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# The Crises of Multiculturalism

Racism in a Neoliberal Age

Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley



With a preface by Gary Young



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**THE CRISES OF  
MULTICULTURALISM**  
racism in a neoliberal age

Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley



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## Preface by Gary Younge

On 15 February 2006 in Strasbourg the head of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, delivered a stout defence of freedom of speech, democratic values and modernity on the continent. With the embers from heated exchanges over a Danish newspaper's decision to publish cartoons of Muhammad still glowing, Barroso laid out the consequences of privileging sensitivity towards 'others' over core values that define 'us'. If Europe failed to defend its principles in the face of such an onslaught, he argued, 'we are accepting fear in our society [...] I understand that offended many people in the Muslim world but is it better to have a system in which some excesses are allowed or to be in some countries where they don't even have the right to say this [...] I defend the democratic system.'

On the very same day in the House of Commons the British government employed fear of terrorism to limit existing freedoms, expanding state power to make 'glorification' of terrorism a criminal offence. Laying out the consequences of privileging freedom over security, the then prime minister, Tony Blair, later explained that the law 'will allow us to deal with "those" people and say: Look, we have free speech in this country, but don't abuse it'. For certain groups the price for belonging and conditions for banishment have shifted dramatically in Western nations, particularly but by no means exclusively in Europe, in recent years. Citizenship is no longer enough. The clothes you wear, the language you speak, the way you worship, have all become grounds for dismissal or inclusion. These terms are not only not applied equally to all, they are not even intended to be. In a series of edicts, popular, political and judicial, their intention is not to erase all differences but act as a filter for certain people who are considered dangerously different.

To achieve this certain groups and behaviours must first be pathologized so that they might then be more easily particularized. The pathologization has been made easier over the past decade by the escalation of terrorist acts or attempts in the USA and Europe in the name of radical Islam. 'Terror is first of all the terror of the next attack,' explains Arjun Appadurai in *Fear of Small Numbers*. 'Terror

[...] opens the possibility that anyone may be a soldier in disguise, a sleeper among us, waiting to strike at the heart of our social slumber.’

But in truth terrorism, and the wars and conflicts that exacerbate it, sharpened this trend and focused it on Muslims and Islam but did not create it. The notion that the presence of certain groups represents an existential threat to a mythological national cohesion was present in Enoch Powell’s infamous 1968 speech in which he prophesied violent consequences of non-white immigration in the UK: ‘As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see “the River Tiber foaming with much blood”.’ It was there in 1979 in Margaret Thatcher’s sympathy with Britons who feel they are being ‘swamped by an alien tide’. And it was front and centre in Jacques Chirac’s 1991 ‘*Le bruit et l’odeur*’ speech. ‘How do you want a French worker who works with his wife, who earn together about 15,000 francs and who sees next to his council house a piled-up family with a father, three or four spouses and twenty children earning 50,000 francs via benefits naturally without working [...] If you add to that the noise and the smell, well, the French worker, he goes crazy.’

For these threats to gain popular traction, however, these ‘others’ have to be distinguished in the popular mind from other ‘others’. So when black people attack other black people it is no longer crime but ‘black-on-black-crime’; if a young Muslim woman is killed over a romantic relationship it is not a murder but an ‘honour killing’. In a country like England that has been embroiled in virtually continuous terrorist conflict for the last forty years in Northern Ireland, the notion that there are ‘home-grown’ ‘Muslim’ bombers is supposed to represent not just a new demographic taking up armed struggle but an entirely new phenomenon. Even as the Catholic Church is embroiled in a global crisis over child sexual abuse and the Church of England is splintered in a row over gay priests, Islam and Muslims face particularly vehement demands to denounce homophobia.

The combined effect of these flawed distinctions and sweeping demonization is to unleash a series of moral panics. In 2009 in Switzerland a national referendum bans the building of minarets in a country that has only four; in 2010 70 per cent of voters in the state of Oklahoma support the banning of sharia law even though Muslims comprise less than 0.1 per cent of the population; in the Netherlands parliament seriously considered banning the burka – a garment believed to be worn by fewer than fifty women in the entire country. Disproportionate in scale and distorted in nature,



these actions cannot be understood as a viable response to their named targets but rather as emblems of a broader, deeper disruption in national, racial and religious identities. At a time of diminishing national sovereignty, particularly in Europe, such campaigns help the national imagination cohere around a fixed identity even as the ability of the nation-state to actually govern itself wanes. It is a curious and paradoxical fact that as national boundaries in Europe have started to fade, the electoral appeal of nationalism has increased; fascism, and its fellow travellers, is once again a mainstream ideology in Europe, regularly polling between 5 and 15 per cent in most countries. Their success suggests that modernity, as it has been framed and presented, poses a challenge not only to Islam and that the demographic group finding it most difficult to integrate into modern society is a section of white society that feels abandoned and disoriented.

But such assaults are by no means the preserve of the far right. Many who consider themselves on the left have given liberal cover to these assaults on religious and racial minorities, ostensibly acting in defence of democracy, Enlightenment values and equal rights – particularly relating to sexual orientation and gender. Their positioning rests on two major acts of sophistry. The first is an elision between Western values and liberal values that ignores the fact that liberal values are not fully entrenched in the West and that other regions of the world also have liberal traditions. Nowhere is this clearer than with gay rights, where whatever gains do exist are recent and highly contested. In the thirty-one American states where gay marriage has been put to a popular vote it has been defeated. The only places it is legal are where it has been ushered in through the courts. Not only is gay equality not a Western value, it's not even a Californian value. The second is a desire to understand Western 'values' in abstraction from Western practice. This surge in extolling Western virtues has coincided with an illegal war that has been underpinned by both authorized and unauthorized torture and a range of other atrocities and a spike in the electoral and political currency of racism and xenophobia.

The contradictions inherent in these trends and tensions found their full expression in the existence of a gay rights chapter within the openly anti-immigrant and Islamophobic English Defence League. 'This is the symbol gay people were made to wear under Hitler,' one member told the *Guardian*, explaining the pink star he was wearing. 'Islam poses the same threat and we are here to express our opposition to that.' Unable to come up with a single, coherent new term which

both encapsulates the atmosphere of fear, threat, panic, disorientation, confusion, contradiction and paradoxes and unites both far right and liberals, the opponents of this diverse, hybrid reality resurrected an old foe – ‘multiculturalism’.

The beauty of multiculturalism, for its opponents, is that it can mean whatever you want it to mean so long as you don’t like it. It has the added advantage of being a political orphan. Since it never had consensual support among the left – many of whom were wary of the attempt to replace anti-racism with a retreat into culture – there are few willing to give the term their full-throated endorsement. The announcement of its imminent death has concerned many not because they honoured its life but because they do not care for its assailants or the manner in which they aim to murder it. For some it clearly means the mere coexistence of ‘other cultures’; for others the state promotion of ‘other cultures’ (although the ability to point to a time when this was ever an official policy pursued with either force or effect seems elusive); and for yet others it represents any resistance to assimilating racial, religious and ethnic cultures into national ones.

There are legitimate philosophical arguments in there somewhere. The trouble is that when applied to the specific communities they are reserved for in this specific context the term ‘multiculturalism’ more often than not simply becomes a proxy for ‘difference’. But for all the angst invested and ink spilt about it multiculturalism is less of an ethos than a simple statement of fact. It emerges not from government edict but the lived experience of people, and at different times may be untidy, vibrant, problematic, dynamic or divisive.

The nation-state is in crisis; neoliberal globalization is in crisis; multiculturalism is simply *in situ*.

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**For Alvar, Jonas-Liam,  
Noam, Partho, Päivi**

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## Introduction and acknowledgements

Multiculturalism is the toxic gift that keeps on giving. As we revised this book for publication in autumn 2010, a cluster of criticisms of something called multiculturalism once again garnered various levels of publicity. They did so against a particular backdrop: the electoral gains of the Sverigedemokraterna and Geert Wilders's Partij voor de Vrijheid; Wilders's subsequent trial in Amsterdam on charges of incitement to racial hatred; the European Commission's response to the French government's Roma expulsion/repatriation policy; the ongoing discovery of the problem of the burka and niqab in ever more locations; the high-profile publication of Thilo Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010) and his subsequent resignation from the executive board of the Deutsche Bundesbank; and, perhaps less at the centre of mainstream transnational news flow, the significant electoral advance of Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs in Vienna and projected gains for Perussuomalaiset in Finland. Odd as it may seem, for some commentators multiculturalism was directly or indirectly to blame for much of this.

Writing in the *Guardian*, and reviving a general argument first rehearsed in *New Left Review* in 1997, Slavoj Žižek (2010) proposed an explanation for this general rise in what he terms 'populist racism' by, among other things, targeting the evasions of 'liberal multiculturalism'. 'Progressive liberals', he argues, are pleased by diversity's contributions to cosmopolitan cultural capital, and schooled in a discourse of tolerance. Yet, by insisting on maintaining a sanitary cultural distance, liberal multiculturalism merely desires a 'detoxified' Other, while 'reasonably' enacting increasingly stringent, stratified and securitized immigration systems. In the UK, a themed issue of *Prospect* edited by Munira Mirza (2010) argued that if racism persisted as an issue in contemporary British society, it did so predominantly as a consequence of multiculturalism's paternalist racializing, and cultural block-thinking about the lives of 'minorities'. Finally, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, garnered significant publicity by declaring that multiculturalism has 'failed spectacularly' in Germany,

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and that attempts to build a ‘*multi-kulti*’ society should give way to greater efforts by immigrants to integrate.

Multiculturalism, as almost everybody recognizes, is a slippery and fluid term, and it has accrued a vast range of associations and accents through decades of political, contextual and linguistic translation. It may retain a fairly useful if limited descriptive sense in post-colonial, migration societies, but it also skitters off to index normative debates, real and imagined policies, mainstream political rhetorics, consumerist desires, and resistant political appropriations. This book is not an attempt to organize this discursive messiness, nor even to systematically survey it. Instead, it is centrally concerned with the insistent sense of multiculturalism as a unitary idea, philosophy, ‘failed experiment’ or era. Multiculturalism has inspired a long history of backlash; however, since 11 September 2001 commentators, politicians and media coverage in a range of European and Western contexts have increasingly drawn on narratives of the ‘crisis of multiculturalism’ to make sense of a broad range of events and political developments, and to justify political initiatives in relation to integration, security and immigration. Yet for all this focus and sonorous rejection, multiculturalism has rarely amounted to more than a patchwork of initiatives, rhetoric and aspirations in any given context. It is this gap between the empirical realities of multiculturalism and the ‘recited truths’ (De Certeau 1984) of what multiculturalism is held to have been, and to have caused, which is the primary terrain of this study.

This gap can be illustrated by briefly examining Merkel’s dramatic repudiation. Under pressure from the right of her party, the CDU, as it sought to siphon off populist fairy dust from Thilo Sarrazin, Merkel’s lament was particularly egregious. It is not just the indecent haste with which she moved on from celebrating the youthful multiculturalism of Germany’s football team in the 2010 World Cup. There is also the fact that it is not entirely clear what project or era of multiculturalism Merkel felt moved to repudiate. It is only a decade since Germany reformed its exclusionary nationality laws (a reform which made that football team possible). Following the revision of the nationality law in 2000, public discourse witnessed ‘attempts by politicians of all persuasions to fill “Germanness” with new content’ (Rostock and Berghann 2008: 347). The left-liberal rhetoric of *multi-kulti* – which Merkel imbued, in her speech, with material-historical form – conflicted with powerful articulations of *Leitkultur* (Pautz 2005) and the specification of *deutsche Werteordnung* (Rostock and

Berghann 2008). As Pautz has shown, some of Merkel's CDU colleagues were centrally involved in promulgating a *leitkulturredebatte* that sought to define cultural boundaries – and hierarchies – between 'nationals and immigrants', drawing on established tropes of national cultures endangered by the demographic challenge and confidence of immigrant cultures in general, and Islam in particular (2005: 43–7).

Mind the gap; merely pointing out the obvious empirical lack of a *multiculturalism that failed* is to miss how it functions euphemistically in Merkel's performance. As per the convention, complex social problems and political-economic disjunctures can be blamed on 'migrants', and the solution, in a neoliberal era, located in an increased individual responsibility to become compatible and integrate. Merkel is only the latest high-profile figure to engage a fictive multiculturalism as a blunt political instrument. The range of processes of social dissolution and varieties of anomie that multiculturalism is held responsible for is scarcely credible. Blamed for everything from parallel societies to gendered horror to the incubation of terrorism, the extent to which multiculturalism was given official imprimatur, public support or governmental form in any context is regarded as somewhat irrelevant. As a loose assemblage of culturally pluralist sentiments, aspirations and platitudes, or more darkly as a euphemism for lived multiculturalism, it provides a mobilizing metaphor for a spectrum of political aversion and racism that has become pronounced in western Europe.

This recited, elastic and mobile sense of multiculturalism, and its importance in the recoding and recasting of racism today, is central to this book. It is somewhat ironic that while multiculturalism is often closely associated with the coded evasions of 'political correctness', invoking the recited truths of multiculturalism depends on the same kind of discursive strategy. In an era where the concept of race is taboo and the charge of racism diluted, contested and inverted, multiculturalism provides a discursive space for debating questions of race, culture, legitimacy and belonging. Presenting it as a 'failed experiment', and inserting it into a causal historical narrative, allows anxieties concerning migration, globalization and the socio-political transformations wrought by neoliberal governance to be ordered and explained. Lamenting it as a benevolent if somewhat naive attempt to manage the problem of difference allows for securitized migration regimes, assimilative integrationism and neo-nationalist politics to be presented as nothing more than rehabilitative action.

Given the multivalent dimensions of the 'multicultural backlash'

over the last decade, the chapters in this book proceed by exploring different aspects and modalities of contemporary racisms, and by layering contextual discussions and a range of theoretical perspectives. Chapter 1, ‘Recited truths: the contours of multicultural crisis’, functions as an extended thematic, theoretical and political introduction to these dynamics, and sets out ways of thinking about ‘multiculturalism’ as a discursive assemblage that is produced and legitimized transnationally. Throughout the book we draw on contextual discussions and examples from a range of countries, seeking meaningful affinities and networks of exchange and meaning, while paying attention to the specificities of contexts, the pitfalls of comparative analysis, and the challenges of translation. In Chapter 1, some core theoretical ideas are explored in relation to the vociferous rejection of multiculturalism in Britain since the disturbances in northern England in the summer of 2001. The opprobrium heaped on multiculturalism after these events – and subsequently as an indirect consequence of the ‘war on terror’, and intensively after the London bombings of 7 July 2005 – makes Munira Mirza’s arguments in *Prospect* about the current problems of multicultural policy in the UK somewhat difficult to substantiate. However, it is this very thinness which makes this second introductory example important. In a response to Mirza’s essay, Gargi Bhattacharyya (2010) cut quickly to the main point:

This is not about multiculturalism [...] what this really is, is an attack on the claim that racism exists and shapes social outcomes, and as other (contributors) point out, this is a longstanding point of political debate and struggle. The most effective method of silencing a critique of racism is to argue that racism no longer exists at all. Those claiming to suffer from its consequences must be pursuing their own selfish agendas.

A central preoccupation of this book is the ways in which the rejection of multiculturalism depends on a repudiation of racism, while being important in the reshaping of racism. Chapter 2, ‘Let’s talk about your culture: post-race, post-racism’, engages the widely held belief that, after multiculturalism, racism no longer exists. Since the end of the Second World War and the uncovering of the crimes of the Holocaust; the scientific discrediting of biological theories of race; an often grudging recognition of the crimes of colonialism; and the end of apartheid, it has become taboo to refer to race in an openly discriminatory way. Racism, where it exists, is exceptional

and aberrant, or an expression of individual pathologies. Indeed, as this chapter examines, the idea of racism is widely regarded as an ‘unhelpful’ accusation – needlessly inflammatory and designed to stifle debate – or as an unfair strategy deployed by minorities in competition for attention and resources.

Thus Thilo Sarrazin, the indirect trigger for Merkel’s lament, was roundly criticized for discussing, in promoting *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010), the contention that ‘all Jews share the same gene’ (Grieshaber 2010). Yet his consistent contention that ‘Muslim immigrants’ in Europe are incapable of ‘integrating’, and often unwilling to, was welcomed by many as a courageous, taboo-busting utterance (regardless of how many similar, and similarly courageous, establishment contrarians have been making the same argument in syndicated newspaper columns, prime-time television shows and widely distributed books over the last decade). Chapter 2 engages in a reconsideration of theories of race and racism to show how, by effecting an ahistorical divide between ideas of (biological) ‘race’ and ‘culture’, it has become unacceptable to essentialize and scapegoat people on the basis of pseudo-science, but a refreshing and necessary form of truth-telling to do so on the basis of equally spurious understandings of culture. While the idea of ‘cultural racism’ is long established in sociology (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Stolcke 1995), this chapter examines how the conjunctural conditions of the ‘war on terror’, a variegated anti-immigrant politics and a range of other socio-political factors have *laundered* and relegitimized some of its core tenets, assumptions and defences.

While Žižek’s general argument about the cost-free politics of liberal multiculturalism is one that is accepted in this book, what is of interest in his focus on the ‘mask’ of multiculturalism is the yawning gulf between his conventional mapping of multicultural politics and the changed political coordinates and discourses now assembled through it. In his somewhat sweeping summary of the European political landscape, he contends that ‘There is now one predominant centrist party that stands for global capitalism, usually with a liberal cultural agenda (for example, tolerance towards abortion, gay rights, religious and ethnic minorities). Opposing this party is an increasingly strong anti-immigrant populist party which, on its fringes, is accompanied by overtly racist neofascist groups’ (Žižek 2010). Aside from the varying degrees of (ir)relevance of this model to the political realities discussed in this book, two major developments are



absent from this picture. First, liberalism – and the ‘liberal cultural agenda’ – has become a popular modality of nationalisms that are primarily grounded through attacks on the illiberalism of minority and Muslim populations, and on the ‘relativist’ licence multiculturalism has accorded them. Secondly, the conventional assumption that extremist ideas from the political fringes contaminate centrist politics does not describe the complex ways in which a liberal attack on multiculturalism’s misplaced tolerance – on issues of liberty, expression, gender equality and sexual freedom – pervade and have been assembled across the political spectrum. Chapter 3, ‘Free like me: the polyphony of liberal post-racialism’, examines this pervasiveness and a number of strange political assemblages that thoroughly complicate the topography of liberalism and populism. It does this through several interlinking discussions – of ‘headscarf debates’ in Europe; of the racial logics of liberalism in Christian Joppke’s (2009) book *Veil: Mirror of Identity*; of identity politics in the Netherlands in the aftermath of Pim Fortuyn; and of recent theories of illiberal and exclusionary liberalisms emergent in the ‘war on terror’ era (Tebble 2006; Triadafilopoulos 2011).

Chapter 4, ‘Mediating the crisis: circuits of belief’, returns in detail to the idea of recited truths to examine their transnational production and circulation. By taking the 2009 Swiss referendum on minaret construction as a central example and metaphor, it examines the ways in which mediated events are linked and indexed to each other in ways that can be made to speak of a cumulative, pan-European or Western crisis of multiculturalism. It examines why immigration and integration debates, for all their popularity and intensity, are never held to be sufficiently ‘open’ or ‘honest’. Examining the mediation of this politics involves recognizing how the symbolic and connotative dimensions of events have become malleable political capital, but also how these dynamics are shaped and intensified by the instantaneous circuitries and networks of transnational media flow. Chapter 5, ‘Good and bad diversity: the shape of neoliberal racisms’, deepens the analysis of racism after multiculturalism as produced through assemblages of often disparate ideas, elements and sources. It takes as a central focus the neoliberal formation of the autonomous, self-sufficient subject, and examines the ‘silencing’ of race in social politics in the USA, and the post-racial logics of ‘diversity politics’ in European contexts that are in various states of collective self-recognition as diverse, immigration societies. It argues

that under neoliberal conditions, the issue is not one of accepting or celebrating diversity, but of examining who qualifies to be recognized as ‘diversity’, and how questions of ‘culture’ and autonomy are combined in the unstated division of subjects into *good diversity* (the German football team) and *bad diversity* (the ‘dis-integrated’ subjects of Merkel’s polemic).

Chapter 6, ‘On one more condition: the politics of integration today’, concludes the cumulative critique of the integrationist politics that depend on an exaggerated and stylized vision of multicultural failure to launder its racializing impacts. Departing from the argument that integration frameworks are frequently constructed to render meaningful integration impossible, the chapter examines the ways in which security, immigration and integration policies are interconnected in systems designed to order hierarchies of good diversity, focusing on utility, ‘compatibility’ and autonomy. However, it is a mistake to focus solely on state action in a critique of the politics of integration. It is interesting to note that the multivalent rejection of multiculturalism traduced by Merkel involved not only conservative culturalist formations, but also civil society movements concerned that multicultural ideas were an impediment to ‘teaching the “migrants” German “core values” of sexual freedom and gay friendliness’ (Haritaworn and Petzen 2010). It is not only in Germany that gender and sexual politics have become inflected with an aversion to ‘illiberal’ forms of life, and by examining examples and cases from a range of contexts, the book concludes by examining how partial and inconsistent visions of already achieved equality and freedom are at the nexus of new forms of racialized exclusions being elaborated by state and civil society actors.

Given the necessarily broad theoretical, contextual and disciplinary scope of this book, and the fluid expansiveness of ‘multiculturalism’ and its attendant literatures and debates, it is also necessary to state some of the things this book is not. While it engages with debates in political theory, for reasons that will be abundantly clear in the analysis it does not take a normative position on multiculturalism, still less attempt to construct one. This is not to say that this is not possible, or important; Anne Phillips’s (2007) *Multiculturalism without Culture*, for example, combines the forms of critical analysis favoured here with some very interesting discussions of recognition and equality. In the British context, the theorization of political

multiculturalism, most obviously in the work of Bhikhu Parekh and Tariq Modood, continues to drive intensive debates. However, as our main focus is on the ways in which renditions of multiculturalism provide a space for the redrawing and laundering of contemporary racisms, a deeper engagement with this tradition, and the questions it raises about political claims-making, is beyond the scope of our analysis (see Fleras 2009 for a transnational, comparative analysis of these issues).

As a work of political and discursive analysis, we draw on a diverse range of sources, voices, examples and opinions, but, for obvious reasons of scale and scope, we do not provide a thorough overview of either the political activities and experiences of the subjects of ‘crisis’, or the sociocultural complexities of their lives. This relative absence should not be read as an inherent romanticization or valorization of the cultural politics and movements which emerge from these experiences and contexts. Similarly, though the anti-racist politics of this book are hardly understated, we do not attempt to offer grand plans for the necessary resistance to these formations. Other than in our critique of movements and organizations complicit in ‘identity liberal’ formations, we have been at pains to avoid what Lisa Duggan describes as the ‘pedagogical mode’ that critical writing about politics and political action can slip into. As Duggan argues, ‘This common pedagogical mode seems counterproductive for political engagement, and it is too often based on incomplete knowledge of the history of the social movements being “taught”’ (2003: 81). What we have instead tried to offer is a critical mapping of developments, discourses and racializing assemblages currently at play in the not-quite-post-racial present, and layered across the chapters, to offer a range of conceptual and analytical possibilities for thinking and organizing resistance.

Fittingly, for two authors with Irish backgrounds, we have accumulated many debts across Europe in the writing of this book. However, these are ones we are only too happy to acknowledge.

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## ONE

### Recited truths: the contours of multicultural crisis

Oh ye people of Europe/ GREAT injustice are committed upon deh land/ How long will we permit dem to carry on? Is Europe becoming a fascist place? The answer lies at your own gate/ and in the answer lies your fate. (Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Reggae fi Peach')

Much like other irritating subjects of the times – postmodernism, globalization, terrorism, among others – the very idea of multiculturalism, the ideology, disturbs out of proportion to what in fact it may be. The reality is that the world in which many people suppose they are living is actually plural: worlds – many of them, through which we pass whenever we venture out of the doors of what homes we may have. Yet, strangely, in a time like the one prevailing since the 1990s when a growing number of people began to profess the multicultural as a way of thinking about the worlds, their professions are often greeted with dismay. (Anthony Elliot and Charles Lemert, *The New Individualism* [2006: 137])

#### The new certainties

Multiculturalism, whatever it was, has failed. Multiculturalism, wherever it was, has imploded. Multiculturalism, whenever it was, has gifted us the pathologies that gird our new certainties.

Few people – particularly those given to regarding actually existing practices of state multiculturalism as a form of liberal nationalism, or overdetermining culturalism, or micro-colonialism, or political containment – can have guessed at the depths of its transformative power. Outlining this solid object of consternation involves more guesswork: described by Stuart Hall as a 'maddeningly spongy and imprecise discursive field', multiculturalism, as Charles W. Mills writes, is a 'conceptual grab bag' of issues relating to race, culture, and identity that 'seems to be defined simply by negation – whatever does not fit into the "traditional" political map of, say, the 1950s is stuffed in here' (2007: 89). Maddeningly spongy, but also bracingly

so: an impressive spectrum of political actors and commentators hold it fully or partially responsible for an equally impressive range of cultural cleavages, social fissures and political dilemmas. The irony of multiculturalism's polysemy is that it has become a central site for coded debates about belonging, race, legitimacy and social futures in a globalized, neoliberal era.

It would be easy, given the tendency for the passing of multiculturalism to be measured out in stark, mediated death notices, to provide an illustrative pastiche of what is now a transnational genre. The fridge-magnet poetry of crisis is familiar, and easy to assemble: at five minutes to midnight the veil of multiculturalism was lifted to reveal the real suicide bomb living in seething ghettos, and so forth. So it is perhaps more interesting to see it officially represented. In January 2009, the Czech presidency of the EU unveiled *Entropa*, an art installation at the headquarters of the Council of the European Union in Brussels. Commissioned from the Czech artist Mark Czerny, it was soon swathed in the controversy it sought, as several European governments failed, as the artist put it, to show that 'Europe can laugh at itself'. In what Perry Anderson has termed Europe's contemporary climate of 'apparently illimitable narcissism' (2007), this was presumably part of the point. Yet what got obscured in the fleeting non-controversy was the political allusiveness of some of the refashioned stereotypes, and the particular dimension of narcissism they evoke. Denmark's installation cites a transnational event widely interpreted as demanding a concerted European stand for the imperilled principle of freedom of speech. The Lego construction is presented as a palimpsest of profanity, a play on the Turin Shroud, where the face of the Prophet Muhammad may or may not be superimposed on the colourful brick topography of Jutland. Keen to dampen any allusion to the 'Danish cartoon controversy' of 2005/06, the Danish government denied that this was the intention of the piece, and in so doing stayed true to their particular branch of hermeneutics. Polysemy has no place in their enlightened Europe, and much as there was then one legitimate way to read the cartoons – as a self-evident act of inclusive liberal mockery – it was important not to be wrongly free in this instance either.

The installation for the Netherlands presents a waterland finally reclaimed by the North Sea. All that survives are defiant minarets poking out from the waves, maritime navigational points for a lost civilization. This lost, plastic Holland fuses historical fears of natural

erosion with more contemporary fears of racial/cultural erosion, and Czerny's creation compresses 'Eurabian' anxieties with an awareness of their transnational recognition and significance. For just as the American children's story of Hans Brinker is associated with courage in the face of natural disaster, the last decade has produced a narrative of Dutch courage in the face of cultural catastrophe. Pim Fortuyn, Theo Van Gogh, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders have attracted international attention for their resolve in shoring up the dykes against equally implacable waves of Islamification. The minarets – which in this multimedia installation actually issue a call to prayer – index their struggles to a wider transnational reality, not just of widespread protests against the construction of mosques and minarets, but to a collective reckoning with the unintended consequences of multiculturalism. For many in the Netherlands and beyond, these personalities mark out another terrain of reclamation: a post-multicultural landscape of liberal reassertiveness, cultural and elective homogeneity, and rehabilitative modes of national integration.

These plastic parodies reference key events and actors in the crisis of multiculturalism held to have unfolded over at least the last decade. A narrative of multicultural crisis has been pegged to a litany of transformative events conventionally dated to 11 September 2001, as evidence of a shared European and sometimes Western crisis, and as salutary lessons in a collective process of political reorientation. If the humanitarian and civilizing discourses of the war on terror are undergirded by a depoliticizing extraction of conflict 'from the dense lattice of geopolitical and political-economic considerations to be depicted as stark morality tales' (Seymour 2008: 215), the conventional accounting of multicultural collapse rehearses stark new certainties. Across the somewhat unsteady spectrum of left to right, through shifting and overlapping assemblages of argument and scales of evidential connection, and apropos of divergent visions of the good society traduced and the better ones to come, multiculturalism is widely regarded as a violently failed experiment. The narrative goes something like this. The 'multicultural fantasy in Europe' (Rieff 2005) valorized difference over commonality, cultural particularity over social cohesion, and an apologetic relativism at the expense of shared values and a commitment to liberty of expression, women's rights and sexual freedom. Its variously left, liberal and middle-class obsessions with self-gratifying practices of respect for cultural difference have been given spatial expression in the parallel



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