Making multiculturalism work:

enabling practical action across deep difference

David Barclay

"a timely and important piece of work"
David Lammy MP

THE CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY CENTRE

Contending Modernities

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Theos

"*Making Multiculturalism Work* is a timely and important piece of work. It is refreshing to read a report that focuses on practical multiculturalism, moving away from theory and looking at how relational politics adds meaning to theoretical discussion of this challenging issue. This is a report that does not shy away from discussing the implications of practical multiculturalism for how political parties are organised, and how they connect people. In discussing what motivates people to public action, the author demonstrates an understanding of a social cohesion that goes beyond a discussion of identity and community, in presenting the need of a public realm that is shared by all."

David Lammy MP

"*Making Multiculturalism Work* is an attempt to do just what the title promises, in this context of an idea in crisis. Debates about Europe, Islam, Englishness, and the West make its contribution both timely and significant accordingly. Picking up the pressing question 'What can hold a multicultural society together?', the report provides a new inflection by focusing not on theories but on practices. The emphasis is on 'political friendships' forged pragmatically as a basis for shared action. In this way, the report avoids getting tangled up in distracting theoretical debates and gets right to where the action is. Anyone interested in the successful expression of multiculturalism in action should read this report and welcome it for the practical contribution it makes to a fractious debate at a crucial moment. The report brings multiculturalism down to earth and is all the more welcome for it."

Professor Adam Dinham, Faith and Civil Society Unit, Goldsmiths, University of London

"*Making Multiculturalism Work* refreshingly emphasises the practical reality of people working together across religious and cultural differences as a huge source of strength for our society. It rightly contests the elitist view that people and organisations need to prove their progressive credentials to be considered acceptable as partners, and challenges us all to be open and honest about our preconceptions and assumptions. To those who lament and those who celebrate the reported demise of 'multiculturalism', David Barclay points to a way of engaging which is more widespread, more invigorating, and more effective than any '-ism': the core human practice of forming friendships."

Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave, Bishop of Woolwich

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David Barclay

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For further information and subscription details please contact:

Theos
Licence Department
77 Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 2EZ

T 020 7828 7777
E hello@theosthinktank.co.uk
www.theosthinktank.co.uk

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executive summary

In the light of the widespread rejection of state multiculturalism, this report advocates a new approach to living together, grounded not in theory but in practice. Although there is a place for multicultural theorising and attempts to articulate what comprises British values, the report argues that it is in localised 'political friendships' that people learn to live and work together. We need to focus less on orthodoxy or right thinking and more on orthopraxy – right doing.

Making multiculturalism work studies two current initiatives – community organising and Near Neighbours – as examples of how 'political friendships' are formed and sustained within communities that are marked by deep diversity.

Drawing on a range of interviews with participants, it argues that ordinary relationships across religious and cultural difference are the key to addressing the malaise of the public square and pursuing a meaningful 'multicultural settlement'. These are forged not by a widespread adherence to abstract national values or an idea of what multiculturalism should look like, but rather by common action. Everyday side-by-side activity is often more productive than face-to-face discussion, however well meaning.

In fostering this common action the report argues that the 'progressive test', whereby groups are required to show that they are sufficiently politically progressive in order to merit a 'place at the table', is both inherently illiberal and counter-productive, killing off the potential for friendship across difference and encouraging retrenchment rather than transformation. In its place, the report recommends a 'relational test', whereby the central criterion for participation is that an organisation must show that it is willing and able to work with people from different backgrounds and perspectives.

Making multiculturalism work further argues that, in sustaining these 'political friendships', we must let people be open and honest about their motivations and objectives. This means, in particular, an end to the discouragement or suppression of public articulations of religious motivation. This is partly because "attempts to find rules that are neutral between the two sides [religious and secular] are pretty hopeless"

(Richard Rorty), and partly because any friendship that is deaf to people's core identity, values and motivations is destined to be superficial.

The report recognises that such openness can be challenging, leading to accusations of insincerity or exclusivity. It can also open up areas of irreducible and irreconcilable difference, and these 'wedge issues' *may* need to be filtered out of formal collaboration.

This acknowledged, however, the direction of travel should be towards a holistic public square in which there is no artificial divide between the private and the public, and where people are free to articulate and share 'deep' public identities.

Overall, *Making multiculturalism work* argues that it is this combination of willingness to work with others, alongside openness to sharing core motivations, that is key to forming 'political friendships' and thereby rescuing and reforming multiculturalism for the 21st century.

introduction and methodology

We have got used to hearing that multiculturalism is in crisis.

Unfortunately, however, there has been a dearth of practical alternatives which could be more successful in bringing people together from different backgrounds. This report starts with the assumption that we need a more realistic exploration of how people are already being brought together in the midst of increased plurality. It draws its lessons not from theoretical debates, but from the experiences of those taking part in projects that are working out how to build relationships across religious and cultural difference.

The report will argue that these projects are able to respond creatively to the challenges of difference by encouraging the development of 'political friendships'. These relationships are formed through diverse individuals and communities cooperating on common problems, often at a very local level, without subscribing to arbitrary conditions of public engagement such as adopting 'neutral' language or identities. It will go on to argue that the development of such 'political friendships' might be key not just to finding a constructive response to increasing diversity, but also to renewing and reshaping our public life more broadly. Ultimately, the question of how we respond to difference is a central challenge of how we shape our public and civic life in general.

Whilst unashamedly entering an argument about how public life should be remoulded, this report does not repeat the mistake made by others of remaining purely theoretical and outside the real experience of ordinary people. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 20 individuals in different parts of Britain from a wide variety of religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds.[1] The thread holding these interviewees together was that they have all been involved in two of the most important current examples of 'practical multiculturalism': community organising and Near Neighbours. The interviews lasted on average around 45 minutes and explored, amongst other topics, the reasons interviewees were involved in their project, whether and how their work enabled them to build meaningful relationships, and the way their project handled faith and other fundamental motivations. A small number of interviews were also carried out with academics who specialise in areas of multiculturalism and faith in public life.

Community organising (CO) brings civil society institutions such as faith groups, schools and charitable groups together to work on issues of the common good in their local communities. Citizens UK is the oldest and largest proponents of the Alinsky School of community organising in Britain, having launched in 1989.[2] In terms of multiculturalism, one commentator has noted that participants in its training programme claim that it both "celebrates diversity" and "unites communities", whilst another, on visiting a public 'accountability assembly', explained that:

> "the turnout was impressive, but also the diversity. There were school groups, mosques, churches, students, university faculties and race-based organisations. Sat next to me were a group of elders from an East End mosque, a university society and a Chinese immigrants support-group."

This unity across diversity made the event "quite simply one of the most extraordinary pieces of political theater [sic] I've ever witnessed."[3]

Near Neighbours (NN) is a £5 million Government initiative which was established in 2011 and aims to "bring people together in religiously and ethnically diverse communities, creating friendships, building relationships of trust and helping people to transform their neighbourhoods together".[4] The main platform for this is a small grants fund designed to "help community groups of different faiths, or none, to create events or projects that foster social interaction and social action".[5] The programme operates in East London, Leicester, Birmingham and Bradford, all of which are areas with the greatest levels of diversity and so the greatest need for increased multicultural engagement. Along with community organising then this makes Near Neighbours a good test case for exploring a more practically focused conversation on generating unity across diversity.

The report begins with an examination of the 'crisis of multiculturalism' and an exploration of some of the reasons why alternative academic and political approaches have failed – specifically, a tendency to emphasise theoretical engagements and a failure to pay sufficient attention to a weakening of public and civic life overall.

Chapters two to four will then use the experiences of interviewees to draw out some of the key 'habits' needed for the pursuit of 'political friendships' across difference, with the experiences of community organising and Near Neighbours as key test cases for how such skills might be encouraged and how such activity might challenge the political status quo.

Chapter two will focus on the importance of working together, suggesting an improvement in people's capacity to take part in public projects as a crucial first step towards joint action with others. This chapter will then examine the challenges of

promoting a habit of working together, suggesting the need for 'relational' rather than 'progressive' tests for possible partners and the importance of a local focus in order to spread the benefits of 'political friendships' as widely as possible.

Chapter three will address the significance of talking openly, advocating the habit of sharing core motivations as another vital tool for developing 'political friendships' across difference. Whilst acknowledging the challenge of discussing matters of fundamental difference, this chapter will argue for a post-secular openness to faith as a valid inspiration for public action.

Chapter four will show how pursuing the skills of working together and talking openly could reshape civic life. In particular it will explore the way that 'deep' public identities which articulate people's core motivations defy attempts to continue a neat division between the 'public' and 'private' spheres. Such a blurring suggests the need for a new 'holistic' model of the public square which can combine deep personal engagement with an ability to work with others on common concerns.

Finally, the conclusion will seek to draw out the lessons of a more practical multiculturalism for all those interested in seeing unity come from diversity.

It should be noted from the outset that this is not Theos' first foray into the disputed realms of multiculturalism and the shape of public life. This report builds on the work of Jonathan Chaplin (in particular *Talking God* and *Multiculturalism: a Christian Retrieval*), whilst seeking to add to it some of the details of grass-roots experiences and thereby advance the conversation which Chaplin sought to begin by asking "what…can hold a multicultural society together over the long haul?"[6] It should also be acknowledged that the author has a professional interest in both community organising and Near Neighbours through his organisation the Contextual Theology Centre. In order, therefore, to pursue a critical analysis of these projects, interviewees were sought with a range of views and experiences. This included former participants in community organising who have decided to leave the Citizens UK alliance.

definitions

In any study of multiculturalism it is important to be clear from the start exactly what is meant by the term. On one level, using the language of multiculturalism is simply a way of describing the reality that in modern Britain a myriad of different cultures, beliefs and traditions are constantly in the process of interacting and often bumping up against each other.

However, where 'multiculturalism' is used in this report, it will refer to the more 'technical' meaning of the term unless otherwise signified. This is the one which Tariq Modood has summarised as "the political accommodation of minorities formed by immigration to western countries" and has also been called 'state multiculturalism'.[7] It therefore refers to a principle of public policy towards ethnic and religious minorities which, as Jonathan Chaplin has noted, has focused largely on how to achieve 'equal treatment' of individuals and communities.[8]

It is the argument of this report that we need to reframe multiculturalism in more practical terms as a set of ideas and practices which aim to build meaningful relationships across difference. Where necessary this will be referred to as 'practical multiculturalism' to distinguish it from the current use and understanding of the term.

introduction and methodology – references

1 These interviewees were chosen both because of their diversity in background and also because they spanned a variety of roles in Near Neighbours and Citizens UK, from paid staff to institutional/project leaders to ordinary participants. Quotes from interviewees have been anonymised except where they belong to specialist academics or those with responsibility for designing Near Neighbours or Citizens UK.

2 Saul Alinsky made his name working in the ghettoes of Chicago in the 1950s and eventually established the Industrial Areas Foundation, which is now a sister organisation of Citizens UK. In a number of books, including *Reveille for Radicals* (University of Chicago Press, 1946) and *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Random House, 1971), Alinsky codified his techniques which form the basis of the broad-based community organising now practiced by Citizens UK and others.

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1

multicultural malaise, democratic deficit

> "[There is] a seeming antinomy at the heart of contemporary western society: that is, how to simultaneously foster social cohesion and respect diversity."[1]

Given the failure of multiculturalism as it is currently understood to produce the 'cohesion' desired by policy-makers, it is hardly surprising that academics and politicians have gone searching for new paradigms or interpretations. However, by focusing on orthodoxy (right thinking) rather than orthopraxy (right doing), they have been unable to connect with everyday life and so have failed to address the deeper problem of the withering public square. In the light of this, new tools are needed to reframe the debate on multiculturalism and assess the skills needed to form relationships with people of very different backgrounds.

the problems of multiculturalism and the failure of new paradigms

Even a cursory glance at the current debate suggests that the credibility of multiculturalism has been deeply undermined by its inability to achieve a sense of shared identity and purpose. In a speech in Munich in February 2011 the Prime Minister David Cameron attacked "the doctrine of state multiculturalism" for having "allowed the weakening of our collective identity".[2] In doing so he was hardly pushing against the tide of academic opinion, but rather reflecting the impact of a decade of doubt which started with Ted Cantle's famous 2001 report on the Bradford riots warning that communities were in danger of living "parallel lives".[3] Many people have now come to believe, as former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has put it, that multiculturalism "was a fine, even noble idea in its time. It was designed to make ethnic and religious minorities feel more at home in society…but there has been a price to pay, and it grows year by year… [It] has led not to integration but to segregation."[4]

This intuition has led academics and politicians on a journey to find a new framework or a way of understanding multiculturalism that can restore a sense of common identity and endeavour, but their efforts so far have resulted in very few tangible successes.

The academic approach is epitomised by Ted Cantle, whose recent work is titled *Interculturalism – the new era of cohesion and diversity*.[5] Cantle's critique of the multicultural settlement is that it has tended to promote "essentialist" identities and that "a cadre of single-identity community leaders…has been created over the years" who "continue to promote their 'difference', with the formal and tacit support of the state, rather than create a broader sense of commonality".[6] In this work he claims that "if societies are to become more cohesive and to avoid being riven by cultural and other divisions, they will need a new paradigm. It is suggested here that 'interculturalism' can fulfil that need."[7]

Even a cursory glance at the current debate suggests that the credibility of multiculturalism has been deeply undermined by its inability to achieve a sense of shared identity and purpose.

Interculturalism is defined as being about "the creation of a culture of openness which effectively challenges the identity politics and entrenchment of separate communities" as well as:

> "a dynamic process in which there will be some tensions and conflicts, as a necessary part of societal change in which people are able to positively envision ideas for multicultural and multifaith societies and where diversity and globalisation are recognised as permanent features of society, to be embraced, rather than feared."[8]

However much one is persuaded by Cantle's construction of 'interculturalism', his work reveals a more fundamental point about the kind of solutions sought by many academics to the problems of multiculturalism as it is currently understood. For the idea of creating a new paradigm to replace multiculturalism suggests a 'trickle down' theory of social change in which the only people whose thinking or practice is worth altering are those intellectual and political elites with the power to alter funding patterns or decisions about different kinds of representation (at his most practical Cantle asks, for example, "should we have a new tick box for 'not identified by any identity' or even, 'member of the human race'?").[9]

Without wanting to claim that such interventions are without constructive value, their weakness is immediately apparent from the reviews of Cantle's contribution, many of which note the inherent vagueness of his proposed solution and the slim possibilities of this new intellectual framework revolutionising everyday encounters. Policy advisor John Perry said:

> "whilst it's easy to develop a feel-good feeling about interculturalism, it's awfully difficult to pin down exactly what it means…terms like multiculturalism and interculturalism may be the subject of detailed academic debate, but can the differences be encapsulated in straightforward ways that are capable of being taken forward…?"[10]

Whilst some politicians seem to have joined the search for the holy grail of a new paradigm to replace multiculturalism, others have taken a more active approach to the task of creating unity out of deep diversity. Unfortunately, such efforts have also largely failed, with the focus too often on defining abstract national identities that individuals are expected to opt into and therefore share.

In the early 2000s, Tony Blair attempted to define and promote 'British values' as a way of generating a stronger sense of common ground across the many different communities of the UK. In a speech to regional newspaper executives he said that "standing up for our country means…standing up for the core British values of fair play, creativity, tolerance and an outward-looking approach to the world".[11] Gordon Brown continued on this theme in 2005 by stating that "we can find common qualities and common values that have made Britain the country it is. Our belief in tolerance and liberty which shines through British history. Our commitment to fairness, fair play and civic duty."[12] Cameron's Munich speech was in this lineage, arguing that "we need a clear sense of shared national identity", and that "it's that identity – that feeling of belonging in our countries, that I believe is the key to achieving true cohesion".[13]

These were all well-intentioned contributions, but the problems of central government trying to advance a coherent programme of defining national values and thereby bringing marginalised groups into public life are manifold. Beyond the obvious difficulties of an increasingly unpopular political establishment deciding the values of the nation lies the almost insurmountable challenge for central government of agreeing what constitutes Britishness without ending up with a nebulous set of buzz-words which could be ascribed with equal validity to almost any western country. As a previous Theos report argued:

> "commitment to the basic civic values of the state is essential and non-negotiable if we are to live together in peace…however, to turn to it to help build social cohesion and foster civil society is to load it with more weight than it alone can bear…it is good neighbours, rather than good patriots, who make the best citizens."[14]

In other words, we can't begin to address what it is to belong to a nation unless we know what it is to belong to a city, neighbourhood or street.

The problem with both of these academic and political approaches in failing to develop theoretical concepts with concrete applications was a recurring theme of the research for this report. As Jane Wills from the Queen Mary's University argued:

> "multiculturalism has become an elite discourse, it's what the elite tell people we should have, so the whole language of multiculturalism is kind of tainted with this do-goody liberal elite thinking…that is really unhelpful because that is not how people experience their everyday life."
>
> *CO participant, university (16)*

the withering of the public square

This discontent with the current discourse on multiculturalism suggests the need for a wider view which takes into account the increasing malaise of the public square, of which the failure of multiculturalism to generate unity across diversity is but a part.

Over the past half century, fundamental public institutions such as political parties, trades unions and faith groups have all seen a rapid decline in membership. In 2010, for example, only around 1% of the British population was a member of one of the three main political parties, down from 3.8% in 1983 and nowhere near the giddy heights of the 1950s when the Conservative Party alone had nearly three million members.[15] In a similar vein, trades union membership has halved since the 1980s and fallen below six million for the first time since the 1940s.[16] Church attendance figures show exactly the same pattern, halving from over 10% of the population in 1980 to just over 5% today.[17]

This erosion of membership from traditional public institutions has been compounded by a growing culture and language of consumerism which has now seeped into political discourse to such an extent that notions of citizenship are often limited to understandings of 'choice' rather than any more active forms of participation.[18] Scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Sheldon Wolin have lamented this 'post-democratic' situation in which the market-state has substituted active citizenship and broad-based movements for legal proceduralism and consumerist engagement, often supported and encouraged by political scientists under the banner of public choice theory.[19] Robert Putnam has famously sought to evidence this decline in civic engagement through the concept of 'social capital', which he argues has decreased in all its forms since the 1950s.[20] Whilst Putnam's main focus was the United States, research in Britain has echoed his claims, with one report in 2008 arguing that "neighbourhoods in every part of the UK have become more socially fragmented" in the last 30 years.[21]

Whilst this gloomy analysis of the state of Britain's civic square has become more and more mainstream, however, the implications for multiculturalism have rarely, if ever, been explored in depth. This is a crucial oversight, for the disappearance of large-scale participatory forms of citizenship or public engagement are not only a political but also a social disaster, allowing patterns of 'parallel lives' to solidify and preventing opportunities for people to learn the skills needed to make friends with those from different backgrounds. Where neighbours might have previously interacted in a number of different places – from trades unions to voluntary associations or local places of worship – now there are fewer opportunities for meaningful relationships to be formed which cross boundaries of belief, tradition and culture. The loss of such infrastructure has unquestionably contributed to a disappearance of the 'soft skills' needed to make connections across difference possible.

the importance of 'political friendships' in creating practical multiculturalism

Politicians and political theorists have belatedly begun to respond to this issue of the fractured public square. David Cameron's flagship 'Big Society' project seems to contain an analysis that the revitalisation of the civic sphere is the necessary precondition for more positive social relationships, though the government's emphasis on austerity and problems with communication seem to have hampered attempts to turn this ideal into reality.[22] From a very different political perspective, the academic and friend of Ed Miliband, Marc Stears, has also sought to tackle the same problem, describing his remedy as 'everyday democracy'.[23] This, he argues, means:

> "a society in which we continuously forge new, deep, and powerful relationships with those with whom we live. It offers a politics in which we discover shared goals even with those with whom we usually disagree. It builds a nation in which we overcome the deep tensions that always threaten to divide us."[24]

Looking from a primarily governmental and structural perspective, he outlines his belief in a recent IPPR pamphlet that:

> "such relationships need:
>
> - Places to be developed
> - Time to be built
> - Organisation to protect them
> - Power to put their results into action"[25]

Such conclusions are hard to argue with, and it is to be hoped that they can soon be turned into a programme for meaningful reform. What is badly needed to compliment this approach, however, and what is offered by this report, is to look from the perspective of ordinary people and ask what kind of citizens are needed to rebuild the public square and to forge new and deeper relationships across difference. Such an approach can connect the emerging work on rebuilding the public square with the somewhat deadlocked discussion on multiculturalism in a way that can shed light on both topics.

In this task the work of the American scholar Danielle Allen on 'political friendships' is of great benefit.[26] Arguing that "the inhabitants of a polity have a shared life", Allen contends that:

> "Political friendship begins from this recognition about what we share with the people who live around us and in the same polity. It moves from this recognition of a shared horizon of experience not to a blind trust in one's fellow citizens but rather to a second recognition that a core citizenly responsibility is to prove oneself trustworthy to fellow citizens."[27]

Relationships built on this recognition are not quite the same as traditional understandings of friendship, for Allen explains:

> "I do not argue that we should all just be friends, nor do I argue that each of us should seek some human commonality that binds us even to strangers, and base our relationships to them on that. [Political] Friendship is not an emotion, but a practice: a set of hard-won, complicated habits used to bridge differences of personality, experience and aspiration".[28]

Although writing in an American context, Allen's key insight applies equally well in the UK, namely that a cohesive society is not in the end an abstract goal pursued through an intellectual exercise in conforming to an ideal or discovering sameness, but rather a relational process of working together in spite of differences. Such a process requires not just a suitable social and political infrastructure but also a particular set of habits or skills which cannot simply be assumed, for as academics have noted, "the ability to participate as a citizen in a political community demands qualities and skills that require *development*".[29]

This report will therefore use the experiences of ordinary people working across difference to explore what these 'hard-won, complicated habits' might be, how they can be fostered and encouraged, and what the results might be for the shape of the public square. In doing so it is hoped that a more practical conversation might be advanced about the future of multiculturalism which is based on better practice rather than new ideas.

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2

working together

> "Solidarity is best built through action and working together through shared issues, not sitting in rooms and talking about things."
>
> *CO participant, university (16)*

To begin to address the problems of cohesion through the lens of political friendship we must ask how, in the absence of meaningful relationships across deep difference, such encounters can be created. In this regard, the importance of common action was a constant theme in the interviews for this research, with almost all interviewees expressing a belief that working together was more powerful than simply having 'dialogue'. One church leader explained that when taking part in common action:

> "you're creating history together…when you're working with people like that it kind of brings out different dimensions of who you are and you're opening up a little bit more about why you want to do it."
>
> *CO participant, church (8)*

Another explained the situation he saw in Shoreditch, East London, saying:

> "you've got very diverse communities working together you know, black Caribbean and African and white and Bengali mums and Turkish/Kurdish communities and people are all acting together around a concern about poor housing and actually that's how you forge strong relationships; it's through the action that those strong relationships are forged."
>
> *Professional community organiser (1)*

Such an insight has also been a significant theme for a number of social and political commentators in recent years. Most notable has been Jonathan Sacks, who in his book *The Home We Build Together* argued that "to turn a group of individuals into a covenantal nation, they must build something together", and that "sometimes side-by-side – working together – is more effective than face-to-face – talking together."[1]

This argument seems to have had a significant influence over government thinking, as evidenced by the Department for Communities and Local Government 2008 report *Face to Face and Side by Side: a framework for partnership in our multifaith society.*[2]

the habit of public action

Clearly, then, the need for joint projects across difference has become a widely recognised factor in multicultural contexts. What seems to have been often overlooked, however, is that in our 'post-democratic' context, the skills and confidence to achieve things in public cannot be taken for granted, but must instead be developed and encouraged before common action can become a reality. This means that helping people to develop a habit of public action is a crucial first step in encouraging the kind of collective work that will lead to political friendships being formed.

Near Neighbours and community organising have both recognised this need to develop ordinary people's ability to take part in projects as a vital step in building alliances across difference. Paul Hackwood, the Chairman of the Church Urban Fund and one of the architects of Near Neighbours, explained that the programme was built on a belief that "it is absolutely imperative that individuals are given the capacity to develop the skill set that they need, the confidence that they need and to have the financial capacity to be able to achieve things." (*NN staff, interview 20)*

Such a focus translates into a hands-off grants policy which encourages participants to take responsibility by refusing to dictate the types of activity that will or will not be funded, and offering no guidelines on how projects must be run. Instead, the only criteria are that the projects 'create association', are 'specifically local' and are 'small, quick and transformative'. As well as providing financial capacity, Near Neighbours also runs specific training sessions to help people develop skills like fundraising and project management, all of which are designed to create individuals capable of public action.

These efforts seem, from anecdotal evidence, to be having a positive effect on the ability of participants to take meaningful roles in grass-roots projects. One project leader explained that "I know I can do it [run the project], but I'm very mindful of trying to help other people take responsibility for it, whereas some of the other people who have similar backgrounds to me would just take over", and that "it's not just about getting it done its about the process for me and to carry people along and for them to own it." *(NN project leader, interview 3)* Several projects have seen participants create spin-off projects from their funded work, with a mums' group in East London now jogging together and a group of fathers in a 'dads and kids' project setting up a football team. Such evidence suggests that Near Neighbours has successfully increased people's capacity to initiate

new projects, as well as pointing to the facilitation and funding of people's own ideas and passions as a more effective strategy for developing their confidence and skills, rather than simply giving them ready-made projects to get involved with or run.

Citizens UK has a very similar focus on helping people to act on their own interests as a key catalyst for building political friendships. Indeed, the charitable aim of London Citizens, a regional branch of Citizens UK, is to "develop the capacity and skills of the members…to participate more fully in society".[3] In order to do this, Citizens UK runs regular two-day and six-day training programmes for their member institutions which are billed as aiming to help people "learn new ways to improve your effectiveness in public life and to bring about positive change".[4] One of the most important themes discussed in this training is power, which is defined simply as "the ability to act". By differentiating between 'power over' (or 'dominant power') and 'power with' (or 'relational power'), Citizens UK encourages participants to view power more positively and to develop their own power by understanding their goals and building relationships with others around shared aims.

Again, this focus on developing people's capacity to act seems to have translated into the lived experiences of those taking part in community organising. A local councillor, who has seen the process both from 'inside' and 'outside', having participated in the living wage campaign but also been lobbied by a local London Citizens group, described organising as "trying to make politics real for ordinary people" by "helping people take power for themselves, helping people develop a voice, get heard." *(CO participant and councillor, interview 14)* This was echoed by a professional organiser, who explained:

> "I think what appealed to me about organising was the fact that really it was about real people and developing leaders and finding issues from the grass roots, and finding a way of making real people being able to play a part in democracy that I felt lots of the sort of local authority structures around participation and community development never really offered."
>
> *Professional community organiser (1)*

Whilst the experiences of Citizens UK and Near Neighbours both bear out the argument that individual capacity-building needs to precede common action, this does not necessarily mean that developing the habit of public action needs to be a purely individualised process. For in both community organising and Near Neighbours the context for developing people's abilities to act in public is almost always a plural one. In Near Neighbours, for example, all projects must involve more than one religious group, and so participants learn how to create or lead an initiative along with others from very different backgrounds. In a similar fashion, Citizens UK training is always marked by

significant diversity, with participants often coming from a number of different faith institutions and representing a wide range of ethnic and cultural traditions. Thus, the lessons for participants on two-day or six-day training are always partly about how to learn and work effectively with others rather than simply how to change one's own way of thinking and acting.

working with disagreement

Of course, one of the key issues raised by developing this habit of public action is how to discern suitable partners for common work. This is an area in which many of the loudest proponents of multicultural engagement suddenly find great difficulty in matching rhetoric to reality.

There is a deep irony at the heart of the 'progressive' political movement that whilst outwardly championing tolerance and diversity, many of its adherents are, in fact, deeply judgemental and restrictive in who they will engage in public action with.

There is a deep irony at the heart of the 'progressive' political movement that whilst outwardly championing tolerance and diversity, many of its adherents are, in fact, deeply judgemental and restrictive in who they will engage in public action with. As a result, many of the parties and institutions who seem to be at the forefront of championing minority rights are often themselves hugely monocultural (the Liberal Democrats, for example, have not a single representative of a black or minority ethnic community amongst their 57 MPs). The root of this problem is illustrated well by the tension surrounding working with faith groups. In an article on the popular Labourlist website titled "Labour needs to stand up to some faith groups on equality issues", Kristin Hay used the analogy of a developing friendship to describe the relationship between the Labour Party and religious organisations, arguing:

> "you begin by finding the things that you agree on, and build up respect. As your relationship grows, you find areas where you disagree, but because you respect that person, you accept them as a friend despite these views."[5]

However, Hay then claims:

> "the question for me is, would I be a friend with someone who thinks my sexuality, or right to access to contraception or abortion is inherently wrong. I would not. Why are making these exceptions seen as not a problem when we deal with faith groups?"[6]

This seems a truly extraordinary view of friendship, for if taken to its logical conclusion it would rule out the possibility of being friends with anyone who disagrees on anything of fundamental importance (i.e. ultimately we should only be friends not only with people who like us but with people who *are* like us). Sadly, however, this is far from an isolated attempt to categorise institutions or people as so unpalatable as to be automatically outside the fold of public engagement. Indeed, such an approach often permeates the world of think tanks and policy advisory bodies, leading to publications like Policy Exchange's report "Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups", which lists nine categories of people or groups with whom the Government "must not engage."[7]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this fear that engaging with certain religious groups might compromise the integrity of participants or legitimise 'regressive' beliefs is also discernible in some attitudes towards Near Neighbours and community organising. One of the biggest proponents of this critique has been Sukhwant Dhaliwal, the former leader of Southall Black Sisters and a PhD student at Goldsmiths University. In a lecture for the Open University she argued that where Citizens UK is concerned, "if you're an organisation that can turn out large numbers of people to demonstrations and you can pay dues, then you're in".[8] Dhaliwal argues that this has led to a situation in which "there are an array of religious organisations involved in that alliance…East London mosque are the right-leaning Muslim organisation in there, the Catholic Church are probably quite problematic as well".[9]

This suggestion that working with 'non-progressive' religious groups is somehow inherently dangerous has been echoed by others in relation to the government's integration strategy, of which Near Neighbours plays a key part. In an article for the National Secular Society, Nahla Mahmoud has described herself as "absolutely outraged reading the integration policy", arguing that "we need to be very careful promoting faith and favouring these groups" because "some communities see religion as an [sic] complete identity and a secure place to belong and use religion as an alternative to the exposure to British culture and the real challenges of integration".[10]

The problem with such an approach is that by precluding any possibility of building political friendships with those considered 'beyond engagement', large sections of society (and in particular religious groups) are condemned to a position of isolation. Compounding this issue is the lack of evidence that 'progressive tests' are in any way effective in transforming the undesirable behaviours or beliefs of those classed as unsuitable for partnership. Rather than incentivising 'better' behaviour, it seems likely that such snubs only serve to embolden exactly the more conservative or reactionary

forces which are deemed to be problematic in the first place, leading to further segregation and retrenchment.

If Citizens UK and Near Neighbours are the focus of criticism from a 'progressive test' perspective, they are also pioneering an alternative approach which could be described as a 'relational test' for groups wanting to take part in their activities. The only criterion for potential Near Neighbours participants is that they must prove they are willing and able to work with people from a different faith tradition to their own. Indeed "Creat[ing] *First Encounters* between people of different faith and ethnic communities" is one of three key criteria used by Near Neighbours for funding, and Paul Hackwood even went so far as to say that "as long as they are committed to working with others, Near Neighbours would welcome with open arms groups that others probably wouldn't dare to engage with". *(NN staff, interview 20)*

Citizens UK has a similar basis for choosing members, namely whether they will be able to work in a diverse alliance. Dhaliwal's claim that ability to pay dues is the only test of membership is not accurate, for new members of Citizens UK also have to sign a 'letter of understanding' upon joining. That letter contains a number of expected actions on the part of the member organisations, including the requirement that:

> "each London Citizens member institution should be relational in all that they do and stand out as friendly and inclusive in their neighbourhood. We are judged by what we do, not what we say. They should feel responsible for the wellbeing of their local community by reaching out to their neighbours in pursuit of the common good."[11]

Indeed, several interviewees talked about this ability to work with others in the alliance as a key test for possible new partners in their particular area. One spoke of how "I would only recruit organisations that I felt could be part of a broad-based organisation, [and] could share common values with other organisations." *(Professional community organiser, interview 1)* He also stated his belief that "that willingness to find a shared agenda is also the thing that attracts people to it." *(Professional community organiser, interview 1)*

Such an approach has been advocated in other spheres by Andy Hull and Ian Kearns, who have argued that:

> "We do not need dogmatic prescription at a national level proscribing partnership work on the ground. Radicalisation is a fundamentally personal process. The choice as to whom to engage should be left to professional practitioners in

> accountable public bodies who know the local characters. Disengagement should be a line for us to retreat behind, not start from."[12]

Certainly the argument that relational engagement leads to more positive change than drawing strict 'progressive' boundaries seems to be gathering evidence. Near Neighbours projects have included a number of what might normally be considered unlikely partnerships, including a conservative evangelical church working with HIV-positive refugees in Leicester and a group of Muslim, Christian and atheist students in Newham discussing sexual health. As one project leader said, such partnerships are important because "my kids are mixed in with kids from different backgrounds, and if I want my kids to be seeing that this is something that is sustainable, they have to be seeing me doing it, because that's how they learn that this is OK." (*NN project leader, interview 3)*

In Citizens UK the key testing point has been in relation to the East London Mosque, whose membership has caused significant criticism, particularly from the Jewish community. When speaking about their experience of the Mosque, however, one interviewee explained that "they've always sat at the table with everybody else and been prepared to work with everybody else…I'm sure it's changed the leadership who have engaged with it, absolutely". *(CO participant, university, interview 16)* Another argued, "in terms of somewhere like the East London Mosque I've found the accusations about what they're supposed to do not to be true. It makes you realise…until we really know people how can we judge that?" *(CO participant, church, interview 8)*

On this thorny issue of how to choose suitable partners for common action, then, it seems that what is needed is a redrawing of the boundaries and barriers of secular liberalism through the establishment of a more relational form of politics. This is not to say that there won't be times when individuals or institutions will be perfectly right to discriminate who they engage with and under what circumstances. Rather it is a challenge to those who consider themselves 'progressive' to discover more political imagination in finding opportunities to encounter and engage with those whom they may well disagree with on fairly fundamental issues. Whilst not always comfortable or unproblematic, utilising 'relational tests' in this way would surely be more successful than the status quo in generating the kind of political friendships across boundaries which are likely to have a transformative effect on all parties.

the need for local focus

The other key challenge in developing the habit of public action is in finding the right context for engagement to be both effective and authentic. As the Harvard academic

Mark Warren has noted, the United Kingdom is a largely centralised political unit, making it hard for local groups to win meaningful change in the way that American groups are often able to.[13]

Whilst devolution and the expansion of city mayors may be countering this trend, it is still the case that many of the most pressing issues on which people might be motivated to act can only be solved in Westminster. This creates a tension for those groups using political campaigns between winning real change and remaining authentic to the specific contexts in which people were motivated to act in the first place.

Citizens UK is in many ways a classic example of an organisation having to operate with this tension. For example, a former Borough co-chair of London Citizens interviewed for this research explained how, in his experience, a desire to advance national-level campaigns often undermined the process of developing agency and soured his relationships. Whilst he remained committed to the theory of community organising, he felt that the local issues he wanted to work on were often crowded out by a wider policy focus because "there's always a broader agenda", which meant that "it felt like whatever you were talking about was crowbarred back into that".

As a result "what I'd understood of organising and what I said we could do together wasn't happening", because "a lot of the activities we had were about feeding into something else." This led him to feel quite disillusioned with the quality of his relationships, arguing that "it feels a bit like you're being puppeteered…what feels like it should be relational actually isn't." *(CO participant, church, interview 17)* As well as the issue of British political geography, he identified a catalyst of this problem in charitable funding models which are usually focused on campaign outcomes rather than committing to a process of action in a defined location.

Near Neighbours does not seem to suffer as much as Citizens UK from this tension due to its simple focus on local actions and projects. However, this does mean that its ability to enable participants to tackle serious social problems is compromised. According to Paul Hackwood, a part of the programme's aim is "to encourage people to get into relationships with each other so that they can effect change in their community when there are powers coming in from outside that affect their community in ways that are negative". Nonetheless, he admitted that other projects like community organising were likely to be more effective at this than Near Neighbours because of their reach into national decision-making structures. *(NN staff, interview 20)*

These concerns suggest a real challenge for any institution or programme seeking to build participants' capacities to act for themselves; namely how to achieve meaningful change in a way that remains faithful to local contexts. The situation of the above interviewee, who no longer participates in community organising despite having

"absolutely loved hanging out with some of the Muslims and listening to them and learning from them", *(CO participant, church, interview 17)* points to the consequences for political friendships and multicultural unity should these problems go unresolved.

Working together is, therefore, a fundamental component in creating political friendships across difference. By developing people's capacity to achieve things in public, civic projects can create platforms for common work that can allow the 'side-by-side' engagement that Sacks and others have commended. In doing so, however, great care must be taken to retain an authentic local focus and to promote 'relational' rather than 'progressive' tests for possible partners. Only in this way can the transformational benefits of political friendships become truly accessible to the groups who most need to be brought within the mainstream of British public life.

chapter 2 – references

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3

talking openly

> "Faith has a role to play and it's not on the peripheries. It's very much in the public."
>
> *Professional community organiser (11)*

If the importance of working together was the primary ingredient identified by interviewees for developing political friendships, another common factor which emerged was the need for openness around core motivations. For joint action alone is unlikely to be enough to overcome 'deep difference' and form meaningful bonds unless it is accompanied by an open discussion about what exactly is driving people to act in the first place. As one interviewee argued:

> "I think it is important in a multicultural society where we do have issues of people not being able to relate particularly easily that we're able to be confident about articulating our story and what makes me do what I do, and as a Christian being confident about that."
>
> *CO participant, church (8)*

As this example suggests, the issue of faith is never far from the surface in a discussion of core motivations in the public square. Whilst examining faith by no means exhausts the possibilities of what the habit of talking openly might involve, such an analysis does reveal how far many public institutions have to go in opening up an honest discussion. It is also a particularly important topic given the way that religion has come to be a defining feature in the contemporary discussion of multiculturalism. The academic Jim Beckford gives a helpful overview of the way faith has risen up the multicultural agenda when he states that "over the past fifty years, the discourse in Britain about 'racialised minorities' has mutated from 'colour' in the 1950's and 60's, to race in the 1960's, 70's and 80's, to 'ethnicity' in the 90's and to 'religion' in the present time".[1] This has left us with a situation in which, as political theologian Luke Bretherton has put it, "a number of religious minorities refuse to be categorised as an 'ethnic' group and demand recognition and access to state resources on the basis of their religious identity".[2]

This chapter then will analyse how traditional forms of public engagement have handled faith. It will then explore how newer forms of civic action are promoting the skills of listening to and articulating core motivations, as well as looking at what some of the challenges of this more open discussion might be.

gagging God?

There was a strong theme amongst interviewees that their faith motivations had in other projects often been stifled or silenced. One man who had spent several decades as a community development worker explained that "I found hostility towards faith groups…there's always an assumption that faith groups will proselytise", and that in his current post "the voluntary sector support agency…is not faith friendly, that's what everybody tells me". *(NN staff, interview 4)* A Church leader described having become "conditioned to play faith down" in public contexts, and cited the local manifestation of New Deal for Communities as an example of public activity in which "faith was almost sort of tolerated rather than anything else". (*CO participant, church, interview 8)*

In a similar vein, a Muslim community organiser explained that in his local area:

> "the youth programmes are excellent examples of places where you try to be as secular as possible and in that you miss out…the reason why they're there trying to do a good thing is completely about their faith."
>
> *Professional community organiser (12)*

Another trainee organiser described his experience in student politics in a similar way, saying that "during my time as an elected Student Union officer it was more or less implied that faith was restricted to the Christian Union groups and the societies, but when it came to meetings it was strictly political views." (*Trainee community organiser, interview 13)*

This evidence chimes with other recent studies of faith and public life. One academic has reported on an event on 'intercultural communication' in Leicester in which:

> "initially, this discussion about cohesion paid little or no heed to the religious background of the young people, but when this theme was introduced it was as if in these settings 'permission' to talk about faith was needed."[3]

A Church Urban Fund survey found that 44% of over 100 faith representatives on Local Public Partnerships felt that the main partners were not open to discussing faith issues, whilst another academic came across similar themes in the voluntary sector, noting that

"faith groups may also find it difficult to express religious values, beliefs and principles in a more secularised policy context due to fear of sounding 'a bit weird'".[4] Adam Dinham from Goldsmiths University has concluded, "the motivations of faith actors and those from government and public agencies may be very different", and "while these differences are unacknowledged, partners are destined to work in 'parallel languages'".[5]

What all of this suggests is a situation in which significant numbers of people in Britain feel compelled by their faith to engage with others and yet are often put off or made to feel uncomfortable in articulating such motivations by a perception of the rules and boundaries of public discourse. This can discourage people of faith from participating in public life because they feel like they are unable to truly 'be themselves', or it can mean that they tend to satisfy their appetite for involvement within their own religious community.[6]

Significant numbers of people in Britain feel compelled by their faith to engage with others and yet are often put off or made to feel uncomfortable in articulating such motivations by a perception of the rules and boundaries of public discourse.

Rather than levelling the playing field for people of different faiths, suspicion of religion as a motivation makes it harder to build the political friendships which are vital in the pursuit of a more cohesive society. It also means that those who do engage are only able to build relationships at quite a superficial level, without finding points of connection or engagement which cut to the core of what motivates them to act.

Dawkins and the 'New Atheists' represent an extreme on the spectrum of secular thought, but even more moderate voices have sought to qualify religious motivations (or indeed any other 'deep' motivation) in the public sphere through a focus on the need for 'public reason'. In his famous *The Law of Peoples* John Rawls argued that:

> "citizens realise that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In view of this, they need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake. I propose that in public reason comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens."[7]

Other important secular voices like Julian Baggini have further developed this concept, arguing that the test in public life is "to find a way of expressing [beliefs] in universalist and not particularist terms".[8] Whilst Rawls himself confines this need for public reason free from comprehensive doctrine to the 'public political forum', he admits that "there is no settled meaning" of what this forum consists of.[9] It is no surprise, then, that others

have extended the need for 'public reason' as far as possible, creating a mood across many parts of the public sphere which views any expression of religious identity or motivation as inherently divisive, partisan or obscure. As a result the already diminished institutions which have hitherto enabled political friendships to be developed – student unions, trades unions, political parties, etc. – have become infused with a closely guarded culture which can make it difficult for religiously motivated actors to participate as authentically as they might like.

Though this culture may be theoretically tidy, it fails to take account what often motivates people to act as citizens in the first place. Many academics have recently begun to challenge this conception of public reason and indeed the entire edifice of secular 'neutrality' on which it is based. Richard Rorty, a former advocate of secular neutrality and author of *Religion as a Conversation-Stopper*, has now concluded that "attempts to find rules that are neutral between the two sides [religion and secular] are pretty hopeless. So is the attempt to say that one or another contribution to political discourse is illegitimate."[10]

Luke Bretherton has gone even further, arguing that "Rawls' account prevents real dialogue and encounter and thus precludes the formation of a genuinely common good" and that "what we need is a politics that can live with deep plurality over questions of ultimate meaning and can encompass the fact that many communities and traditions can contribute to the common good – each in their own way".[11]

post-secular public engagement

Community organising as practiced by Citizens UK represents one form of this 'post-secular' political action, as a number of key concepts and practices directly encourage participants to articulate and listen to fundamental motivations, including those coming from a faith commitment. As well as directly engaging faith institutions who form a majority of the membership of Citizens UK, a huge emphasis is placed in the practice of community organising on one-to-one meetings, with professional organisers contracted to conduct at least 15 per week.

The purpose of these 'one-to-ones' is to build 'relational power' by finding mutual 'self-interest'.[12] One academic has described community organising one-to-ones as "social capital with a twist: these relational networks are built with an explicit moral-political content – that is, these ties are important to people because they are laden with political and ethical meaning, not seen as ends in themselves."[13]

For many people their 'self-interest' could be significantly based on their faith identity, as with one interviewee who commented:

> "my self-interest is that people would come to know Christ, that's it. I don't want to do that in a coercive way, I just want that desperately for more people, and for them to know the love of God and that's that. And so if part of expressing that is being with you and serving the poor, feeding kids, getting people homes, I'm like 'that sounds cool to me. Let's do that'."
>
> *CO participant, church (17)*

Another explained that "I think in a one-to-one setting you have permission in community organising to tell your own story", and this was seen as an opportunity to be honest about how his faith motivates him. *(CO participant, church, interview 8)*

It's important to note that this does not necessarily alienate 'secular' participants, who seem to appreciate the positive impact that faith can have in public life and accept its articulation in the processes of Citizens UK. One interviewee explained:

> "I used to be a fairly aggressive atheist, I suppose, and thought there was no space for religion in the public square and now I feel differently – I just think those faith institutions are engines of social capital and in the end what they do is turn up, in numbers, and turning up in life is half the battle."
>
> *CO participant and councillor (14)*

Another argued that "rather than it being a difference that you necessarily have to negotiate, I think it's actually a commonality that helps to bring people together", *(former professional community organiser, interview 19)* whilst another explained that "Citizens UK allows for people to not pretend…there is this space where people don't have to [pretend]…it allows you to build relationships across difference because you're being honest". (*CO participant, charity, interview 9)*

Whilst it would be untrue to say that faith articulation is unproblematic in community organising, as will be seen below, it is clear that Citizens UK has not only been able to keep secular participants and institutions on board with a process that is open to public articulations of faith motivations, but have even convinced many that such a process is a positive force in building political friendships.

This openness to faith institutions and articulations in public life has been mirrored by the Near Neighbours programme. Baroness Warsi has described Near Neighbours as evidence that the Coalition Government 'does God', whilst Paul Hackwood explained his

belief that the programme has "shifted the goalposts to a point where faith is recognised with its presuppositions and beliefs and values as an intrinsic good." *(NN staff, interview 20)* Indeed the research for this report found several examples of Near Neighbours-funded projects where people were going beyond traditional understandings of 'public reason' and engaging with faith identities and motivations across a range of different traditions. For example, the leader of a women's cooking project talked about how in the process of making mince pies at Christmas "one of the Muslim women talked about the relevance of Jesus in Islam, which was fascinating for us just hearing that experience". *(NN project leader, interview 3)* She contrasted this openness to talk about faith amongst the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and atheist participants with other forms of local public engagement, and, particularly, "the Women's Institute where you're not allowed to talk about faith." She also testified to the way this openness allowed for the development of meaningful relationships, explaining that "the immediate effect is we acknowledge each other in the street". *(NN project leader, interview 3)*

In another project, which taught English as a second language to a group comprising members of a local Church and Mosque, the teacher explained that "part of our teaching approach is to bring out interesting debates that more traditional teaching approaches sweep under the table…so politics and religion are welcome", and that far from causing discord, "there's always been a lot of respectful understanding". *(NN project leader, interview 2)* This success was perhaps explained by another interviewee who said, "I don't think you have to agree on things to have relationships with people…but what you have to do is you have to be prepared to discuss openly your differences". *(NN staff, interview 20)*

As with Citizens UK, then, Near Neighbours seems to have found a way of allowing participants to express core identities and motivations in such a way as to undermine traditional understandings of 'public reason' whilst at the same time enhancing rather than inhibiting the formation of meaningful inter-communal relationships. This suggests that an ability to articulate and listen respectfully to fundamental motivations, including those that come from faith, forms a vital tool for those who would seek engage with those from very different backgrounds.

the challenges of insincerity and exclusiveness

Like the habit of public action, sharing core motivations is sometimes easier preached than practised. The first challenge which is often encountered is not that expressions of faith can be divisive, but rather that encouraging them can seem inauthentic or insincere. This is often the charge levelled in the American political context where talk of religious

motivation can be seen as a kind of routine which politicians need to go through to prove their suitability for public office. As one interviewee said, "sometimes in the States you go 'oh well they're just saying that because it wins votes'." *(CO participant, charity, interview 9)*

Such a problem is often intimately connected with the charge of exclusivity, the idea that an open discussion of core motivations ironically results in the prioritising of particular types of inspirations over others. This can again be seen in the context of America, where community organising has become split between 'faith-based organising' and 'broad-based organising', suggesting some difficulty in holding religious and secular motivations together in the same alliance.

It is no coincidence then that both Citizens UK and Near Neighbours have been criticised for being insincere or exclusive in their practices of sharing core motivations. In terms of exclusivity, Near Neighbours has caused some alarm by requiring prospective projects to inform their local Church of England cleric as part of the application process, with a recent University of Bristol report describing "some disquiet about Near Neighbours being administratively based on the Church of England parish system".[14] In a similar vein, an article in the *Journal of the Leicester Secularist Society* has also complained about a lack of opportunities to identify as non-religious in the process of evaluating the programme.[15]

Citizens UK has also been vulnerable to charges of creating a culture in which secular participants feel uncomfortable, with one interviewee saying that the use of Scripture and prayer in public meetings means that "they [Citizens UK] obviously get a lot of stick for being too faith-y, particularly on the left", *(CO participant and councillor, interview 11)* and another explaining that "a lot of people that I've brought to London Citizens events who are from the left or trade unions or both then find the religious side of it slightly strange". *(former professional community organiser, interview 19)*

Whilst this may be due, in part, to the need for the political left to develop a more nuanced approach to religion in public life, it led a secular interviewee to reflect that perhaps more could be done to explore secular traditions in public meeting, asking "what are the civic traditions that have some really articulate speakers that could be read at the same time [as reading from religious texts]?" *(CO participant, charity, interview 9)*

While the charge of exclusivity thus tends to come from secular commentators, the critique of insincerity is more often articulated by participants from a religious background. One Christian interviewee explained that the culture of some Citizens UK meetings "can feel a little bit tokenistic sometimes by just throwing in a little Bible reading, a Qur'anic reading in the beginning", and that he has "cringed in the past when

we had a multifaith choir". *(CO participant, church, interview 8)* For him opportunities for people to express their own religious identities or motivations, whether through their institutional identification, their dress or their testimony, were entirely to be welcomed. But situations in which people were claiming to speak for a particular religious tradition or project a certain set of values and beliefs onto the group were more likely to create problems. As he put it, Citizens UK should recognise that:

> "things like the roll call [mean] we're coming as a Church…We can have a banner and we can have whatever that really displays who we are. [But] I think that the language and the articulation of these things is quite tricky without becoming tokenistic or equally cringeworthy."
>
> *CO participant, church (8)*

the problem of irreconcilable difference

If an open discussion of core motivations thus needs to be on guard to retain authenticity and inclusiveness, it also has to find ways to deal with the other key challenge of how to handle irreconcilable difference – an inevitable problem for diverse alliances or networks that look to develop political friendships. As one commentator has said, "public civil discourse is genuine to the extent that participants learn to speak with one another in their differences as well as their shared languages".[16] How such contested issues are handled is a vital question if an open sharing of core motivations is to lead to bridges rather than barriers being built.

From the evidence gathered for this report it seems a key theme in responding to this challenge is the necessity of on-going relationships. As has been seen already, Near Neighbours has a fairly open policy in terms of discussing difference, allowing individual projects and participants to design their own methods for negotiating points of disagreement or contention. On the whole, this seems to have been relatively successful, with the momentum and structure of the projects allowing for discussions of difference which are held within a wider partnership. As one interviewee said, "if people are committed to doing something locally then the differences that they have make very little difference to the fact that they'll work together to achieve the sorts of things that they want to achieve." (*NN staff, Interview 20)*

Where such a context of on-going relationship and practical action is taken away, however, it seems likely that open discussion of core motivations becomes much more complex, having to deal with those like Kenan Malik who ask "why should I, as an atheist, be expected to show respect for Christian, Islamic or Jewish cultures whose views and

arguments I find reactionary and often despicable?"[17] Such a question can perhaps only be answered where the necessity for partnership to overcome shared concerns is obvious.

Perhaps concerned by the possibility of such complexities, Citizens UK has adopted a more structured approach to handling difference. While allowing the articulation of diverse core motivations, they filter out issues of fundamental division, calling them 'wedge issues'. A professional organiser explained how she dealt with these 'wedge issues', stating that:

> "when you have an alliance built on relationships and you're in close contact with the people that you work with, you get a good gauge of where people are coming from and what might float…and if you know that something is going to divide half of your organisation…then it's just totally impractical to work on that."
>
> *Professional community organiser (11)*

Of course, what this understanding of 'wedge issues' means is that certain issues which may form the core of many people's belief systems are likely to be ruled out as possible Citizens UK campaigns. Where participants felt that the process of deciding which issues on which to work was transparent and participative, they were often unconcerned about the fact that some problems couldn't be solved by the community organising alliance. One explained that "there's been a couple of times when we've come together to debate whether we should get involved in something or not", *(CO participant, church, interview 8)* whilst another argued that "it wouldn't be possible to do anything otherwise" and that "if I wanted to pursue another issue I'd have to do it another way, that's absolutely fine by me". *(CO participant, university, interview 16)* Within community organising, then, there seems to be a broad acceptance that its process enables co-operation across difference around fairly obviously shared goals.

However, there was also a sense from some interviewees that this concept of 'wedge issues' placed a barrier on community organising's ability to build bridges across areas of deep difference and particularly those arising from faith commitments. One suggested a need:

> "to think about how might we use these relationships to be able to talk about [wedge issues] in a setting where we've known each other a while…[and] we've got history together, we've achieved stuff together. That, for me, is a perfect place to talk about difference".
>
> *CO participant, church (8)*

Ignoring this opportunity to use existing political friendships to explore 'wedge issues' and perhaps even find points of common ground may compound the problem of some topics polarising society, as Romand Coles has argued in his study of the American community organising group the Industrial Areas Foundation:

> "Shying away from engaging volatile differences can have its costs…the danger is that these general tendencies to shy away from certain types of conflictive issues might harden into ideologies of closure that damage our ability to successfully understand and respond to the problems at hand".[18]

In other words, not discussing certain issues because it is hard to find consensus may ultimately serve to make them more divisive in the future.

It seems likely, then, that if the technique of 'wedge issues' is to be of wider use in a public square more open to sharing core motivations, it will have to be combined with other programmes which allow for a structured discussion and debate of contested issues in a way that supports rather than endangers on-going relationships and common projects. In this way, the habit of talking openly can be confidently acknowledged as a source of deeper unity rather than unsolvable division. For by discussing religious and other core motivations, it will be possible for institutions and projects to draw more people into public encounters with one another, as well as ensuring that such engagement is at a deep enough level to make meaningful connections across difference.

Not discussing certain issues because it is hard to find consensus may ultimately serve to make them more divisive in the future.

Of course, care will have to be taken to avoid the pitfalls of insincerity and exclusivity, and creative ways sought to deal with irreconcilable differences. But the evidence of Citizens UK and Near Neighbours is that such an open approach is likely to be constructive for encouraging political friendships across difference, challenging more traditional 'secular' forms of civic life which operate with clear but shallow levels of interaction between participants.

chapter 3 – references

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4

the 'holistic' public square

> "We must rethink the sharp division between the private and public spheres of social existence."[1]

One way of thinking about the crisis of multiculturalism is not to say that there has been too much, but that there has been too little. In 2007, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, gave a lecture on the topic of multiculturalism in which he suggested that:

> "If we can distinguish between a multiculturalism that is simply a minimal public tolerance for eccentric or exotic private diversities and a multiculturalism that brings into public democratic debate the most significant motivating elements in people's convictions about human dignity and destiny, we shall have moved on significantly from some of our current deadlocks."[2]

This chapter argues that it is exactly the combination of common action and sharing core motivations which can bring out these convictions by helping people to develop 'deep' public identities. As hinted at by Williams, however, such a practice challenges the very heart of the liberal public settlement – the division of the public and private realms – and therefore suggests the need for a new 'holistic' model for the civic sphere.

'deep' public identities

Evidence from interviewees suggests that as people develop the habits of public action and sharing motivations, they are enabled to speak publicly in ways which articulate their core identities. One person talked, for example, of how a fellow participant had been allowed "to feel confident enough to tell his story and to tell it publicly and powerfully", *(CO participant, university, interview 15)* whilst another spoke of "drawing on lots of things from people's private life, people's values…to help them to act in a public way". *(Professional community organiser, interview 3)*

Citizens UK has a particular focus on leadership development which often involves helping people to explore what their own 'public identity' might be. New participants are encouraged to develop their leadership at first by undertaking one-to-ones in their own institution, with six-day training containing a session to create a plan for how they might go about this. As has already been noted, this task is heavily focused on listening and understanding the motivations of others, but also on articulating one's own motivation or self-interest. Developing participants through having them conduct one-to-ones is at least partly about helping them to create and share their identity in a way that builds relationships that, in turn, might lead to action.

From this platform of one-to-ones, participants are usually given positions of wider responsibility such as chairing a public meeting or giving testimony. Testimony, or personal story-telling in a public setting, is often a crucial element of Citizens UK public actions and was much in evidence at a public assembly of the Eastern branch of London Citizens analysed as part of the research for this report. At the meeting, a girl from a member school talked about the difficulties of studying in cramped and poor quality housing, before a man told his story of having been a member of a gang and living a life of drugs and violence. Changed by a dramatic conversion experience whilst in prison, he joined a member church and was then able to get a job through Citizens UK's work with the Olympic contractors, which has enabled him to build a new life free from his past. Finally, a group of schoolgirls talked about the difficulties they faced in preparing for life after school with such an uncertain jobs market.

These stories all fulfilled slightly different functions in the meeting, from building commitment to a campaign through to celebrating success and trying to leverage the power of those with the ability to grant Citizens UK their demands. The important thing to note across all these different forms of testimony, though, is that all of the openness and fundamental motivating factors discussed in the last chapter were on show in a public setting – from faith to family to personal prospects. What is happening in the process of preparing for and delivering testimony is that participants are developing their ability to articulate who they are in a public way, to build a public identity which showcases important and often personal factors or events. This could be called the development of 'deep' public identities, where personal experience is brought explicitly into play with public issues.

The importance of this process was reflected on by one interviewee who talked of her experiences working with a former migrant detainee. She explained that the advancement of his role in the community organising alliance:

> "required quite an important process of developing confidence, of making him aware of the importance of his own story and allowing him space to practise

> the telling of that story. He then went from having felt completely powerless in the face of his experience of detention to giving his testimony of his experience directly to each of the candidates standing for election in that constituency."
>
> *CO participant, university (15)*

The time-limited nature of Near Neighbours projects means that as a programme it is unable to match Citizens UK's strong focus on deepening people's public identities through on-going training and development. But one project leader hinted at its inherent ability to allow for such deep identities when they described an atheist participant who had joined the group because of her son's experience at a predominantly Asian school where his fellow students were unable to understand his lack of faith. As a result, his mother became involved in Near Neighbours because "she was interested in helping people to accept that having a philosophy of atheism is ok". *(NN project leader, interview 3)* This suggests that Near Neighbours is meeting an appetite for public engagement which can expose fellow participants to deep aspects of identity and thus break down barriers of confusion and misunderstanding.

towards a 'holistic' public square

Promoting the habit of articulating and sharing deep public identities is subtly revolutionary for the shape of the public square. For many centuries, philosophers, political theorists and practitioners have sought to make a clear distinction between the 'public' and the 'private' realms in order to try to create a sphere of cerebral deliberation sealed off from emotions and personal interests. David Hollenbach has described this as "the sharp division between the private and public spheres of social existence", arguing that Rawls and others have used this "method of avoidance" to deal with deep diversity in politics.[3] Janet Newman has gone into even more detail, describing the "view of the public sphere of modern western nations as a domain of rational deliberation that can be clearly marked from the passions and pleasures of the personal and the commercialised relationships of the market".[4]

The secular strand of thought already noted in the previous chapter is in many ways simply a branch of this deeper current of thought which has designated religion as one of a number of 'private' beliefs or interests to be kept separate from the public world if at all possible.

In recent decades, however, this neat distinction and supposed opposition between public and private has come under increased attack. Hollenbach has argued that the "privatisation of 'thick' visions of the good…is a moral constraint on political activity",

whilst Newman has explained how the current settlement "offers a relatively narrow politics of the public sphere – one that fails to acknowledge particular claims for voice and justice".[5] In particular, Newman and others have focused on the way sharp distinctions between the public and the private spheres often contain a significant gender bias, ruling certain issues out of public discussion which have a disproportionate effect on women.

The evidence of this report certainly suggests that this division between public and private realms has proven incapable of generating political friendships across difference. For in ruling out certain issues or motivations as inherently private it prevents people from moving beyond superficial engagement and making the deeper connections necessary to overcome barriers of religion, culture and tradition.

One answer to this problem seems to have come in the form of new technologies which allow people to act publicly in highly personalised ways. Social media and the internet have created platforms in which public identities can be formed from a range of what might traditionally be considered both public and private interests. This is certainly true of those in positions of power, with Twitter now allowing politicians such as the MP Stella Creasy to create a highly individualised profile which is not directed by her party and which encompasses areas of what would traditionally be thought of as both 'political' and 'personal' concern.[6] As the academic Anna Rowlands noted, this is fundamentally at odds with the previous understanding of the barriers of the public square, for "things like Facebook, Twitter and all forms of social networking have broken down and eroded those distinctions, those identity distinctions between public and private". *(CO participant, university, interview 15)*

Douglas Carswell (himself a MP who actively tweets and blogs) has hailed these changes as the birth of 'iDemocracy', claiming that "the internet is breathing new life into politics" and that "politics is being repersonalised".[7] Extolling the virtues of the 'digital revolution', he argues that "there is suddenly scope for that which is distinctive, niche, particular and local," and that "digital communication not only brings the politician closer to the voter, it brings the voter up close and personal to the politician...this means hyper-accountability".[8] The result for the shape of the public square is made clear when he predicts that "the citizen-consumer will demand in the public sphere the same freedom to exercise individual choices that he or she already takes for granted in the private".[9]

The problem with this more 'personalised' public square is that engagement is very rarely achieved in the context of substantial relationships. Whilst politicians and citizens may be breaking down the barriers between 'public' and 'private' motivations and issues, they are doing it alone rather than as part of a process of developing political friendships. Indeed, forms of internet activism seem at times to actively shield people

from the messiness of relating to others with very different inspirations or beliefs, whilst social media makes interactions shorter and shallower than other forms of public engagement. This makes political friendships across difference less rather than more likely. As a result such politics tends towards the factional, generating groups of like-minded people rather than movements which are able to deal with difference and tension.

On the surface, practices like community organising and Near Neighbours could be seen to be part of this 'personalisation' of the public sphere. Like these forces of new technology, they are contributing to the erosion of the public/private barriers which have kept a more 'guarded' public square intact. Several interviewees reflected on this, with the academic Jane Wills explaining that "in a sense because people are aiming to forge relationships with each other the personal is more up front than it is in other kinds of politics", *(CO participant, university, interview 16)* and Anna Rowlands arguing that community organising "doesn't place barriers around religious identities in the way that lots of other forms of political advocacy would do, so it sees as seamless the relationship between religious identities and social and political identities". (*CO participant, university, interview 15)*

Where Citizens UK and Near Neighbours part company from new forms of technology, however, is in their insistence that the dissolving of the distinction between public and private must take place in the context of meaningful relationships. For as we have seen, the sharing of core motivations and the development of deep public identities are only effective within community organising and Near Neighbours in so far as they contribute towards the building of 'relational power' in an alliance across difference. Luke Bretherton has described this process, explaining how "the hearing of others' interests and concerns in the context of ongoing relationships and the recognition that everyone…occupies the same mutual (not neutral) ground foster the sense that in each others' welfare we find our own".[10]

This process of bringing personal values and experiences into the public square within a context of on-going relationships demands a different model for understanding the shape of the public square. 'Holistic' may be the best term to describe it, encompassing the importance of engaging the full depth of an individual's identity in public life whilst also acknowledging that relationship with others encourages a broad understanding of citizenship in a way that individualised engagement can never quite match. This would seem to be the best model for encouraging in individuals what Anthony Appiah has called 'rooted cosmopolitanism' – a deep commitment to particular traditions and beliefs alongside an acceptance of difference and the need to engage across boundaries.[11] In modelling what such a 'holistic' public square might look like, Citizens

UK and Near Neighbours live out some of the possibilities identified by Janet Newman who argued that faith engagement could potentially become part of a wider civil society movement to "re-inscribe the public domain with values associated with the private and personal spheres", whilst at the same time encouraging the building of deep political friendships.[12]

Interestingly, however, Citizens UK doesn't necessarily think in these terms. An entire session in the Citizens UK national six-day training is dedicated to teaching a model of public life divided between 'public' and 'private', with extensive discussion on the importance of differentiating between the two. When organisers were asked in interviews how community organising viewed the public and private realms, almost all began their answers by emphasising distinctness, saying for example that "one of the things we teach which is very true is that there are two worlds, one which is public and one which is private". *(Professional community organiser, interview 7)*

This seems largely to be a reaction against more personalised forms of engagement, which community organisers are worried may be causing people to invest too much of themselves into the public sphere. One argued, for example, that:

> "now you have politicians tweeting about what music they listen to and whatever and there's no clear distinction…people who get involved in leadership roles sometimes don't make that distinction between their private selves and their public work at a detriment to themselves so you have a lot of burnout."
>
> *(Professional community organiser, (6)*

However, when confronted with the way their training seemed to jar with participants' experiences, several organisers admitted that there often wasn't a clean distinction between public and private within the community organising methodology, saying for example "the line isn't always kind of clear you have to judge it". *(Professional community organiser, interview 6)* Interestingly, one professional organiser even admitted:

> "that's my most hated session in the five day training…it's a really challenging session to do because you're trying to create a dichotomy of saying [that] organising is about building a healthy public life but actually…organisers and leaders draw on values and experiences and often personal traumas that are very private. But actually, they are the things that motivate people to act, so they're often the things that bring people into public life but then we try and create a dichotomy to say 'actually these are very separate things'."
>
> *Professional community organiser (3)*

This dissatisfaction with that particular aspect of Citizens UK's training was shared by a number of other interviewees, with one explaining:

> "In training quite a lot is made of the difference between public and private so if you go on six-day training…there's a kind of distinction made but I'm not sure that I've ever really been conscious of it in any of the engagements I've had."
>
> *CO participant, university (16)*

Near Neighbours seems not to have confronted this issue of how its activities might be reshaping the public square, which is perhaps unsurprising given its focus on short-term local projects. In the light of this, and acknowledging the tensions and paradoxes in Citizens UK's thinking in this area, it seems that as innovative forms of civic engagement emerge which differ from more traditional forms of secular liberalism, they may well do so in stuttering and, at times, contradictory ways. As with all changes in habits, sometimes letting go of older modes of practice is a difficult and drawn-out process, and new forms will take time to emerge out of the patterns of previous generations.

The evidence examined in this report, however, would suggest that ability of projects like Near Neighbours and community organising to encourage deep public identities is paving the way for a new 'holistic' public square in which the possibilities of political friendship will become more plentiful and interesting than ever before.

chapter 4 – references

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12 Newman, 'Rethinking 'The Public' in Troubled Times', p.33

conclusion

> "I've been involved in high-level government cohesion and integration thinking and I think it would do well to just get down and dirty and…creat[e] a public realm where those conversations can happen."
>
> *CO participant and councillor (11)*

In the wake of the failure of traditional forms of multiculturalism to generate unity across diversity, this report has found alternative models to be severely wanting in their ability to impact grass-roots activity. In order, therefore, to create a more practical understanding of multiculturalism, those interested in making connections across the deep diversity of modern Britain need to focus less on orthodoxy, or 'right thinking', and much more on orthopraxy, 'right doing'.

This report has explored what such an approach might look like by examining successful expressions of multiculturalism in action through the lens of how they contribute to the formation of political friendships. The lessons of Near Neighbours and community organising in this regard fundamentally revolve around the key habits of working together and talking openly. These are the skills which need to be developed and encouraged if individuals from a variety of religions, cultures and traditions are to pursue a common life together which is characterised by cooperation and understanding rather than the tension and fear which is so often seen today.

Community organising and Near Neighbours employ a number of very practical tools to encourage these habits, which include:

- Giving people the financial resources to achieve their public ambitions alongside others;
- Encouraging the use of one-to-one meetings;
- Teaching about 'self-interest' and 'relational power';
- Having active processes of leadership development.

From the evidence of this report, however, encouraging the habits of working together and talking openly is not simply a case of promoting positive behaviours but also of challenging old orthodoxies which act as barriers to the creation of political friendships.

Prime amongst these is the use of 'progressive tests' to rule out partnership with those of different beliefs, which would seem to be preventing the habits of working together and talking openly from reaching the parts of society which need them most. Instead of fretting over ideological purity, those with a real interest in making multiculturalism happen should be more open to working with those willing to engage across difference. This is what one interviewee described as "building a 'thick middle' where people are engaging in a conversation together and doing things together", which at the same time will have the effect of "creating less of an environment where the extremes can flourish". *(NN staff, interview 20)*

Encouraging the habits of working together and talking openly is not simply a case of promoting positive behaviours but also of challenging old orthodoxies which act as barriers to the creation of political friendships.

In a similar way, it seems that the neat division between the 'public' and 'private' spheres is proving a block on relationships which can cross deep barriers of difference and find meaningful points of common ground. As such, it may need to be abandoned for a more 'holistic' approach to public life which sees personal beliefs and experiences as vital contributions to civic discourse, as long as where possible they are expressed in a plural context of working with others. Interestingly, one interviewee suggested that such a change may already be happening within the Labour Party, explaining that:

> "I got an email today from Tom Watson [deputy chair of the Labour Party]… which is all about relationships and stories…now two years ago that would've been an email from Gordon Brown with a graph in it and a load of stats. Part of that shift that's happening in British politics is down to the impetus that Citizens UK have brought on that agenda."
>
> *CO participant and councillor (11)*

It would be naïve, however, to suggest that Near Neighbours and community organising represent a perfect or sufficient approach to creating a more practical multiculturalism. Both projects contain a number of tensions and contradictions, such as having not yet fully come to terms with the tension between a local focus and the political geography of the UK which often demands national-level campaigning. Citizens UK have also yet to fully integrate their training on the public and private

sphere with the lived experiences of their participants, whilst both community organising and Near Neighbours could become more sophisticated in how they deal with irreconcilable differences.

Even if all of these issues could be resolved, we would still be faced with the challenge of encouraging political friendships in the vast majority of the UK where Near Neighbours and Citizens UK do not currently operate. Indeed, it is often in just such towns in the North-West of England or areas around the outskirts of London where many of the deepest tensions of multiculturalism are felt, particularly where two ethnic communities currently stand-off against each other.

practice makes perfect – building the habits of political friendship

Given these challenges, it is important to lay out some practical examples of how this report should inform changes in behaviour or attitude across a variety of contexts.

An obvious place to start is funding. Charitable or other funding bodies which truly seek to promote practical multiculturalism should avoid wherever possible constricting projects by dictating or demanding specific outputs in advance. Instead they should commit to resourcing tried and tested processes which bring together broad coalitions in a meaningful local context.

Another area where the evidence of this report suggests the need for a change in mind-set is the education sector. Now that citizenship has been retained on the national curriculum it is the perfect time to reimagine how the subject could transition from an intellectual exercise towards a more practical exploration of working together with others across difference. Given their diverse nature, schools are the perfect setting for young people from different cultures and traditions to build the habits of working together and talking openly, and formal partnerships between community organising alliances and educational institutions could have a huge impact on the political friendships of the next generation.

Such a partnership could be pioneered in the government's flagship National Citizenship Service, a programme for Year 11 students which includes residential training and a social action project.[1] By involving Citizens UK or other community organising groups in the process of training these young people, the programme could encourage the development of projects which will specifically engage the skills of bringing people together across differences, sharing core motivations and

expressing deep public identities. Given that the programme is designed to improve interaction across different backgrounds as well as giving young people the tools to be active members of their communities, it would seem eminently sensible to learn from what is best practice in these areas.

Another obvious place where this report may well spark changes is in institutions and projects that consider themselves to be working in the same fields as Near Neighbours and Citizens UK.[2] Such activities should use the habits of working together and speaking openly as a litmus test for whether they are promoting political friendships, and consider how simple changes in language or practice could put these habits front and centre of their work. This could be helped by increased collaboration between different community organising practitioners, and might also involve the adoption of some of the practical tools noted above in other institutions contexts (e.g. campaigning groups might want to increase their use of testimony in public or internal meetings).

Indeed, there may well be political institutions from a variety of different fields who may want to implement the lessons of this report. As one interviewee said:

> "instead of having a conversation about does it [multiculturalism] exist or does it not, the best thing to do is…a litmus test in your community to see 'is this a place where people can share their values…or is it a place which is lacking in that conversation?' and if it's spaces that are lacking in the conversation, then there's a bit of work to do."
>
> *Professional community organiser (11)*

Simple tools like one-to-ones may help such institutions to explore core motivations across a wider section of their membership, drawing in groups which currently feel excluded and encouraging more participatory projects across difference.

Danielle Allen is once again an excellent guide in this task of improving the ability of institutions to foster political friendships. She ends her book, *Talking to Strangers*, with an open letter to her employer, the University of Chicago, suggesting a number of policies which could enable the University to foster citizenship and trust both amongst its staff and students and with local residents. [3] These include setting up satellite sites in the community from which academic courses and materials could be made available to local people, and creating a "polis-wide development council" which could allow for public discussion of policies and plans that are likely to affect both the University and the wider area.[4] Allen also attacks the expansion of the

University's police force, arguing that "we should not be content to let the project of integration depend on the display and application of force".[5]

The raising of such issues and the spreading of conversations and suggestions like these across civic institutions could pave the way for the practical multiculturalism that Britain now needs to form political friendships across difference. The stakes could hardly be higher, for such an achievement would be a key step in making Britain the place that Jonathan Sacks and so many others have dreamed of, the "home we build together".

conclusion – references

1 See http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/

2 The government-funded community organising programme run by Locality is an obvious example, as is Movement for Change which describes itself as the "home for community organising within the Labour movement".

3 Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, pp.175–184

4 ibid. p.183

5 ibid. p.181

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Making multiculturalism work:
enabling practical action across deep difference

David Barclay

In the light of the widespread rejection of state multiculturalism, this report advocates a new approach to living together, grounded not in theory but in practice – the localised 'political friendships' through which people learn to live and work together.

Drawing on a range of interviews with people involved in two major initiatives – community organising and Near Neighbours – ***Making multiculturalism work*** argues that ordinary relationships across religious and cultural difference are the key to addressing the malaise of the public square and pursuing a meaningful 'multicultural settlement'.

These are forged not by adherence to abstract national values or an idea of what multiculturalism should look like in theory, but rather by common action – working side-by-side and pursuing common goals.

In fostering this common action, the report argues, we should abandon any 'progressive tests', in which groups are required to show that they are sufficiently politically progressive in order to merit a 'place at the table'. Instead we should use 'relational tests', in which organisations must be willing to work with people from different backgrounds and perspectives.

We should also let people be open and honest about their motivations and objectives – religious and secular – rather than suppressing difference in pursuit of an ideological neutrality to which all must subscribe.

"David Barclay's thoughtful new Theos pamphlet offers constructive ideas about the importance of building contact, relationships and trust from below, and how that can contribute to the practical pursuit of a shared society."

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