

# IDENTITIES WITHOUT BORDERS

## INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON INTEGRATION AND DIVERSITY

### PROCEEDINGS SUMMARY

#### PUBLIC LECTURE

**Lord Bhikhu Parekh**, Professor of Political Theory, University of Hull and the London School of Economics, began the proceedings with a wide-ranging keynote address. Introduced by Professor Eileen Barker of the LSE, Lord Parekh emphasised the need to look for elements of civil society that can be shared by increasingly diverse populations, working towards a society that is cohesive as well as pluralistic. The author of many articles and books on multi-cultural societies, Lord Parekh urged the audience to consider how citizens might be ensured of equally important responsibilities and rights in order to create a situation where the "celebration of diversity" is more than a superficial layer of ethnic events and festivals.

#### COLLOQUIUM

##### PANEL ONE: Contemporary Issues in Migration, Refugee, and Diaspora Studies.

*Moderator: Dr. Ruth Mandel (UCL); Speakers: Prof. Peter Loizos (LSE), Prof. Khachig Tololyan (Wesleyan), Dr. Gloria Toticaguena (U. of Nevada).*

This panel continued with the issues raised the previous evening and considered, among others, the following questions:

- a. the anxieties of the host societies concerning their own diaspora citizens - the hyphenated citizens among them - are they as committed to the society as everyone else?
- b. Where must "the line" be drawn on loyalty issues? Is this a false fear?
- c. Suggestions of key factors in adaptation of a diaspora community -- language skills, economic support and access to credit, the building of social capital.
- d. How can a group avoid a focus on victimhood that can be politically destructive and cognitively disabling - without ignoring perceived threats or injustices?
- e. Diasporas, both in definition and nature, have been changing and evolving - and we might consider two related concepts along with diaspora: transnation and globalisation.
- f. How does a diaspora construct and sustain an identity? This is a cultural as well as a political issue, concerning the diaspora, a potential homeland and the

host society. How does leadership develop and work in dispersion? It is expected that tensions will develop between the leadership of the homeland and the diaspora.

g. The links between homeland and diaspora are constantly evolving and cannot be taken for granted and may often be symbolic (while remaining important).

h. How to avoid "monolithic" narratives of history and allow for other voices, including diasporas and other minorities.

A recurring theme in the following discussion concerned relations between diaspora peoples and a homeland, including issues of identity - who is a "real" member of the ethnic group? How is the group defined and by whom? To what degree are governments and political parties successful in moulding opinion and action?

##### PANEL TWO: The Public Space of Diversity: Diasporas Explored in the Media and the Arts

*Moderator: Dr. Claire Mouradian (EHSS, Paris); Speakers: Mr. Thomas Chullikal (Menuhin Foundation, Brussels), Ms. Emma D'Costa (Cultural Cooperation)*

In this panel, the discussion focussed on the presentation of diaspora and other minority cultures to the wider community. Increasing awareness, educating - and entertaining - the public, facilitating networks of artists and musicians and thus creativity, assisting and expanding the role of the media were all considered. Both speakers elaborated on the work of their organisations, giving examples of the kinds of projects that can promote understanding at different levels and for a variety of ages. The Menuhin Foundation, explained Chullikal, takes its projects directly to schools, taking artists and musicians into the classroom. The Foundation links students in different countries, as well as teaching children about the minorities in their own countries. In one of its recent projects, Armenians were included as a minority people and the Armenian Institute contributed towards finding and creating the resources used. Chullikal emphasised that the key point is to teach children that identities are multi-layered and that they can co-exist happily.

Cultural Cooperation operates a website which offers human and practical resources to the British public, especially schools, who wish to learn more about the different cultures present in Britain. They promote understanding primarily through the arts and also organise large-scale music festivals with participants from across the world, as well as throughout Britain. The Music Village Festival explores the cultural dimensions of diasporas and provides a showcase for talent, raising the profiles of those peoples.

The discussion noted that such an emphasis on the arts can be successful in turning a focus away from victimhood and