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Version: Accepted Version

Book Section:
Bagguley, P and Hussain, Y (2020) Cosmopolitanism in an Age of Xenophobia and Ethnic Conflict. In: Cicchelli, V and Mesure, S, (eds.) Cosmopolitanism in Hard Times. Brill, pp. 317-327. ISBN: 978-90-04-43801-9.

https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004438026_024

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Cosmopolitanism in an Age of Xenophobia and Ethnic conflicts

Paul Bagguley and Yasmin Hussain

Introduction

In this chapter we evaluate the idea of cosmopolitanism in relation to some recent forces that appear to be reversing it in cases such as the UK in the forms of the return of nationalism, the rise of populism in the West (Ashbee, 2017), counter-terrorism discourse and practices, and increasing xenophobia, Islamophobia and racism. This is taking place in the context of increasing social inequalities (Picketty, 2014) and global economic and political competition between nations. We begin with a discussion of Beck's (2002) analysis of cosmopolitanism using this heuristically to assess recent developments in the UK in terms of three moments of 'anti-cosmopolitanism'. They are all characterised to some degree by a form of populism, transformed public discourses and a shift in state institutions and practices. Each of these moments signalled an anti-cosmopolitan movement in different fields. Firstly, in terms of the field of internal relationships between ethnic groups within the UK and how these are managed by the state. For example the state's response to the 2001 ethnic riots in the UK (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008) was distinctly anti-cosmopolitan, being focused upon encouraging the assimilation of British South Asians. Secondly, in terms of international relations and internal securitisation, the state's responses to the 9/11 attacks on the USA, but especially the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London can only be read as being contrary to the process of cosmpolitanization identified by authors such as Beck (2006). Thirdly, and most recently the vote in the UK's referendum to leave the EU (Clarke et *al.*, 2017) popularly known as Brexit, also demonstrates both a popular and state level anti-cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism between normative political philosophy and sociological realism.

Ulrich Beck stands as perhaps the most stridently optimistic social theorist in his view of the cosmopolitan present. The main thrust of his analysis was to take the idea of cosmopolitanism from the discourse of political theory towards a more sociological perspective. He argued that the idea of cosmopolitanism has:

> … left the realm of philosophical castles in the air and has entered reality. Indeed it has become the defining feature of a new era, the era of reflexive modernity, in which national borders and differences are dissolving… (Beck, 2006: 2)

He conceived of cosmopolitanism in terms of national differences, whilst others would relate it to imaginary racial differences, ethnicity or religion. Beck goes on to describe cosmopolitan thought and action as a '… vital theme of European civilisation and European consciousness…' (Beck, 2006: 2). A key question for him whether cosmopolitanism may be able to 'include other modernities and civilisations' (Beck, 2002: 19), which is suggestive of a strategy of incorporation of the 'other' into 'the West'. Furthermore, Beck suggests that cosmopolitan ideas have gathered support recently, because it is a reflection of cosmopolitan realities. This is related to his analysis of globalisation, which he sees occurring within nation-states, so that the resulting cosmopolitan social reality characterises people's everyday experiences and daily life. Although Beck was critical of 'methodological nationalism', it might be argued that his approach risks being Eurocentric (Bhambra, 2014: 73). For example Turner (2002: 52) notes that cosmopolitanism in practice is not the monopoly of the contemporary West and that trading centres in early Islam enabled peaceful encounters between ethnically, religiously and tribally diverse groups. Finally, Beck's discussion is not just located in the West, but within that configuration the EU.

Harrington (2016: 352) has also pointed to the inherent circularity of Beck's argument whereby one has to accept the emergence of cosmopolitanism in order to be in a position to analyse and appreciate it. In addition Martell (2008: 131) has suggested that Beck '… does not recognise the agency of actors in making cosmopolitanism and who can also reverse it.' In many respects it may be argued that this is precisely what has happened in the first two decades of this century in certain Western countries such as the UK. What Beck refers to as anti-cosmopolitanisation has become dominant, contrary to his rather dismissive view of it as: 'superfluous and absurd' (Beck, 2006: 110) and 'tantamount as to a clinical loss of reality' (Beck, 2006: 117). He suggests that anti-cosmopolitanism can only 're-erect the old boundaries only in theory, not in reality' (Beck, 2006: 117). This

perspective has left Beck's analysis unable to properly understand and explain the anti-cosmopolitan developments that we discuss in this chapter. The Brexit vote in Britain may be seen as an attempt at the re-erection of old national boundaries in reality. Furthermore, Martell (2009) has pointed out Beck sees American military power as humanitarian and cosmopolitan, which in effect legitimates global inequalities and the USA's routine negligence of international law. It could also be suggested that it overlooks the crisis of US hegemony (Bergesen and Lizardo, 2004) and the how the 'war on terror' has become the dominant discourse of contemporary international politics as understood from the perspective of the West (Sayyid, 2013).

There are grounds for thinking of cosmopolitanism as being the cultural, philosophical and social mirror of global capitalism. Within this perspective the middle classes are seen by some as the strategic cosmopolitans of contemporary capitalism who serve as: ' (…) a nodal agent in the expanding networks of the global economy. He or she is the new, superior footsoldier of global capitalism' (Mitchell, 2003: 400). However, as Harrington (2016: 352-3) has noted increased global mobility need not produce greater global sensitivity. Szerzynski and Urry (2002) see the spread of cosmopolitanism as the localised effects of globalisation, and they give a central role to globalised media resulting in a 'banal globalism'. They usefully treat cosmopolitanism as an 'empty signifier' (Szerzynski and Urry, 2002: 469), and write of a 'ideal typical' cosmopolitan individual who is characterised by extensive mobility, consumption of diverse places, curiosity of different peoples and places, risk taking in encounters with others, being able to make aesthetic judgements about different places, possessing semiotic skills of interpretation together with an openness to other peoples and their cultures (Szerzynski and Urry, 2002: 470). Contrary to this analysis it can be suggested that the past twenty years have seen a reversal of this trend at multiple levels in the UK in terms of state practices towards, political discourses about and everyday experiences of those considered 'other'.

More recently there has been a resurgence of studies of everyday cosmopolitanism, whilst often critical of the prescriptive moral character of cosmopolitanism as political philosophy, it may be argued that they still retain a certain degree of optimism. This is despite often noting the racist or othering friction

that sometimes occurs in cosmopolitan encounters in the UK for example (Andreouli and Howarth, 2018: 14; Neal et *al.,* 2018: 27; Hall, 2012: 67-8). We feel that this approach overlooks or down play three important issues. Firstly, as studies of micro interactions between relatively powerless groups they do not fully take account of the wider structural context of racism. Secondly they fail to consider the possibility of what Houts-Picca and Feagin (2007) in a US context have theorised as 'two-faced racism'. This requires the recognition that otherwise convivial every day interactions may be 'front-stage' performances in public settings, whilst in a 'back stage' more private context where only White people are present racism may re-emerge. Thirdly the ways in which public events give rise to many micro events of racist hostility, and we shall discuss an example of this in the case of the UK's vote to leave the EU as discussed below. If we were truly on the path towards a cosmopolitan utopia as implied by some such as Beck (2006) then such events would be less likely, or least managed more effectively, by social and political elites.

Three instances of anti-cosmopolitanism in the UK

This section examines three instances of anti-cosmopolitanism in the UK. The first of these are the ethnic riots in the North of England in the summer of 2001 (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). It then moves on to examine how responses to terrorist attacks in the UK and the Brexit vote may be seen as instances of anti-cosmopolitanism.

The spring and summer of 2001 was marked in the UK by a series of riots in the North of England in Oldham on 26-29 May, Burnley on 24-26 June and most seriously in Bradford on 7-9 July (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). In response the government commissioned a report that became known as the Cantle report on 'Community Cohesion' (Cantle, 2002). What is striking about the Cantle report is how strongly anti-cosmopolitan its arguments were, and how its central ideas and policy prescriptions around 'community cohesion' came to dominate public political discourse and policy making in the UK around matters of ethnic identity and racism. The idea of community cohesion was closely linked to the influence of communitarian thinking on the Labour governments of Tony Blair (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008).

The Cantle report represented South Asian Muslim communities as self-segregating – not just geographically, but also socially and culturally. It saw South Asian Muslim communities in the North of England as in a state of self-generated crisis. They were seen as reproducing 'dysfunctional practices' such as not speaking English at home, organising arranged marriages, and involved in intergenerational conflict. Muslim communities were to be 'required to integrate' under the Cantle report's recommendations (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008). The Cantle report and the subsequent translation of its ideas into local policies of community cohesion represent a clear example of anti-cosmopolitanism as a state practice.

The 9/11 attacks on the USA, the 7/7 bombings in London and other attempted terrorist attacks have occurred at the height of academic debates around cosmopolitanism. Popular reactions to terrorist attacks, public discourse and state policies are all aspects of the process of securitisation of British Muslims (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012). All of these aspects of securitisation can be seen as anti-cosmopolitan. Securitisation is the process by which an issue or group defined as a security threat, so that governmental and societal resources are mobilised to counter it. Through this process political leaders build public support – through political statements and the media - for exceptional and new legislation and state initiatives to counter the threat. The security 'threat' becomes the 'common sense' in political debate, the media and amongst the public. It becomes impossible to speak of that group without implying their 'threat' to security. (Buzan et *al*., 1998). In the UK the Terrorism Act – 2000 the Anti Terrorism Crime and Security Act – 2001 are examples of the exceptional powers taken on by the state as part of this process. These entail additional powers to police – search, arrest and detain. In practice these powers are applied in excess to the issues that they ostensibly address as illustrated by the fact that 1228 people arrested under anti-terrorism legislation between Sept 2001 and March 2007. Only 41 or under 4% of those arrested were convicted of a terrorist offence. (Hewitt, 2007)

Even prior to 9/11 the main themes of news coverage of Muslims in the UK were overwhelmingly negative. Muslims have for several decades now been represented as a threat to UK security because they are involved in deviant activities

of various kinds. Muslims are perceived as a threat to British values and therefore a threat to social integration. It is widely assumed that there are inherent cultural differences between Muslims and the British which creates interpersonal tensions. At the same time Muslims are seen to be increasingly agitating for their interests in politics, education and against discrimination (Poole, 2006).

Similar negative themes have continued in media reporting, but are now organised around one main theme: 'Islamic terrorism' (Poole, 2006). Islam is presented as anti-modern, politically unstable, undemocratic, barbaric and chaotic. The representation of Muslims in the UK is dominated by this framework (Nickels et *al.*, 2010). They are seen by journalists as threats to British values, alongside ambiguous representations of Muslims as either moderate or extremist. Moderate Muslims seen as have a responsibility for bringing the extremists under control- preventing 'radicalisation'. The securitisation of everyday encounters (Hussain and Bagguley, 2013) has meant that individual and collective experiences of verbal abuse and physical attacks on Muslims have increased after terrorist attacks. Certain symbols seem to provoke such reactions, such as the carrying of a backpack, or wearing clothing perceived as Islamic. Airports are routinely identified by British Muslims as the locations of humiliating encounters with authority. What exactly is humiliating about such experiences is the denial of taken-for-granted national identity, and the challenge to 'respectability' – many were lawful, highly educated and middle class – that these practices entail. Muslim identity is routinely seen as threatening by UK Airport authorities. Furthermore, markers of religious purity, e.g. women's hijab, are treated as signs of danger, as a reason to be suspicious (Blackwood et *al.*, 2013).

The 'Prevent' strategy developed since the 2005 terrorist attacks on London seeks to challenge the ideology behind terrorism. It aims to disrupt those who promote terrorism, whilst supporting those who are seen as vulnerable to recruitment into terrorism. One of its main goals is to increase the resilience of communities to terrorism, however, the focus is almost entirely upon Muslim communities. The Prevent strategy is delivered locally through local councils and the police, schools, universities and the health service, where front-line teachers,

health and social care workers are given short training courses on how to recognise the signs of terrorism amongst their clients.

Section 44 of the Terrorism Act allowed Police to stop and search anyone anywhere anytime without reasonable grounds for suspicion that they were engaged in terrorist or terrorist related activities. In 2009 more than 100,000 section 44 searches were carried out but none resulted in an arrest for a terrorism related offence. A few hundred people given warnings about alcohol use and possession of cannabis, so that it is evident that the legislation was being used to police petty crime. Evidence suggests that the legislation was disproportionately used against those of South Asian or Other ethnic origin. Interviews with those stopped and searched revealed that felt they were stopped because 'they were Asian, Black or looked Muslim', unlike White people who were stopped (Parmar, 2011). What this also signifies is a breakdown of the boundary between counter-terrorism policing and ordinary policing. Further interviews with the police revealed that they thought: 'It's a really useful piece of legislation…' Section 44 searches had the effect of 'reassuring the public' (Parmar, 2011). This example of policing to reassure the public is a good example of securitisation. However, the overall response to terrorism may be seen to exemplify anti-cosmopolitan tendencies. Rather than the features of cosmopolitanism identified by Beck (2006) such as openness and tolerance of national and ethnic differences, these very differences have becomes signs of a threat to a Britishness which is understood in traditional ethnically homogenous 'Whiteness'.

The final example of an instance of anti-cosmopolitanism that is discussed here concerns the vote in the UK in a referendum to leave the EU – popularly known as the Brexit vote. Firstly the principal features of the leave campaign and how it was suffused with anti-cosmopolitan themes are outlined. Then the discussion moves on to consider the wave of racist attacks that occurred immediately after the vote to leave the EU. This wave of attacks is conceptualised as a form of 'celebratory racism'. By 'celebratory racism' is meant a form racist behaviour performed in public that often expresses either 'anger' or 'fun'. It is performed for public audiences of other White British people friends or even strangers. It reinforces a sense of White British superiority and 'victory' over the 'threat' from racialised

minorities. This was especially important in the context of the Brexit campaign. It often occurs in contexts where there is a feeling that 'normal constraints' on behaviour in public had been removed, so that racist performances that be normally seen as 'deviant' in public places are suddenly felt to be acceptable. What was previously expressed privately 'back-stage' becomes expressed 'front-stage' for a public audience.

Central to understanding how this celebratory racism suddenly emerged after the Brexit vote is the how far immigration was the central issue underlying the campaign for Britain to leave the EU. Rather than the actual numbers and character of migration to the UK from Europe being the key factor, it was how politician's concerns with immigration generated a series of myths about the numbers and categories of migrants that principally constructed the public response (Favell and Barbulescu, 2018). More generally it has been suggested that the Brexit vote reflected long term deep seated racism across the UK population and not just amongst a 'left behind' working class (Virdee and McGeever, 2018).

The broader politics of Brexit was also a reflection of a divided ruling elite, especially within the ruling Conservative Party; a crisis of the party system within both major parties, but especially the Conservatives, who feared losing support to the anti-European UK Independence Party; and a crisis of legitimacy of the dominant neo-liberal strategies for the country (Jessop, 2017: 134). The result was the cross-class character of the support for leaving the EU in the referendum of 2016. Whilst two thirds of the traditionally defined manual working class voted in favour of leaving the EU this made up only 24 per cent of the overall vote in favour of leaving. Most of the vote in favour of leaving the EU came from the middle classes (Antonucci et *al.*, 2017), and the South of England (Dorling, 2016). Furthermore, 66 per cent of those aged 66 and over voted in favour of leave, and 53 per cent identifying as 'white British' compared to only 23 per cent of those from minority ethnic groups (Clarke et *al.*, 2017: 155). Rather the leave vote was a cross-class coalition of older and middle sections of the population. This was mobilised partly in terms of a nostalgia for the British Empire, but also in terms of a British isolationism. The first of these was connected to the idea of returning democratic control of the country to the UK so that it could re-establish trading relations with the former empire. After the

Brexit vote this economic strategy was referred to by UK government officials as 'Empire 2.0' (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1805). This reflects a postcolonial melancholia (Gilroy, 2004) rooted in the loss of empire and the decline of Britain's former imperial prestige, and in part explains the support for the leave campaign amongst the older sections of the population. The second aspect revolves around the longer run constructions of the migrant as an economic threat (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1806) to the 'indigenous white working class', as well as Muslims constructed as a security threat to the British nation (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012). This interpretation is also confirmed by statistical analyses of surveys after the vote which showed that concerns about controlling the economy, immigration and terrorism were strongly associated with voting leave, and that these were views solidly in place before the referendum (Clarke et *al.,* 2017: 161).

The outpouring of interpersonal racism immediately after the vote to leave was announced was just as shocking and surprising as the leave vote itself. This involved not just verbal racism, but physical attacks on people and property. The number of hate crimes recorded for the last two weeks in June increased by 42 per cent compared to last year. A total of 3,076 incidents were recorded across the country between 16 and 30 June –compared to the 915 reports recorded over the same period in 2015 (https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/29/frenzy-hatred-brexit-racism-abuse-referendum-celebratory-lasting-damage). Celebratory racism appeared 'almost instantly', but not spontaneously. It reflected the enduring nature of racism as a macro phenomenon, alongside the reproduction of racism 'privately' in 'back-stage' safe spaces for racism. The racist character of the 'leave campaign' had effectively legitimated public expressions of racism resulting in its normalisation. What was also striking was the generic character of Brexit celebratory racism: all visible ethnic minorities were targeted not just Europeans. All ethnic and racialized minorities became represented during the Brexit campaign as 'immigrants' who would no longer be 'allowed in' or were to be 'sent home'. These performances of 'celebratory racism' were often expressed as either 'anger' or 'fun'. They were performed for public audiences of other White British people be they friends or strangers. They had the effect of reinforcing a sense of White British superiority and 'victory' over the 'threat' from 'immigrant' racialised minorities.

These performances emerged from the feeling that 'normal constraints' on behaviour in public had been removed by the Brexit campaign. Although racist incidents were experienced before the Brexit votes by recent migrants to the UK (Rzepnikowska, 2018), what was new after the Brexit vote was both their scale and scope, and the ways in which they reflected the dominant discourse of the leave campaign (Burnett, 2016).

Conclusion: after the cosmopolitan revolution just racism as usual?

Beck described the resurgence of interest in cosmopolitanism almost two decades ago as a 'revolution in the social sciences' (2002: 17). What we have seen since then is increased is not so much the increased cosmopolitanisation (Beck, 2002: 17) that he predicted, but increased resistance to these processes. In the case of the UK this will see epoch making structural economic, political and social changes in its relationship with Europe.

In one of this last public lectures Zygmunt Bauman reflected upon Britain's Brexit vote and the wider global context of increasing populism, nationalism and xenophobia as a situation which was already cosmopolitan but that popular was such: 'as if nothing had happened' (Bauman, 2016: 3). What he was suggesting here was that people's cultural frameworks of action had been inherited from a more nation-state bound past, and were no longer congruent with a more globalised present. In one of his final books he developed the concept of retrotopia as a form of nostalgia that reconciled security and freedom based on a highly selective memory of the past (Bauman, 2017). The past of the UK and Europe was of course always global to some degree marked by colonialism, imperialism, migration and trade, but that is not how most people remember it. The past that people recall is more nation-state bound and ethnically homogenous, and is captured by how Bauman conceives of retrotopia where: '(…) you feel free to fantasize, to imagine … how nice it was to live in the past, how much better there were the ways of life which our parents, or ourselves even, in our naivity abandoned.' (Bauman, 2017: 3). Most strikingly in the case of the leave campaign for Brexit but also in the case of the other examples that we have discussed here, the motivations and processes involved exemplify a particular form of retrotopia. Rather than living in an age of cosmopolitanism as

conceptualised by Beck, we live in an age of retrotopia that has emerged as a form of reaction against the forces of cosmopolitanisation.

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