



## Summary of discussion points

# Transcending national boundaries: mixedness and identity

Thursday 14 May 2020 | WP1792V1

In association with Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol

### In what ways can mixedness inform public policy making and strengthen civic structures?

We explored this question as it relates to the increasing number of people whose parents come from differing backgrounds, be it racial, ethnic, national, or religious.

Mixedness is an increasing reality for the identity of British people and extends beyond race. However, the number of mixed race people is one of the most obvious manifestations of our mixedness. Projections indicate that people of mixed race will constitute the largest ethnic grouping in the UK at some point in the next 20-30 years. There are complexities with regard to definitions, the related data, and the way in which identity is perceived and owned, but the fact remains that an increasing number of people come from transnational families with different geographical, ethnic and faith backgrounds.

This short online discussion brought together 14 people, based mainly in the UK, with input from the US and Lebanon, and from a range of backgrounds to consider:

- In what ways can mixedness inform public policy making and strengthen civic structures? What are the obstacles and how to transcend?
- How will the Covid 19 pandemic impact the interplay between individuals, communities, cities and regions and in what ways can the unique contribution of people with mixed identity assist to rebuild coherence and promote equality?
- What would be the added value of holding a Wilton Park residential conference at a later date- themes, objectives and potential funding sources?

### Key points

The exploratory discussion was designed to open up the conversation, and make space for the different experiences, views and definitions rather than to find a consensus. We wanted to know if there was energy in the possibility of taking this conversation and exploration further and with more people. Key points and comments which came up in the discussion include:

- Everybody is mixed, and everybody manages different identities and labels. There are both shortcomings and privileges to being mixed. Everybody is an outsider in some context, but mixedness offers a deeper opportunity to act as a bridge between communities and to provide unique insights informed by multiple perspectives.
- Mixedness has been held up as a place from which to build bridges and see more than one perspective. But it can also be a place of limbo, combining contradictory, dynamic and asymmetric experiences of relative privilege over

others of their oppressed heritage, inferiority to others of their advantaged heritage, a need or desire to possess a key bond with one or the other, and mistrust and sometimes rejection from both.

- Mixed race is not about undermining anti racism, or other oppressions, by watering down the black or other voice. But it potentially offers a challenge to the legitimacy of racial, and other, categories that have been used to organise and justify social-economic inequalities. We must hold this alongside the need to work in terms of race and other categories because a failure to understand race would lead to a failure understand how we got here and therefore the way out.
- Race and faith, whilst they have a strongly formative impact, are not, in themselves, enough to define an individual. Everybody carries multiple identities and a more intersectional approach is needed.
- Disadvantage and race are closely linked. The evidence shows that disadvantaged people in society are less likely to go on to higher education, and more likely to end up in the custodial system.
- Education systems do not reflect the rich diversity found in current society- historical and geographical biases are prevalent.
- It is important to understand why the Covid 19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on BAME communities in the UK.
- Perception of faith has become more prominent since the emergence of violent extremism and the subsequent debates about belonging and societal responsibility.
- There are varying perceptions of status and class. There is a risk of stereotyping, and appearance can be a key factor.
- Belonging and identity are complex. In some cases, globalisation has created closer transnational links between more privileged classes, than exist between upper and working classes within a nation.
- Individual struggles with mixedness are deeply personal and often of a sensitive nature, they cannot be grouped under one label.
- There needs to be a nuanced approach to identity and to be aware of the risk of reductive definitions; the pressure to impose binary identities is concerning and can play into xenophobic and racist narratives.
- Individuals from mixed nationality heritage struggle with belonging, as they may feel simultaneously 'both' but 'neither'.
- Parents navigate which cultural norms to relay to their children, to instil a sense of self-worth and counter-act insecurity and disconnection.
- Context is key - individuals in conflict settings are often compelled to choose sides. Mixedness can sometimes come about through conflict, forced through an act of rape.

## **Opportunities**

- Mixedness opens up the potential of a new source and place for understanding global challenges of identity, conflict, peace and reconciliation
- Mixedness provides space for individuals to explore ideas from a range of perspectives and to have a deeper understanding of different groups and communities. It can allow us to be more empathetic and see multiple viewpoints. It offers an opportunity to choose the best of both worlds.

- Individuals living across boundaries have the possibility to provide insights into behaviours and cultural norms that help to bridge divides.
- Mixedness provides the opportunity for people to challenge old frameworks that have failed to provide answers and cause problems. Mixedness can be a voice to help change these flawed systems, challenge hate, discrimination and inequality, and promote open democracy.
- The power of an individual's story has the potential to help others feel more valued, provide them with a role model and lead to a more inclusive community.
- There is an opportunity to be more aspirational and use the discussion about mixedness to consider what kind of society we want.
- The identity of mixed heritage people can be affirmed as a legitimate place, rather than a place of limbo.

### **Proposed next steps**

- A series of virtual meetings covering a different sub theme of mixedness to delve deeper into the topic.
- A Wilton Park face to face dialogue. Possible themes could include:
  - The role of mixedness in challenging stereotypes and existing categorisations of people be they racial, ethnic, national or religious.
  - The implications of that challenge to those categories for questions of identity, belonging, conflict, peace and reconciliation.
  - How mixedness could play a part in conflict resolution.
  - Identity and mixedness: impact and implications on public policy.
  - Whether international, national or city/local political leadership is best placed to grow and exploit any opportunities these challenges might bring.
  - A focus on fairer, happier and healthier cities and communities.
  - Relationships between cities and transnational exchanges.

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Wilton Park | 20 May 2020

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