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Transformation of Sociocultural Integration Policy and Inherent Political Theories in the United Kingdom: A Way Forward

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Abstract

The contemporary integration policies (Community Cohesion Agenda [CCA]) of the United Kingdom have been criticized for their foundational weaknesses, conceptual inadequacies, myopic views with regard to the complexity of the issue, lack of evidence, and so on. Vast majority of the studies conducted to verify this discourse have been done in the line of theoretical arguments of diversity management rather than exploring their connections to a target community in reality. This study aims at establishing a linkage between the growing theoretical arguments of the integration discourse with empirical data in light of the policy framework of the CCA. We have selected the fastest growing Bangladeshi community of the CCA-adapted Aston City of Birmingham as the representative group of the ethnic minority communities of the United Kingdom. Qualitative data collection approach has been followed, where primary in-depth interviews were conducted on various policy actors, social workers, faith leaders, and Bangladeshi residents of Aston. The entire policy instrument, starting from its broad purposes to operational strategies, has been severely challenged by both residents of the community and relevant policy-implementing bodies in Aston. CCA policies appear to be largely inclined toward the interculturalism/communitarianism ideology rather than to multiculturalism. However, the empirical evidence shows that the need for multiculturalism, to be more specific—Bristol School of Multiculturalism, as a political theory remains in the integration discourse in the context of the United Kingdom. Findings are expected to have implications on practitioners and policy makers in designing diversity management policy instruments by having a wider synthesized view on both theoretical argument and empirical data.

Keywords

community cohesion, multiculturalism, sociocultural integration, interculturalism

Introduction

Concerns regarding accommodation of the immigrants in Britain are not recent phenomena though a deliberate policy framework for integrating them was lacking at the early stage of the immigrant movement in Britain. Britain started to face large influx of migration from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent after the World War II. Initially, during the 1950s to 1960s, migration was triggered by labor market shortages in the United Kingdom. Afterward, with various degrees of economic fluctuations, the nature of migration mostly occurred either for better life opportunities or for family reunification. During the 90s and onward, the composition of immigrants started to change as a large wave of East Europeans along with sub-Saharan Africans kept arriving to the United Kingdom as economic migrants and/or refugees. As of 2019, the United Kingdom, hosting around 9.5 million immigrants (14% of U.K. population), is being ranked as fifth in the list of countries with most immigrants (or foreign-born population) in Europe (Dillinger, 2019; Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2020).

With such a rich background of multicultural diversity, concerns for accommodation of the immigrants into the "British" society emerged very early as a policy issue in Britain compared with other European nations (Manning & Georgiadis, 2012). Initial idea rested on sustaining coexistence of different ethnic groups in a dominant "British" setting primarily based on the legal aspects (Kurcewicz, 2014). The immigrant-accommodating policy programs gradually

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evolved toward the discourse of integrationism with multiculturalism at its core. Formulation of the antidiscriminatory policy framework, *Race Relations Act of 1965*, can be considered as the first policy framework that reflects multiculturalism, where emphasis is given on accommodating "differences" of the immigrants to the greater community (Manning & Georgiadis, 2012). With the passage of time, several policy frameworks (e.g., Race Relations Act, 1968, 1976) were developed embracing the multiculturalism idea. The political idea of multiculturalism sustained in Britain until early 21st century when a range of race riots occurred that raised questions against the appropriateness of the idea of multiculturalism as a political theory. Particularly, many argue that the 2001 terrorist attack in New York and the urban disturbances (also known as race riots) that took place in the Northern cities of the United Kingdom in 2001 primarily account for shifting in the integration approach from multiculturalism to "community cohesion" (Alam & Husband, 2013; McGhee, 2005, 2008; Ritchie, 2001; Thomas et al., 2017). Following the race riots, several reports were commissioned to analyze their underlying causes. It is argued that the idea of community cohesion was the result of such reports, as they were particularly critical of multicultural policy (Finney & Simpson, 2009). The most prominent of these reports, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team, 2001* (Home Office, 2001), criticized multiculturalism as an integration policy platform. Particularly, the report was based on a study of South Asian communities in few Northern cities (Oldham, Burnley, and Bradford) where there had been social disorders between the ethnic groups, especially the Pakistani Muslims and the White community. Based on the analysis, it introduced the popular, yet contestable, concept of "community cohesion." This report asserted that minority ethnic groups in the United Kingdom are, not only physically segregated, but that

> Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges. (Home Office, 2001, p. 9).

Hence, a series of endeavors have been undertaken by the then Labor Government to bring about cross-community harmony based on the community cohesion concept. Such policy efforts are popularly known as the Community Cohesion Agenda (CCA), which is often referred to as the postmulticulturalism approach to integrationism, and this idea is still sustaining though the form has changed over time.

Irrespective of CCA's efforts to bring cross-cultural harmony, a range of ideological and practical issues of the CCA can be observed. It is often argued that this contemporary integration policy is discriminatory as it only focuses on certain ethnic (e.g., South Asians) groups or communities for having extremely distinctive ways of life that are at odds with the norms and values of the dominant culture (Flint & Robinson, 2008). Likewise, there are wider concerns that the recent discourse of integration is allegedly based on racialized minorities that focuses more on religion than the previous discourses of color, race, and ethnicity (Abbas, 2004), and particularly, for certain reasons (e.g., Islamophobia, global terrorism), Islam has become the focus of this discourse (Cameron, 2015; Thomas et al., 2017). Communitarian critics condemn such developments on the ground that such a policy approach undermines the democratic process and social justice by eroding trust and common understanding (Bell, 1995). Critics also argue that, apparently, contemporary integration policy rests on an attempt to dismantle and dissolve the cultural identities of the ethnic minorities to form a common "British" citizenship based on social control instead of social justice (Alexander, 2009). Furthermore, there are several controversies about the foundations and rationales of the postmulticultural integration policies. Therefore, this research begins with a critical analysis of transformations of relevant philosophical and/or ideological standpoints of the integration policies (CCA) within the contemporary sociopolitical context of the United Kingdom. It then examines the practical aspects of the CCA's mechanisms from the point of view of the policy actors in operation. It then goes on to explore the plausibility of the CCA in connections to various ethnic, social, cultural, and religious issues of a target ethnic minority community, the Bangladeshi community, which is predominantly a Muslim community, of the United Kingdom. On one hand, the study examines the inherent complexities of the concerned community that is affected by the implementations of the CCA, and on the other hand, it explores United Kingdom's contemporary political, ideological, and/or theoretical platforms of integration policy discourse in connection to the primary evidence. Hence, the study explores a synthesis among political theory of integrationism, the CCA, and ground reality. In doing so, the article searches for a particular political platform/theory (e.g., multiculturalism, interculturalism) that will pave the way to deal with the diversity issues of the United Kingdom.

Is Multiculturalism Dead?

The concept of multiculturalism is complex, and often contested, because its meaning is a product of several sociohistorical issues (Beckett & Macey, 2001) and political cultures (Modood, 1997). Moreover, the concept of multiculturalism also varies in terms of ideological, philosophical, theoretical, sociopolitical discourses, or policy paradigm. The term multiculturalism is contextual in nature as its dimensions vary in terms of geographical origin. During the 1960s and 70s, multiculturalism emerged as an "ideological" (Uberoi & Modood, 2019) policy platform in Canada to strategically accommodate immigrants who would preserve the national identity of

the state. The essence of the Canadian multiculturalism rested on the minority cultural maintenance where emphasis is given on the equal rights to conserve culture and mother tongue of all ethnocultural groups in an unbiased manner and "cultural superiority" was discarded by principle (Levey, 2019). During this period, Canadian multiculturalism was transmitted to Australia, where it was focused on giving settlement space to the minority groups in a dominant mono-ethno-cultural society without being discriminated. The overarching principles of the multicultural policies of Australia were based on ". . . individual liberty, equality and tolerance" (Levey, 2019, p. 4). In both the cases, the multiculturalism followed a top-down approach where the state determines minority-accommodating policies followed from central principles or values founded on individualism, impartiality, universal rights, and equality (Joppke, 2017; Kymlicka, 1995). Advocates of such dimension of multiculturalism are often labeled as liberal nationalists or universalists.

Unlike Canada or Australia, the inception of multiculturalism in Britain surfaced from "below" where various groups of immigrants struggle to preserve their unique sociocultural traditions and to establish their own identity. Hence, British multiculturalism emerged as a response to the minority demands than overarching state principles for managing diversity. This version of multiculturalism is often termed as the Bristol School of Multiculturalism (BSM) that is more so a contextual political theory/perspective (Meer & Modood, 2009; Uberoi & Modood, 2019) that emerged out of the works of a group of scholars from the University of Bristol's Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship (Levey, 2019). Being one of the proponents of the BSM, Parekh (2000) suggests that multiculturalism may refer to any kind of difference of values/norms/culture/belief/principle, or even way of life, from the dominant group of a state; however, the BSM focuses only on diversity that relates to culture and identity with a majority–minority dimension.

The advocates of the BSM reject the conception of liberal individualism as a core essence of multiculturalism as it limits space for the groups. Whereas, on the issue of citizenship, the BSM does not ignore the rights of individuals but, in the light of the discourse of integrationism, it argues that a person can hardly be individuated as a group, and group–culture form the way a person thinks and ". . . in the language they think" (Uberoi & Modood, 2019, p. 8). One of the major contributors of the BSM, Modood (2008) argued is that the importance of an individual's agency matters within the paradigm of collective agency because he considers that, politically, an individual cannot exercise rights unless his or her voice is raised through a legitimate institution that is recognized and authorized by the State. For example, a Muslim woman cannot ask for a divorce following the Muslim legislation in the United Kingdom unless the state recognizes the Muslim authoritative institution and the officeholders who deal with this issue (Modood, 2008). Thus, he argues that, in the context of the contemporary integration policy discourse of Britain, the term multiculturalism is crucial to ensure recognition of marginalized groups in the community. In relation to accommodation of marginalized groups, Modood (2007, 2008) considers that multiculturalism is particularly concerned with recognition and accommodation of the minority ethnic groups that are racially excluded, and/or culturally and religiously (e.g., Muslims) stigmatized.

However, there are arguments about the degrees and limits to which the minorities can practice their religiocultural rituals. In many circumstances, it becomes difficult to take "universal" normative decisions when minority beliefs or values conflict with the value system of the dominant culture. For example, with regard to such practices as female circumcision, polygamy, the Muslim and certain conservative Asian (e.g., Sikh) practices of withdrawing girls from sports where parts of the body are revealed, Muslim and Jewish methods of slaughtering animals, forced marriages, marriages within prohibited degrees of relationship, Hindu cremation of deceased on a funeral pyre with ashes scattered in the river, Sikh's refusal to wear helmets when driving motor cycles or working in building sites in order that they can wear their turban, Muslim girls wearing head scarves in schools, it would be a challenge to establish universal norms for everyone (Parekh, 2000). Thus, it is often argued that there are no comprehensive, universally valid values to guide people in relation to these issues as universal values are often too thin and too ". . . few to cover all important areas of life" (Parekh, 2000, p. 266). Rather, the acceptance of such differences or "unique demands" often depends on the level and limits of the tolerance of the dominant sociocultural system. Hence, the BSM believes that multiculturalism is the creative interplay of the dynamics and dimensions of cultural plurality that will sustain in a multicultural population.

Irrespective of the arguments regarding the nature and form of multiculturalism or the BSM, currently the wider concern is to what extent multiculturalism as a political theory or philosophy is compatible in the discourse of integrationism. The 9/11 incident and subsequent series of terrorist incidents that resulted in Islamophobia contributed to the rise of antimulticulturalist views where the Muslims are often being labeled as a problematized group (Bourne, 2007; Cameron, 2015; Finney & Simpson, 2009; Thomas et al., 2017). There is a perception that Muslims make "politically exceptional, culturally unreasonable or theologically alien demands" (Modood, 2009, p. 164). However, broadly, in the new postmulticulturalism era, it is not only the Muslims but also the South Asian communities that are being "problematised" in the United Kingdom. This is based on the assumption that these groups supposedly nurture a culture, especially their values and norms, which is at odds with the dominant standard values (Burnett, 2007; Flint & Kundnani, 2007; Robinson, 2008).

Critics of the BSM often argue that though the ethnic minority communities are individually cohesive or have social bonding within them, they are physically and socially

isolated from each other and, thus, these tendencies to separate lead to racism, intercommunity antagonism, lack of a common sense of belonging, and hence, a weak sense of British citizenship or identity (Burnett, 2008; McGhee, 2008; Ratcliffe, 2012). Moreover, the BSM was criticized as incompatible in a situation where immigrants have security issues with the state (e.g., Arabs and Muslims after 9/11; Kymlicka, 2012). With such perceptions in mind, the BSM is condemned as the root cause of several social problems; and hence, the policy focus shifted toward harmonizing cross-community unity based on *British culture*, norms, and values (i.e., "Britishness") in Britain.

CCA

As mentioned in the "Introduction" section, in response to the race riots of the northern cities of the United Kingdom, the concept of community cohesion emerged. The then Labor Government, which was already moving away from multiculturalism since the mid-90s, wholeheartedly embraced the "The Cantle Report," a report developed by the Community Cohesion Review Team, where Ted Cantle was the chair of the team, and inclined further toward the "community cohesion" that rests on ". . . cultural assimilation and British values" (Broadhead, 2020, p. 3). CCA defined a cohesive community as a community ". . . where there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all" (Local Government Association et al., 2002, p. 6). CCA was based on the belief that social interaction and cross-community participation are crucial to achieve a cross-community cohesion (CIC, 2007; Home Office, 2001). The subsequent coalition government (Conservative–Liberal Democrat) also supported the Labor Government's communitarian philosophy that believed in the forced integration of the ethnic minorities. Here, it is worth mentioning the then Prime Minister David Cameron's (2011) comment on state multiculturalism and his vision for the a "Big Society":

> Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream . . . we have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values . . . we need a clear sense of shared national identity . . . we must built stronger societies . . . making sure immigrants speak the language of their new home . . . ensuring that people are educated in elements of a common culture and curriculum. (Cameron, 2011)

David Cameron pushed for his idea of "Big Society" where the idea was to decentralize power from the central government to the local authorities (localism) and let the local people take initiatives voluntarily (volunteerism) for a better community. Big Society's essence of empowering local people and ". . . bringing people together in positive environments to share ideas" echoed the idea of community cohesion. However, his political idea of Big Society gradually declined by the end of his term. Afterward, Prime Minister Theresa May from the Conservative Party came into power in 2016. She was also keen on following a conservative approach to integration policy issues, rather in a much more assimilative manner. Her rejection of multiculturalism was reflected well in her speech at the Conservative Party Conference in 2015 where she highlighted that ". . . when immigration is too high, when the pace of change is too fast, it's impossible to build a cohesive society" (May, 2015). In the most prominent policy paper, *Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper*, which was published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in March 2018, May made it clear that the immigrants need to blend with the dominant "British" culture:

> This is what true integration looks like—communities where people, whatever their background, live, work, learn and socialise together, based on shared rights, responsibilities and opportunities . . . Recent migrants should learn to speak and understand our language and values and seek opportunities to mix and become part of our communities. (MHCLG, 2018, p. 10)

Finally, current Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, also shows solidarity with his conservative predecessors. On several occasions, he pledges to make all immigrants learn English and stressed on integrating them to national identity through his belief that every immigrant who lives in the United Kingdom should feel ". . . British—that's the most important thing" (Halliday & Brooks, 2019). His tone clearly shows that the political integrationism of the United Kingdom has moved away from multiculturalism and is heading toward the community cohesion idea with a much more assimilatory approach.

However, it is to be noted that there has never been any ". . . national UK-wide policy framework on integration" (Broadhead, 2020, p. 3); rather, it is customary that various policy papers identify issues and set broad visions and goals that reflect certain political doctrine. In some cases, the policy papers outline broad operational guidelines and let the local-level state and the partnered institutions/organizations cater their means in light of the contemporary political integration theory. Primarily, the Home Office looks after the integration and settlement issues of the refugees, and the MHCLG (former Department for Communities and Local Government) is responsible for the integration issues of the immigrants (Broadhead, 2020). The Department for Education, Local Authorities and Devolved Administrations; Government Equalities Office; and relevant strategic partners such as local-level voluntary and private sector organizations also take part in delivering various integration projects and activities in their localities. It is worth mentioning here that the primary think tank on community cohesion, Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo), was established in 2005, which became the leading authority in this area (Ted Cantle, n.d.). Currently, a U.K. national charity, The Cohesion and Integration Network, is working in this sector to build up

local capacity on community cohesion. Few of the broad postmulticultural integration initiatives include citizenship test, English language test, creating conditions for meaningful social contacts, and change in children's national school curriculum. Moreover, various local parties also take different initiatives that are based on the local context (specific contextualized initiatives are discussed in the "Findings and Analysis" section).

Criticisms of the CCA

It is argued that the contemporary integration policies define the central issue (e.g., intercommunity antagonism) from a narrow "cultural" view while undermining the issues related to structural inequalities and complexities of the dynamics of various minority ethnic groups having diverse value systems (Finney & Simpson, 2009). These policies are also criticized on the ground that it would be a mistake just to see the issue from a shallow view of cultural differences and separateness (alleged "parallelism") of the minority ethnic communities. Rather, what is needed is a thorough understanding of the conditions that create and mobilize ethnicity and, hence, the so-called "ethnic conflict."

The ideology of the CCA, that is, the establishment of a collective "British identity" based on common shared principles has also caused some confusion. It is not clear what the dimensions of the commonality would be as there can be various commonality grounds: shared attachment to locality, agreement for democratic solutions, particular forms of ethical and cultural values, particular forms of psychological bonding, or shared emotions (Wetherell, 2009). According to Kundnani (2007), society definitely requires common values to unite around but that may not have to be limited to specific British values, rather, the values could be ". . . universal values of human and democratic rights" (Kundnani, 2007, p. 9). There is also confusion about the single identity concept based on British values from equality in diversity perspective. People can have multiple identities with respect to their culture, faith, and various social roles. Therefore, the focus on core British values or "Britishness"—which is, in itself, a contestable concept—can be a part of the overall identity of a person (Wetherell, 2009, p. 6). In a similar vein, Parekh (2009) argues that, rather than having a single collective British identity, ". . . being British must accommodate plurality and allow people to be British in their own different ways" (p. 134). In line with the fluidity, or plurality, of the identity debate, a study, conducted by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE; which later merged into Equality and Human Rights Commission) found that peoples' identity encompassed a number of dimensions (i.e., geography, national symbols, people, values and attitudes, cultural habits and behavior, citizenship, language, and achievements) in its formation (Ethnos, 2005). However, their conception of "Britishness" is restricted to a few dimensions and the way they have defined the dimensions that include

> . . . watching and supporting football, cricket and rugby; and consuming food and drink such as "fish and chips," "English breakfast," "Yorkshire pudding," "cream teas," "cucumber sandwiches," "roast beef "Sunday lunch," "curries," and "beer." (Ethnos, 2005, p. 7)

Here, the dimension excludes the cultural characteristics of the ethnic minorities. Critical examination of this study shows that postmulticulturalism does not accommodate cultural diversity while forming the collective or British identity.

Critics also argue that the new community cohesion approach would require a change of relationship between the State and the citizen. They assert that the CCA is a type of a forced assimilation strategy in disguise (Alexander, 2009; Back et al., 2002; Burnett, 2008; Kundnani, 2007; Sivanandan, 2006), where the State is the sole guiding and enforcing power in creating national unity through intended "norms" and "values," and the citizens are subtly or indirectly, in some cases directly, forced to comply with it. For example, compulsory citizenship ceremonies ensure that those who obtain citizenship must swear loyalty to the state. Moreover, "Britishness" is now intended to be taught to children through the national curriculum (Burnett, 2008, pp. 39, 47). Similarly, the British value test (i.e., Life in the UK Test) is now a mandatory requirement of the naturalization process.

Research Method

The research looked at the integration issue of the United Kingdom from two strands—examine fundamentals of the CCA and, in light of the operational implications aspects of the CCA, analyze racial, ethnic, and religious issues of a target community, Bangladeshi community, predominantly a Muslim community. In the first part, the research could be termed as exploratory in nature where qualitative approach or, particularly, *narrative and ethnographic approaches* were followed. Within this qualitative approach, in-depth interviews (directed by broad topic guidelines), secondary researches, and relevant policy documents were used as the main sources of data. On the basis of the findings from the analysis of the empirical evidence, policy implications are identified and scope for adjustments is discussed. In the second part, the micro cases are linked to the growing debate about the inherent political theories of the integration approaches: multiculturalism and community cohesion, which are often linked to the idea of interculturalism. The argument then leads to the future direction of the integration policy paradigm in the United Kingdom.

While linking the empirical evidence to the theoretical discussion, the BSM is considered in this study as the guiding tool. According to the BSM, multiculturalism is a political theory that is an outcome of the ground-level sociocultural issues of the immigrants having diverse characteristics to be accommodated with the context of Britain. The BSM particularly focuses on recognition and accommodation of diversities

of various entho–cultural–religio "groups" in terms of their sociocultural and religious rituals, traditions, and various "unique" characteristics; however, individual rights, identity, and citizenship aspects are not ignored as well (Levey, 2019; Meer, 2019; Uberoi & Modood, 2019). It is to be noted that this conception of multiculturalism is contextual to integration movements of Britain; that is, this version of multiculturalism is not an overarching state policy in managing diversity; rather, it emerged from the movements of the immigrants in Britain from bottom and gradually surfaced at the policy level.

The Study Region

Aston, an electoral ward in Birmingham, was chosen as the study area. Birmingham is significantly culturally diversified. With such a diverse population, Birmingham City Council (BCC) has had to put more effort into their cross-community and cross-cultural work than any other city in Britain. In light of the ideology of *community cohesion* and, with the guidance of the Home Office, BCC, along with its local partners, has taken various strategic and operational steps to implement integration policies.

Data Collection

Initially, interviews were conducted with the policy actors that play important roles in the local integration policy process. After this, the Bangladeshi residents of Aston were researched to explore their living experiences in light of the cross-community integration issues in Aston. At the same time, opinions of various social workers, faith leaders, and people of different voluntary organizations were taken into consideration. The participants were given maximum freedom to express their views on the selected topics (the appendix). Purposive and snowball sampling were used for all categories. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the primary data. Data were collected when the newly developed action plan was implemented and validated later.

The details of the sample units are provided below (these are the parties that are responsible for formulating and implementing community cohesion initiatives in Aston, Birmingham):

- individuals from the *Equality and Diversity Division*, BCC;
- individuals from various organizations that are associated with BCC and are involved in community projects in the area, notably projects that cover Bangladeshi residents in the area;
- a range of local voluntary and social organizations (they work as third party to the BCC);
- prominent key person(s) of the Bangladeshi community who have track records of active participation in social and community activities, these persons can also be termed as community leaders representing the Bangladeshi community;
- voluntary social workers who are associated with the activities in the Bangladeshi community
- faith leaders in the Bangladeshi community (specifically, Muslim faith leaders).

The details of the respondents are given below:

Types of respondents	Frequency
Policy actors in the formation and implementation of CCA Community leader Community worker Faith leader	20[a] (Individual respondents)
Ethnic minorities of Aston (Bangladeshis)	Numbers in each FGD
FGD with males Age: 25–50 years	5
FGD with females Age: 25–50 years	7
FGD with young girls and boys Age: 16–20 years	8 (girls: 6; boys: 2)
Total number of respondents	40

[a]Some respondents have overlapping roles such as few policy actors also belong to the community worker category and, hence, it is hard to differentiate them. FGD = focus group discussion.

Findings and Analysis

CCA in Aston

Policy actors' experiences show that certain riots or "social disturbances" in the northern cities of the United Kingdom, local and global terrorist incidents, Islamophobia, and the social, cultural, and religious diversity of the minority ethnic communities of the United Kingdom are the perceived reasons for the development of the community cohesion ideology in the United Kingdom, and these findings are coherent with the argument that we have presented earlier in the literature review. An active community worker, being a supporter of the CCA, stressed on the fact that the British communities are overburdened with cultural diversities that the nation cannot handle, and hence, a control mechanism should be in place to regulate such chaotic societal amalgamation.

Some of the policy actors expressed their concerns regarding rising Islamophobia in the United Kingdom and its role in the integration policy paradigm. One of the policy actors said that the perpetrators of the terrorist incidents in the United Kingdom were mostly Muslims and, therefore, non-Muslims, including the government, became afraid of Muslims. This, he believed, is how Islamophobia became an issue in the United Kingdom and the government and non-Muslims became suspicious about the operations of mosques, as some were allegedly, involved in the 7/7 bombing incident. With this perception, the government stereotyped the whole Muslim community as a potential threat.

Based on these developments, a range of policies have been implemented in Aston with a view to bring cross-community harmony. The primary objective of some projects is to *break down cross-community tensions and conflicts* among various ethnic minority communities. Among various projects, intercommunity sports, cross-community interfaith programs, community festival programs, community residents engagement programs, and so on are focused on bringing various communities together, so that they can interact with each other to get to know each other better, especially in terms of each others' culture and religion. A policy actor, who is involved in the development of the wider community cohesion policy programs in Aston, emphasized the development of the third sector as part of their wider *community capacity* development program:

> . . . part of our work has been building the capacity of that community, both in terms of its governance, and all communities, not just one community, but all communities around governance, quality assurance work, definitely at third sector level . . . we've got more organisations, again, from the Asian community, definitely from the Bangladeshi community, going towards charity status. Whereas before they were very ad hoc. They weren't managed properly, you know, managed by a group of volunteers and . . . goodwill people, but they didn't have the skills. We've worked hard in making sure that there's sustainability within that. (Interview, local authority person, partner organization of BCC)

However, there are critical views as well. With regard to ideology, some policy actors perceive that the government has made clear their rejection of the multiculturalism ideology and were keen to push the idea of a united community. For example, one local authority worker, who is involved in delivering the community cohesion activities, shared his perception regarding the CCA vision, as follows:

> I think the message [of the Government about CCA] is out there—if you don't believe in what we believe in then you are not one of us. I think in a nutshell that's what it is. And that's a difficult one to become—because you have to become be one of us to . . . you know . . . you have to believe in what we believe in to—be one of us. And I think that's a wrong way of going about things. I think that defies the whole objective. (Interview, community cohesion project worker, Aston)

With a similar perception, another community cohesion project worker added,

> . . . the other aspect [of the CCA] is to be to try to bring more communities together and become more British citizen, rather than individual citizen. (Interview, community cohesion project worker, Aston)

A Muslim faith leader, who is also involved in various community cohesion activities, expressed his concerns about the rationales of the CCA. He considered that the CCA was initially triggered by the race riots (in 2001) where Muslims were labeled as a problematized group and this then escalated into Islamophobia, which underlies the whole objective of the CCA. He, moreover, agreed with the prevailing perception that the CCA is an authoritative approach to integrate the minority ethnic communities with the English community of the United Kingdom:

> As the whole issue [of CCA] started from those issues [e.g., Islamophobia], I do not like this idea. And for that reason I do not like the idea that community cohesion will bring any change . . . whether the motive of these policies is to change ourselves in the name of establishing Britishness or not—I'm very dubious [about the CCA]. (Interview, Muslim faith leader, Birmingham)

A community worker pointed out that there is a lack of connection between the policy makers at the top and the ground reality. He thinks that the people who actually formulate integration policies may not have clear ideas about the cross-community issues of different regions at the local level. In relation to this, he said,

> . . . actually, physically people like us. We know what's right because we are actually, physically doing the work. We work in the community. You can't know about Aston, sitting in a fancy office in the city centre. That's the way I look at it and I think that's where they [the Government] went wrong, unfortunately. (Interview, community worker, Aston)

It was felt that some policy actors were actually worried about the constant ideological tension in relation to integration discourse of the United Kingdom. One of the policy actors expressed his confusion and worry that the CCA is so strong that it may turn out to mean a push for assimilation of the minority ethnic communities of the United Kingdom. Moreover, it could be sensed from the concerns of the policy actors that the CCA may not have close connections to real issues that persist in the ethnic minority communities.

The Bangladeshi Community of Aston

From the primary evidence, it could be noticed that a constant tension persists among some Bangladeshi immigrants regarding their identities and relationships to the host community. The dimensions of the identity and feeling of belongingness mostly pertain to various social, cultural, religious, and even legal issues. Some second- and third-generation Bangladeshis said that the way their identity is defined or labeled by others, mostly native English people, is different to their self-perceived personal identity, and thus, this difference often causes confusion and dilemmas among the Bangladeshi immigrants of the United Kingdom.

One prominent Bangladeshi community leader stated that the identity of the first- and second-generation Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom is closely associated with their ethnic origin, culture, religion, and citizenship status. According to

him, a good proportion of the first-generation Bangladeshis, those who migrated during the 60s and 70s, often feel that, as they were born in Bangladesh, their roots still belong there. Hence, they perceive Bengali, the native culture of the Bangladeshis, to be the dominant part of their identity. However, from a citizenship or legal perspective, generally some older generation Bangladeshis, who have got British citizenship, asserted that they are "British." However, it is to be noted that the older generation Bangladeshis perceive "English" as a cultural identity of the ethnic White or indigenous people. They consider "British" identity as applicable for all those, irrespective of race or ethnicity who hold British citizenship.

To accommodate these two diverse aspects—citizenship/legal status and "Bengali" as cultural identity, the hyphenated identity came into play—"British-Bangladeshi" or "British-Bengalis"—an identity that denotes, both the citizenship status and their ethnic origin and root culture. It was found that often Bangladeshis are comfortable with this hyphenated identity. However, there are differences of opinions about this hyphenated identity across generations. For example, it was noticed that the older generations put more stress on the Bengali or Bangladeshi aspect of their hyphenated identity.

In contrast, in most of the cases, younger generations of Aston have, since birth, been exposed to various cultures of the minority ethnic groups of the area. They have, thus, developed a broader spectrum of culture where a variety of norms, values, rituals, and traditions, derived from other Muslim communities, are embraced. Some of those interviewed said that they consider themselves to be more Muslim-British than Bangladeshi-British or English. Thus, their identity has become religion driven, rather than driven by the Bengali culture:

> As a Bengali-Muslim, I am happy to be a Bengali-Muslim. I am less Bengali than I am Muslim—I would like to think, because my parent's generation they came from Bangladesh, they had more of Bengali culture and they propagate that with us. Because we grow up in this country . . . we . . . essentially, cohabited with people from all sorts of other cultures. We are able to take some of their understandings and belief structures and bring those within our own living. So, I am more than happy to be what I am . . . As far as I am concerned, I am a law abiding citizen . . . as long as that is respected, I don't see any need to assimilate [with ethnic White] in any way. I don't see the need for me to walk around with a union jack flag, because I am more than comfortable and proud of being a British citizen. This is where I was born. This is where I belong. I can't live anywhere else. (Interview, a young British-Bangladeshi boy, Aston)

It is true that the young Bangladeshis are tending toward a more complex (combination of multicultural and religious) identity, rather than their traditional Bengali identity. The evolution of identities of different generations of the Bangladeshis indicates the inherent complexities or danger in developing a collective or shared identity based on the dominant host culture, "Britishness"—which is one of the goals of community cohesion.

One of the respondents highlighted that the perception of community is limited to cultural or ethnic homogeneity in the area. Her experiences revealed that certain cultural preferences and the disproportionate composition and dispersion of various ethnicities in Aston facilitated the formation of a tightly bonded Bangladeshi community, or in a broader sense, Asian community:

> . . . because everybody is, like, Asian or predominantly Bengali, so everybody knows each other . . . Everybody's been living here for generations, so everyone knows . . . Even the businesses are, like, family businesses. (Interview, British-Bangladeshi Muslim girl, resident of Aston)

Generally, Aston is perceived to be a high crime zone by outsiders. However, the young people who participated in the focus group discussion (FGD) commonly agreed that they felt safe and comfortable living in this community as it is a closely bonded community and everyone knows each other well. They also asserted that the demographic composition of the area (small native British community and large Asian Muslim community) is a positive reinforcement for the ethnic minorities living there. According to a youth resident of Aston:

> . . . you feel safe and you feel more comfortable with people from your own ethnic background . . . whereas, with other people, you don't. That's why people like to stay here even though there's a high level of crime and stuff. People still feel safe because they've been here for years and they know everyone. (Interview, British-Bangladeshi Muslim girl, resident of Aston)

Usually the Bangladeshi residents are comfortable with the fact that all the social facilities (e.g., mosques, education, health services) and social amenities (e.g., community centers, sports facilities) they need are in Aston within their surroundings. One of the interviewees highlighted that it is a positive factor that, due to higher concentration of Bangladeshis and Asians, various regular services (e.g., taxis, restaurants, grocery shops) in the area are provided by them as well. He further added that nowadays some Bangladeshis and other Asians also work in various essential service-providing organizations in the area (e.g., education institutions, hospitals, banks).

From a cultural perspective, Bangladeshis perceive some commonalities with that of the other south Asian communities, especially Indian and Pakistani communities in the area. Moreover, in relation to the cross-community commonality issue, one male interviewee asserted that professional work interest plays a major role in developing positive relationships with each other. He asserted that some Bangladeshis have developed joint business ventures with the Pakistanis

and Indians in the local area, and, he perceives, this professional association has a positive influence on the cross-community relationships in the area. Few Bangladeshis also stressed on the religious commonality of the Bangladeshi and other minority ethnic communities of the area. They feel that gathering in mosques for daily prayer is a symbol of closeness among different Muslim ethnicities.

It is also observed that there is a persistent racial and, more so, religious, tension among the young Bangladeshis regarding wider relationship between the Muslims and the native English of the United Kingdom. One of the interviewees highlighted that the prevailing racial tension in Aston often depends on the composition of the racial and religious demographics of the area. For example, he feels that, due to the religious–ethnic compositions of Aston (majority Muslim immigrants and minority English native population), Bangladeshi Muslims hardly face any racism from the native English people because, being the minority in Aston, the English keep a distance from the Muslim immigrants. However, some of the interviewees considered that they would face severe racism from the native English people if they moved out of Aston and lived in a predominantly English area. One of the young boys expressed his concern about mixing with the ethnic White, stating,

> . . . if we go to, like, an all White school, we would find it difficult to settle in. Like, it'll be really hard for us because we're so used to be Bengalis. (Interview, British-Bangladeshi Muslim boy, resident of Aston)

Primarily, it seems that some of the respondents perceive racism to be cross-racial and cross-religious antagonisms between the native English population and various ethnic immigrants, mostly, Muslims. According to a young interviewee, contemporary faith issues such as terrorist issues, Islamophobia, and the relevant role of the media have generated this tension between Muslims and non-Muslims in the United Kingdom. Another interviewee perceives that the native English people or, in some cases, other non-Muslims, in the United Kingdom generally tend to believe what the media and government say about Muslims. He asserted that the media and the U.K. government stereotype all Muslims as potential terrorists, based on some local and global terrorist incidents. Several young interviewees perceive these faith issues act as a barrier to developing healthy relationships between the Muslim immigrants and the native English people in the local area.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the primary evidence, it appears that the concept, community cohesion, the central idea of the postmulticulturalism integration approach, arises from a mere response to civil unrest, rather than the social evolution of a multicultural society. Community cohesion emphasizes cultural issues of the ethnic minorities over wider social evolution. Linking the policy actors' understanding of the ideology of community cohesion with the wider understanding of community perceived by the Bangladeshi residents of Aston reveals further dimensions of the integration issues. The various perspectives defining self-identity, sociocultural–religious norms and values, and overall community show how difficult it may be to fix the meaning of community cohesion with a universally accepted concept that encompasses all the crucial aspects of social life.

The primary data also reveal that the relationship of Bangladeshis with other communities depends on various factors, such as their preferences and need for sociocultural–religious life, their economic dependencies within their community, their experienced and perceived racial issues with various communities, the demographics of the area, both global and local faith issues, and Islamophobia. Having such complexities, physical proximity and frequent interactions, which are initiated by the CCA, with each other may have some influence on cross-community relationships, but its nature (whether positive, negative, or mixed) and degree of influence would be highly contextualized. As asserted by a policy actor, the communities themselves have to be ready before they are forced to integrate, physically, so that they can develop good relationships with each other. Otherwise, although there are prevailing intercommunity antagonisms, such policy interventions may have detrimental effects on their relationships.

Moreover, the analysis of the Bangladeshi residents' life experiences shows that there are a number of reasons for them developing their own community in Aston. The discussion regarding the social evolution of the Bangladeshis shows how and why a dense and tight Bangladeshi community was established in Aston when Bangladeshi immigrants first arrived in the area during the 60s. Hence, the concept, "parallel lives" asserted by the Cantle Report, which initiated the community cohesion ideology, fails to understand the underlying issues of an ethnic community, and, rather naïvely, concludes that the existence and sustenance of individual minority ethnic communities are linked to cross-community antagonisms. Therefore, it is important to understand the social dynamics of ethnic minorities more acutely to handle the cross-community integration issues of Britain.

The discussion about the identity of Bangladeshis indicates the importance of a plurality of identity of the Bangladeshi community in a dominant host cultural setting. It appeared that Bangladeshis do not have any resistance to being British (e.g., from a citizenship perspective). However, they want to be "British" in their own way—being British while preserving some crucial aspects of their ethnic culture and religious customs and rituals. Moreover, it appeared that the Bangladeshis are dubious about the CCA because they think the government intends to assimilate them into the English culture through such policy programs. In addition,

the policy actors of the area are also doubtful about the inherent motives of the CCA. Some of them think that the CCA may turn out to be an assimilatory integration tool aimed at the ethnic minorities. These findings compliment the wider debate regarding the ideology and the fundamentals of the CCA, discussed earlier. Moreover, the CCA stereotypes all the ethnic communities based on its own assumptions regarding various sociocultural aspects of these communities and, subsequently, develops blanket policies for everyone.

From another angle, the primary research shows that the Bangladeshi residents and the community workers in Aston perceive that the community cohesion ideology particularly labels Muslims as a problematized group in the society. They criticized the government and the media for establishing and propagating this negative image of Muslims and, hence, promoting Islamophobia among non-Muslims. They perceive that Muslims, in general, are stereotyped for the acts of few terrorists, who happen to be Muslims by faith, though several interviewees asserted that those terrorists are diverted from Islam and, hence, do not belong to the greater Muslim community.

Policy Implications

The policy actors made a number of relevant suggestions as to how to tackle some of those issues of the CCA. These recommendations aim to address the ideological implications, approaches, mechanisms, and operational strategies of the CCA. First, it was noticed that there is widespread ignorance among the Bangladeshi residents regarding the various projects and programs of the CCA that operate in the area. Thus, dissemination of information and effective communication with the target community could be an area of concern of the CCA.

Another area of concern of the CCA could be to run community leadership development projects for adults. Currently, the CCA has leadership development projects for youth, but the residents complained that they did not have enough effective Bangladeshi community leaders who would listen to their voices and deal with their issues. It appears that Bangladeshis have a lack of representation in the local council, that is, their representatives are not in sufficient proportion to their numbers in the community.

In general, it was felt that people are aggrieved with the situation where they perceive that the government blames the ethnic minorities for the so-called "social disorders" in the community and, moreover, they accuse the government of not taking effective measures to solve their problems. This antigovernment feeling is particularly intense among the youth of the area. Thus, it is important that more two-way communication (dialogism) between the general population and the government should take place regarding the local community issues and their policy initiatives. The policy process should be more community driven and transparent.

Many interviewees, both policy actors and residents, asserted that the integration policy moves with the changes in political interests. Few interviewees urged for the separation of the integration policies from their alleged political association. This is an area of argument, whether the integration policy is free from the political interest or not. It appears from the primary evidence that widespread confusion and suspicion persists among the policy actors and the target community about CCA's relation to the government's political agenda regarding the ethnic minorities' integration in the British society. Thus, it is suggested that the government should clarify this alleged political association within the policy paradigm if they really want to gain the trust of the citizen as well as the policy actors. Otherwise, much of their effort, irrespective of their motives, role, and importance, may not be welcomed by both the policy actors and the target communities.

Finally, it can be seen that the policy makers, in several instances, may not be aware about the issues at the ground level while formulating policies at the top. It was found that the people who actually deliver the action plans to the target community have an issue with the top-down approach of policy making. They argue that it is wrong to form general perceptions about all the ethnic communities without exploring the internal issues/distinctiveness of each community. Once the particular issues of each community are identified, then these issues should be incorporated within the broader policy framework. In connection to the issues, it is an area of concern whether the community cohesion (which is allegedly a top-down approach) as a political framework is working for integration paradigm or whether reconsideration of multiculturalism as a political theory would be more appropriate. The following section would explore this issue further.

The Way Forward

It is evident that the postmulticultural integration policy perceives the diversities of various ethnic minorities of this country to be a burden (rather than a strength) that often leads to cross-cultural antagonisms. Hence, there is the notion that diversity should be managed. Various political leaders' and policy actors' allegations regarding the dysfunctional role of multiculturalism also raise concerns about the accommodation of the diverse life of the ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. The research reveals that the CCA, which develops on antimulticulturalism idea, fails to address the *equality* issues that are linked to the *differences*. As the contemporary integration approach rejects the political theory of multiculturalism, then what would be the normative standpoint regarding various different ways of life of the ethnic minorities of the United Kingdom to be pursued by the integration policies?

Let us revisit the key features and criticisms of multiculturalism, or particularly, the BSM while exploring a plausible

alternative for the contemporary integration approach. The key feature of the BSM rests on recognition and accommodation of various forms of contextual group differences or inequalities while dealing with the integration issues of the ethnic minorities within the dominant host community. However, conventional multiculturalism, as a public policy, has gone through severe criticism on the grounds that it is inherently an essentialist idea that asymmetrically focuses more on the politics of difference and recognition of certain "groups" and, hence, favors preferential treatments to those "groups" over identical treatment to all the disadvantaged including poor White communities of the United Kingdom (Barry, 2001; Goodhart, 2013); and thus, the BSM is no exception to this criticism. In line with this argument, the critics assert that the BSM mainly focuses on equalities of differences where differences only pertain to ethnic, cultural, and/or religious aspects of the ethnic minorities, and thus, fails to address other areas of differences—gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic disparities (Hansen, 2006). The BSM is also accused of being relativist (Meer & Modood, 2011) and illiberal as, in some cases, it defends ethnic minorities' certain cultural practices—religious conservativeness with regard to sexual orientation and gender issues—"that violates norms of human rights" (Kymlicka, 2005, p. 83). Similarly, the BSM is also criticized for not considering the challenges that the majority identities are currently facing due to the forces of globalization and deindustrialization in the United Kingdom (Antonsich, 2016).

Having such dissatisfaction with multiculturalism, another stream of political theory, interculturalism, surfaced in the integration paradigm where the idea of community cohesion is considered to be aligned with it. It argues that the interculturalism is a form of discourse that supposedly rests on the critiques of multiculturalism (Joppke, 2017) and subsequently offers "novel" solutions to them (Modood, 2017). Advocates of interculturalism assert that it is a discourse or political theory that is less groupist and more liberal, opposes ethnicization of individuals, has a stronger sense of whole, favors hybridity and fluidity of identity, is committed to national citizenship and societal cohesion (Meer & Modood, 2011; Modood, 2017; Zapata-Barrero, 2016), and is "more geared toward interaction and dialogue than multiculturalism" (Modood, 2014, p. 302). It is claimed that, as opposed to multiculturalism, essence of interculturalism is dialogism in openness or interactions between people from different diversities in a public sphere (Zapata-Barrero, 2016) through which sense of belongingness based on commonality could be formed; this idea, to a certain extent, resembles contact theory. The interculturalism also stresses that the dialogue and interaction are so vital that the process, by itself, could address normative aspects of various crucial issues. From a slightly different angle, Bouchard, one of the proponents of interculturalism highlights that it "allows for the recognition of certain elements of ad hoc (or contextual) precedence for majority culture" (Bouchard, 2011, p. 451).

If we examine the dimensions and arguments of the two "isms" in search for a plausible integration policy discourse, primary evidence of the Bangladeshi community can play an important role. The identity issue of the older generation Bangladeshi community, on one hand, highlights the importance of groupness asserted by the BSM; and, on the other hand, the views of the younger generation (shift from the Bengali to the greater Muslim identity) and hyphenated identity (British-Bengali) of the Bangladeshi community support the plurality/fluidity/hybridity conception of identity asserted by both the BSM and interculturalism. The transformation of identity clearly shows that the forms and nature of identity change over time but it will never be identity-less. Furthermore, the CCA, by breaking down cross-community barrier, tries to explore areas of common interests and shared principles and pushes for a dominant identity, "Britishness," showing the duality of *majority–minority tension* in forming identity. With reference to the contextual dimension on the ground, it is evident that the universal liberalism, which is the essence of the Canadian version of multiculturalism or interculturalism, is questionable. Furthermore, this empirical evidence clearly shows unique complexities of the Bangladeshi community in Aston for which it is important that the policy formulation follow a bottom-up approach (that the BSM proposes) than a top-down approach that is followed by the community cohesion approach.

Primary evidence of the Bangladeshi community can also shed light on the idea of dialogism, which is supposed to be the core essence of interculturalism, though to a relatively lesser extent also valued by the BSM. According to primary evidence, the representation of Bangladeshis in the local council of Aston is not proportionate and, hence, it is likely that the Bangladeshi voices are not cared much in the local council. Thus, they urged for leadership development (developing competencies) programs for Bangladeshis so that they actively can take part in the political process. Hence, it is clear that mere interaction or open dialogue may not work where all the parties are not equal in the power balance and in competencies. The BSM's protectionism approach for the minority in this regard cannot entirely be disregarded. It can also be argued that, for dialogism to be effective, appropriate environment or condition must be ensured for all the parties. For example, both the policy actors and the Bangladeshi residents of Aston raised their concern about the Islamophobia, which may endanger the cross-community interactions as non-Muslims have reservations against Muslims in the area. Bangladeshi residents asserted that non-Muslims seem to stereotype all Muslims based on the way Muslim's images are projected in the media as terrorists. Thus, the core essence, naïve contact theory, of interculturalism and the CCA is in question; whereas, the BSM is clearly sympathetic to minority ethnic communities in this regard.

In relation to the empirical case, and, after having thorough examinations of the arguments for and against the two prominent political theories of integrationism, interculturalism and

the BSM, it is evident that the weights are more inclined toward the BSM. However, the core essence of interculturalism, dialogism, should be appreciated though it needs to consider the conditions (e.g., power balance, competencies of the participants) within the process. Any integration political theory should consider an ethnic minority community's inherent social complexities before pushing them to interact with others, especially with the dominant entity, and of course any policy formulation must consult the subject on the ground. It is also to be noted that, theoretically, it may be possible to have identity-less and self-less individuals; but in reality, identities do matter even though they transform and take different shapes over time. Thus, race, culture, identity, and religious aspects always are there in the integration discourse. Particularly, considering the sociocultural condition of the Bangladeshi community of Aston, it is deemed necessary that certain protectionism policy (or support) may be needed for them to be included in the mainstream society, and this is what the BSM intends to achieve. Whereas, interculturalism may take a stance for a broader, liberal, and less protectionist integration approach, but this approach may be effective when all minority ethnic communities are out of their various forms of inequalities compared with the dominant community. Till then, the BSM as a political theory should remain in the integration policy discourse.

Appendix

Thematic Framework: Broad Themes and Subthemes.
Rationales and ideology/philosophy of the integration and community cohesion
Understanding/perception about the concepts Experiences/perceptions about community cohesion; it objectives and rationales Current movement of Community Cohesion Agenda (CCA) and its future
Reasons for the development of CCA
Social disturbances/race relation issues Terrorist events/global issues/Islamophobia Factors associated with norms/values/beliefs/religion/culture/language/differences Economic issues, political issues/foreign policies Others (e.g., structural issues, crime, institutional or operational issues)
Mechanisms of the community cohesion policy/programs
Experiences/perceptions about particular integration programs Role of various partner/social/voluntary organizations Others (e.g., general issues of the current projects, general impacts, any suggestion)
Community cohesion and Islam
Islamic norms/values/rituals/views and integration Islamophobia and views of others (non-Muslims) toward Islam and Muslims Other Muslim/religious issues
Community, community life, and the Bangladeshi community
Views about community and community life Factors important for a healthy community Cross-community relation and racism History of British-Bangladeshis Views/status of the Bangladeshi community Various traits of Bangladeshi community (e.g., behavior, attitude, traditions)
Others
Nature and form of identity and issues related to it Issues of other ethnic minority communities Demographics and other socioeconomic issues of Birmingham/Aston Miscellaneous (e.g., social dynamics; social evolution; general issues related to community, community life, and society; political issues; structural issues)

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