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**THESES OF THE PhD DISSERTATION**

**of**

**Dániel Vékony**

**Others or parts of us?**

Collective memory as a tool of multicultural government policy for increasing societal coherence between British Majority Society and British Muslim minorities

**Supervisors:**

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# RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR THE CHOICE OF TOPIC

## Introduction

On 5 February 2011, former British Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a speech at the annual Munich Security Conference (Cameron, 2011). When describing the current situation in Great Britain, Cameron drew some ‘general lessons’ (ibid.) for the audience concerning Muslim minority groups. Cameron said that some young Muslims found it hard to identify themselves with the traditional Islam practiced at home by their parents and with Britain too. In his speech, the former British Prime Minister acknowledged that a significant part of British Muslims had been marginalised and feeling rootless in Britain, which could easily lead to the radicalisation of these individuals. Examining the causes of this phenomenon, Cameron engaged in some self-reflection. He blamed the British State’s attitude for the alienation of a part of Muslim people. In his view, in Great Britain, under the ‘doctrine of state multiculturalism’ (ibid.) different cultures had been encouraged to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream; and the State had tolerated the existence of communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to British values. In addition, Cameron also pointed out that the British State had failed to provide a vision of society to which Muslim minorities felt they wanted to belong. This, combined with the above-mentioned passive tolerance against extremist views and individuals, led to the radicalisation of many Muslims (ibid.).

David Cameron’s speech was a milestone in Europe in the relationship between multiculturalism and the state. Shortly after the British Prime Minister, Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, President of France Nicolas Sarkozy, and Minister of the Interior of the Netherlands, Piet Hein Donner, one by one, roundly condemned multiculturalism (Hvg.hu, 2010) (Wright & Taylor, 2011) (The Telegraph, 2011) (Dutchnews.nl, 2011). The government of Great Britain, which had been among the first ones to embrace multiculturalism in Western Europe, was the first one to officially turn away from multiculturalism. Cameron blamed multiculturalism for the weakening of national identity, and for individuals belonging to Muslim minorities not being able to identify themselves with this national identity. The Prime Minister also express sharp disapproval of multiculturalism

for the fact that Muslim minorities had not been capable of integrating into the society and thus many of them had turned to radicalism.

The multiculturalism described by Cameron, therefore, leads to the isolation and segregation of social groups. In the absence of common values, the groups that make up society are unable to work towards a common goal, and thus certain minorities may feel excluded from the nation, as it is unclear to them where they exactly should belong.

Since 2011, in the popular mind, multiculturalism is thought of as a fallen ideology, and has disappeared from public discourses in Western Europe (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Politicians have removed this term from their vocabularies, and the emphasis is rather placed on integration and common values. It may seem that multiculturalism has failed in Great Britain. Political parties have condemned multiculturalism; the term was banished from government communication, and this word is hardly heard in public discourses. If it is mentioned at all, it mostly has a negative connotation (ibid.).

But where is the British Government heading after the fall of multiculturalism? What is the alternative? The goal is to create an alternative national narrative, or self-image, that is able to find a suitable place for Muslims, too, in British society. Thus, such a society would be created where, instead of mere coexistence, cohabitation (living together while engaging in intercultural interaction) would be realised as a result of social cohesion.

The primary purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that, despite the fact that the political elite and the Government have clearly turned away from multiculturalism, the British government, in fact, continues to formulate its policies regarding Muslim minorities according to the same principles as those on which the framework of multiculturalism is based. This will be examined through the collective memory narrative propagated by the Government. In this thesis, the author seeks to demonstrate that the turning away from multiculturalism has only happened at the level of rhetoric. Despite the fact that multiculturalism has become an *idea non grata* in British politics, it has not disappeared and, what is more, continues to pervade the British Government's ideas.

In order to prove this, the concept of collective memory will be used, since collective memory is the social phenomenon responsible for shaping the image that a nation has about itself. A more inclusive national narrative – in which, among other things, British Muslims

can feel at home and at their rightful place – can be created through a change of collective memory. The Government has an important say in the emergence of such a national narrative.

## Hypothesis

In this thesis, the author tries to prove the following hypothesis:

*In Great Britain, as a result of the change in the collective memory narrative propagated by the Government, the national curriculum framework has changed so that, contrary to the past decades, Muslim minority groups no longer appear as distant aliens in collective memory but as entities that are constituents of the British society, thereby promoting the peaceful cohabitation of the different social groups in British society in accordance with the discourse of multiculturalism.*

The Government can influence this image through multiple channels. One of the most evident channels is (public) education. For this reason, the author has decided to present the image that the Government tries to create among the members of society through an analysis of public education.

In recent years, the literature on Western Muslim minorities has seen an explosive growth. Here, we will only highlight the most important sources, without aiming to give an exhaustive list.

Ansari provides a comprehensive picture of the historical and social background of British Muslims (Ansari, 2004). Scheffer's critical attitude points out many dilemmas regarding immigration as well as Muslim and other minorities (Scheffer, 2011). Tibi gives an insight into the topics of radicalism and Islam through Western European examples (Tibi, 2008). Roy shares a number of valuable ideas about the consequences of the failure of integration of Muslims in Western Europe (Roy, 2004). Hasan analyses the issues of British multiculturalism which went off track after the 1990s (Hasan, 2010). Goodhart illustrates the impact of immigration in today's Great Britain by raising some fundamental issues (Goodhart, 2014). The collection of studies edited by Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf gives a comprehensive view of the situation in Western Europe after the shift from multiculturalism (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010).

## Theoretical background

Assmann says that memories, and collective memory, are always associated with a particular group (2013, pp. 40-41). The sum of the elements that make up collective memory<sup>1</sup> is what constitutes the self-consciousness of a given group, i.e. such elements can be considered as the fundamentals of group identity. One of the cornerstones of the question “Who are we?” and of answering this question is to be able to tell where we came from and how we became who we are. Collective memory provides a narrative to the past that is accepted by the group, and thereby, through the group, influences the self-image of individuals. The past is not remembered for itself but because of the challenges the community faces in the present and the future goals that its members formulate in the present.

According to Halbwachs, collective memory, which includes the past and the present, resides in the minds of individuals as a motionless picture, as a tabloid (Halbwachs, 2000). However, this collective memory, which seems to be motionless, is actually constantly changing as the group faces new challenges. Pataki and Hobsbawm note that collective memory, and the traditions linked to it, can be arbitrarily constructed or reconstructed (ibid.), which can be used by those in a position of authority to achieve their own goals (Hobsbawm, 1983) (Pataki, 2010).

Misztal (2003) stresses that the content of social memory is also of key importance because it affects how the members of a specific group relate to other groups. How we see our past and the past of our environment is decisive in terms of whether conflict or cooperation will be dominant between the two groups.

In this regard, Roy speaks about the acculturation of young Muslims who were born in Western Europe. Roy describes this as a process where Muslims growing up in Western Europe are no longer able to receive the culture and memories of their parents, and they only receive a fragmented collective memory. The collective memory of the majority society, however, contains elements that can be offensive or humiliating for Western European Muslims. Therefore, identifying themselves with any cultural identity is problematic for many young British Muslims. So in the case of Muslims who lose their culture this way, cultural identity is substituted by an Islamic identity that is free from the cultural elements that are found in the identity of their ascendants. This neo-fundamentalist interpretation of Islam offers an Islam that is free from cultural accretions and largely builds

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<sup>1</sup> These include the fables, myths, memories of past events, traumas, etc.

on the initial period of this religion – and, in many cases, on the literal interpretation of religious texts. For this reason, the members of these communities may be more receptive to radical ideologies (Roy, 2004).

It is therefore necessary to create a new national collective memory narrative that gives British Muslims their rightful place in the society. Owing to this inclusive collective narrative, it will be possible that both members of the majority society and members of Muslim minority groups may consider British Muslims as an integral part of the nation.

During the study of the relevant literature, the author realized that none of the sources covered the field of collective memory in regards to multiculturalism and Western European Muslim minorities. This is the main research gap that the author intends to cover with this thesis. Besides, the author would also like to point out that many of those who criticize multiculturalism only focus on empirical evidence and thus they ignore its theoretical background (Hasan, 2010) (Malik, 2013) (Tibi, 2008) (Todorov, 2010). Thus they criticize the normative form of multiculturalism by bringing forward arguments against the descriptive or positive form of this system of cohabitation. And this is a problem, since using multiculturalism as part of political discourse does not necessarily mean the actual application of normative multiculturalism as part of government policy.

This is what has actually happened towards the end of the 20th century. The British government made a stand for multiculturalism only on the rhetorical level, but it failed to introduce a clear strategy in line with normative multiculturalism. This is why the author also aims to prove that unlike during the 1990s, present day British government policy is in line with the core principles of multiculturalism. We are aware of the fact that this topic might be too wide for a doctoral thesis. That is why this thesis will only focus on British government policy in the field of collective remembrance, as it is possible to prove the authors arguments in this field within the framework of this book. By demonstrating the points mentioned here, this book will also contribute to academic debate on multiculturalism in regards to Muslim minorities.

According to Kymlicka (2012, p. 24), there is not long-term alternative of multiculturalism in liberal societies. Although the author is not so optimistic, as the social support behind multiculturalism is marginal today. Still when issues related to Muslim minorities arise, we see reactions and actions from the states and majority societies that are in line with the framework of multiculturalism. The situation is similar as far as the British collective memory is concerned that is supposed to ensure coherence between various social



groups. This thesis attempts to demonstrate the British government's intention on creating a new narrative of collective memory that is inclusive for Muslims. Thus enabling British Muslims to find their place in British society without having to give up their own identities. This new more inclusive national narrative of collective memory is in line with the principles of multiculturalism despite the government's turning away from them.

## Structure of the book

The structure of this doctoral thesis is the following: The first chapter will give a short introduction of the British Muslim minorities, their background and the challenges they face. In order to better understand the topic, it is also necessary to briefly describe the conflicts between British Muslims and the majority society. This chapter will be followed by the one that deals with collective memory and remembrance. In this part the author is going to review the relevant literature of that topic and will explain the importance of it in regards to the topic of the thesis. Besides, this chapter will shed light on the conflicting and possible connection points of the collective memory of the majority society and of British Muslims. This will be followed by a chapter that gives a theoretical overview of possible models and systems of cohabitation between the two groups concerned. After this second literature review, the author will construct his own framework for multiculturalism that he will use during the rest of the book. The next chapter presents the methodology used during the research process. This will be followed by the chapter that presents the findings and the results of the research. The role of this part is to prove the hypothesis based on the theoretical foundations laid down in the previous chapters. In the conclusion, the author is going to present his final analysis and will lay out directions for possible future research.

## RESEARCH METHODS

After studying the relevant literature, the author decided to prove the hypothesis through the analysis of British, and within those, English high school textbooks. The analysis involved History, Citizenship and Religious Studies textbooks. The research used qualitative analysis, so the sample shown here is not representative. Books published in the 1960s are compared with those that are currently in use. Through this, the author would like to show, how the collective remembrance narrative, that the government intended to spread in connection with the British Muslim minorities, has changed.

Throughout the research, the research goals shown below have been formulated:

- Analysis of social cohabitation forms, especially in the framework of multiculturalism
- Examination of the collective remembrance of the British majority society, and the British Muslim minorities
- Revelation and demonstration the changes concerning collective remembrance in the British education policy
- Examination of the attitude of the British government in regard to shaping collective remembrance

Through the paper, interpretivist research philosophy will be applied, with the help of subjectivist ontology. In other words, is approached as a phenomenon created by society. Understanding social phenomena will be possible through understanding the motivations of the social actors associated with the phenomenon, and the subjective meanings behind them.

The paper uses deductive research approach. Thus no new theory, in the literal meaning, will be created, but the author, after reviewing the relevant literature, forms his own interpretation of multiculturalism, and applies it throughout the work.

Our research strategy will be case study. Our goal is to write a unique case study, demonstrating and analyzing the majority society and the Muslim minorities of Great Britain.

This approach is narrowed further: the author examines the collective remembrance narrative supported by the British government through the English educational system.

The paper does not cover the curriculum of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since only the English education policy can be defined directly by the government of Great Britain, the author will concentrate on the materials used in English education, in order to keep the focus of the paper.

Qualitative content analysis was chosen as the method of the research, complemented with basic tools of critical discourse analysis. The author used high school History, Citizenship and Religious Studies textbooks to create the sample he used for the analysis. The sample was created using purposive sampling (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, pp. 237-239). The sample is divided into two parts: one part includes the books published and used in the 1960s. The other part focuses on the textbooks that are currently in use. This will be complemented with the currently used subject specifications. The sample created this way is not representative.

However, this will not mean any problem, because quantitative, not qualitative data analysis will be done. The author chose to examine materials used in high school education, because it is mandatory for everyone in Great Britain, since compulsory education lasts until the age of 16 (Gov.uk, 2017).<sup>2</sup> So every juvenile, with no regards to their background, takes part in these courses, and the great majority of the British youth is in some way exposed to the collective remembrance narrative propagated by the government.

In the next chapter, we are going to summarize the results we obtained as a result of the analysis of the sample described here.

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<sup>2</sup> The length of compulsory education in Great Britain is different by the parts of Great Britain. It is mandatory in the whole country to take part in education until the age of 16. After that, it is not compulsory outside England. In England, students between the age of 16 and 18 can take the GSCE or A - level, similar to the Hungarian matriculation exams. After this they can choose to learn a profession in an educational institution or beside work. (Gov.uk, 2017)

## RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH, DISCUSSION

The purpose of the thesis was to demonstrate that the proclaimed British governmental turning away from multiculturalism had been realized only on the level of political rhetoric. This phenomenon was presented through the narrative of collective memory propagated by the government. The results of the research have proven that the image of collective remembrance is in line with various elements of the framework of multiculturalism. However, this simply would not be sufficient for the proving of the hypothesis. Therefore, it needs to be emphasised that the author has not found sources that stood for principles and values that are against the above mentioned system of cohabitation. Therefore, it can be stated that the current narrative of collective memory of the British government is in line with the framework of multiculturalism.

This current governmental collective narrative of remembering is part of a political strategy that puts an emphasis on increasing social coherence among the diverse groups of British society. However, the goal here is not the creation of a British melting pot. The government is not willing to assimilate minority groups as it has taken a stand by diversity. The present approach to minority related cohabitation cannot be called cosmopolitan either, as British national identity is emphasized as part of the narrative of the government. Through the examination of materials, the author has found that various publications, draw attention to how good it is to live in Great-Britain, whilst a comparison with poorer, more oppressive regimes is presented. This means that when asking the questions 'Who are we?' 'Where do we come from?', today's British secondary school students come across with a more complex set of ideas than past ones. In this complex image, national pride is also present, that is completely in line with the framework of multiculturalism, too.

Having examined secondary school textbooks and other publications, it can be stated that the hypothesis has been successfully proven. Indeed, the narrative of collective memory propagated by the government has changed in Great-Britain. This transformation is also present in textbooks published according to the national curricular standards. The narrative of collective memory, as it is today, suggests that principles and values of multiculturalism penetrates governmental attitude towards collective remembrance and national identity.

Although government officials do not use the term multiculturalism, they shape the narrative of collective memory regarding Muslim minorities according to the principles of this

framework of cohabitation. Given that the term itself is so widely rejected, Judd and Kymlicka chooses to use the term post-multiculturalism to describe the current social situation (Jupp, 2011) (Kymlicka, 2010).

Eventually, it may not be important how government officials and agencies address the challenges of Muslim-minority-related cohabitation. They might use terms such as 'integration', 'coherent society', or 'interculturalism' in order to sustain societal consensus. Nevertheless, the British government still articulates a narrative of collective memory, that is in line with the framework of multiculturalism.

This attitude may have far reaching consequences for Muslim-related radicalism. The significance of counter-cultures have been mentioned previously. The fall of the USSR also meant the end of the socialist, communist paradigm. As a result the secular, left-wing, revolutionary counter-culture was discredited and lost support <sup>2</sup>. Gilroy (2003) draws attention to the fact that until the 1990s, culture of Blackness represented the most significant counter-culture in western societies since the 1970s.

Hasan also refers to this phenomenon by arguing that until the 1990s Asian youth, many of them Muslims, in most cases did not define themselves Asian or persons of brown, but identified themselves as black (2010, p. 57). In the 1990s this counter-culture of Blackness was admitted into mainstream culture as many young people, belonging to the majority, could identify with it. As a result, black identity and Blackness stopped being a culture of resistance. According to Gilroy, Islam stepped into its place and has become the new western counter-culture for many young people (op. cit.). This might explain why those Europeans who convert to Islam are overrepresented in the Islamic State terrorist organization (Schuurman, et al., 2016). Oliver Roy is also of similar opinion. Roy contests Kepel's (2007) point of view who argues that the problem of Islamic radicalism is to be found in the radicalization of Islam. Roy claims that it is not the radicalization of Islam, but the Islamization of radicalism that is taking place (2016). According to this perspective, radicalism is present in Western societies, and it might manifest in various ideologies.

The author argues that Gilroy's and Roy's theories might help to understand the popularity of radical ideologies among Muslim youth and they might be used when looking

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<sup>2</sup> PKK and FARC might be the most significant organizations who commit violent acts in the name of radical left-wing ideology. In 2016, FARC stopped armed conflict. The PKK, along its left-wing ideology, in its activities is following an ethnic nationalist, not an internationalist approach.

for solutions for the problem. As one can tell, the integration or assimilation of various British Muslims was unsuccessful. The large-scale social mobility of British Muslims has still not taken place. This problem, along with the passive rejection of Muslims, may give rise to radical ideologies.

This is why it is important to include Islam and Muslim communities into the collective memory of the majority society, as with this shift society might be able to make a step forward in dealing with Islamic radicalism as well. If Islam and its subculture is incorporated into mainstream culture, then there is a chance that radicalism finds new outlets. The tension between Muslim minorities and the majority of societies might ease, resulting in a more harmonious and coherent society.

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