

Over the last century, Britain has become an increasingly multi-cultural society, with the roots of her residents spanning the globe. From Jamaicans searching for work, to Bangladeshis fighting for Britain during World War II, the list of reasons why foreigners have moved to Britain is vast. As a modern society, the British are expected to embrace other races and religions alien to their own and respect each others beliefs. Obviously, in practice, this is a different story: when contrasting cultures are expected to co-exist this will eventually lead to conflict, whether it is friendly mockery, or interracial gang warfare. Fortunately, the latter is fairly uncommon and as a whole, Britain is a fairly tolerant society. In fact, some races, however adamant to retain their traditions and culture, live in a more stereotypically British manner than many “British” people! Why has a society with such a diverse cultural range made this transition? And what do we class as “British”?

Multi-racial societies are usually found in inner city areas and normally, the community is divided into the “white” people, then everybody else. This is not necessarily because either group are unaccommodating; it is more likely to stem from historical reasons. However, it is within the groups including other races that are not traditionally British that new societies are forming. Although these people are usually keen to continue their cultural customs and live in a similar way to they did (or their ancestors did) in their home country, the change in lifestyle often means this is very difficult, and a more “British” way of life is often adopted. For example, members of Islam are expected to pray at least four times daily, but if they are in a responsible or busy job, this cannot always be adhered to. Therefore, many find their religion becoming less important in their everyday routine and thus leading to a loss of ethnic identity. Also, in many places considered multi-racial, institutions that are considered British or European, such as pubs and cafés are set up by minorities, for minorities. Ironically, religions are sometimes followed within these establishments, such as only serving kosher food, or not serving bacon to Muslims.

Another reason for the increasing similarity between races in Britain could be simply that living and working alongside each other leads people from different races to gradually assume British daily life; without realising it. Many professions are still dominated by white people, although this is not always the case, but this leads to a generic way of working that is traditionally “British” and does not automatically include methods favoured by other cultures. However, jobs that are dominated by people of other races, with the exception of some professions such as medicine, are usually menial labour jobs such as manufacture. This proves that the evolution to an integrated society is not completed yet.

The commercial supremacy of Christianity in Britain may eventually lead to a decrease in religious individuality. For example, Christmas is regarded as a huge marketing device by many manufacturers: from clothing labels to electronic companies. Over time, it has become more and more difficult to explain to younger generations why Christmas is not celebrated by everybody. Also, Christianity is still the principal religion taught at state schools; although many families may have begun to teach their children their own set of beliefs, having different values taught to them may displace their sense of religion and lead to a generation of virtual atheists.

It is this that some religious groups fear, as many still hold their cultural identity as a central value. This fear has evolved into the creation of extreme religious activist

groups, whose general aim is to promote their religion using whatever means available. Sometimes this is just protests, but violence is sometimes used if a contentious issue has arisen. Obviously, this is a principal problem with the development of an integrated society as not everyone believes that Britain should be evolving this way and wish to have each element of society separate. It is mostly those of the older age groups that have these beliefs, although some younger members of society are responsible for the formation of fundamentalist groups; this could be explained by a need for physical power rather than spiritual guidance however.

The older generation of immigrants are often more concerned with the continuation of their personal values through their families. For example, many arranged marriages still take place and interracial relationships are often frowned upon. However, there are many older people who have spent more of their lives in Britain than their native countries; therefore they may have a romantic view of the country they have left. For example, they may have been educated there to a high standard, and believe that the jobs offered to them in Britain do not reflect this. In extreme cases, families have been known to send their children back to their native country in a measure to ensure that traditions are not forgotten. However, this is not always effective. The distorted views many immigrants have of their "homes" often do not realise that situations may have changed there: it could be becoming more "Western" in an attempt to develop, and these estranged children often return to Britain having lived a similar life to the one they may have led if they hadn't left.

Many ethnic minorities are concerned about their loss of identity through the increasing integration of British society. Yet they are still willing to take a job, live in a British community, go to British schools, and so on. This causes many problems: if they cannot accept the changes developing to make Britain less of a segregated society, then it slows the process down. However, many people embrace the idea of everyone in Britain being considered "British" and Trevor Phillips, the head of the Commission for Racial Equality, has called for all citizens to "assert a core of Britishness" and said the term "multiculturalism" was archaic, and should be discarded. This suggests that the gradual lessening of separation between races is happening because people want it to and this can only be a good thing.