

# 1 Introduction: Thought Paralysis

**The pagination of this file, does not match that of the actual book**

An anxiety and a caution.....	3
Two short (schematic) stories and a moral .....	5
A culture of fear – another short story .....	6
In search of Obamaland .....	7
The celebrators of Diversity.....	9
Two caveats and their consequences .....	9
Tiptoe through the minefield of taboos.....	10
Good guys and Bad guys .....	11
Thought Impasse.....	12
Method.....	13
Overview and Outline .....	13

Over the last few decades there have been many heroic struggles and enormous efforts put into challenging the inequalities and iniquities endemic in our society, specifically in the areas of ‘race’, gender, class and disability. And indeed a great many positive changes have taken place. For one thing the struggles have brought about a profound change in social conventions in Britain, so that it is no longer acceptable in polite liberal company to say dismissive or hateful things about women, Blacks or lesbians; changes in the legislature mean that same sex relationships are granted official recognition – something that was unimaginable fifty years ago. Yet it is also the case that despite these efforts, despite substantial changes in the legislation and so forth, the statistics tell us that racism and sexism continue to flourish; for example in the 2010 season of the BBC Proms concerts ‘only 1.6% of the conductors and 4.1% of the composers [were] women’ (Thorpe, 2010). But worse, in some cases *the situation has actually deteriorated*: two cases in point being the fact that the pay differentials between men and women have actually *widened* in the last year or two (Hencke, 2009), and the fact that that in the five years from 2004-9 there has been a 70% *increase* in the numbers of Black and Asians stopped and searched on the streets of Great Britain in comparison to the previous five years (Travis, 2010). At the same time these very same institutions make proud claims in their Equal Opportunity statements that they subscribe to the values of inclusivity, fairness, non-discriminatory practice, and so on. They back their claims by pointing to the fact that they require all their employees to participate in ‘equality and diversity’ trainings, in order that they develop more tolerant and inclusive attitudes towards others. Despite these efforts and claims, there remains quite a gap between what institutions say they are doing and what is actually happening.

The contrast between the achievements of the Equality Movements and the road yet to be travelled by them, is found in two articles that happened to appear on the same day in the newspaper *The Guardian*. A glimpse of the achievements are found in an article describing the return of the 'Freedom Riders' to Mississippi, to mark the 50 year anniversary of the first struggles against segregation. One returning veteran of the early struggles remarked: "There are only two kinds of bathrooms now, men and women. The last time I was here there were eight: white men, coloured men, white women, coloured women, white men employees, white women employees, coloured men employees and coloured women employees" (MacAskill, 2011). It is a testament to the achievements of the struggle, that it is so hard in this day and age to even imagine that strict apartheid was the social norm in parts of the USA (and not so very long ago at that). Meanwhile in Britain at that time, whilst there was no formal apartheid, virulent racism and sexism were the prevailing norms.

A glimpse of the road yet to be travelled is provided by the headline, "14,000 British professors – but only 50 are black" (Shepherd, 2011), which computes to just 0.34%. The headline speaks for itself.

So how is it that regardless of the enormous amounts of money and effort being poured into equality initiatives, inequality continues to flourish to the extraordinary extent that it still does? One explanation favoured by those on the 'right', is that these initiatives go against 'human nature' and so are bound to fail; they would say that the paucity of Black professors is simply due to their (lack of) ability or their poor work ethic. The book proceeds in a different direction. It attempts to answer this question by critically reflecting on the assumptions that formed the rationales of the equality enterprise. And whilst acknowledging successes of the equality movements, the work focuses on some of the dead ends that the equality project has found itself in, in order to learn from them. One reason for some of the wrong turns taken by some influential streams of the equality movements (particularly by those that 'celebrate diversity'), is that they subscribe to a singularly impoverished version of human psychology as well as sociology.

The book will be arguing that the equalities project has floundered to some degree in part because of the machinations of vested interests, and in part because of the ways that the equality movements (particularly the 'celebrators of diversity'), have conceptualised the problem (and the solutions that follow from them). At times these 'solutions' have worked in the direction of reinforcing the difficulties rather than of dismantling them. For example, it turns out that both, the racists as well as *some* proponents of multiculturalism and diversity, buy into the same essentialist premise, to believe that the 'difference' each venerates is real and incontrovertible. The category beloved of the racists is that of 'race', whilst the categories beloved of the multiculturalists and diversity promulgators are those of culture and ethnicity. But peculiarly, the proponents of diversity utilise their category for the same purposes as the racists – to distance human groupings from each other in order to preserve their 'authenticity'. The racists do this by denigrating those who are different, and the diversity promulgators manage this by idealizing and fetishizing difference. Caught between the two, the casualty, often enough is thought itself.

A part of my developing argument will be that racism as well as the other processes of marginalization (of which racism is but a subset), are in many ways analogous to parasites. Parasites mutate and evolve to mimic the functioning of the host in order to fool the host into thinking that that the parasite is a good and healthy

part of itself. This results in the parasite dropping ‘below the radar’ of the defence systems of the host in order to sneak into its body. Once ensconced, the parasite leeches on the resources of the host, depleting and weakening it, and often enough killing it off entirely. In some cases, like that of the cuckoo, the host is sufficiently fooled into *actively* feeding and nourishing the parasite to the detriment of itself. In regards to equality, this is the kind of situation we currently find ourselves in. My contention is that *some* of the processes of marginalization have mutated into forms that fool liberalism into fostering them and giving them succour, and in the process undermining its own integrity. One of the more successful of the recent forms taken by these processes is the ‘celebrating diversity’ movement. The values of the diversity movement, that you *must* respect difference, looks decent and innocent enough, but it is not. It is insidious, because it has fooled the host (democratic liberal society) into switching off its immune system, this being the capacity to think. How the processes of marginalization have managed this feat is in part, what the book is about.

### ***An anxiety and a caution***

The danger in writing a book critical of *aspects* of diversity, multiculturalism, and the like, is that it might be construed that I am against the emancipatory project *per se*. Further, the critique could be used to give succour to the racist, or those who cry ‘political correctness’ in order to stifle and undermine challenges to the current order of things. So let me be clear on where I stand: Unlike some right wing pundits, I *do* think that there are many anomalies in regards to equality in our society. To my mind there is no question that there are serious and very real issues to be thought about as to how and why only some ‘kinds’ of individuals appear to make the grade and other kinds hit ‘the glass ceiling’. All of this is beyond question and dispute. There is evidence aplenty that racism, sexism and the like continue to flourish. For example in the four year period from 2005 to 2009 the Metropolitan Police Territorial Support Group (a specialist police unit) has had over 5000 complaints made against them for ‘oppressive behaviour’. And of these, just 0.18% of the complaints were upheld, the rest were deemed unsubstantiated (by the police themselves). One officer has had 31 complaints lodged against him of which about twenty six were lodged by Black and Asian men. In other words, not only does racism continue to flourish, there seems to be very little real will to confront it by the authorities, and is often enough being perpetrated by the authorities themselves. But it is also an error to talk of the authorities as a ‘them’, as though they were all of one mind. In this instance the police force’s watchdog, the Metropolitan Police Authority is deeply critical of the Territorial Support Group, saying that “its time for an ethical audit and thorough overhaul. They desperately need better training” (Lewis & Taylor, 2009). Why training is not the answer to this sort of situation is something I will address later in the text.

So whilst I agree with the equality movements that there are profound issues regarding inequality and injustice that need challenging, I disagree with some of the strategies being proposed as how to solve these problems. Some of my disagreements are at a fundamental level, not just at the solutions proposed, but at the very way in which the problems are being conceptualized in the first place.

I also want to distance this book from the many works emanating from the right of the political spectrum that mock and lampoon some of the suggestions and prescriptions put forward by the equal opportunity movements. Their purpose is destructive, to undermine the entire equalities project and to normalise prejudice,

hatred and bigotry as ‘natural’ phenomena. To this mindset the ones causing difficulties are the equality pundits and their ideologies and the poor victims are beleaguered Whites, embattled in their own land. For example here is a scaremongering, inflammatory headline in the pages of *The Times* newspaper: ‘Adoption Couples Blocked by Race Barrier’. The article begins:

Thousands of families seeking to adopt a child are being turned away at first inquiry, with hundreds told that they are simply the wrong race. One family in four was turned down of which 13% were told it was because their ethnicity did not match the children waiting for a home.

Bennett (2011)

A little later in the article the hint is made explicit, that it is White families who are being blocked from adopting ‘ethnic’ children. I do not want to take up the issue of whether families of one colour ought to be able to adopt children of another colour. Instead, I want to focus on how mischievously the paragraph is crafted and what it invites the reader to think. At first read it seems as though thousands of (White) families are being blocked from adopting babies. But a second read tells us that one in four were turned down for a multitude of reasons, *out of which* thirteen percent were denied because of their ethnicity. The arithmetic is simple: thirteen percent of twenty five percent comes to just over three percent. In other words just over three out of every hundred applicants were turned down because of their ethnicity – not as exciting as the ‘thousands’ and ‘hundreds’ announced in the initial sentence. It then also turns out that the ‘thousands’ and ‘hundreds’ referred to are not literal but *extrapolations* from a research whose ‘sample is small’. Surely the intention of the article is malicious in that it seeks to foster and inflame the racist mindset.

So although this book is going to be critical of certain lines pursued by the diversity and equality movements, my intention is not to attack in order to dismantle the equalities agenda *per se*. Rather, the intention of this work is to *strengthen* these emancipatory movements by critiquing their weaknesses, anomalies, conceptual confusions, and so forth. To use an arboreal analogy, I consider this work as analogous with pruning rather than felling.

To anticipate some of the discussion yet to come, in my view racism at a systemic level is not caused by ‘ignorance’, nor by psychologically malfunctioning individuals, but sustained and produced by power relations. The reasons as to why the situation has not progressed more than it might have is for several reasons. The first and foremost reason is quite simply that institutions and those in power resist structural change (not necessarily consciously) and find ways of apparently complying with equalities enterprise without actually doing so. The equalities enterprise becomes perverted into a paper exercise the intention of which is to be seen to be doing good rather than doing actual good. And the way that they have managed this is by stripping ethics out of the conversation and replacing it with bureaucratic procedure. Further, the Diversity agenda has been hijacked by some corporations, who purport to subscribe to the emancipatory project for justice, but in fact exploit the notion of Diversity to further enhance their profit margins. These, I contend, are the main obstacles to real change. But this does not let the equality movements off the hook regarding the ways that they themselves have contributed to this situation. The weaknesses of some of the reasoning from sections of the equality movements have created hostages to fortune that have been opportunistically exploited by vested

interests, not only in the service of sustaining the status quo, but also of dismantling the equalities project entirely. Their wish, in contrast to mine, is to fell rather than to prune. For example as the book is going to press, the UK government is ‘consulting’ the general public about whether The Equalities Act of 2010 should be scrapped entirely or at the very least seriously curtailed because of the ‘red tape’ it generates. It does create red tape, but that is its function, which is as an inhibitor of certain kinds of unethical activities, one of which is as follows. Ian Duncan Smith, the Works and Pensions Secretary, wants employers to give priority to British workers over ‘immigrants’ from Eastern Europe. But to do this would be to break the law as found in the Equalities Act. So it would suit his agenda to have this tiresome bit of red tape removed from the statute books. Once freed of this ‘red tape’ companies can get down back to the business of favouring the ‘us’ over the ‘them’, and astonishingly, being rewarded by the government for doing so. Duncan Smith’s proposal is extraordinary for its naked advocacy of a return to a version of racism – with the key term changed from ‘Whites’ to ‘British workers’. It is exactly to prevent this sort of thing that the Equality Act exists. But it is also the case that the real problem is not ‘red tape’ but the business mentality that puts profit before any sense of loyalty, commitment or community.

In sum, the fact that the book consists of a deep critique of aspects of the equality movements, is not to suggest that the main difficulties are caused by them. The intention of my critique is to pre-empt the exploitation of conceptual weaknesses for reactionary ends. The argument of this book tries to tread the thin line between the apologists – those who deify Otherness and Difference (diversity peddlers and liberals of a certain persuasion), and the zealots – those who hate and vilify various kinds of Others (racists and right wing pundits).

### ***Two short (schematic) stories and a moral***

When Harry was about thirty year old, his promising life trajectory came to an abrupt standstill when he was hit by a series of catastrophes. He became depressed. Unable to sustain an independent life, he moved back into the parental home. He began each day by switching on the television and playing computer games. When Harry’s father Jim remarked to his wife Sue that he thought that their son beginning each day in this way was not helpful to his recovery, she rebuked him. Sue said that Jim had just made *a judgement*; she thought it wrong to make judgements about others because judgements *impose* something onto them. In her view then, the making of judgements about others is unethical and should be avoided at all costs.

Jim was troubled; was it the case that he was wrong to form a judgement about what his son was doing? Ought he instead to stand back and accept Harry on his own terms and rationales? And if so, what was Jim to do with his concerns regarding what he was witnessing? Jim ended up in a state of confusion and paralysis.

-

The other day, whilst taking a walk in the countryside along a river, I passed a woman speaking into her mobile phone. I noticed myself have the fleeting thought: her awareness is not in the present; she is not taking in the beauty of the setting, and instead she is preoccupied with something and someone elsewhere.

-

The first episode captures exactly the predicaments generated by the prevailing ethos being promoted by *some* multiculturalists and celebrators of diversity. According to their pronouncements, it would appear that to make judgements about others is wrong *per se*, and instead one *always* ought to accept and respect what ever it is that ‘they’ are doing because it is their way. This is because one’s disapproval of ‘their’ ways is born of a judgement made on the basis of ‘our’ way, and so it has no legitimacy. If we are to judge them, we must do so on their terms, not ours.

Not only has this way of thinking become a taken-for-granted norm in many quarters of the equality movements, it is also the norm in the day to day life of many ordinary citizens (as Jim’s story shows). Citizens with liberal sympathies learn to live lives that have the appearance of being compliant with the diversity ethos; they learn to silence their inner responses in order to be seen to do the right thing. But like in Jim’s case, they are often left in a state of bewilderment, confusion and paralysis. The fact that disapproval is ruled out of court means that the question that can never be asked is, what is the basis of the disapproval? Is the disapproval an expression of say, racism, or does it have some other more respectable basis?

Whilst the liberal citizen is often silent and silenced, there are untold others who feel no hesitation nor guilt, nor any shame in voicing their negative views about various ‘others’. They are not unlike the smug judgemental me on the river bank, who in a subliminal flash made a series of unreflected unsubstantiated assumptions, culminating in the condemnation and dismissal of the woman whilst rendering myself superior. This is an instance of judgementalism, and is indeed to be challenged and reprovved.

The moral of the two stories show that there is an important distinction to be made between judgement and judgementalism, a distinction not kept sufficiently in mind by the equality movements. In their haste to challenge the *judgementalism* present in much human interaction, they have ended up vilifying *judgement* itself. This then is one of the key tasks of the book, it is an argument for the necessity of holding onto our capacity for judgement, and this is the thing: we need to be able to make judgements in order to counter the forces of judgementalism.

### ***A culture of fear – another short story***

It is also the case that a certain kind of fear has come to take hold in public conversations in regards to the marginalised and dispossessed – a fear which paralyses our capacities for discernment. For example, in Britain, the governmental agency called the Health Professionals Council has recently determined that ‘service users’ must be drawn into all aspects of the work of health professionals – sit on interview panels, have a presence on various regulatory committees, and so on. The intention behind the suggestion is a perfectly sensible one – to bring the experience of the ‘user’ to the attention of the ‘provider’ so that the provider might better attune what they provide to the needs of the ‘user’. That is the background to the story that follows.

I was facilitating an event at which a team of health professionals were reflecting on their day to day practice. In the course of this conversation it emerged that there was a shared *but unspoken* anxiety about asking the fundamental question: is it a good thing to involve service users at all? To ask the question was taboo; the

fear was that to ask the question would be taken to mean that one was against service users *per se*.

A participant then described his recent experience of sharing an interview panel with a service user: the service user's behaviour during the interview had been difficult in various ways. It had been a terrible experience all round. But then, and this is key, in a later review of the interview process he found himself not voicing his actual experience and instead found himself saying that the presence of the service user had been productive. Several people identified with this 'confession' and the conversation moved onto thinking about why it was that they found themselves 'performing' in one kind of way in public, whilst keeping their doubts and questions private. What became clear then was that they felt unable to exercise their faculties for discrimination and judgement to discriminate *between* various service users. Something silencing was taking place. In effect, the category 'service users' was not only being treated as a single homogenous entity, but as a sacred entity. The result was their range of possible responses became reduced to two: for them (they are all good) or against them (they are all bad). There was no possibility of a more nuanced response to the differences *within* 'them'.

Another task of this work then is to examine and counter the culture of fear and anxiety of speaking one's mind, as this ends up working to the detriment of all. Interlinked with this task is the further one of understanding how and why 'the one' comes to stand for 'the all', both in the problem, as well as the solution.

I should say that I too am not immune from the sort of anxiety just referred to. As I write about the problems with a particular 'service user' I imagine a wave of disapprobation (somewhere in the ether) rising up against me. It is difficult to hold onto the view that to criticise one service user does not mean that one has dammed all service users. This kind of conceptual collapse is continually to be resisted.

### ***In search of Obamaland***

Many people might think that a work on the subject of equality is redundant because the equality movements have completed their work. They see in the extraordinary election victory of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency in 2008 the death knell of racism, and take it to mean that we are now in a post-racial world. They take the fact that even in the previous Republican administration President Bush had already appointed two Black people to senior positions (one of them a woman to boot), Professor Condoleeza Rice and General Colin Powell, as further evidence of the end of racism and sexism. They point to the fact that over the last 40 years, many democracies have had female leaders— something unheard of until relatively recently Margaret Thatcher in Britain, Indira Gandhi in India, and Angela Merkel in Germany, to name but three. The new prime minister of Iceland, Johanna Sigurdardottir, is openly lesbian – a world first. A recent President of India, Mr. Narayanan, was an 'untouchable'; something that would have been utterly inconceivable previously. So when these sorts of facts are put together we can see why it would seem to many that the equality movements have achieved their goals.

These 'successes' are used by some to argue that the entire basis of the equality movements is fundamentally incorrect in that they have misconstrued the nature of the problem. They reason that as some women, Black people, etc. achieve high positions, is evidence that there is no 'glass ceiling' and anyone can succeed if they just worked hard enough. And others don't succeed because they don't have it in

them, or they do not try hard enough, or that it is a 'life style choice'. This, last, is the extraordinary claim made in Anthony Browne's book *The Retreat of Reason* that 'the cause of the gender pay-gap in the UK is not the result of women suffering sex-discrimination in the work place but because of their lifestyle choices (Browne, 2006). More recently Catherine Hakim (2011), a sociologist, has claimed in a report published by the Thatcherite thinktank the Centre for Policy Studies, that the war for gender equality is over because it has been so successful. She is in agreement with Browne and thinks that women gravitate towards low paid jobs through choice. She concludes "We cannot assume that a low percentage of women in higher-grade jobs is due primarily to sex discrimination" It is a life style choice born of women having different aspirations from men; "Few women aspire to be engineers or soldiers" (quoted in Gold, 2011). In her opinion the drive for equality actually harms women's prospects in the workplace. Reason has indeed retreated, but not from the places that the likes of Browne and Hakim have deemed.

The liberal ethos of the freedom to live and let live is under attack from fundamentalists of many different kinds. In consequence, there is a growing chorus of voices defending the principles of the Enlightenment and liberalism – a chorus I would gladly join. But here too there is danger. A closer look at some of these 'defences' (eg Anthony Browne, Melanie Phillips) show us that they are the means of smuggling back in a great many reactionary attitudes which re-legitimate all kinds of injustices like racism and sexism.

For example, a normally sane colleague shouts out angrily: he will not be silenced! He has a right to condemn the Muslim practice of child marriage. I agree he has this right and agree with his condemnation of the practice; but his self righteous fervour is such that he has not noticed that a great many Muslims too find this practice abhorrent. Nor does he notice that some fundamentalist sects of other faiths (including his, the Judaeo-Christian) are also for this practice. What leaks out in his cry for justice is something akin to Islamophobia.

Clearly then it is not the case that we are in a 'post racial' world, nor is it true that there is no racism, sexism, and the like. Untold statistical studies like those just cited show that there is still a great distance to go. There is ample evidence that the processes of marginalization continue to do their work in covert and overt forms, in all sorts of territories, ethnic minority households are almost three times more likely than White households to be in a poor neighbourhood (Institute of Race Relations a); the ethnic minorities appear to suffer from more 'mental disorders' than Whites (MIND); in higher education the ethnic minorities in Higher Education are better represented than the general population but then they find it harder to get jobs (Business in the Community); and in the workplace unemployment rates for 'ethnic minorities' are twice as high as for Whites. (Institute of Race Relations b). The statistics in regards to women show similar sorts of patterns.

In sum, our societies are still riven by very real problems of marginalization of people perceived to be of a different kind. There is terror and there is horror; there is the decimation of lives and families, not only in war torn Iraq or Bosnia – but also here, in ordinary everyday Britain, in neighbourhoods and workplaces full of genuinely decent folk (no irony intended). As these and other statistical analyses continually tell us: some 'kinds' of people continue to do less well than other 'kinds' in all arenas of life. As a character in Woody Allen's film *Whatever Works* says, we might have a Black man for President, but he still can't get a cab to stop for him in



New York. He could also have added that it is inconceivable to imagine that a self confessed atheist could be elected to the USA Presidency today (although he or she is more likely to be able to get a cab to stop for them). We are a long way yet from Obamaland.

### ***The celebrators of Diversity***

Increasingly, the solution proposed by some to address these iniquities, is the celebration of diversity: let us not hate and fear those who are different, instead let us celebrate our differences from each other – let us celebrate our diversity. The injunction has become ubiquitous, at least here in the ‘West’, and specifically the UK and USA – the axis of decency. In some arenas it has become so taken for granted that diversity *per se* is a good thing and that it *ought* to be celebrated, that no question remains save *how* best to celebrate it. At least this is how it seems from even a cursory glance at the goings on within public sector services like health and education on both sides of the Atlantic, and also within private organisations of all sizes – from minnows to megalithic trans-national corporations.

On first acquaintance, the celebration of diversity seems a perfectly sensible and decent idea. But then whilst reading a book on diversity in organizational life, I found myself hesitate and pause as I read the following sentence: “Both approaches [to diversity issues] have strengths” (Hays-Thomas, 2004, p.12). I had ‘stumbled’ because my expectation was to read the more usual phrase: ‘Both approaches have strengths *and weaknesses*’. As I immersed myself further in the literature on diversity, it rapidly became apparent that this was no slip of the pen, but an expression of a growing ethos, the ethos being that one should not criticize any point of view; instead, one should celebrate, understand and accept all points of view regardless, else one would be being oppressive (recall Jim’s story). It seems to me that this strategy is singularly dangerous, as ultimately it seems to be suggesting that the way to stop individuals *unfairly* discriminating, is to stop them discriminating *per se*, with the result that thought itself becomes paralysed.

The book looks at how and why this peculiar one-sided situation has come about (a situation that does more harm than good) to become the norm for those promoting equality and diversity programmes in organizations and society in general.

### ***Two caveats and their consequences***

The use of the term ‘diversity’ emerges from the world view known as liberalism. In broadest terms, this world view is taken to be the bedrock of the beliefs and practices of democracy – our way of life in the UK.

Straightway I have to make two caveats. First, that there are many versions and understandings of liberalism, some antithetical to each other; in other words the notion of liberalism itself is imbued with diversity. Second, there are many inhabitants of the UK (and not just immigrant others) who would not identify with the ‘our’ in the phrase ‘our way of life’. But what I have just revealed, to myself as much as the reader, is that *I do* broadly sign up in some unreflected way to the ethos of liberalism, that *I do* consider myself to be part of this particular ‘us’, despite being one of the immigrant others.

The phrase itself ‘our way of life’ is contentious and tendentious, because even whilst it lays claim to something, it manages somehow to exclude and de-legitimate untold others. It becomes immediately clear that my uses of ‘us’, ‘we’,

‘them’, ‘the West’ and so on, will inevitably draw on a number of unspoken assumptions, assumptions that might well clash with you the reader’s assumptions as to the nature of the ‘we’ that is being spoken of. For example, there are some who would question whether I as an immigrant (despite being in Britain since the age of 12) can ever legitimately place myself as belonging within the British ‘us’. To the racist, I (and my progeny) will forever be one of ‘them’, and to the cultural essentialist I could never get away from my true, essential identity, my Indian-ness. On the other hand if I were to claim a continuing sense of Indian-ness, many would say that this is just nostalgia on my part, and in the colloquial they would describe me as a ‘coconut’ – brown on the outside but become white on the inside. So where do I belong? Which is the ‘us’ that I may claim as my own? Is it really the case that this is an either/or scenario and that *I have to* choose between being *either* British *or* Indian?

Stepping back from the personal to the more general, we see that even whilst this self same ‘West’ is allegedly celebrating diversity, ironically, it finds itself confronted by an increasingly belligerent ‘Rest’ – and particularly by the burgeoning identity called Fundamentalist Islam. Should the notion of ‘celebration’ be extended to them? And if not celebration, then should at least tolerant respect be extended? Some say ‘yes’, others ‘no’, and others again say ‘it depends’. Certainly the stance taken by the governments appears to be contradictory. On the one hand their rhetoric is one of encouraging their populations to celebrate of diversity *within* their national borders, but on the international stage their stance is not one of celebration but of confrontation – war.

### ***Tiptoe through the minefield of taboos***

I, as an inhabitant of the West, one with not very well thought out liberal inclinations, find myself increasingly unable to speak and reflect on what is going on. Like Jim and the health professionals, I find myself gripped by a thought paralysis that is due in part to confusion, and in part to fear. This is because to engage *publicly* with the subjects of racism, rights, Islam, and so forth, in this place, day and age is to encounter a number of potent taboos. Taboos are Manichean structures, binary structures with no in betweens; things are either good or evil; in or out; good or bad, with nothing allowed between these alternatives.

There is George Bush’s Manichaeism: ‘Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists’. Mr. Blair’s version was: ‘you either support the war on Iraq, or you are a lover and supporter of the despot Sadam’. There is the Islamist’s binaried vision: ‘You accept the words of Mohammed (as I decree them) or you are an infidel deserving of death’. Next to which is the Zionist version: ‘Say anything about the Israeli attitude towards the Palestinians and you are anti-Semitic’. And next to that are untold others: ‘Say anything against the Palestinian Authority or Arafat and you are a rabid Zionist’; ‘say anything about the USA’s desire for oil as one of its reasons for launching the war on Iraq – and you are a paranoid conspiracy theorist’. And let us not forget the multiculturalist Manichaeism: ‘respect all differences else you are a racist’, nor its liberal counterpart: ‘each *must* be allowed their absolute freedom of conscience else we will be oppressing them’.

So, if I mention the fact that the war on terror has killed and maimed untold more innocents than all the terrorist attacks and suicide bombers put together, then does that make me an apologist for the terrorists? If I don’t agree with the *some* of the

practices espoused by *some* followers of The Prophet, then does that immediately make me an Islamaphobe, a cultural imperialist and a racist?

The paralysis is further reinforced because any and all number of distinct issues (and therefore taboos) are overlaid and linked, so that in addressing one issue, one inevitably falls foul of another. For example I was taken aback (no doubt naively) when I read Moazzam Begg say in the book he wrote on being released from Guantanamo Bay that Palestine was “the best known *Muslim* issue” (Brittain & Begg, 2006, pg 44), and that his concern was for the *Muslims* in Iraq. Now, that is not how I primarily think of those embroiled in either of those contexts – as Muslims; nor do I think that the *sources* of the conflagrations have anything to do with religion (more on this in later chapters). In fact, in being asked by Begg to think about these events in relation to Islam, I find myself alienated from the victims in those contexts. In speaking in this way Begg has appropriated those struggles for his own Islamic ends. The late great Palestinian Edward Said certainly did not think about the conflict in Palestine in these simplistic terms. So when Begg frames the Palestinian question in this form, then the only way I am allowed to take a position on Palestine or Iraq, is to take a position vis a vis Islam: I can only be for or against Islam (like I can only be for or against service users), and in the process (whether I want to or not) end up appearing that I am for or against Judaism or Christianity. Increasingly I find there is less and less room for manoeuvre, and so I become paralysed and emotionally, I take a step backwards.

*But what is it that I step back into or onto?*

Wherever I step, I am bound to fall foul of somebody’s sensitivities and taboos – including my own. The territory is literally a minefield of taboos. Confounded by the range of taboos, I find myself paralysed, because to step anywhere is potentially to cause offence and court disapprobation in myself as much as in others. Can I find a place to stand, indeed *is there* a place to stand between the apologists and zealots of all descriptions, be they theistic, Marxist, capitalist, or whatever?

### ***Good guys and Bad guys***

How am I to think about what is going on? The ‘real’ world is not neatly divided into good guys and bad guys. For example on coming through immigration at Heathrow Airport a couple of years ago, I was powerfully struck by two events. First, that one of the immigration officers scrutinising the passports was a female in a headscarf, clearly Muslim. I found the image anomalous: here was ‘the enemy’ at the gate, but this time the alleged enemy, a follower of Islam, was actually guarding the gate at the British frontier! Does this mean that the xenophobes like Melanie Phillips (2006) are right and ‘they’ have taken ‘us’ over?

Anyhow, a few moments later, another similarly dressed woman approached a white English man ahead of us in the queue who, despite there being signs saying that for security reasons mobile phones were not to be used, was speaking loudly on his mobile phone. She drew his attention to the notices. He hardly looked at her, waved her off dismissively and carried on speaking as though she was not there until he had finished. She stood helplessly by watching him all the while.

None of us said anything.

The situation carried the additional irony that in this vignette Britain’s security was being potentially undermined by an ‘indigenous’ Englishman, and being

defended by a Moslem woman. Presumably, in his eyes she (as one of ‘them’) had no authority to tell him what to do in his ‘own’ country.

### ***Thought Impasse***

Let me go further into the sources of my own thought impasse. Growing up in London in the 60’s and 70’s racism was open and common place. And although I had never thought of myself in these terms previously, I found myself increasingly being named (and then naming myself) as ‘Black’. I had a growing sense of notional armchair solidarity (I was by no means an activist) with others who laid claim to this kind of identity. In brief, ‘Blacks’ and other marginalized folk were the good guys. But what has happened to me in the current context, is that I find that I have lost my ‘natural’ allies, and so don’t quite know *where* to stand or *with whom* to stand (see Nick Cohen’s *What’s Left*). It is somewhat embarrassing when some of the people one has defended and identified with (various underdogs), start behaving in ways that are, let us say, problematic. The situation is not unlike that of an intimate, a family member or friend, saying or doing something untoward in public. What is one to do? Tough it out and loyally stand by them come what may? Or pointedly distance one self from them? Whatever one does, of necessity it reveals and exposes something of oneself to the intimate as well as to the onlookers. Thus one can easily find oneself paralysed and doing nothing. But in doing nothing one is inevitably lending the appearance of condoning what is going on. It becomes clear then that one cannot ever *do* nothing. For to do nothing, is to agree tacitly with the voice that speaks.

So whilst having no sympathy with xenophobic Islamabhobes, I also find myself alienated from some of those speaking *for* the Islamists. For example, when Ken Livingstone publicly embraces the Egyptian theologian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi whilst praising him as scholar. This is the same scholarly Qaradawi that said of a Moslem who might decide to leave Islam of his own free will: “He is no more than a traitor to his religion and his people and thus deserves killing” (Cohen, 2005). Similarly, I was somewhat bemused when the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair decided to honour the so-called moderate Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary-General of the Muslim Council of Britain, by making him a Knight of the Realm. This is the same Sir Iqbal Sacranie that said of the fatwa on Salman Rushdie “death perhaps is too easy for him...his mind must be tormented for the rest of his life unless he begs forgiveness from the Almighty Allah” (Cohen, 2007). As far as I know he has not publicly withdrawn this view.

More recently, Salman Rushdie himself was also knighted. This set off another round of strong protests by *some* Muslims, including effigy and book burnings. The claim was that as Rushdie had insulted Islam, to honour Rushdie was to insult to Islam. It is worth noting the difference in the responses to the two situations – when Sacranie was knighted there was some (muted) verbal protest and when it was Rushdie’s turn, there was violence in the streets. This difference points to another of the arguments in this book, which is that as these two responses are of very different kinds, it is at the very least foolish to extend them both the same courtesies.

The situation can be encapsulated in this way: the attempt to right the wrong of unfair discrimination has taken the course of suggesting that all processes of discrimination are a bad thing. In trying to defend those that are denigrated on the basis of some difference, what has come to take place is the fetishising of difference. The result: one’s capacities for judgement become frozen and one is unable to think.

The particular kinds of discriminations we sign up to, or find ourselves signed up to, are integral to who we are as individuals; they are the basis of our integrity and constitute our ethical natures. We can say, adapting Descartes, *I discriminate therefore I am*. If I give up discriminating (that is, thinking) then I cease to be human. In fact, I would go so far as to argue that what the world needs is not less discrimination, but more.

The question is, how do I retain my integrity in the face of something that is profoundly disagreeable to me? Is there a course to be set between annihilating the Other and annihilating the Self?

## **Method**

This book builds on the theorizations developed in my last book *Race Colour and the Processes of Racialization* (Dalal, 2002), and takes them out ‘into the world’ to reflect on policy and practice today, primarily in Great Britain. The purpose of the reflections is to try to make sense of things for myself as much as for the reader. To this end I think of the book as a conversation which inquires not only into what has become taken for granted and unquestioned (by me as much as anyone else), but also into issues that have become taboo and unquestionable (also by me as much as anyone else).

The work is ‘citation lite’ as I deliberately do not engage directly with bodies of literature emanating from cultural studies, sociology, and so forth. Rather, what I try to do is work my own way towards a view point by drawing on experiences and material that the ordinary reader will come across in their everyday, day to day life; as it is these are the basis of our forming attitudes and views about equality, difference, and so forth. This material being, news stories and reports, anecdotes, experiences in the workplace, gossip, public proclamations emerging from multinationals and government bodies, as well as claims made in the media by various ‘experts’, politicians and diversity enthusiasts. I ask, what is it that they are saying? What is the basis on which they are saying it? Does the world actually conform to what their presumptions and assertions, or are they distorting it to fit in with their ideology? I do this analysis in as straightforward a way as possible through directly engaging with the material in question – showing up contradictions, elisions, silences, obfuscations, and so forth, as they arise.

Having said that, my attempts to think things through and work things out are of course deeply uninformed by what others have said and thought. In particular, this book and I owe a profound debt of gratitude to the following works, works that have greatly influenced my thinking, works that have educated me. Most prominent amongst these are Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *The Ethics of Identity* (2005) and Seyla Benhabib’s *The Claims of Culture* (2002); I am also deeply indebted to Nick Cohen’s *What’s Left* (2005), A.C.Grayling’s *Towards the Light* (2007), Charles Guignon’s *On Being Authentic* (2004), and Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* (1989).

## **Overview and Outline**

Multiculturalism provided several answers to this question. Primarily its watchword has been tolerance – and for good reason. But taken at its most simplistic, the requirement on me is to tolerate the intolerant, to tolerate the intolerable, to tolerate that– which according to my ethics – ought not to be tolerated.

Multiculturalism's emphasis on tolerance has its source in the principles of liberalism, specifically the wish to allow people to live their lives as freely as possible. And so it is here that I begin, with an overview of the philosophy of liberalism (2. The Struggle to Live and Let Live: the liberal world view). We will see that there are in fact two versions of liberalism and that they are in conflict with each other: one grounded in the values of the Enlightenment (which blinds itself to difference), and the other in the values of the Romantic Movement (which deifies difference). The equality movements do not keep the distinction between the values of the two sufficiently in mind which is why they end up in a number of conceptual cul-de-sacs.

The next chapter (3. Equal Strokes for Different Folks: The Legislature) takes up the story of how and why the attempts to establish the values of liberalism in the legislature have created a number of contradictions. Each bit of legislation was provoked into reluctant existence by events in the recent history of gender and 'race' relations in Britain. In the main these events consist of disturbances (like riots and protests) of some sort – disturbances that were disturbing the complacent equanimity of the establishment. Each bit of legislation then is an attempt to 'answer' the questions thrown up by a particular conflagration. I make my points primarily but not entirely through a narrative of 'race' relations rather than gender or other 'differences', else the argument would get too dispersed. In my view (which I hope to convince you of) the legislation ends up making aspects of the situation worse even whilst its intention is to make it better. One reason for this is that the legislature begins by taking it for granted that the 'kinds' of people just exist as eternal facts of nature; it does not take any account of how and why the 'kinds' of people come to be manufactured by the processes of power relations. Most worrying is the way that the legislature has come to legitimate the fiction called race in the statute books, and then made things even worse by also instating the idea of *mixed* race, thus giving succour to the myth that there are such things as *pure* races. Thus, even as the legislature works to dismantle racism, it ends up reinforcing and perpetuating it.

The next two chapters dismantle the naïve understandings of the cultural group and the individual found in the equality movements. These two chapters are where psychoanalytic and group analytic understandings of the human condition are introduced, critiqued and developed. As it is with people, so it is with psychoanalysis; neither is a homogeneity. Some 'kinds' of psychoanalytic understanding are emancipatory, whilst other kinds are deeply authoritarian and conservative. I have done my best to reduce the use of technical psychoanalytic language in these cogitations to make them more accessible to those unschooled in these ways of thinking. The ideas developed in these two chapters are key, and form the basis of the critiques that follow. The theoretical schema developed in these chapters is 'psycho-social' rather than a reductive psychological or a reductive social. Chapter four (Manufacturing Kinds of People: processes of inclusion and exclusion), critiques the simplistic acceptance that the 'kinds' of people just exist as facts of nature, and then offers a more complex understanding of the human group. As the argument evolves it becomes clear that the cultural group is not the homogenous consensual unity that it is mostly taken to be, but that it is a conflicted multiplicity. Chapter five (The Human Condition) argues that *the* individual is no more a unity than is the social group. The argument proceeds on the basis that as the social is prior to the individuals that are born into it, the internal worlds of individuals are socialised worlds. And eventually this leads to the conclusion that the 'I' too is a conflicted entity, generated by the

tensions between the varieties of ‘we’ that one belongs to. In effect, the psyche is a politicised entity.

We now find ourselves faced with two realizations. First, that as human life is so entangled, we have neither the possibility nor the luxury of *not* impacting on the lives of others. Non-interference is an impossible ideal. Second, that conflict, internal and external, is endemic to the situation. One always has to decide which aspect of ‘them’ one will respect and support, knowing all the while that even one does this one will necessarily offend many others within the same ‘them’. It also becomes clear that the ‘kinds’ of people are not simply found, but generated by these very conflictual engagements. Such is the complexity of the existential situation that confronts the equality movements. On the whole the equality movements have based their corrective strategies on a much simplified understanding of the world which presumes that one can legislate away the existential reality – that human life is forever constituted by conflict, ambiguity and ambivalence.

If the first half of the book is loosely thought of as having to do with ‘ideas’, the focus of the second half is (equally loosely) on ‘practice’. In what follows I give a reasoned critique of some of the advice being given by mainstream governmental organizations as well as of a number of the practical programmes proposed by the equality movements to correct the iniquities within the work place and social life in general. In various ways, they all turn out to be deeply problematic.

A key component of equality work is the requirement by law for institutions to continually collect statistical evidence to get a picture of the problem, as well to monitor the progress being made by the attempts to rectify wrongs. In chapter six (Counting Discriminations), whilst agreeing that it is good and necessary to collect statistics, I take issue with the kind of ‘evidence’ that is being collected, as well as the way that it is collected. In particular I take issue with the ‘ethnic-monitoring form’. The espoused reason for collecting this sort of data is to observe the workings of racism, yet the data being collected is not of ‘race’ but ‘ethnicity’. Why? Further, the forms are filled out by people who self-ascribe their ethnicity. This would seem to be a good thing in that we are respecting their right to define themselves. But racism works on the basis of other-ascription not self-ascription. I argue that this manoeuvre is a sleight of hand, and is made possible because the equality movements have taken these categories to be objective entities and simultaneously to be subjective experiences. The chapter also notes in passing how the statistical evidence is massaged and manipulated to give the right picture to appease the authorities.

The seventh chapter (Corrupting the Liberal Ideal – Diversity in Organizational Life) exposes the reality behind the rhetoric of celebrating diversity in organizational life. It shows that the real motivation is not the espoused one of inclusivity and egalitarianism; rather it is driven by the ethics of the spreadsheet and in the service of increasing profit. Here we also get to see that the version of ‘psychology’ called on in this literature is not only deeply impoverished, but also ethically compromised. We also see in this chapter that the nineteenth century project of scientific racism is found to be alive and well in the theory of cross-cultural psychological types. What we find in the guise of science is the reproduction of the old myths about ‘their’ unreliability, weakness of character and so on. This is the corrupt and insidious end of multiculturalism’s decent enough wish to promote the understanding of Others in order to get on better with them. The fact that this kind of nonsense finds a respectable place in scientific discourse is extremely troubling.

Chapter eight (Perverting the liberal ideal – Fear and Control in the Panopticon) remains with institutional life. The formulations of the equality movements are necessarily fashioned out of the paradigms prevalent in the contexts out of which they emerge. I argue that the modern workplace is akin to the Panopticon with procedures and protocols used as instruments of surveillance resulting in a culture of fear and timidity. I suggest that the ideals of the equality movements are similarly perverted and also put to use as instruments of fear and control

The equality movements are regularly lampooned for some of the suggestions they make about what it is acceptable to say and what is taboo. Often the good liberal is anxious about what is the current correct term for a particular ‘them’. Chapter nine (The Difference that Dare not Speak its Name) questions the thinking behind certain kinds of PC-speak and the rationale for it. It does this through a detailed examination of the kinds of advice being given by various agencies like that of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The chapter details some of the conceptual confusions that lie behind some of their more questionable suggestions as to what are appropriate terms of speech and what are not.

Chapter ten (The Vicissitudes of Unfair Discrimination) begins with a human predicament, this being that the ways we come to view and experience the world are patterned by the milieus we find ourselves in; further that these patterns are value laden mostly lie below the threshold of consciousness. This leads to an unhelpful and extreme version of relativism. I use these considerations to critically examine structural attempts to counter individual and structural prejudices, in particular the equal-opportunity interview and bureaucratic proceduralization. And lastly I look more closely at how unfair discriminatory processes come to be institutionalised and so rendered invisible.

Having spent the previous ten chapters saying what is wrong about the way that the diversity movement have been proceeding, it is beholden on me to say what ways might be more helpful. The task of the final chapters is to establish the ground between the cultural relativists and the cultural imperialists, and then to think about what the notion of engagement would look like on this sort of ground.

The work of chapter eleven ‘Islam: The new Black’ is to think about the basis of the antipathy towards Islam and Moslems in general. Is the fear of Moslems a prejudicial paranoia or is it justified? I argue that the liberal mindset, ever vigilant not to be seen to be racist, is afraid to discriminate between varieties of Moslem, in effect trying to respect them all, but in doing so, damming them all. And finally the chapter looks briefly at how and why democratic governments in the West as well as sections of the revolutionary left’s support have come to support and fete the Islamofascists.

Chapter twelve (Tolerating Discrimination: Discriminating Tolerance) begins with a study of the politics and psychology of tolerance to conclude that tolerance is not the opposite of discrimination. I argue for the rehabilitation of the emotions in the thinking regarding theorisations about the engagement with Others. I make a case for the necessity of retaining the tension between the liberal values of being true to yourself (authenticity) and being good to others (fairness). I argue that what is often described as a ‘culture clash’ is better described as racism. I then think about two conundrums; what is one to do when one is faced with the intolerable, and what when faced with the intolerant? In this process I put forward a position in which I argue how and why it is both necessary and legitimate to hold onto one’s particular non-universal ethical viewpoints in these sorts of situations. And finally, I give my



rendition of the process of engagement and recognition. I conclude that whilst there is no point of arrival in equality heaven (as is usually promised), and that the political and psychological work consists of a certain kind of permanent ethical struggle for recognition.

The final chapter (The road to nowhere: conceptual cul-de-sacs) puts the celebrators of diversity in the dock one last time. This time to show that the connotations of 'diversity' (which are to do with mixing, change, creativity and the emergence of the novel) are in conflict with the service it is being put to when it comes to cultures. I critically examine their rationales for the preservation of cultures, and find them wanting. I follow this with a defence of rationality and the Enlightenment – the villains of the piece for Romantic relativists. The final section consists of a discussion around the complexities of disability. I argue that there are two opposing demands that we constantly make, and that they are both true at the same time: remember that I am different; remember that I am the same. These kinds of issues make the emancipatory project increasingly complex, a complexity we have to hold onto. And what we have to resist are the simplifications being foisted on us by the celebrators of diversity.