challenge for any policy trying to create benchmarks. Optimal relations represent different things for different people and for the same groups at different times.

While belonging is a human need, there are different degrees of belonging: some may experience weak belonging, as is the case for people who have no or little support mechanisms to turn to (for example, undocumented migrants, and the poor). Belonging can also be very strong – as in individuals who find recognition in one singular type of identity or affiliation such as being a nationalist or member of an extremist group. However, as every individual belongs somewhere, the grey area is wide, with many forms, grades and shapes of belonging in between:



Whilst most people today would find themselves towards the centre-right hand side of the spectrum (ie. passive or interactive) – an increasing number of people in Britain also find themselves at its extremes. The jump from not feeling any sense of belonging to a sense of extreme belonging is very small – they both share a sense of unfairness and injustice which divides them from the system and the outside world – and too little or, even, too much belonging can have serious consequences on the individual and society:

- **Emotional consequences:** Weak or absent forms of belonging can impact on individuals' forms of self help, self esteem and support. According to Charles Taylor (1992), 'our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others – and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.' Partly as a result of changing lifestyles, at the level of the individual people interact less. Having no or few points of reference in life can lead some individuals to experience loneliness, depression or anxiety. For example, in many areas where strong community ties have declined many elderly people experience serious isolation. When belonging can provide a frame of reference in case of crisis, a recent survey by MORI and the Young Foundation shows that one in 50 people (2%) said they had no one to turn to in a personal crisis (Mulgan, Buonfino & Geissendorfer, 2006).
- **Health and wellbeing:** The sociologist Robert Putnam (2000) has argued that while social connectedness has been declining, depression and even suicide have been increasing. Much research has shown that social connections inhibit depression. People who have close friends and confidants, friendly neighbours, and supportive co-workers are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem and problems with eating and sleeping. According to a Gallup survey in the USA, people who are isolated but healthy are twice as likely to die over a period of a decade as those who are not isolated. On the other hand belonging to an association – a club, a neighbour group etc – can add ten years to someone's life.
- **Wider Societal consequences:** Too little or too much belonging can also have important negative consequences for society as a whole. As Mary Douglas suggests in her grid and group theory, people who experience no or little belonging (the 'isolates' – represented on the left hand side of the spectrum above) can be targets of political entrepreneurs who can redraw boundaries by 'organizing, linking, dividing, and representing constituencies' (Tilly, 2003). The formation of what Douglas calls 'enclaves' with very high degrees of belonging can lead to a very 'black and white' or 'us and them' vision of the world. Enclaves such as terrorist groups, gangs or extreme right groups can often form in deprived areas where there are a potential pool of disaffected supporters ready for a new cause (however, it should be noted that the analysis in this context has limitations as there are some extremist groups who do not fall in this categorisation). Enclaves provide people with new frames of reference, sources of support and enemies. At their worst, however, too much belonging can

produce a rejection of otherness – in the form of hyper-nationalism, anti-immigration sentiments, religious radicalism or segregation.

On the other hand, the fluid adaptability of identity reveals its vast potential as a tool for conflict management. While national identity can easily become a negative influence, it can just as easily be transformed to a positive impetus for peace. Intentional manipulation of any national identity should inspire some degree of wariness – as exemplified by the rise of hyper-nationalist movements around the world – yet leaders and policy makers can affect significant positive change through identity transformation. Increasing awareness of the self and supporting a more equitable perception of others can be facilitated through cross-cultural exchanges, or highly visible dialogues. Sharing of each group's unique history, traditions and culture are all positive initiatives that mutually reinforce one's own and the other's identity. As illustrated by Miles Hewstone's work on contact theory, for example, this needs to be done carefully in order not to reinforce prejudices and stereotypes.

Section 2: What are the elements of belonging?

"A young man watches as you slowly board the bus, and then offers you his seat. Driving down a street in a predominantly white neighbourhood, you are pulled over again by the police, suspended in mistrust while the officer runs your identification and plates.

You recall how several of your male co-workers unexpectedly declared that they think you'll be the next woman in the office to have a baby.

You wait for the volunteer to find your name on the voting rolls. You add a new accomplishment to your curriculum vitae" (Markell, 2003)

People's lives contain a complex pattern of identities, belonging and recognition. From everyday interactions to the far reaching deliberations of legislature and courts, people face questions such as: Who are you? What relationship do you have with me, us and the system? What does the system say about you? In answering these questions people locate themselves and others in a social space, orientating themselves practically and regularly deciding what to do, how to treat others, and how to navigate the system – if at all.

Many of the debates on belonging and identity are set within the realms of diversity and ethnicity. However, belonging is a wider phenomenon that is not exclusive to race but applies to every single member of society. People find recognition in and through a variety of spheres ranging from family and schools to politics and the economy. This section sketches eight different elements that make up belonging in today's Britain. In particular it will highlight the importance of creating and facilitating avenues for finding recognition in each of these spheres.

For some people, all or none of the elements below will play a role in their sense of belonging – and the significance will vary considerably. This think piece argues that in order to avoid the negative nuances of belonging (emotional as well as societal), which often take place when individuals experience belonging to none or only one source of recognition (such as family, work or ethnic community), it is necessary to enable access to new avenues and paths for belonging.

1) Intimate social networks of support

Intimate networks of support are still largely one of the key loci for belonging. Love, affection, happiness are all central to a person's identity and act as points of reference. There is much evidence that shows that having family and friends around can improve people's wellbeing and belonging to a place. According to a MORI survey on unmet needs (Mulgan, Buonfino & Geissendorfer, 2006), the most important sources of support, security and respect for people do not come from the state, the market or the voluntary sector – but rather, from friends, family and neighbours.

Overall in the UK, there is evidence to suggest a correlation between how much we interact with neighbours and to what extent we feel we belong to a place. According to Richard Layard (2003a; 2003b), for most people, valued personal relationships with family, colleagues, friends and neighbours provide the best guarantee of happiness – rather than money. Layard shows that happiness has not increased in the US, Japan, continental Europe or Britain over the last 50 years, demonstrating that increased levels of production and consumption of material goods do not increase human satisfaction, at least beyond a certain level. Good mental health, satisfying and secure work, a secure and loving private life, freedom, moral values and a secure community were found to be the main factors affecting happiness (ibid). According to a MORI study in the UK, important predictors of happiness are being retired, talking to neighbours and doing sport (2005). The more people speak to neighbours, the happier they tend to be (even after controlling for correlated factors such as being retired).

2) *Weak ties*

Humans live and interact across a diverse set of physical spaces. They each formulate their own personal meaning of place using a myriad of observable cues such as public-private, large-small, daytime-night-time, loud-quiet, and crowded-empty. Unsurprisingly, perceptions of place are dominated by the people with which one shares such spaces. Sometimes these people are friends, family and colleagues. More often, and particularly in the public urban spaces people inhabit, the individuals who affect us are ones that we repeatedly observe and yet do not directly interact with – people who Stanley Milgram (1977) called *Familiar Strangers*: fellow Londoners, people in the tube, people living in the same street or crossing the park each morning. Despite not knowing them, people share space with them and a relationship of mutual respect can go a long way towards creating a good sense of place and belonging.

Around Britain there have been several attempts to strengthen relations to strangers sharing space. A particularly notable example is the 'meet the neighbours' scheme organised by the Haringey's Area Assemblies in Tottenham N15, the most diverse postcode in the country with 106 ethnic groups. During the sessions community organisations are invited to come along and make a presentation about their origins, the motivating factors that brought them to Tottenham and the aspirations for their families. The organisations bring along a selection of snacks from their own culinary traditions. Elsewhere in London, on the Camden North estate in Southwark, a local resident held separate meetings with the elderly white residents and the young predominantly Asian residents. She took the opinions of both groups across to each other before eventually bringing the two together in a joint meeting. The group worked to identify activities that could bring together different generations and cultures, and successfully started projects on the estate based around sport, gardening and day trips out of Southwark. The outcome of this intervention was that people felt the estate had improved – vandalism was at a minimum, the young people were more respectful of how their noise might affect the older residents (Southwark Alliance, 2005). These examples illustrate how

paying attention to the weak ties that we have with those who live around us can help to make people feel more secure and welcome in their neighbourhood – and ultimately, increase their sense of overall belonging.

3) The Economy

People can feel valued (or not valued) and recognised through their status and their economic place in society – through employment, access to networks and opportunities. According to an EU wide public opinion survey on citizenship and belonging, work was rated as one of the three most important elements of 39% of EU citizens' lives (Eurobarometer, 2004). As a large part of people's lives are spent working, careers affect both the ability of people to make choices and their self esteem. The modern importance of work and career can explain much of human need for recognition – and can become very much part of an individual's identity.

In Britain today, unemployment is starting to rise – with London accounting for 17% of all the workplaces in the country but also suffering from the second highest rate of unemployment in England. London has more people at the high and low ends of the income scale than the rest of the country, slowly creating a US style hourglass economy. Some groups are at risk of being squeezed out of the market – their vulnerable place in the economy possibly excluding them from a powerful element of belonging. Most migrants in London earn less than the amount deemed the living/minimum wage for London by the Greater London Authority and three fifths of them receive no maternity or paternity leave. Performance in the labour market is also variable across Britain's ethnic groups – on average Indian men have better employment and pay records than white men in Britain, while black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi men fare worst. In Tower Hamlets for example, the white employment rate is 73% compared to 33% for Bangladeshi people. Evidence suggests that there is an ethnic penalty in the labour market (i.e. discrimination). However, there are other factors that influence economic integration (for example, life chances and educational attainment). In this context, economic integration is absolutely critical as a ground for belonging.

For many, fears of downward mobility are great sources of stress – across races and across social classes. Psychologists account for work place stress as a major factor in mental illness. In addition, perceived threat to jobs in vulnerable areas can easily lead to resentments and anger towards migrants. In many European countries (not just in the United Kingdom), fears of downward mobility correlate with hostility to migrants. Mary Douglas' category of 'isolates' (as discussed in the previous section), can often form 'enclaves' against threats to their status and place in society. This can occur due to the perception of threat, or the ability of political entrepreneurs. The success of far right parties in areas like Barking and Dagenham in the UK or amongst disaffected youth with poor employment prospects in former East Germany are a consequence of a 'militant' identity – whereby people project their fears outwards and mobilise against threat.

In this context, it is vital that government policies continue to tackle disadvantage and promote equal life chances. Social inequalities place people in competition with each other, and this has significant negative implications for belonging and recognition. A strong legal framework and anti discrimination policies can provide the right framework of justice and fairness from which to ground a positive sense of belonging. It is also essential to tackle economic inequalities for all groups – particularly those feeling left behind and voiceless.

4) Culture

‘It takes one day to destroy a house but to build a new one will take months, perhaps years. If we destroy our way of life to construct a new one, it will take thousands of years’ (Maasai belief)

As Britain becomes more diverse, culture will continue to play an essential role in determining people’s identity and providing key reference points. Culture not only represents a human need for differentiation but also serves a powerful social function – it gives people a common language, symbols and norms through which groups are held together. According to the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1912), if left to their own devices for a long time, individuals’ beliefs and convictions will weaken and will have to be reinforced – in this context, religion has the function of maintaining the influence and the strength of society. Rituals, according to anthropologists like Douglas (1966), Danforth (1982), Bloch & Parry (1982) and Rappaport (1999), can constitute an important social glue through which individual intentions disappear in the name of community. Not all rituals can act to unify communities – studies of rituals surrounding Rwandan genocide, for example, show how rituals might be instrumental to trigger a sense of belonging to a group by highlighting the differences and the conflict between the group and outsiders (Taylor, 1999). However, shared symbols and ceremonies can go a long way to unifying people. From formal religious rituals like masses, weddings or funerals to festivals, rites of passage, eating and dancing rituals, doing things together and recognising one another, strengthens community, social unity and hierarchy. There are many examples of this across the world ranging from tribal rites of passage to neighbourhood festivals, national celebrations (i.e. Bastille Day in Paris; 4th July in the United States).

Society can represent a significant source of belonging depending on the extent to which people see their own values, symbols, icons reflected around them. This is particularly meaningful when it comes to multiculturalism and the extent to which people can freely exercise their culture and values but also when discussing segregation and separation and the extent to which people find comfort around others who more directly share their own values, norms and symbols. Yet if shared celebrations of culture can go a long way towards making people feel they belong, a feeling that culture is being ignored, diluted and devalued can create considerable tensions and backlashes. Some young Muslims feeling that their values and beliefs are misunderstood and rejected by wider society, and the white working classes witnessing change and feeling increasingly voiceless

are just two current examples of the power of culture as an element of belonging and recognition.

In this context it is important to create a space for multiple identities to be expressed whilst recognising that there will always be areas where different groups need to negotiate and compromise. The state has a critical role in moderating these kinds of discussions.

5) Physical space

The locally distinctive character of neighbourhoods or public spaces is also extremely important as it can help people to develop a sense of belonging, identity and shared value. As Dines and Cattell (2006) suggest, places can provide opportunities for social interaction, social mixing and social inclusion, and can facilitate the development of community ties. People they interviewed in Newham, London, said that their regular visits to the street market provided a 'feel-good' factor due to the buzz of activity.

Space can encourage social interaction and can make people feel at home but in the same remit, it can be threatening and discourage mixing. No-go areas in neighbourhoods dominated by gang crime, badly lit parks in the evening, and segregated areas can have a powerful effect in making people feel threatened, diminishing their quality of life and in general limiting their sense of belonging to an area. This is not only valid in areas where segregation by race and class is a problem (for example, in Britain almost two thirds of black communities live in five urban areas – Birmingham, London, Manchester, Leeds and Bradford – with almost half living in London and 42 per cent living in the 50 most deprived districts of England as compared to 22 per cent of white communities) but also in areas where segregation by age group is becoming an obvious obstacle to community mixing. In many town centres or parks for example the elderly are marginalised either for economic reasons or because they fear becoming victims of crime (Holland *et al*, 2007).

But 'good belonging' can be supported through good design, local landmarks, common spaces and symbols. A failing identified in past social housing projects was the inclusion of spaces which had no clear ownership, fostering dereliction and conflict. Neighbourhood space can benefit from clear ownership, and accordingly from enclosure which demarcates public from private space. Intermediate kinds of spaces can contribute positively to neighbouring interactions: front gardens, porches and balconies are private but provide opportunities for interaction. They also support 'active street frontages', or what Jane Jacobs (1961) called 'eyes on the street'.

6) Politics

Politics can be an ideal venue through which people may find recognition, see themselves listened to and channel their voices. Both national and local politics can provide channels for belonging as long as this is seen by people to reflect their concerns and where leaders

are perceived to look and think like them. The scholar Bruno Frey showed that there is a strong relationship between direct democracy and greater happiness: where there are more direct democratic initiatives and referendums, for example, in Switzerland where Cantons are powerful, residents are happier. This also applies to non Swiss born residents with no voting rights.

The United Kingdom may not provide the same system as Switzerland but nonetheless it is doing well compared with some other parts of Europe. In most European countries, the representation of nationals of non-white backgrounds in national parliaments is still extremely low. While at the national level in Britain only 2.3 per cent of members of Parliament are from a non-white background, the local picture is very different. At the most local level representation amongst elected members of different communities is strong. In the London's borough of Tower Hamlets, for example, 65 per cent of councillors are from black or minority ethnic backgrounds.

While forcing representation is not the way forward, good belonging is a matter of voice. All too often conflicts, tensions and resentment happen when groups feel ignored or not listened to. Representation and flexibility in institutions still need to go a long way towards encouraging openness.

7) Safety

In the 1950s, Michael Young and Peter Willmott's well-known study of neighbourhood and community relations, *Family & Kinship in East London* (1957) found a world where 'Bethnal Greeners are not lonely people: whenever they go for a walk in the street, for a drink in the pub, or for a row on the lake in Victoria Park, they know the faces in the crowd'. The study analysed the social relations which underpinned this web of mutual recognition, support and interaction. Longstanding residency across generations, reinforced by overlapping ties of extended family and friendship, had helped to lay down a strong sense of ultra-local identity. Grandparents living a few minutes walk away helped to raise grandchildren. It was a socially homogeneous place – white, working-class, with the men employed mostly in the docks, as artisans or as manual labourers, and formal female employment was low. Private space offered few amenities and was reserved for the immediate family, but front doors were unlocked to the street, a playground not yet overtaken by cars, its territory contested in the pitched battles of childhood. Living together was a continuous, immediate and defining experience.

Today this has changed in many parts of Britain where mobility and career demands have largely eroded the strong local community ties of the past. Knowing neighbours and trusting the local community made people feel relatively safe – this is now much rarer, particularly in cities. It is hard to recreate but in general it still holds true that feeling safe and comfortable where one live remains key to people's sense of place and belonging.

According to the Home Office Citizenship Survey (Kitchen et al, 2006), people who feel they live in communities where people from different backgrounds get on were least likely to be concerned about crime and were more likely to think people in their area would intervene in the event of anti-social behaviour. According to the survey people who felt they belonged to the neighbourhood, that people in the neighbourhood pulled together to improve things and that people in the neighbourhood could be trusted were more likely to think that local people would intervene. Feelings of belonging to a neighbourhood also empowers people to act to improve the area. 83 per cent of people who felt they belonged to the neighbourhood thought people would intervene if children were spray-painting graffiti compared to sixty seven per cent of people who did not feel they belonged to the neighbourhood. This would suggest that feeling safe and having a sense of community/belonging go hand in hand. According to data from the Henley Centre Headlight Vision (2006), social class and the ability of people to choose where they want to live (and as a consequence their neighbours) also play a strong role: higher social classes are much more likely than lower social classes to feel that there is a sense of community where they live.

It is at the very local level that much of the challenge of belonging takes shape: how to enable people to feel comfortable and secure where they live and in daily interactions in the street and how to organise discussions at the local level so that people can learn to understand each other, and to get along.

8) Law

Law is the ultimate and most formal recogniser of belonging. It determines who is 'in' and who 'out', who belongs and who does not. It can make people feel proud of belonging through the acquisition of citizenship and ceremonies. It can grant rights and identities as well as take them away. As Mary Douglas argues, community should not be conceptualised as some shared essence but as a process of 'being in common'. The issue is who is to define who 'belongs' or what is to be excluded as 'out of place'. In most societies, citizenship is ultimately the formal determinant of belonging providing differentiated categories ranging from citizens, residents and second class citizens (tourists; refugees; people on short term working visas) to asylum seekers and undocumented migrants.

Being citizens gives people an initial yet essential space for belonging. As J.G.A. Pocock argues: 'What makes the citizen the highest order of being is his capacity to rule, and it follows that rule over one's equal is possible only where one's equal rules over one. Therefore the citizen rules and is ruled; citizens join each other in making decisions where each decider respects the authority of the others, and all join in obeying the decisions... they have made'. This activity of ruling and being ruled, the life of politics, is a distinctively public activity. As free participants in politics, citizens shape their own lives and thereby bring their nature to its highest fulfillment. Yet at the national level where participation is much removed from the layer of public activity, a citizen

nonetheless remains one who is entitled to be treated in certain ways, and has important responsibilities towards the rest of society.

The law and universal rights have the ability to expose hypocrisies where responsibilities are not lived out and can be capable of accommodating asymmetric deals – special rights for certain communities such as allowing Sikhs not to wear crash helmets, by making special provisions for halal foods, or by allowing special housing provision for Hasidic families – although these provisions will only work if their importance is effectively communicated to the rest of the population.

Conclusion

In general, sharing only one element of belonging will not work on its own. Surveys of British born BME communities living in the UK show that people identify more with their local area and the place of origin of their family than with Britain; surveys of white working class people show that many no longer identify with their local area. Gangs, cults or US style ghettos tend to experience very inward looking forms of belonging generally opposed to the outside world. Migrants rely in the first place on strong transnational networks of support both in and out of the country of destination. Many ethnic minorities retain multiple identities and maintain significant transnational links with kin and networks abroad – benefiting from access to global information, communication technologies and media.

However, it is important to create pathways for people to be able to go out of their local area, to interact with strangers or members of other groups and still feel that they belong. As social beings everyone needs some form of identity to feel that they are part of something bigger, to be supported, to be understood, to be part of history. A successful feeling of belonging comes from people feeling part of the economy, of politics, of their local area, of the nation. Through a more holistic feeling of recognition and belonging, people may feel more part of wider society.

In order to benefit, society should strive to enable wider forms of belonging which encompass multiple elements. Therefore, emphasis should not just be on Britishness or political participation but should strive to emphasise 'spaces for encounter' at the local level and integration of people through the labour market. Feeling left out from the economy, not identifying with other groups, not being able to access public spaces (because of fear or lack of access) can have very negative effects for people's individual experiences and can often have strong negative effects on society as a whole possibly in the form of alienation and misunderstanding. Taking into account a new framework for belonging based on a wider concept of what it means to be 'part' of society can go a long way towards achieving a more stable, balanced and inclusive Britain.

Section 3: Recommendations

'If the home, the neighbourhood and the nation are all potential spaces of belonging, this is no simple matter of disconnected, parallel processes. Each of these spaces conditions the others and the question is to understand how 'the nation and the locality invade the home' (Sibley, 1995:90) because these spaces are simultaneously tied together by media messages, by the workings of the real estate market, and by macro factors such as the immigration policies of the state and the impact of the global economy. It is these interconnections with which ultimately we need to be concerned.' (Morley, 2001: 433)

"An essential feature of social interaction is the effort to take account of the other's purposes, perceptions, intentions, and expectations by implicitly taking the role of the other on the assumption that the other has a mind like one's own, with similar kinds of purposes, perceptions, intentions, and expectations." (Kelman, 1997)

As highlighted throughout this think piece, belonging is innate to human need. However, feeling part of society, the local area, politics or the economy is a challenge for many – not always because of a lack of will but sometimes due to a lack of occasion for contact or ability to participate. Belonging and finding recognition from structures and surroundings can help people live better and happier lives, improve self esteem and can significantly help in reducing tensions and societal problems. Some of the barriers to forming and strengthening the elements of belonging could be addressed simply by applying well known design lessons aimed at enabling contact between people and at reinforcing weak ties; others by social innovation to extend the range of available options.

As highlighted in this think piece, in 21st century Britain, belonging is a lot more complicated than ever before: there are more networks to interact with; neighbourhoods are changing fast; multiple identities and global connections are more of a reality; work plays a more dominant role in people's lifestyles. To a large extent strengthening more than one element of belonging is principally a question of social choice: whether one wants to interact more with their neighbours; take part in politics; exercise their rights and responsibilities; feel pride in their status and jobs; and celebrate or share their culture. However, belonging is a need and the more clearly that individuals can see opportunities of finding recognition in places they go and people they meet and the more easily that they can take them up, the more they will be likely to do so. Belonging, in the sense of weak ties, will necessarily be structured in the first instance around brief interactions in the office or the neighbourhood, possibly leading toward common projects, activities or interests. These can also provide grounds for new kinds of solidarity. Economic belonging will have to be structured around the ability of people to see that they play an important role in society and their aspirations are not diminished by people's fears of downturn mobility. Pathways for enabling people to belong to wider circles and elements of their lives should be encouraged (and not enforced – as this will only push people towards the extremes of the spectrum of belonging in Figure II).

One important caveat is that belonging is not very amenable to large scale national policies. Small scale actions at the local level are often very important for bringing people together. For this reason, the most central condition would be to give local areas, communities or individuals the widest possible range of options and opportunities to foster a greater sense of belonging and encourage a good understanding of what can be done and why.

Social frameworks and physical environments have the potential to enable interaction and encounters in neighbourhoods, public spaces, or in institutions. The key to finding belonging and recognition is 'other people' – people to interact with, identify oneself with, share and compare values and views. Interaction plays a role in increasing understanding (when a lack of it can make people feel angry or unsafe) or providing spaces for people to meet and new ways for them to discover common interests. It also creates the conditions for relationships to be established, and for people to engage in mutual exchange, support and small collective acts. The question is: how can we support practices that encourage belonging and that are rooted in intimate or weak ties, while respecting people's differences, cultures and privacy?

We do not yet have enough evidence to understand fully the potential of enhancing belonging (beyond race, class or culture) for community relations in Britain, so the proposals made below should be treated with caution, and further research will in many cases be necessary. The ideas below follow from the discussion in this think piece and related work by the authors, but are by no means intended as a complete agenda.

Social, economic and political participation:

- **Re-engagement in politics:** Active public and local re-engagement in politics would go a long way towards providing people with a needed space for dispute, voice and power. As Stephen Coleman (2004) points out: 'Citizens of democracy...want to see an authentic relationship between speaking and being heard, input and output, touching the lever and seeing the wheel turn'. That is bound to be easiest at the very local level. For example, in areas like Slough where there is generally a high level of voter contact – this has been translated into relatively high turnouts in local elections. People expect to see their political representatives, to have their voices heard and be listened to. This requires a new politics of re-engagement at the local level, putting local people back into politics and providing them with a new sense of vision and a stake in decision making and public life. By providing a space for discussion and dispute, residents can not only find an area for channelling their hopes and ideas but also anger, fears and misperceptions which could otherwise cause alienation or make them subject to far right or extremist campaigns.
- **Leadership and young people:** Particularly when it comes to young people's role in society and the economy, poor aspirations and opportunities represent a significant challenge for integration in the labour market and belonging. Today in areas like Barking in London, one in four young people are not in education, employment

or training. Rates of mental health are also increasing amongst young people and teenagers highlighting the symptoms of a deep problem. Increasing the skills of the bottom 20% of the population and diversifying the range of skills and opportunities for young people even in the most deprived areas would go a long way towards strengthening their feeling of being part of society and protecting them from the fears of downward mobility. Moreover, a leadership vacuum was cited as a major problem for areas in the North West which experienced riots and disturbances in 2001. Dynamic and engaged leaders can play a crucial role in attracting investment both from Government and private sector in to local areas as well as in working to build greater cohesion and solidarity in local communities. New leadership programmes for young people of both white and BME background – placements and shadowing opportunities in public bodies, the voluntary sector, in local and national politics or the corporate sector as well as learning new valuable skills for the marketplace – would help significantly towards the quest for belonging and leadership.

- **Democratic engagement:** preparing the next generations for active engagement in politics, and encourage a sense of pride and duty in the common democratic heritage.
- **Quality of life central to local political agenda:** A shared sense of responsibility and values are desirable and indeed possible but only within a wider culture fostering equality of opportunities for all. People will continue to resort to identity politics if they feel that they are discriminated against or disadvantaged due to their ethnic, class or religious background. Trying to encourage people of different ethnicities to share values based upon their common needs will not work unless their needs are indeed similar. This means constructing a local political agenda where quality of life is central to discussions; where issues like better public transport, housing, health and education or job security unite residents and give them a common purpose. We could aim to cultivate a local identity where shared needs and priorities imbue a sense of belonging to place which transcends ethnic boundaries.
- **New ways to reach people:** Community leaders can be a help and a hindrance and thus alternative ways by which people can be reached and mobilised should also be explored.
- **Language barriers** can be very powerful obstacles towards belonging. An inability to speak English largely prevents people from aspiring to new jobs; communicating with others outside their immediate circle; sharing their culture; experiencing British life and customs fully. Wider opportunities for people to use the English language and interact in the social space as well as wider, engaging provision, and practical help should be encouraged.
- **Participation** in local/national politics, the voluntary sector as well as in the labour market should be encouraged and supported. People can identify with politics only if they see their interests represented and that political leaders resemble them in the

way they speak or they act or the values they represent. In the same way participation in the labour market should be encouraged across class and race divides. This could be enacted through wider access to employment programmes targeted to the needs of the local area and training and opportunities for volunteering. In the case of new skilled migrants, work experience schemes in the professions they were previously established in could be one way to help in the fight against underemployment, and for example, prevent doctors becoming cab drivers etc

- **Economic integration:** there is the need for strategic partnerships involving the public and private sector as well as civil society. Only joined up strategies across different levels of government and the economy can hope to make a sustained difference to people's life chances and social mobility.

Social interaction:

- The social institutions of family, kinship and identity once provided firm and straightforward bases and grounds for belonging, helping people to come to know one another and providing the basis of mutual trust. The secondary associations that sprang up in their wake – from gardening to book clubs – often failed to sustain themselves given the competitive pressures from private life and the state. However, given the strong and possibly increasing public interest in the very local level, it is worth revisiting what social architecture might help support local belonging and collective action in the new environment of weak ties, diversity, individualism and competitive demands on time.
- **Neighbourhood events** such as street parties, festivals, fêtes, shared national sporting event or collective celebrations of holidays can help people to get to know their neighbours and build a feeling of community spirit. There is also a question of how commuters can be more closely involved in their area, perhaps through weekend activities, and through opportunities for flexible and home workers to meet each other during the day in a café or a local resource centre.
- **Re-use of some of the many derelict buildings** across Britain for local activities like cultural arts and events; recurrent local fairs; exhibition centres.
- **Space for inter-generational contact** should be encouraged. This can be done through local activities like neighbourhoods' media or local campaigns or events aimed at the wider community. It can also be favoured through the organisation of public spaces for mixed use – parks, street corners and others.
- **Social opportunities:** Eating and dancing are long standing rituals that help to celebrate togetherness, create an informal environment for breaking boundaries of language, culture or fear. Tottenham's 'Meet the Neighbours' scheme for example is very successful in increasing interaction and understanding through culinary events from its diverse communities from all over the world. There is scope for more events

at the local level that involve residents in activities, encouraging dialogue, and pride in their local area.

While the character of physical space will at best act as a platform to facilitate belonging, badly designed or poorly maintained space can become a major obstacle – it can make people feel unsafe or prevent contact between groups. Design on its own cannot solve social problems, individual anxieties or lack of contact but it can facilitate encounter. Some suggestions include:

- The custodianship and maintenance of the quality of public space is a challenge to which there are different responses, ranging from CCTV to neighbourhood wardens or friends' groups. But commonly owned spaces like gated alleyways, squares or cul-de-sacs can also play a part in supporting very local neighbouring. Cul-de-sacs in particular are in great demand with home-buyers, though there is a trade-off here, as ease of movement should also be valued: strangers and passers through can help to keep streets populated and safe, and a **permeable and legible** network of streets and public spaces is necessary if people are to be able to walk through neighbourhoods with ease, safety and pleasure.
- **Spaces for social encounter** are a key condition for neighbouring to take place, and can take many forms – from parks to health centres, from street-corners to hairdressers. Public and open spaces with a variety of purposes can become obstacles if they fall into dereliction, but where they are well-designed and maintained they are a key environment for neighbouring and for attracting families and children in urban centres (Silverman et al, 2006). Local shops, pubs, cafes, markets and playgrounds where people can interact informally do not necessarily encourage new meetings, but can reinforce already existing connections. 'Neighbourhood hubs', ideally flexible and multi-use buildings which may bring together public services with community space and business, can provide a focus for neighbourhood interaction.
- **Other interventions:** Traffic-calming, pedestrianised areas, wider pavements, seating, public toilets, public art, trees, better signing, street-sweeping, footway repairs, graffiti-removal and lighting can all encourage people to spend more time in their neighbourhoods and to feel safer and prouder.

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