'The cult of ethnicity exaggerates differences, intensifies resentments and antagonisms, drives even deeper the awful wedges between races and nationalities.' (Schlesinger, 1998)

Since the end of World War II, the developed world has striven to erode protectionist policies and to promote trade liberalisation. The result? Globalisation: a term that has become as ubiquitous across the social sciences as it has in modern politics. The collapse of borders – which has been further advanced in recent decades by the rise of the Internet – has not only resulted in the interdependence of markets, but so too, cultures. Coupled with increasing global freedom of movement for workers, the social make-up of our planet is transforming at an unprecedented pace, with in excess of 175 million people currently living in a country other than that of their birth (Koenleurs, 2010). But what is the consequence of this remodelling?

As nations are becoming evermore culturally diverse[1], governments the world over – especially those throughout Europe and North America – are facing intensifying pressure to successfully facilitate the convergence of cultures within their frontiers. The debate is highly prevalent in the political arenas of both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom at present, with fervent supporters of all perspectives in this wholly subjective argument. Whilst governments would agree that social harmony is the aspiration, how does one embark upon achieving such an endeavour? Is it feasible, or even desirable, to derive a set of policies that promote social cohesion, whilst simultaneously avoiding the demise of cultural autonomy? And what path are the Dutch and British governments following in their quests of eluding a clash of cultures within their respective societies?

What is Culture?

Prior to assessing the intricacies of government policy concerning cultural diversity, it is important to understand that governments' attitudes towards the notion of culture can themselves prove divisive. A general definition of *culture* is that of a shared set of values, beliefs, and practices of any given group. But assigning individuals to a culture is far from a facile process. According to French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, it is 'the organisation and ordering of things into classificatory systems that meaning is produced', and for governments 'to maintain some social order', classification to bureaucratic ends is a necessity (Woodward, 1997: 29-30). In striving for clarity of meaning, consequentially, certain facets of the issue are neglected.

Classification involves essentialising. Governments often speak of a *national culture*, but to what extent can a nation with x-million inhabitants be said to share in the same values and beliefs? Even taking into consideration regional variations, the extent to which a group of people can be homogenous remains questionable. Individual identity is entirely overlooked for the purpose of administrative efficiency. Furthermore, these distinct classificatory tags imply that cultures are not only static, but also mutually independent. Individuals, thus, become affiliated with only one culture, a wholly abstract concept. Amartya Sen has named this 'privileging and reifying [of] one particular marker of identity' (in this debate, predominantly ethnicity, race, or religion), *solitarism*. 'This 'miniaturisation' of people, as he calls it, does a

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[1] According to Giddens, 'the meaning of multiculturalism has actually become very confused. People often confuse multiculturalism with *cultural diversity* – they talk about living in a 'multicultural society' when, in reality, they mean that society is made up of people from many different ethnic backgrounds' (2009: 645). Thus, in the scope of this essay, *multiculturalism* will refer only to the government policy; *cultural diversity* will be used on all other occasions.

disservice to social reality, while at the same time helps to create potentially dangerous structural divides between people' (Booth, 2007: 136). The potential threats to social unity posed by these differences are, for Schlesinger, disquieting; how governments proceed to manage these differences can lead to their emphasis, as much as the detraction from their focus.

Assimilation versus Multiculturalism

Academics themselves admit that the terminology used in this discourse is abundant, and, at times, even superfluous (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 68). Indubitably, the perplexity of this sociological nomenclature does nothing to dispel confusion in the debate. For the purposes of this essay, it shall be presumed that there are, ostensibly, two approaches open to governments in devising policies targeting social harmony: *assimilation* and *multiculturalism*. As with many theoretical concepts, it must be borne in mind, however, that these are solely ideals, and that they are unattainable in reality. They both have their limitations; that said, Schlesinger's fears are rooted in the realm of multiculturalism.

The government policy of multiculturalism embraces not only the notion of many cultures co-existing within a single society, but also the belief that the 'preservation and protection of ethnic heritage is a fundamental right and responsibility of all' (Kumaravadivelu, 2008: 104). Whilst respecting the diversity of a society, the absence of intercultural communication leaves the society predisposed to a clash of cultures. In allowing individual cultures to adopt their own academic curricula, their own languages, their own religions, is there a threat to social cohesion? Schlesinger believes so. The more introverted and parochial cultures become, the more segregated the society, where ultimately, 'the recognition of diversity can lead to self-segregation, with each culture trapping itself within a territory and regarding any attempt at communication that comes from the outside as an act of aggression' (Touraine, 2000: 195). It is this notion upon which Schlesinger's convictions are founded. So long as cultures are entitled to absolute autonomy, differences emphasised by solitarism will continue to be exaggerated, cultures will continue to be marginalised, and social harmony will continue to be under threat.

With such a cogent argument against multiculturalism, many contend that assimilation is the solution to social cohesion, but this policy, too, has its deficiencies. At the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, assimilation necessitates the full adoption of the majority culture by the minorities – whether in terms of seemingly trivial aspects, such as dress, or the more deep-rooted, such as language. Of course, such an endeavour is wholly unattainable and ethically dubious, despite its well-intentioned attempt at social unity. Cultural autonomy is lost and diversity foregone for the sake of social harmony, but the more the majority 'powers identify with one central unifying principle [...] the quicker their societies' descent into the hell of totalitarianism' (Touraine, 2000: 158-159). Solitarism aside, assimilation is fundamentally a policy aimed at the individual; one cannot expect all members of a culture to simultaneously forego their shared identity. Furthermore, the renunciation of one's identity is an impossible feat.

Maintaining the balance between social unity and cultural autonomy often proves extremely problematic for governments. Whilst they aspire to the social cohesion that comes as a product of assimilation, they are concurrently acutely aware of the prejudices that the adoption of such a policy engenders against minority cultures. Conversely, according to those like Schlesinger, a focus on cultural autonomy can reify cultural differences and have an adverse impact on social

harmony. Both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have struggled in recent years to reach a compromise.

<u>*Attitudes towards cultural diversity in the Netherlands*</u>

Perhaps an apposite insight into attitudes towards cultural diversity in the Netherlands comes from Maarten van Rossem's recently published book, *Who are we?* Written in Dutch, and intended for the mass market, the renowned historian seeks to answer questions regarding *the* Dutch national identity, and *the* Dutchman (2011). For a nation stereotypically renowned for its collective tolerance, many have been surprised at the extent to which the discourse on cultural diversity in the Netherlands has 'degenerated into an aggressive nationalism in order to defend itself against the globalisation of the economy' (Touraine, 2000: 162).

The government has, for the most part, adopted a stance very much entrenched in multiculturalism posterior to World War II. Remnants of the long tradition of pillarisation could be seen in the 1983 *Ethnic Minorities Policy*, introduced upon the government's realisation that the temporary immigrants were, in fact, there to remain. The Turks, Moroccans, and Surinamese – who today each number between 300,000 and 350,000 (Entzinger, 2007: 2) – were, amongst others, to receive generous funding to support their autonomy (Vasta, 2007: 716). One major factor was, however, overlooked: the relationship between the more dominant Dutch culture, and that of the minority cultures. 'Separation might permit the assertion of minority group identity and strength, but without acceptance and empowerment by the majority, the minority will continue to suffer from the associations between racial difference and social and political status' (Minow, 1985: 157). Two areas that have come under much scrutiny within the minority communities, are those of attainment in education and successful entry into the labour market; for non-Westerners, the level of unemployment is much higher than that of the native Dutch, and educational attainment is much lower (Vasta, 2007: 719-720). In preserving their independence, minorities have inadvertently led to the relegation of their socio-political status.

This perceived inferiority, combined with a lack of intercultural communication, has in recent years, highlighted cross-cultural differences and prompted a significant proportion of the Dutch majority to endorse nativist views. The current discourse very much focuses on the apparent dichotomy between the 'liberal democracy' of the Netherlands and the 'backwards religion' of Islam. Resentments and antagonisms appear to have intensified – just as Schlesinger anticipated – and a recent public backlash against cultural diversity and multiculturalism policies has begun to rear its head in the form of ever-increasing assimilation policies. With more stringent checks for new immigrants, and compulsory language and citizenship tests for existing ones, the move to abolish cultural autonomy has gained much momentum (Entzinger, 2007: 13). The rise of populist politicians, including Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, has added further fuel to the fire. Many wonder whether this reaction by the Dutch majority has perhaps been too hasty and too extreme, and with the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, it appears as though the society is more divided than ever.

<u>*Attitudes towards cultural diversity in the United Kingdom*</u>

The recent death of Ray Honeyford has once again brought the issue of cultural diversity to the fore. This former headmaster of a Bradford school – 95% of whose intake was of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin – was impelled to resign after an article he authored cautioning against the government's multiculturalism policies led to public outcry. Fearful that 'ethnic minority children

were encouraged to cling on to their cultures, customs, even languages, while the concept of a shared British identity was treated with contempt' (McKinstry, 2012), Honeyford predicted the deepening of 'awful wedges between races and nationalities' that Schlesinger went on to echo two decades later. Yet, whereas Honeyford was portrayed as a racist, an increasing number of politicians, academics, and civil servants from persuasions spanning the political sphere, are now voicing identical sentiments without fear of such severe repercussions.

As in the Netherlands, the UK has, in recent decades, adopted a stance in favour of multiculturalism. With both qualitative and quantitative evidence proving this policy has not achieved the desired result of a unified, culturally diverse society, the policy of putting people into autonomist boxes is being reconsidered. David Cameron recently gave a speech saying that 'under the "doctrine of state multiculturalism", different cultures have been encouraged to live separate lives' (BBC News, 2011), with his predecessor, Gordon Brown championing 'the need to be more explicit about what we stand for' (Harrison, 2006). Intercultural communication has faltered under multiculturalism, and 'resentments and antagonisms' have intensified, just as Schlesinger forecast. That said, the UK has not witnessed the same levels of vehemence abundant in the Dutch debate.

According to a BBC survey, whilst the overwhelming majority of the UK population is in favour of a culturally diverse society, 58% also supports the statement that 'people who come to live in Britain should adopt British values/traditions' (BBC News, 2005). The championing of multiculturalism has not proved successful in terms of social cohesion, with Trevor Phillips from the Commission for Racial Equality raising concerns that the UK is 'sleepwalking into segregation' (McKinstry, 2012). So where does this leave policy makers?

A move towards Sophisticated Multiculturalism?

Neither assimilation nor multiculturalism are feasible policies for governments to adopt, but that is not to say that the issues of cultural diversity and social cohesion can be neglected. It is inevitable that globalisation will continue to impact the social make-up of our planet for decades to come, and governments must do their utmost to successfully facilitate the convergence of cultures within their frontiers. Both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are currently in the midst of attempting to reach equilibrium, but, because of its subjectivity, the issue is one of much contention.

Giddens has proposed a solution that draws upon the advantages of both policies, whilst disregarding their flaws: _sophisticated multiculturalism_ 'emphasises the importance of national identity and national laws, but also the fostering of connections between different social and ethnic groups.' Effectuated pragmatically, such a policy can promote social cohesion, whilst simultaneously allowing for some degree of cultural autonomy. Of course, 'equality of status does not mean that we accept uncritically the practices of other groups' (Giddens, 2009: 645-646), as 'the call to celebrate difference is a potentially dangerous postmodernist metanarrative posing as tolerance' (Booth, 2007: 140). Equal rights and mutual respect, coupled with open intercultural communication, and not discounting an appreciation of an individual's complex web of attachments to numerous cultures, is the way to proceed.

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