Liberalism and Esposito
MULTICULTURAL IMMUNISATION

Liberalism and Esposito

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This book takes as its starting point the idea that there is a contradictory situation in the UK today, where there is at one and the same time great hostility towards minorities and a persisting idea that the UK is a place that welcomes and celebrates diversity. Often this is thought about in terms of two competing discourses, one of multiculturalism, and one of a backlash against multiculturalism. I will be arguing that rather than being a mere backlash, the hostility to otherness is already inscribed within liberal multiculturalism and liberalism more generally. It is my contention that liberal multiculturalism is best understood as a process of immunisation that attempts to protect liberalism against the perceived threat of a foreign Other.

In order to argue this I will be engaging with the work of Roberto Esposito and others to demonstrate that various aspects of liberal multiculturalism can best be understood as a series of immunitary processes. I will be focusing on three types of processes in particular: rights, consensus, and recognition. However, before outlining my argument in more detail, I want to first engage in a little scene-setting and give some examples of the contradictory state of discourse on multiculturalism in Britain. This is not intended as a detailed and systemic inquiry, but rather as an illustration of the kind of discursive situation we find ourselves in. So I will start with some examples of the hysterical discourse around multiculturalism in Britain, and use this as a springboard for the theoretical argument that follows.

THE CONFLICTED RELATIONSHIP TO MULTICULTURALISM

On 5 February 2011 the British Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech at the Munich Security conference in which he declared the failure of state multiculturalism. A few weeks later, on 14 April, Cameron gave another speech, this time to the Conservative Party Conference,
about immigration, the need to curb it, and the failure of multi-culturalism.\textsuperscript{2} Together, these speeches have been seen as the point at which the backlash against multiculturalism reached its highest level. The multiculturalism promoted by successive Labour governments was now being followed by a Tory clampdown (with Labour following suit in order to compete, as exemplified in various speeches by Ed Miliband).\textsuperscript{3}

However, taking a step back, we can see that this is hardly an accurate portrayal. The situation under Labour had plenty of hardship to offer migrants, and the rhetoric too was not all rosy. If we look back at the leadership debates before the 2010 General Election we will find Gordon Brown saying ‘in future, when we do it, there’ll be no chefs allowed in from outside the European Union. […] I talked to some care assistants – no care assistants will come in from outside the European Union’, and in the very next sentence saying ‘we are a tolerant, we are a diverse country’.\textsuperscript{4} Moreover, this simultaneous hostility to and embracing of diversity was perfectly intelligible, rather than being perceived as contradictory. In fact, Cameron too, in his Munich speech, devotes some time to stating the value of Islam. The shift is in fact far less pronounced than it might seem and constitutes more of a shift of emphasis from one point of the rhetorical axis to the other than a backlash.

The reason for this is that both parties are operating within the framework of a specifically liberal multiculturalism. What I want to argue is that what is generally perceived as the backlash against multiculturalism is not a backlash at all, but rather an inherent part of the logic of liberal multiculturalism. In this way we can make sense of the subtle shift in tone, but largely continuous shape, of multiculturalism from Labour to Conservative governments. We can also begin to make sense of a situation where, despite all manner of fears around immigration and multiculturalism, the idea that ‘we are a tolerant, diverse country’ prevails.

In fact, the attitude goes further: the British imaginary conceives of the UK as a paradise for immigrants. Witness the following BBC report on the ‘jungle’ in Calais, from 2009, which claims: ‘Britain […] is perceived like “an Eldorado” in the eyes of people traffickers and illegal immigrants. In short, there’s a perception the UK is a soft touch – and a place where immigrants can prosper.’\textsuperscript{5} This is a noteworthy statement in several regards. Firstly, that the UK is ostensibly a place where immigrants can prosper is conceived of as a bad thing, since it means
more immigrants will be attracted, who will then prosper. Secondly, despite the hostility exhibited in the framing of the statement, the idea that Britain presents an eldorado for immigrants is not questioned (and then there is of course some striking colonial imagery at work in both ‘El Dorado’ and the ‘jungle’).

Marking the UK as an eldorado actually involves a curious but not uncommon inversion employed by the political groups of the far right: the idea of England being overrun by foreigners, of Britishness being destroyed, of ‘indigenous’ white Englishmen being the true oppressed of our age, of Britain effectively being colonised. This discourse is peddled most overtly by the BNP, although one can find traces of it in many places. While this discourse is highly dubious and often seems to border on the bizarre, it has been pervasive and very powerful. Now of course, the UK consists not just of the BNP. However, this far right discourse can intelligibly be seen as a kind of return of the repressed, as the breaking into the open of the excess, of what is often hidden in other, more benevolent discourses. We can find it implicit in all kinds of media articles and politicians’ statements (in fact, the BNP itself referred to Cameron’s Munich speech as an instance of the ‘Griffinisation’ of politics), and certainly there is hysteria about foreign presence even when it stops short of reverse colonial imagery. In fact, the idea of Britain as an eldorado is crucial to understanding the worries that have been stoked around ‘benefits tourists’ who come to the country to make use of the NHS.

Before introducing the basic structure of my theoretical argument I want to take some time to focus briefly on the hysteria that exists around immigration and multiculturalism in the UK. This hysteria can broadly speaking be viewed in terms of four types of fears – over security, economy, culture, and nature. I will be illustrating each of these by way of some press reports on the town of Peterborough as well as giving some supplementary examples along the way. What emerges is a picture of a liberalism marked by its hostility to the Other, even as it asserts its commitment to diversity.

* 

Peterborough may not seem the most intuitive place to use as a representative example, and yet in a way Peterborough focuses so much
of what is interesting in current debates on multiculturalism. While there is no one, unified discourse of multiculturalism, looking at Peterborough can help us see a number of discursive themes that are present across the spectrum of liberal discourses on multiculturalism. Despite not being the kind of urban setting that might come first to mind when thinking of multiculturalism, Peterborough allows us to see all the major fears around immigration at work. In fact, from its Middle England location and pastoral setting to the way in which threats by other cultures are perceived, Peterborough is astoundingly representative in terms of illustrating British discourses on multiculturalism. Partly this is a self-fulfilling prophecy; Peterborough has been hoisted into this position by the tabloid press, who frequently cite it as a location that illustrates what is wrong with multiculturalism. Peterborough has in a sense been constructed as a representative site of British multiculturalism. However, in filling out this role, Peterborough has in fact become representative in more ways than the scandal-mongers of the Daily Mail and Sun could have ever anticipated. That is, it allows us to see the hysterical nature of the fears surrounding multiculturalism, owing to the very lack of any precarity in this locale. So, while starting in Peterborough might risk making one complicit in a tabloid construction, I hope that the insight taken from this will make this a worthwhile risk to take.

To give a little context for those unfamiliar with Peterborough: it is a city of 164,000 people in the east of England, situated on the River Nene, with its cathedral as its main landmark. In 1967, Peterborough was designated a ‘new town’, which triggered a steady growth process. More recently, it has again profited from a major redevelopment fund and has received £1 billion in funds for regeneration. Partly because of this regeneration project, Peterborough has been experiencing an economic boom, which was sustained through the economic crisis. This boom has also attracted a significant number of seasonal workers, who work in the fields surrounding the town, doing jobs most locals are no longer willing to do with the increase of service jobs in the city. Peterborough is a small city that might not be particularly noteworthy except in so far as it has actually been quite a success story in terms of post-war development. And yet, it has become for the British tabloid press something of a synecdoche for everything that is going wrong in multicultural Britain. And if we look at reporting about Peterborough, we can see the four fears that I have mentioned.
Let me start by looking at fears surrounding security. Peterborough makes migration related headlines more or less regularly, but it was with regard to the issue of security that it first took on its current role in the press, in 2007. Peterborough has been a mainstay of reporting on the impacts of migration ever since Chief Constable Julie Spence warned of the need for more staff to deal with the impact of migration. Even though the police also stressed that there was ‘little evidence that the increased numbers of migrant workers have caused significant or systematic problems in respect of community safety or cohesion’, and that “inappropriately negative” community perceptions about migrant workers often complicate routine incidents, raising tensions and turning them “critical”, the tabloids had a field day.

When reading the articles, one could be forgiven for thinking that Peterborough was a squalid urban ghetto, rather than a prospering provincial town. They paint a picture of a once tranquil and bucolic place disrupted by the ravages of immigration. ‘Once a peaceful cathedral city, Peterborough has become a symbol of the changing face of Britain.’ The article paints a dark picture: street battles between Iraqis and Afghans; Kurdish refugees firebombed; Lithuanians murdered. Even though much of the violence features immigrants only as the victims, the implication here is that they bring it on themselves; by their sheer presence they have unsettled the area, made it insecure, invited retaliations. The actual violence experienced by foreigners is sidelined by the perceived threat to the English. We encounter an array of elderly residents who dare not leave the house owing to violence and rowdiness (including an 82-year-old who ‘refused to give his name for fear of reprisals’). There are occasional moderating moments: we find the police saying that they are in control and that their figures on violent crime do not refer exclusively to migrants; and we find a young Lithuanian who is leaving Peterborough because he finds it an unwelcoming place. However, the overall picture is one of a once-peaceful town now overrun by muggings, robberies, prostitution and drug dealing.

What we have here is a general fear that the presence of migrants leads to an increase in insecurity. An increase in diversity is equated with an increase in crime (see also the Daily Mail’s assertion that ‘one out of every five killers is an immigrant’). Moreover, diversity is also sometimes associated with obstruction of justice, such as in recent debates over the wearing of the burka in court. In the case of Peterborough this does
not even take on the added war-on-terror dimension of associating the presence of multiculturalism with a tendency to breed terrorism. This is of course mainly because in Peterborough the majority of immigration is from Eastern Europe.

If we want to see the added dimension of fear for security with regard to Muslims and terrorism, we need look only as far as David Cameron’s Munich speech. The very fact that Cameron used a speech at a NATO security conference as the forum to talk about multiculturalism is already testimony to the kind of securitisation we have witnessed over the past years. Multiculturalism is seen as a policy that allows for, or even encourages, radical Islamism. Cultural difference is immediately identified with a threat – multiculturalism and national security become intimately linked. Or think of the claim by Labour’s former immigration minister Phil Woolas that Britain’s presence in Afghanistan is a valuable way of curbing the number of asylum seekers. There is a general fear around multiculturalism as something that compromises security, both national security and the day-to-day security of citizens.

Back to Peterborough and this time to fears around the economy. Recall that Peterborough has, since the 1960s, again and again received massive government injections of money: the whole development of the town depended on it. However, when newcomers make use of government help, this becomes a problem. Reports about Peterborough play on the familiar motif of immigrants pushing in front, of being treated better than locals. In this case, a Czech family of nine allegedly received housing from the council two weeks after arriving in Britain. The message is: ‘while this Czech family are thrilled with their new council house, such largesse is ruining communities.’ The picture that is painted is that not only are they getting things faster than locals, but they do not deserve it, as they cannot take care of what is given to them. The article mentions ‘a battered bench in the middle of the garden, which is littered with rubbish. Outside the kitchen door there are grubby children’s clothes and some beer cans.’ The idea that people arriving from Eastern Europe do not respect the neighbourhood and cover the town in litter is one of the most frequently recurring motifs in the reports on Peterborough. Moreover, the family are insatiable and greedy, wanting a bigger house
(currently, three bedrooms for nine people) even though the husband is (allegedly) on Jobseeker’s Allowance and they hardly speak any English.

We then move to a more general picture. We encounter a whole list of outrages and overburdened services. ‘Too many babies!’, exclaim outraged GPs. Fish stocks are decimated by immigrant anglers (whose fishing, it is implied, is somehow less acceptable than that of locals). And again and again the benefits issue, the Inland Revenue office ‘besieged’ by ‘a queue of girls speaking foreign tongues’. And, as if the benefit scroungers where not bad enough, there is ‘a growing foreign underclass’ of squatters living in camps and makeshift houses. Again there are reports of squalor – in, however, a tone that seems to show more concern for the Peterborough cityscape that is being tarnished by it than for the people who suffer it. There is, of course, a contradiction here: immigrants are always presented as a unified mass, yet they seem to live in grandeur and squalor simultaneously, doubly ruining the city, economically and aesthetically. (Part of this contradiction may be lessened if we keep in mind that the different charges might be made by different discourses on multiculturalism; however, this is not necessarily the case and sometimes they do appear in tandem.)

The issue of overburdened services, and of benefit fraud, is one side of fears around the economy. The other side is of course the by now very familiar claims of immigrants taking away jobs from natives. Thus we find the Daily Express claiming that 98 per cent of jobs are given to immigrants, and Gordon Brown’s erstwhile promise of ‘British jobs for British workers’. It is also with regard to this fear that we have pledges like those of the Conservatives that immigration will be brought down to the tens of thousands.

This pledge illustrates very well that along with fears about the economy comes an obsession with quantity. There is a fear around the alleged mass, or flood, of people coming into the country – most recently with regard to Romanians and Bulgarians. Almost any time immigration and multiculturalism are criticised, there is the adjunct statement that it is not a matter of being against immigration, but of being against too much immigration – that immigration is something that should only be allowed in moderation, lest it overrun the British polity. The articles on Peterborough are symptomatic again: it is stressed that the immigrants are respected for being hardworking (despite most of the reports claiming exactly the opposite) and that the concern is only with their large numbers.
It is also with regard to the obsession with quantity that we are presented with quasi-Malthusian arguments about the need to curtail the size of the population, and, in the case of MPs Frank Field and Nicholas Soames, a conviction that one can only begin to fight racism once there is a commitment to keep the population below a certain level.23

Moving on, let us turn to fears around culture. There is a common fear with regard to multiculturalism that allowing diversity endangers local culture, that British culture risks being irrevocably lost. Thus in Peterborough residents bemoan the fact that ‘from health to schools to the fundamental character of the city, virtually every aspect of life has been affected’.24 Nothing is as it was. In a letter written by two Peterborough councillors to the three party leaders before the 2010 General Election, they long for times gone by, lamenting that ‘people would know their neighbour years ago but today there are 150 properties but between ten and 15 languages are spoken by households’.25 There is a kind of nostalgia for a lost unified community that probably never existed in the first place.

Curiously enough, culture is in fact the area that reports about Peterborough focus on least, so I will turn to some other examples. One example, which would be cute if it did not stem from someone who was at the time in a position of power, is Phil Woolas’ demand that immigrants learn that most British of pastimes, queuing.26 In fact, there was actually something quite insidious about this demand by Woolas that immigrants become versed in ‘the simple art of taking one’s turn’, in that it taps into the whole discourse of immigrants taking away social services, of them skipping to the front of council housing waiting lists and so on. Woolas’ call for queuing is, however, not the most absurd instance of claiming a British institution under threat. Among the tallest of claims is probably the one in the BNP’s 2010 manifesto, that pubs were under threat owing to the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the ‘indigenous’ population and the lack of interest among immigrant communities in maintaining this crucial aspect of British culture.27 There seems to be a general fear of what are deemed quintessentially British habits being replaced by other practices. It is the same worry that leads David Cameron to fear the replacing of good exercise with Indian dancing.28
This is supplemented by a fear around visible markers of different cultural practices (recall the hysteria around the potential building of a ‘mega-mosque’ in London a few years ago).*

Back to Peterborough, and let us turn to nature. The expression of this fear is not as common, but I think it is worth singling out because in its very absurdity it illustrates very well that we are really talking about a kind of hysteria rather than simple trepidation. Peterborough gets hoisted back into the news in March 2010, with the extraordinary headline ‘Slaughter of the Swans’, and the byline: ‘It was an inflammatory claim – Eastern European migrants living in makeshift camps accused of pillaging wildlife from a town’s river. The Truth, as locals reveal, is even more unsettling …’ The mode is most eloquent here, since the Daily Mail is simultaneously admitting that previous claims of this nature were inflammatory and asserting that, given the truth, they were not inflammatory enough.

The idea of immigrants eating swans has been a consistent image in tabloid reporting over the years, inaugurated by the Sun in 2003 and often repeated. This particular trope is usually associated with Eastern Europeans, although it has recently been extended to Muslims as well. The recurring nature of the swan theme is acknowledged thus:

Stories of immigrants killing and eating swans […] have emerged with increasing regularity since Britain’s borders were thrown open […] Equally regularly, of course, such claims have been dismissed as urban myths spread by opponents of immigration, fabricated as part of some sinister racist agenda.

The message is clear: the repeated reports are testimony to a truth, the accusations of racism are part of a conspiracy theory. This ‘truth’, then, is even worse than imagined. What does it consist of? The article paints a picture of bands of feral immigrants marauding by the riverside and killing the wildlife, finding the swans ‘a rich source of food’ and having adopted ‘the lifestyle of ancient hunter-gatherers’. The language adopts the tone of a nature documentary. Peterborough is described as a place where local people no longer dare walk in their parks and streets.
Immigrants are reduced to a barely human primitive presence, that threatens not only English culture but the constitution of its very nature. Immigrants are considered to prefer destructive activities ‘rather than simply enjoying the spectacle of these majestic birds’. The immigrant presence not only denigrates the British eldorado, it eats it away, depleting it of its very beauty. The article cleverly weaves in an attack on immigrants for depleting economic resources into the point about them destroying nature – the riverside had recently been regenerated with National Lottery money, an investment rendered useless by the destruction inflicted on nature by the migrants. The immigrants are moved from the realm of culture into that of nature, and are simultaneously seen as predatory, as a threat to nature. They are a truly other presence that threatens the very constitution of the UK.

* Yet despite all this often vociferous hostility, despite a climate that leads to vans telling migrants to ‘go home’ and to them receiving texts from UKBA telling them the same, despite all this, the idea that Britain is a tolerant and diverse society that embraces all cultures is still present. The same Conservative Party manifesto that calls for the reduction of immigration states that immigration has enriched the nation. Similarly, Cameron, in his Munich speech, states:

> Our country has benefited immeasurably from immigration. Go into any hospital and you’ll find people from Uganda, India and Pakistan who are caring for our sick and vulnerable. Go into schools and universities and you’ll find teachers from all over the world, inspiring our young people. Go to almost any high street in the country and you’ll find entrepreneurs from overseas who are not just adding to the local economy but playing a part in local life. Charities, financial services, fashion, food, music – all these sectors are what they are because of immigration.

This is the very same speech which is considered Cameron’s ‘death of multiculturalism’ speech. At the same time as multiculturalism is proclaimed dead, the praises of diversity are still sung. While the celebration might often be of things like festivals and cuisines, this does
not take away from the fact that, despite all the hostility, in practice the idea still remains that Britain loves to celebrate its diversity – something that again became apparent during the Olympics, where the multicultural constitution of Team GB was celebrated.

The British encounter with diversity sometimes seems akin to Zeno’s encounter with his beloved in Italo Svevo’s novel. Zeno is madly in love with Ada, and one night he thinks he is caressing her foot with his under the table. It turns out that he is mistaken, and it is in fact only the leg of the table he is caressing. As if this misrecognition was not enough, he discovers that the person he has whispered confessions of love to in the dark is in fact Ada’s sister Augusta, who Zeno finds repellent – however, he ends up marrying her (which in fact turns out to be the better fate for Zeno). It is as if in the UK there is, on the one hand, an idealised image of the exotic other, of colourful festivals, of vibrant diverse culture, and on the other an utter recoil and disgust when one finds out that there is more than just that idealisation. Similarly, we might perhaps see the flaring up of ever new incidents of racism (always designated exceptions and remnants of the past) as parallel with Zeno’s many last cigarettes – not at all as marking an end, but rather as being an endless continuation that is endemic.

MULTICULTURAL IMMUNISATION

I will be arguing in this book that all this can be best understood if we conceive of liberal multiculturalism as a mode of immunisation, as a way of immunising liberalism from the perceived threat of the Other. The category of immunity provides the key for making sense of the situation in which there is both great hostility to other subjects and celebration of diversity. It will allow us to see that a backlash against multiculturalism is already nascent in liberal multiculturalism, and that there is a certain kind of other-hostility that is inherent in liberal theories of multiculturalism.

In order to make this argument I will start, in Chapter 2, by providing an overview of the breadth of liberal thinking on liberal multiculturalism. There is, of course, no one indivisible thing called ‘liberal multiculturalism’. The term refers to a whole range of theories which disagree on many things, but which nonetheless can be usefully thought about in conjunction. Liberal multiculturalism incorporates ideas of group-
based rights, of institutionalised dialogue, of recognition of different ethno-cultural groups, and of differential treatment, among other things. They may differ in terms of the importance they attach to cultural belonging, in the precise targets of their theories (indigenous groups, national minorities, migrants) or their strategies for regulating co-existence. But what unites liberal theories of multiculturalism is that they see completely uniform treatment as being in some way unjust, that they accord some degree of value to the acknowledgement and preservation of difference. As such, they in some sense define themselves against the old model of the ethnically homogeneous state and against assimilation, and try to provide an alternative approach to the difference-blind approach of classical liberalism.

How far these theories go in valuing difference is something that varies greatly. But there are always limits, for these are liberal theories, and they do not seek to take diversity so far that it undermines liberalism. That is, liberal theories of multiculturalism are distinct from more radical formulations that have attempted to make ‘multiculturalism’ a term of struggle, or a critique of the structures of civil society. However, given the dominance of liberal values in the world, it is really liberal multiculturalism that we think about when we hear ‘multiculturalism’, and it is certainly the only kind that we see implemented in liberal states. As such, these theories frame the ways in which we generally tend to think about multiculturalism in the West; they demarcate the realm of what is generally thought possible or desirable with regard to accommodating or recognising difference.

What I want to argue is that there are significant shortcomings within this body of thought as a whole, and that these shortcomings lie at the heart of liberal multiculturalism, and in fact, liberalism more generally. When I say shortcomings this needs to be qualified: what I see as problems and shortcomings are not necessarily seen as such from the liberal perspective. However, from the perspective of what the name multiculturalism promises, the problems are extensive. Liberal multiculturalism is characterised by a certain hostility towards otherness, at the very same time that it is an attempt to accommodate it. There is an Other-hostile tendency at the heart of liberal multiculturalism. The so-called ‘backlash’ against multiculturalism is a tendency that was already present, if dormant, in the logic of liberal multiculturalism – this tendency is best understood in terms of an immunitary logic.
What do I mean by an immunitary logic? Ideas of immunity have appeared in the work of Baudrillard, Derrida, Harraway, Heller and Sloterdijk. However, while their treatments of immunity differ, they tend to see immunity primarily in terms of auto-immunity. The most sophisticated theorisation of immunity qua immunity, or at least the one most useful for my purposes, comes from the Italian political philosopher Roberto Esposito. Esposito is useful, because he situates immunity both on a biopolitical horizon and in a direct relation with community. Furthermore, by allowing us to think of hostility and incorporation as part of the same operation Esposito’s conception of immunity provides a vantage that is distinct from other critiques of liberalism’s attitude to the Other. It allows for an altogether more dynamic approach.

Esposito has theorised on what he calls the immunity paradigm in a trilogy of books: Communitas, Immunitas, and Bios. In its broadest terms, the paradigm refers to the incorporation of a dangerous outside element into the body in order to strengthen it against that very element; that is, a partial inclusion of the Other (although Esposito prefers to speak of the outside) with the aim of keeping the Other at bay. He develops the concept as a way of thinking through a particular tension or antinomy in the concept of biopower. However, his starting point is an attempt to reconceptualise the notion of community, which will also be important for this argument.

Esposito is a major figure of Italian political thought, but he is only gradually receiving attention in the English-speaking world. Apart from writing on biopower and immunity he has also, more recently, written on notions of personhood. The translation of his work on immunity has taken a somewhat odd form, with the last part of the trilogy, Bios, being translated into English first in 2008, only four years after its original publication. Meanwhile the founding part of the trilogy, Communitas, originally published in 1998, was not published in English until 2010, while Immunitas, from 2002, was published in English in late 2011. While Esposito’s work is thus in the process of receiving more attention (starting with a special issue of Diacritics all the way back in 2006), his is not yet a generally recognised name, certainly not in Politics departments in the UK, anyway. In utilising Esposito I will be focusing on his early work, as it is here that he develops a full theory of community and
immunity. I am leaving his more recent work on personhood to one side. This is not because it is not worthy of attention, but because this book is driven by an attempt to apply concepts practically. The choice of Esposito’s early work is, then, a pragmatic one: it is this work that can best be utilised to think productively about liberal multiculturalism in a novel way.

Esposito’s work emerges out of a particular Italian context. His trilogy of books, *Communitas, Immunitas* and *Bíos*, is in a way driven by the reception of Foucault’s work, and in particular the notion of biopower, in Italy. There have been two major strains of thinking on biopower that have emerged from Italy, that of Giorgio Agamben and that of Antonio Negri. Agamben, who owes as much to Heidegger as he does to Foucault, develops his conception of biopower over several works, the most famous of which is no doubt *Homo Sacer*. Agamben advances a negative conception of biopower that inscribes it into the sovereign state of exception that divides bare life and political life. Agamben sees the politics of modernity as a biopolitical space whose genesis is inextricably linked to the birth of the camps. He sees biopolitics as essentially a kind of thanatopolitics where the political in fact withdraws in favour of the biological. Negri, coming from the background of autonomist Marxism, and also deeply indebted to Spinoza, develops his conception of biopower primarily during his collaborative works with Michael Hardt. However, the conception is indebted to his previous readings on Marx and in particular on the notion of immaterial labour. Negri’s conception of biopower is an altogether more positive one. Hardt and Negri see biopolitics as productive. Biopower is both the scene where Empire exerts its power and also where new social singularities (rather than subjectivities), both in the forms of the multitude and otherwise, new democracy, and new understandings of the common emerge. For Negri, the biopolitical formation of the multitude overcomes the negative aspect of biopower and inaugurates a new concept of sovereignty – essentially, an affirmative biopolitics is opposed to (and triumphs over) a negative biopower.

Esposito distances himself from both these readings. His own understanding of biopower – which he considers to be ‘external and non-concentric’ to Agamben and Negri – is developed over the course of his trilogy. His project is to develop an affirmative take on biopolitics that accentuates neither only the negative nor only the positive and
productive. Moreover, it neither renounces the historical dimension (which he sees Agamben as doing) nor collapses the philosophical into the political (which he sees Negri as doing). (Arguably, there is something of an affinity with Negri in terms of the project of an affirmative biopolitics; and between the operation of immunity in Esposito and Agamben’s notion of exclusive inclusion.) Esposito identifies a tension in Foucault’s work, of which Agamben and Negri represent the extremes; the theoretical apparatus for dialectically bridging this gulf is that of immunity. His conception of immunity in turn is developed out of a particular conception of community that is at odds with that of political philosophy.

However, when I say Esposito’s work emerges out of an Italian context, it is important to remember that this is not just a philosophical context but also the context of a particular discourse on migration and multiculturalism in Italy. Italy has recently been the site of some very overt hostility towards otherness, especially that taking the form of discrimination against Roma and the establishment of ‘white towns’, as well as highly xenophobic election campaigning. However, Italy has also been interesting in that it has put the Schengen regime to a test. In the wake of an influx of refugees from Tunisia onto the island of Lampedusa, Italy issued a limited number of these refugees with temporary visas, without much scrutiny, but to much criticism. The prime motivation for this was the hope that these refugees would quickly move on to other Schengen states, in particular France, a situation that ultimately led to France temporarily closing the border with Italy. Both Italy and the countries criticising Italy were in effect driven by the motivation of having someone else deal with the refugees, allegedly a mass, really a trickle. The temporary opening of the border at one end of Europe was thus met by an immediate clampdown elsewhere, but one that put the very logic of the Schengen system into question (although the EU later ruled, rather absurdly, that both sides were in fact acting within their rights).

While Esposito’s work is of course not a direct reaction to the situation of migrants or Roma (and was written before the current conflicts around Schengen), his work does emerge from a context in which the issues of borders, migrants and difference take an important place in political discourse. And in fact, Esposito does in part attribute the fact that so much thinking on biopower has been conducted in Italy
to Italy being a country geographically and culturally on the frontier, situated between North and South, Europe and the Mediterranean.

He sees Italy as existing on the border, and he considers the border the proper place of biopolitics, which itself is situated at the intersection of different discourses.

However, there are other linkages to consider apart from the Italian context. Esposito’s early work is highly influenced by and shares a great deal with that of Jean-Luc Nancy, with whom he has been in dialogue.56 This is especially true of Communitas and Immunitas – by the time of Bìos, Esposito’s work had moved closer to that of Foucault and Deleuze. By his own account, this is due to an increasing feeling that deconstruction remained too caught up in language, and that it was time to move out of the Heideggerian horizon into the field of bìos and biopower.57 (Despite being outlined by Foucault, ‘biopower’ lay around unused as a concept for quite some time. When asked why it took a detour through Italy for the concept to really gain ground, Esposito attributed this to a crucial difference he sees between Italian and French philosophy: the importance that Italian philosophy has always given to the category of ‘life’.58)

Now for my purposes, it is in fact the first two works that are the most important, as these develop Esposito’s thought on community and immunity most extensively. While the biopolitical dimension haunts Esposito’s entire oeuvre, and is no doubt important for my work as well, I am less interested here in the precise negotiations that are going on with Foucault, Agamben, and Negri, and more in the configuration of community and immunity. However, this raises a question, since I am engaging with a part of the work which, while not exactly having been disavowed, has it would seem been moved on from. Except that it is not really so – Bìos is in a way an attempt to recast our readings of the first two parts, putting particular focus on things that were present in them but perhaps not yet prominent. When I say that I am more concerned with the first two parts, I don’t mean that I will be ignoring this realignment: I mean quite simply that I am less concerned with the debate with Agamben and Negri that Esposito throws up in discussing immunity now primarily as an issue of biopower. And in fact, the shift should not be overstated either. While there clearly is a shift, especially when Communitas is directly compared with Bìos, it does not take the form of a radical break. Foucault is there from the outset; nor do Derrida and Nancy completely disappear. Immunitas in a way stands between,
and not just literally; Foucault is already major, but deconstruction is also prominent. And Esposito says himself that in so far as anything has changed, it is not his perspective on the category of immunisation but the theoretical framework within which it is inscribed.\textsuperscript{59}

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What I want to do in the following chapters, then, is to look at liberal multiculturalism as a series of immunitary mechanisms that immunise liberalism against the Other, and any community with the Other. In order to do this I will first provide an overview, in Chapter 2, of the breadth of liberal thinking on multiculturalism. I will then elaborate, in Chapter 3, on what the immunitary paradigm is: how it relates to biopower, and especially how it relates to community, and the way in which Esposito reconfigures community. In the three subsequent chapters I will then turn to a series of themes (rights, consensus and recognition), and look at how they operate within the thought of a particular liberal thinker as a way of immunising liberalism against difference. This division is largely for reasons of presentation. If I am aligning one liberal thinker with one theme, this is not to reduce them to that theme. All liberal thinkers engage with these themes to a greater or lesser extent. At the same time, it is also a way of showing that different liberal thinkers are haunted by some of these issues more than by others. It is simply that some of these themes take on a particular importance in the work of one author, so that it seems permissible to use that author as the representative liberal for this particular area.

I will begin, in Chapter 4, by looking at the issue of rights, both in terms of civic and human rights, and of how it figures in the work of Will Kymlicka. In Kymlicka we can in fact see an immunitary logic at work fairly openly. It is his express purpose that multiculturalism should strengthen liberalism, and strengthen individual rights. In the following chapter I will deal with the work of Bhikhu Parekh, and in particular the role that consensus plays in it. I will argue that the process of deliberation and consensus building that Parekh advocates is itself an immunitary mechanism that stands as a bulwark against any substantive intrusion of difference into liberalism. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will turn to Charles Taylor and look at his work under the theme of recognition and tolerance. Recognition lies at the heart of liberal multicultural
politics, and I will argue that this very process too is marked by an immunitary logic. What I will be doing in these chapters is presenting different liberal processes as embodying an immunitary logic. But I will do so via the enlistment of other critical theorists. That is, I will enlist various forms of critique, and assert that what they help us identify is the immunitary paradigm at work within liberalism. There is thus in each case a triangulation going on between Esposito and, variously, Kymlicka–Balibar, Parekh–Rancière, and Taylor–Povinelli/Brown. What this triangulation will help to do is not just to designate liberalism as immunitary, but also to illustrate what happens to actual Other subjects when they become the subjects of an immunitary process.

Following on from this substantive critique of liberal thinking on difference, Chapter 7 attempts to sketch out a possible path for thinking about difference and coexistence more productively. I suggest some possible beginnings for thinking about a political community that embraces substantive differences and is not overdetermined by an immunitary tendency. My contention is that an engagement with Henri Lefebvre’s work on rhythm can help us move towards cognitively mapping such a political community.

CONCLUSION

The aims of the book can hence be summarised thus:

• to provide an overview of liberal theories of multiculturalism
• to suggest that these theories are best understood as a mode of immunising the liberal polity against difference
• to suggest that there is thus a certain kind of hostility to the Other inherent in liberal multiculturalism, and that what is generally understood as the backlash against multiculturalism has to be understood as a part of the operation of liberal multiculturalism
• to outline the beginnings of how to think a new politics of multiculturalism that can move beyond immunitary tendencies

There are essentially three parts to the book. Chapters 2 and 3 (along with this introductory chapter) serve as exposition. The second chapter looks at liberal theories of multiculturalism. The third chapter examines Esposito’s conceptions of immunity and community, and also looks at
what it means to become subject to an immunitary process. These chapters will, in a way, stand separately at first, operating beside each other. It is in the second part of the book that the connection between these two corpuses of thought is made. They are brought into confrontation by an examination of three different immunitary processes at work in liberal multiculturalism. In the final part of the book, consisting of the last two chapters, I will attempt to explore how a community that escapes the liberal immunitary logic might be conceived. What should be clear by the end of the book is that a multiculturalism that is truly deserving of the name must move beyond liberalism.

NOTES

1. Cameron, ‘PM’s speech at Munich Security Conference’.
2. Cameron, ‘David Cameron on immigration’.
3. BBC News, Miliband: People “lost trust” in Labour on immigration; Mason, ‘Miliband shifts immigration policy, saying Labour “got it wrong”’.
7. There are endless examples of this. For a representative one see Heffer, ‘Defy the EU and stamp out benefits tourism’.
11. Travis, ‘Ministers to assess migrant groups’ impact on public services’.
13. Hough, ‘Migration is ruining our peaceful city, say Peterborough councillors’. Rather amusingly, at the end of the list of ills in this article comes the rather parochial ‘an increasing number of drivers without road tax or insurance’.
14. Hickley and Benetto, ‘One out of every five killers is an immigrant’.
15. See for instance Hickey, ‘Judge refuses to let Muslim defendant wear burqa in court’.
16. Dodd, ‘British soldiers in Afghanistan helping to curb asylum seekers, claims Minister’.
17. Reid, ‘City that can’t cope any more’.
18. All quotations in this and the next paragraph are from Reid, ibid.
19. Hall, ‘British Jobs pledge shattered as 98 per cent given to immigrants’.
22. A fear that was rather hilariously undercut when a throng of journalists, along with two MPs, spent New Year’s Day at Luton waiting for what turned out to be one new arrival. See Davies and Malik, ‘Welcome to Luton: Romanian arrival greeted by two MPs and a media scrum’.
23. Field and Soames, ‘Cowardice on immigration has allowed the BNP to flourish’.
25. The Councillors’ letter is quoted in full in Reid, ‘City that can’t cope any more’.
26. Dixon (2010), ‘Learn to queue if you want to be British’.
28. Guardian, ‘David Cameron: school sports targets result in “Indian dance” classes’.
30. In the online edition the byline has been changed to ‘As carcasses pile up and migrant camps are built on river banks, Peterborough residents are too frightened to visit the park’, which is odd in so far as this is hardly less inflammatory or sensationalist. Malone, ‘Slaughter of the swans’.
31. See the Sun, ‘Swan bake – asylum seekers steal the Queen’s birds for barbecues’; Hickley, ‘Sorry, poached swan’s off’; Lorraine, ‘Who ate all the swans?'; Daily Mail, ‘Swan bake’. The original Sun article was taken offline after the amount of criticism it received.
32. Grant, ‘Chef who throttled swan is spared jail’, p. 27.
34. These were eventually axed again. However, this was because they were deemed a ‘blunt instrument’ that was too ineffective rather than because of disagreement with the message. See Travis, ‘“Go home” vans resulted in 11 people leaving Britain, says report’.
35. Travis, ‘UK Border Agency texts tell legitimate immigrants to leave UK’.
37. Cameron, ‘PM’s speech at Munich Security Conference’.
38. Svevo, Zeno Cosini.
41. Esposito, *Communitas; Immunitas; Bíos*.
42. Esposito, *Third Person*.
44. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; see also *Remnants of Auschwitz; The Open; State of Exception*.
45. Hardt and Negri, *Empire; Multitude; Commonwealth*.
47. For a discussion of the difference between biopower and biopolitics see Lazzarato, ‘From Biopower to Biopolitics’.
50. For instance: *BBC News*, ‘Italy rebuke on Roma fingerprints’; Hooper, ‘Southern Italian town world’s “only white town” after ethnic cleansing’; Israely, ‘An Italian town’s white (no foreigners) Christmas’.
52. *BBC News*, ‘France blocks Italian trains carrying migrants’.
54. *Die Tageszeitung*, ‘Brüssel gibt Italien und Frankreich recht’, p. 10. This was essentially the EU refusing to deal with the general issue, since the specific influx of migrants was in the past. See also Braun, ‘Wenn Zwei sich streiten’.
56. Esposito and Nancy, ‘Dialogue on the Philosophy to Come’; Esposito et al. (eds), *Nichilismo e Politica*. Nancy also wrote the preface for the French edition of *Communitas*, an English translation of which can be found in ‘Conloquium’.
58. Ibid., p. 109.