# 'NATIONAL ASSIMILATION': SCOPE AND STRANDS

## A review starting from a 1925 thesis written for the University of Vienna

## INTRODUCTION

In 1925, Severin Breier, born in Lviv (then Lemberg, in Austro-Hungary), was 27. He was a veteran of World War I, having fought in northern Italy and been held subsequently as a prisoner of war in southern Italy. He was now coming to the end of four years of part-time study at the University of Vienna. His last assignment was a thesis, for which he chose the title 'Towards Theory of National Assimilation'.

This thesis has recently come to light among Breier's archives inherited by me, his daughter. I translated the entire thesis from German, in the hope that it might be publishable in English. However, it became clear to me and to scholars who read or reviewed the manuscript, either in English or the original German, that the thesis does not merit publishing in its entirety. The thesis contained a discursive section and an almost equally long statistical section, with emphasis on statistics relating to regions and peoples of the then Austro-Hungarian empire. Although ostensibly heading towards theory, no theory emerges; nor is there a conclusion that draws together the arguments and propositions and ties the supporting data into a theory. The referencing is not good by today's standards and the text is burdened with stereotypical statements and assertions. However, scholars believe that an article based on the thesis could be of great interest, given the intense focus today on national assimilation in all its guises.

It is not known why Breier chose the subject of national assimilation. One might imagine that, as a Jew, it was particularly personally intriguing. However, the thesis barely mentions Jews. There are two possible reasons for this. One, having already suffered anti-Semitism during the war and in the febrile climate of the mid-1920s in Vienna, he did not want to draw attention to his Jewishness. Two, the Jews were not regarded as an ethnic group and there were few statistics available on their numbers, locations or social characteristics.

Assimilation was, at the time, a topic of interest in both Europe and the United States, and assimilation and the related phenomena of integration, adaptation and individual and group identity remain so today. This paper is an attempt at a study of these phenomena as they are now conceived compared with the notions and assertions put forward in Breier's thesis, notably the discursive section where he tried to define and describe national assimilation and its counterpart, which he called 'Behauptung'. The word in German literally means 'claim' or 'assertion' and we assume that he meant 'identity assertion', as demonstrated by a group or community that live within and pay allegiance to a nation from which they do not originate but who maintain their (mainly cultural) identity. An example might be certain Polish or Turkish Cypriot groups living in the UK.

## METHODOLOGY

I am not a sociologist, ethnographer or even historian. Lacking the associated skills myself, I have researched the themes of nation, national, nationalism, assimilation, identity assertion in the writings and other forms of communication, such as broadcasts, of people who do have or claim to have them.

My purpose has been to compare and contrast the themes, theories and assertions in Breier's thesis with those of the present day, 100 years later. This led, as research often does, in various unexpected directions, such as identity politics, upward mobility and the concept of Whiteness. My sources have

not been all those of true scholars, nor have I researched the topics for decades. Consequently, this piece is more of an amble than a trek through the material, but it is my hope that some will find it of interest. The work is divided into sections reflecting the various strands relevant to the broad topic.

Parts of the thesis are quoted in the present article. All faults in translation are attributable to me.[1] Some passages of particular interest have been rendered here in bold type.

Professor Martin Albrow (personal communication, 2023), having reviewed Breier's thesis in the original German, notes the differences and incomplete parallels in the span of meaning between English and German terminology for collective social organisation. At the time Breier was writing (1925), Albrow observes, 'these differences were particularly contentious because of the high prominence given to Darwinian uses of concepts like adaptation and the romantically coloured notion of the people as expressed in V*olk* and *Volkstum.* That the latter are normally translated as "people" and "folklore" indicates the semantic divergence between English and German in seeking to grasp key aspects of group formation. There can be no perfect translation in this field. The difference of emphasis that arises in each language was just one of the factors of mutual incomprehension that contributed to the fatal descent into two World Wars.'

## 'NATION' AND 'NATIONAL'

Naturally, Breier's first task was to define 'nation/national'. First contrasting 'nation' with 'nationhood', he writes:

> Nation means a community of a group of people and the people themselves, whereas nationhood can be understood solely as an intellectual or spiritual community. This interpretation admits of no doubt.

> Above all, we want to establish that people and nation are not single-meaning terms. According to Neumann (1888, p. 50), 'people' can be understood as:

(1) People as people of a state, for example if we speak of the 'people' of Hungary or Austria or if we say that a 'people' makes its own laws.
(2) People as part of such an entity, e.g. lower-class people, prince and people, the Viennese, etc.
(3) People as a so-called 'natural' entity. In this sense, we may be talking about Swabian, Bavarian, Frankish or the people of Asia or Africa.
(4) People used in the same sense as nation, e.g. the German people.

'Nation' can be understood in the following ways:

(1) Nation as a political entity, the word being mostly, in the German language, used in compounds, e.g. national revenue, national wealth, national debt, national provinces.
(2) Nation in the current sense, e.g. when we refer to the German, Frankish, English or Italian, etc. nation.

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[1] Certain words in German do not translate directly into English. For 'geistig', I have sometimes used 'intellectual' or 'spiritual' or both, according to context. For 'Verkehr', I have used, variously, 'intercourse', 'communication' or 'exchange'. 'Bildung/gebildet' can mean 'education/educated' or something more akin to 'cultural sophistication', 'knowledgeable' or even 'well-read', and has been variously translated to suit the context.

What is the nation in this sense? Rarely in the study of society has the question about a term been so often posed and so variously answered; and it will require some effort to find a way through the hitherto suggested definitions [which] all seek to explain the nation in terms of outward features. It is of course entirely reasonable to foreground the differences between the individual nations, such as languages, customs, heredity, citizenship, various geographical circumstances and the like, and to construct a term of nation from them.

… Otto Bauer (1924, p. 113) gives prominence to the development of a natural community on the basis of natural conditions and the cultural community [sic], but on the other hand **defines the nation as a community of character (*Charaktergemeinschaft*) arising from a community of fate (*Schicksalsgmeinschaft*).** Relying on Bauer, but more happily expressed, L. M. Hartmann (1913) defines the nation as the sum of common fates and common interaction, mediated by language, that becomes a cultural community of bonded human beings. **Seipel understands the nation (*Nation*)** (1916, p. 6) **'as an aggregate of people welded together from more or less similar, or at least potentially assimilable, elements extending from common experience [*Schicksal*] up to cultural and linguistic unity'**. This cultural association may be so strong 'that all cultural differences of a personal, social status, or local kind that are contained within its boundaries are subordinated to those that separate it from other cultural associations' (1916, p. 40).

**Max Weber** (1913; the conference debated the sociology of nationality), in common with most speakers at the second German sociologists' meeting, opposes these views. Max Weber puts this question to the conference: **What kind of cultural community exists between aristocracy and proletariat?** The answer to this is that the community of culture between aristocracy and proletariat is definitely much looser. The proletariat stands on the furthest boundary of the cultural community. However, insofar as it participates in or comes closer to culture, it is always a matter of being incorporated into the cultural community of the nation. The national language is the precondition for the reception of cultural contents. On the other hand, there is absolutely no cultural community between the aristocracy of one nation and that of another. What the two have in common can only be status group interests or a high cultural standing, but only as defined within their own national cultural community. …

What we have here is a descending series of stages of spiritual community formation. Parallel with this decrease, the ethnological, 'natural' characteristics are ever more pronounced. We could express this in brief by saying that, with the word 'nation', emphasis is on cultural community, whereas, with the word 'people', it is more on natural conditions, on character qualities. As an example, we will consider someone who had English parents, was born in Munich and been brought up by German relatives without knowing his parents, and then been educated in Munich, to be clearly belonging to the German nation. On the other hand, we will have some reservations about assigning him to the German people, and even more to the Bavarian people.

Nationality is understood above only as the designation of a certain community. Used across the field, nationality means belonging to a particular nation, i.e. it is substantially the same as the term nation itself.

In a footnote, Breier observes:

Tönnies (1913, p. 49), in the discussion at the second German sociologists' annual conference, described the various distinct and prominent character groups as nationalities within the frame of the nation, a terminology less to be recommended.

This terminology appears to jar with Breier because it suggests that nationalities can exist within a nation; hence, the terms nationality and nation are not 'substantially the same'.

## NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL CHARACTER

In his article on 'The nature of nationalism' (1939), Hans Kohn writes: 'Men and men's character are extremely complex, the more so, the less primitive man is. This holds true even more of a highly complex group like a nation.' A nation is made up of an immense diversity of individuals and is subject to the most diverse influences, which mould and transform it. Growth and change are the laws governing all historical phenomena.

'Nationalism,' writes Kohn, 'is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, which since the French Revolution is becoming more and more common to mankind. The mental life of man is as much dominated by an ego-consciousness as it is by a group-consciousness.' Both of these are complex states of mind arrived at by experiences of differentiation and opposition, 'of the ego and the surrounding world, of the we-group and those outside the group.'

Breier writes:

> We will go into **the two most relevant definitions of the term nation**, which are those that constitute **the language community and the character community**.
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> Regarding the definition of the nation as a **language community**, an explanation that seems understandable, insofar as most nations have in fact cultivated a language, requires only the observation that **its weakness is apparent in reality**. The English and the Americans share a language, as do the Portuguese and the Brazilians, Spaniards and Argentineans. By contrast, in Switzerland, despite the multilingualism that prevails there, a new nationhood has emerged. In particular, Gumplowicz (1879, pp. 5ff.) views the common state organisation as the main basis for the emergence of a nation; leaning towards this interpretation, one can hold multilingualism within a nation to be entirely possible (ibid., pp. 300ff.)
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> The definition of nation as a **community of character**, as put forward first and foremost by Bauer (1924), also seems to have a lot to be said for it. Under community of character may be understood certain common customs and practices and, further, a certain community in the thought, behaviour and perceptions of individuals. Thus, the fact of the presence of common characteristics, among which are the nation-building characteristics of individuals, cannot be denied.
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> Various communities of character within each nation exist, thanks to social or natural conditions. Adaptation according to natural conditions and further social development create character communities that are often so distinct from one another that their members' emerged common characteristics are more similar to those of other nations than to those of their own. For example, the customs and usages evince a greater similarity between the Frisians and the Dutch than between Frisians and Bavarians.
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> We can therefore state that the nation is a particular kind of community of character. We can describe this **particular type of community of character, which marks the nation, with the special term 'national character'.**

Breier then deliberates on what national character is:

> The **national character is the expression of a <u>higher</u> spiritual or intellectual community**, developed through living together in the course of history, whose integrated communities of different spirituality and different character give a homogeneous impression and which become subordinate to it. By this means, the nation represents the ideal entity for the intellectual and spiritual communities of its members. It is, however, inadequate to explain the immanent 'people's soul' in terms of the spiritual community arising from the people. The metaphysical interpretation of 'people's soul' – which Otto Bauer described as the national spirit (1924, p. 121) – may be internally satisfying to us but does not qualify as an explanation of this spiritual community. **The national community as a whole is a product of historical development, i.e. one founded on natural conditions, of which the most important is a locational connection underpinned by geographical relations of the relevant group of people, forming an ever more highly evolving spiritual community, namely the cultural community. This, in consideration of its accomplishments over the course of history, we call nation.**

Kohn's discussion of national character (1939) echoes that of Breier but is more insightful and aware of the stereotypes that Breier takes at face value. 'Life in a common territory,' writes Kohn, 'subject to the same influences of nature and, to an important although lesser degree, to the same influences of history and legal systems, produces certain common attitudes and traits which are often called national character.' The Gauls or the Greeks, the Germans or the English are commonly deemed to have their own national character. But, continues Kohn, there are 'known instances where what was considered at a certain time the most essential character trait of a nation changed after a few decades.' Thus, at the beginning of the 18th century, 'the English were considered a nation most inclined to revolution and to change, whereas the French were considered a most stable and stolid nation.' Voltaire expressed the general French consensus about the English, that 'the government of this island [Britain] is more tempestuous than the sea which surrounds it, which indeed is true.' Yet, a hundred years later, 'quite the opposite opinion about the English and about the French was generally held. The English were then, and are even today [1939], considered (and consider themselves) a stolid nation, proud in their disinclination to revolution; while the French were considered a people easily given to and delighting in revolutionary upheavals.'

Likewise, the Germans were, in the 18th century, 'thought a most impractical people, fit for metaphysics and music and poetry, but unfit for modern industry and business. They were then the object of a loving admiration and of a somewhat condescending benevolence on the part of the more practical, and therefore more powerful, peoples.' Yet, at the time Kohn was writing, 'the Germans were producing very few, if any, metaphysicians, musicians, or poets of renown, but on the other hand had become most successful and practical.'

Kohn notes that collective or group consciousness can centre around different groups, some permanent, such as family, others temporary, such as a football club. All these groups develop their group character. Moreover, group consciousness is never exclusive: people may be members of different groups at the same time and indeed, 'with the growth of the complexity of civilization', the number of such groups increases. Here, Kohn's thinking aligns neatly with that of Thoits and Virshup, who, in their article on the forms and functions of social identities (1997), discuss two conceptions, 'the "me's" and "we's" or, for variety, "individual-level" and "collective-level" identities' and 'raise questions about the relationships between individual-level and collective-level identities'.

Kohn cites the American psychologist W. B. Pillsbury (1919, p. 5), who wrote that a nation is 'a group of individuals that feels itself one, is ready within limits to sacrifice the individual for the group advantage, that prospers as a whole, that has groups of emotions experienced as a whole, each of whom rejoices with the advancement and suffers with the losses of the group … Nationalism is a mental state or community in behavior.'

In his review (1944) of Kohn's book, *The Idea of Nationalism*, S. W. Baron, while mildly rebuking Kohn for failing to clarify his own opinion on what constitutes the ultimate criterion or the ultimate criteria for national feeling, adds his own opinion: '… in the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as in Germany, Italy, and among the Slavonic peoples, nationalism found its expression predominantly in the cultural field. … it was not so much the nation-state as the *Volksgeist* and its manifestations in literature and folk-lore, in the mother tongue and in history, which became the center of the attention of nationalism.' With the growth of the third estate and the political and cultural awakening of the masses, this cultural nationalism, in the course of the nineteenth century, 'soon turned into desire for the formation of a nation-state'.

'The growth of nationalism,' writes Baron, 'is the process of integration of the masses of the people into a common political form. Nationalism therefore presupposes the existence, in fact or as an ideal, of a centralized form of government over a distinct and large territory.'

In *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Grosby, 2005), Steven Grosby presents his definition of the term 'nation'. Nations, he notes (Abstract), 'are comprised of social (i.e. norms, customs, or language) and territorial relations, which give rise to a collective self-consciousness over time.' Nations are comprised of a community of families or kinships, in which individuals recognise themselves to be continuously related to others. Such families or kinships aid the inheritance of genes but also enable cultural inheritance.

According to Grosby (2014), 'the liberal principle of self-government usually requires the existence of the "self" of a nation that asserts or seeks to assert its right to determine its own affairs […] the "self" in the liberal idea of self-determination and self-government necessarily implies a boundary that distinguishes a member of the group from someone who is not a member of the group.' Mostly, we understand this 'self' to be a nation.

However, 'the existence of the nation implies a boundary that distinguishes one human from another, a member of the nation from someone who is not. Moreover, that distinction may not be in accord with the liberal principles of human equality or recognition of merit through achievement, for example, the location of one's birth as the determining factor of whether or not one is a member of the "self" in the term "self-government".'

This paradox could be resolved, writes Grosby, only by the elimination of all boundaries and creation of a world government, which would involve a 'monstrous bureaucracy'. Self-government would become meaningless. Thus, nations, however formed, may be necessary for the realisation of the liberal principle of self-government.

The great polymath Rabindranath Tagore warned with chilling prophesy of the dangers of nationalism. In a three-part essay that formed his masterly work *Nationalism* (first published 1917), written at the height of World War I, Tagore asserted: 'When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the Nation, becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity.'

To Tagore, '[t]he idea of the Nation is one of the most powerful anaesthetics that man has invented. Under the influence of its fumes the whole people can carry out its systematic programme of the most virulent self-seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion.' That moral perversion, he argued, was the belief that one set of people, constituted as a nation in one place, was superior to another set of people constituted as a separate nation in a different place. Such ideas emerged from the basic concept of a 'national purpose', in which the nationalist sees his own as the ultimate nation.

'My religion,' Tagore told Albert Einstein, 'is in the reconciliation of the superpersonal man, the universal human spirit, in my own individual being.' 'Our mind,' he continued, 'has faculties which are universal, but its habits are insular.' In *Nationalism*, he wrote that '[t]here is only one history – the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one.'

Breier writes:

> With regard to the nature of the higher spiritual community, it can be agreed that other communities can be adduced.
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> Hence, **nationhood is the <u>ideal</u>, in reality not always attained, unity of all spiritual communities**. On the other hand, one might argue that communal connections can form among those who belong to different peoples. However, in reality, there is consensus that the entirety of spiritual communities that have the nature of a nation is understood as a community of unity. The only difference is the degree to which single communities are integrated within the community as a whole. Every community is installed within the whole, according to its nature, though its position in the whole is quite peripheral. **All spiritual communities are, according to their nature, national; only communities of interest are international.**

A questionable assertion. He continues:

> In order to secure this definition – nation as a union of all spiritual communities, but especially as a union of cultural communities – we must pose the question whether the unities that are superior or subordinate to the nation do not similarly represent a union of cultural communities, a higher spiritual unity. **Above nationhood stands the cultural sphere, the highest unity of mankind.** When we speak of a cultural sphere, we mean only a communality of cultural features, never in reality a unity of culture. We want only to express that the cultures that have arisen within this sphere have been influenced by a specific cultural centre.
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> Even less do we want to connect the concept of 'mankind' or 'society' with that of one's own culture. Culture is precisely the differentiating element in society. There is no culture of mankind as such, but always only national culture.
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> It is in the above sense that **Spann defines the term nationality** [the reference is presumably to Spann's 1921 *Der Wahre Staat*; Spann was one of Breier's lecturers at the University of Vienna]. **Nationality is the 'unity of characteristics of all spiritual communities, whose core and nature construct cultural communities.'** We wish to touch briefly on other interpretations that perceive the nature of nationhood within the cultural community.

Indeed, Gumplowicz (1879, pp. 5ff.) sees the cultural community as the essence of a nationality – for him this is identical to 'nation', but only insofar as this is produced and advanced through a common polity. …

Thus, Gumplowicz limits the concept of the nation to nations that have arisen from the effects of state organisation, while, on the other hand, to be sure, a nation has often emerged first and then later has been in a position to create a unified state. Just think of the German and Italian nations.

**Neumann** (1888, p. 74) **defines the nation as a 'substantial population that has achieved a unique common nature as a result of advanced, unique cultural achievements (especially in literature, art and science or in political connections) and that has been handed down over an extensive territory from generation to generation**.' (Preferably it seeks to express this in a common language, common character traits, common outlooks and common customs and practices as well as a lively developed feeling of belonging together.)

*An ideal size?*

On a wry note, Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 9, Chapter 10, section 3), in discussing friendship, asked whether, as regards good friends, we should have as many as possible, 'or is there a limit to the number of one's friends, as there is to the size of a city? You cannot make a nation of ten men, and if there are a hundred thousand it is a nation no longer. But the proper number is presumably not a single number, but anything that falls between certain fixed points.' (Naturally, this specificity is not something that is embraced by later commentators.)

# 'ASSIMILATION'

## NATIONAL ASSIMILATION

In an early conception of assimilation, Park (1914, p. 606) claimed that assimilation entails minority groups assimilating into majorities and majority groups incorporating the minorities. Smaller groups thus merge into larger and more inclusive social groups (Park, 1914, p. 607).

Classical assimilation theory essentially equates assimilation with the process of upward mobility for immigrants and their offspring. Each subsequent generation is believed to achieve higher social and economic status as it becomes more culturally and linguistically similar to the destination country, notably to its middle class.

Before embarking on his pursuit of a theory of national assimilation, Breier makes an important distinction between assimilation and 'assertion':

'National assimilation' … can … be understood as the integration into the national community of groups from another national community. The completion of national assimilation is, for the individual, synonymous with the change of nationality.

**However, the word 'assertion' can designate successful resistance to the assimilatory endeavours exerted by another national community.**

> In a further sense, 'assertion' can also of course be understood as the maintenance of a relative or absolute part of a minority, without regard to its origins. …

He continues:

### *National Assimilation*

> … the individual or the majority of persons bent on assimilation exists within the sphere of two national communities, one of which exerts a greater influence than the other. The stronger community induces the splitting off of groups of the other community and incorporates them. The presence of two national communities in a particular district, of which each endeavours to gain the membership of the individual – the contest between them, in view of the vital cultural content of the national community, cannot take anything but an antithetical form – always gives rise to manifestations of assimilation or assertion thereof. Those facts that promote assimilation or assertion also lie in the power of one or the other community.
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> … **The entirety of events on earth originates from two forces, the creativity of nature and the human spirit. Every social development is, in the end, attributable to these two forces. Assimilation and assertion, as a social process, are also linked to these two factors, though they cannot be determined in any way by reference to them. A direct effect does exist of a particular natural geographical location or of a particular stage of development of the human intellect, but assimilation or assertion are, to an incomparably greater extent, determined by social phenomena and institutions, which themselves are the outcomes of the abovementioned primary forces – and a consequence moulded by fate in various ways.**

## CULTURAL ASSIMILATION

Initially referred to simply as 'assimilation', cultural assimilation has been defined as the economic, social and political integration of an ethnic minority group into mainstream society. Cultural assimilation may be used to convince a dominant power that a culture has peacefully assimilated, but such voluntary assimilation does not mean the group in question fully conforms to the accepted cultural beliefs.

Cultural assimilation is often voluntary, occurring in response to pressure from a more predominant culture and affording safety to those who perform it. During the Spanish Inquisition, for example, Jews and Muslims responded to persecution by voluntarily converting to Roman Catholicism. Known as Moriscos and Marranos, respectively, they secretly continued to practise their original religions.

In an article on cultural assimilation and its impact on mental health (Seven, 2023), Zuva Seven writes of the true and alleged benefits of cultural assimilation, noting that indigenous, immigrant and ethnic minority groups are often encouraged or pressured to assimilate culturally, but that they often change or hide elements of their own culture, including their language, food, clothing and spiritual practices, in order to adopt or appear to adopt the values and social behaviours of the dominant culture.

'Those who advocate for cultural assimilation,' writes Seven, 'believe that it decreases conflict, contributes to a more cohesive national identity, and improves the social and economic opportunities for minority individuals.'

However, some suggest that 'cultural assimilation contributes to the loss of culture and history, increased discrimination and violence, and damage to people's self-esteem and confidence.'

Cultural assimilation is commonly alluded to as 'melting pot theory', an analogy with metals that, when heated together, 'melt' to form a new, stronger compound. This theory is more commonly used to describe the American context where it appears under the rubric of 'Americanisation'. Critics of the theory suggest that the melting pot notion harms diversity and leads to cultural loss. 'Instead,' writes Seven (2023), 'some people promote the idea of multiculturalism, utilizing metaphors such as a mosaic or puzzle in which people are able to come together yet retain their unique culture.' In the USA, immigrants were encouraged to assimilate as a means of achieving social stability and economic success. 'Americanising', it was thought, would minimize instances of 'self-segregation' and eradicate intergroup rivalry for jobs and resources. Instead, however, it created a hierarchy of citizens in which those who were able to integrate fully were afforded more capital.

Cultural assimilation can lead to a loss of identity and cause significant psychological stress, ranging from homesickness to depression and severe mental illness. At its most intense, migration can cause 'cultural bereavement', a form of grief arising from the loss of one's culture and thus a core aspect of one's identity, as well as the separation from people and places of one's country of origin (Seven, 2023).

## THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUAL COMMUNICATION

Breier writes:

> Assimilation or assertion takes place through intellectual communication with fellow human beings or, rather, with social institutions, establishments, books, etc. What works towards influencing mutual intellectual communication at the same time influences the absorption, in their own national character or in a foreign guise, of their capabilities, forms and values. Intellectual communication on the part of the individual can be derived from the following particulars. Physical proximity – spatial distance between the individual and his fellows or from certain persons will facilitate intellectual communication or, respectively, make it more difficult. Intellectual proximity – similar intellects attract, and so the communication ensues spontaneously and in greater measure. Economic and political situation – everyone exists in the context of economic conditions and thereby in terms of communication. Equally, everyone is obligated to participate in political life and consequently in communication with others, according to the extent of his activity in the political administration.

> **Essentially, it seems that intellectual communication is subject to four conditions and unequivocally determined by them. 1. Spatial–locational conditions, i.e. how people live, among which people, whether in a densely populated area or not, etc. These circumstances predestine, to some extent, the 2. economic, 3. political and 4. intellectual conditions of communication, without, of course, establishing their particular forms of manifestation, without forcibly influencing them in a certain direction or in the only possible direction, so that they are simply the consequences of the circumstances of their place in the order of things.** Under similar conditions, different economic and different intellectual circumstances are, by contrast, conceivable and hence separate considerations apply.

> Assimilation is, however, not automatically a socially performed process on the basis of the abovementioned circumstances. **As a rule, the receiving population as well as that**

**portion of the population that has been subject to assimilation will try to influence assimilation or assertion.** …

National organisational activity may influence the intellectual process of assimilation or assertion in a particular way but is itself brought about by particular circumstances. … **As organisation depends on intellectual conditions or must necessarily arise from them, so this influences what is significant for an intellectual process, likewise correlative organisational activity.**

**It is thus similarly essentially subject to the influence of the four cited groups of conditions: the spatial–locational, the economic, the political and the spiritual–intellectual. In this context, … political circumstances are of special consequence vis-à-vis the others. The furtherance of or constraint on organisational activity will largely be initiated by political institutions.**

## GROUP VS. INDIVIDUAL ASSIMILATION

Breier's thesis focuses entirely on the assimilation or 'identity assertion' of groups, not of individuals. In today's world, the freedom of the individual to choose his or her identity and affiliation is regarded as paramount. However, group belonging also has its place.

In their article 'Assimilated or the boundary of Whiteness expanded? A boundary model of group belonging' (2023a), Karimi and Wilkes explore the differential assimilation outcomes for European and non-European immigrants to the USA.

First, however, they discuss assimilation theory, which regards assimilation as a process of 'becoming alike' and anticipates upward mobility among immigrants. They observe that assimilation research conceptualises assimilation as 'the outcome of individuals' intergroup interactions but reports assimilation as a group-level outcome'. This group-level approach fails to consider whether all individuals in first and later generations take part in assimilation and 'the rate at which intergroup interactions determine a group's assimilation'. Further, in assimilation theory the focus is on the upward mobility of and within a class, neglecting the racial aspect of the process. 'The assumption is that class mobility leads to racial re-categorization', a claim, the writers say, that remains theoretically undeveloped.

In their paper, Karimi and Wilkes assert that, in the 19th century in the US, immigrants of east and south European 'ethnicity' were considered dark-skinned and working-class. 'By the 1950s, they were re-categorized as White.' To understand the process of re-categorising groups, in this case in and out of Whiteness, the authors developed a boundary model to modify, or even replace, assimilation theory. This model incorporates the combined effect of individuals' intergroup interactions and majority groups' racial boundary expansion–contraction.

In their discussion, the authors set out four hypotheses. The first is that assimilation occurs only when *boundaries shift to recognise intergroup interactions* so as to include new members. Second, if *intergroup actions are high but do not trigger boundary expansion*, then assimilation does not occur. This may be the case with, for example, Asian immigrants to the USA. Third, if *no intergroup interactions occur but racial boundaries expand to include new members*, assimilation does not occur. Finally, if *no intergroup interactions occur and the racial boundaries do not expand*, then assimilation does not occur. In this situation, multicultural integration policies may encourage immigrants from racial minorities to hold on to their communities and cultures instead of

participating in mainstream culture and assimilating. This appears to align with Breier's concept of 'identity assertion' among groups.

Thus, Karimi and Wilkes conclude that assimilation occurs when boundaries expand to recognise intergroup interactions so as to include new members (Karimi and Wilkes, 2023a).

Today, the most common measures of assimilation are job market participation, residential segregation, educational attainment and intermarriage (Waters & Jiménez, 2005, p. 106).

## ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Ethnic diversity is, historically, the legacy of conquests that brought diverse peoples under the yoke of a dominant group; of rulers who imported peoples to serve as labourers or for their technical and business skills; of industrialisation, which intensified the long-standing pattern of migration for economic reasons; or of political and religious persecutions that drove people from their native lands.

Most commonly, the responses to ethnic diversity have been assimilation or acculturation, whether forced, induced or voluntary.

## FORCED AND VOLUNTARY ASSIMILATION

> *The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long that nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was … The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.* – Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

Forced assimilation was imposed in early modern times by the English conquerors, who suppressed the native language and religion in the Celtic lands of Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Their French contemporaries did likewise when they extended their conquests into the *langue d'oc* region of southern Europe. Chinese ethnic groups in Thailand and Indonesia have been legally 'induced' to adopt the dominant culture in a process called 'directed acculturation'.

Other notable attempts to compel minority groups to assimilate were made among the European colonial empires of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. In the Americas, Australia, Africa and Asia, colonial policies towards indigenous peoples frequently forced their religious conversion, the removal of children from their families, the division of community property into saleable, individually owned parcels of land, the shifting of responsibility for farming or other forms of production from women to men, and the banning of access to indigenous foodstuffs. Forced assimilation rarely succeeds and generally has lasting negative consequences for the recipient culture.

A ghetto is a quarter of a city in which members of a minority group are concentrated, especially as a result of political, social, legal, religious, environmental or economic pressure. In the mid-1930s in Germany, the Nazis were not yet ready to proceed to their 'final solution of the Jewish question', the physical liquidation of Jews. They decided to concentrate and ghettoise the Jewish population in cities with good railway connections, so that the Jews could later be deported further. 'The Nazis consciously renewed the medieval concept of the ghetto – a closed quarter of the city designated for Jews. Unlike the ghettos of the Middle Ages, however, these were designed to be merely temporary,

a transition point on the path to extermination.' Unlike concentration camps, ghettos had autonomous Jewish administrations, with Jewish councils, led by a Jewish elder. 'In reality, however, these autonomous administrations were merely illusory, serving as tools for the Nazis' (Ghettoisation of the Jewish population. https://www.holocaust.cz/en/history/final-solution/general-2/the-ghettoisation-of-the-jewish-population/).

In the USSR after Stalin, assimilation was neither forced nor voluntary but actively encouraged, and with some success. 'Under cover of restoring Leninist norms, and granting symbolic concessions to the union republics, [Nikita] Khruschchev launched a most ambitious program of complete national assimilation and integration' by offering non-Russian peoples 'a combination of concessions, retreats, restrictions, and pressures through which he hoped to overcome the most persistent obstacle on the road to Communist construction.' 'Although few legal or constitutional changes were introduced into Soviet national relations during this period, the position of non-Russian peoples of the USSR under Khrushchchev improved considerably, especially during the period of his ascendancy ending around 1958' (Fedyshyn, 1967). Part of the challenge for Khrushchev was the complexity of the Soviet Union's diverse population.

## SOCIAL GROUPS

Relevant to this discussion is the concept of social groups. The American sociologist C. H. Cooley, in his *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902), distinguished between primary and secondary groups. A primary group is one in which personal relations are direct, face-to-face, relatively permanent and intimate, such as the relations in a family or a group of close friends. They are the cornerstone of our emotional support system. Primary groups usually involve regular, intimate interactions.  Members know one another very well and are interdependent. In primary groups, relationships tend to be long-lasting, even maintained over a lifetime. The structure of primary groups is typically informal. They are not guided by formal rules or regulations but rather are fluid and evolve naturally over time. A secondary group (described later, not by Cooley himself) is one consisting of all other person-to-person relations, such as work groups, in which the individual is related to others through formal, often legalistic or contractual ties. Secondary groups are typically goal-oriented, formed around achieving objectives. They often have a formal structure in which specific regulations and roles guide members' behaviour and the group's functioning. Relationships within secondary groups are usually temporary, lasting only as long as the group's objective remains relevant. Interactions in such groups lack emotional depth, being mostly focused on accomplishing tasks.

American sociologist Talcott Parsons developed the idea by identifying factors that distinguish primary from secondary groups, arguing that primary socialisation is usually taught by the family, whereas secondary socialisation is the re-evaluation of norms and values that need to be applied in wider society. In *The Social System* (1951), he analysed large-scale systems and the problems of social order, integration and equilibrium. He believed that the structure of society was shaped by its function and that each individual had a distinct role to play, all members of the society interacting with one another in accordance with mutually accepted standards of conduct. He proposed a structural-functional analysis to study the ways in which the interacting units in the system contribute to its development and maintenance. The system is an environment of 'brute facts', which consists, among other things, of climate, material resources, the population structure and the physical possibilities of communication.

Among other classifications of social groups is that of the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, who differentiated between *Gemeinschaft* ('community') and *Gesellschaft* ('society' or 'association'), which corresponds closely with the distinction between primary and secondary.

## SELF-SEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

Seven's (2023) reference to 'self-segregation' leads directly back to Breier's thesis and his notion of 'Behauptung', which forms a significant part of the thesis. As explained in the Introduction, I have translated 'Behauptung', which literally means 'claim' or 'assertion', as '[identity] assertion', and understood it to mean just this same 'self-segregation', and thereby clearly distinguishable from 'assimilation'. This may apply to ethnic groups, social groups or categories of a population that, within a larger society, are distinct from that society and bound together by common ties of race, language, nationality, religion or culture. This definition of ethnic groups holds that, until the 20th century, ethnic diversity, a form of social complexity, held no great problems for empires. However, the nation-state and ethnic diversity are theoretically diametrically opposed, and nation-states have frequently attempted to solve the problem of ethnic diversity by eliminating or expelling ethnic groups. Examples abound, notably Nazi attempts to eliminate the Jews before and during World War II and expulsion of the Arabs and East Indians from newly independent African countries in the 1960s and 1970s.

'Identity assertion', in the present context, is precisely characterised by the idea of being 'distinct … and bound together'. Certain groups, notably Jews and Muslims in Western, predominantly Christian or a-religious societies, have historically integrated to the extent that they regard themselves as part of their host society, participating in its education, electoral and political systems, while maintaining and celebrating their common history, beliefs, culture and practices. They may live comfortably happily and undisturbed within their host societies but they are not fully assimilated.

David Snowden, in a piece about the assertion of identity (2008), observes that people need to have an identity and to recognise that they are 'the outcome of multiple emergent processes in which their history is an intimate part', but questioned whether it is right to assert that identity. His article cites examples of people being forced to abandon their identity: pupils in Wales being beaten for speaking Welsh in school as part of a systematic attempt to eliminate the language; imperial powers (Rome, England, the US) suppressing challenges to their cultural authority; indigenous people and members of particular ethnic or religious groups being forced into concentration camps (South Africa, Nazi Germany). Snowden's own view is that assertion of identity, 'with humour', is valid and 'a sign of self-confidence, a willingness not to ignore the past but to embrace it and move forwards', whereas 'others think that this is a new form of racism'.

In his book *A Small Town in Ukraine* (2023), a quasi-biography of the town of Krakowiec, Bernard Wasserstein records how, between 1880 and 1914, there was a massive emigration from Galicia of both Jews and non-Jews, the largest proportion of the nearly two million exiles going to the United States while many also settled in other parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire, notably Vienna and Budapest. The 'push' was poverty and lack of a viable future in their homeland; the 'pull' was enhanced opportunities in big cities. In exile, Wasserstein notes, Krakowiec Jews remained connected with their home town, and '[b]y 1899 they were numerous enough on the Lower East Side of New York to establish a *landsmanshaft*, the Krakovitser Kranken Untershtitsing Verein (society for the support of the sick)', which included a synagogue and burial society. Consciously or unconsciously, the Krakowiec Jews in New York exemplified 'identity assertion'. Living with mutual acceptance among their American hosts and adapting to the American way of life, they nevertheless cherished their common identity; they were not acculturated; they could not and would not have wanted to 'pass' for Americans; and, though integrated, they were not assimilated.

In 2016, BBC Radio 4 broadcast an edition of its series 'Moral Maze', under the heading 'Social integration'. It asked: do we have a moral duty to make friends with people of different races, social backgrounds and sexuality? The London mayor, Sadiq Khan, had warned that a lack of social

integration in the UK was costing the economy about £6bn annually and said that the answer lay 'in our own hands'. Talking at an international conference on the issue, he said, 'Promoting social integration is a matter for everyone, for every citizen of our cities. It means ensuring that people of different faiths, ethnicities, sexualities, social backgrounds and generations don't just tolerate one another or live side by side but meet, mix and forge relationships as friends and neighbours as well as citizens.' London is undoubtedly one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world, with over 300 languages spoken in it and more than 50 non-indigenous communities, each with a population of more than 10,000. Yet it is clear that some groups choose to settle in areas where there is already a high proportion of people from the same background. Outside London, the effect is even more pronounced. 'Moral Maze' debated: 'At a time when social polarisation is an issue in many communities, is it time to see social integration not only as a policy priority but also a personal moral imperative? Should it be as unacceptable to admit to having a mono-cultural social network as to admit being prejudiced? Or is this the kind of [politically correct] interference in our lives which fires public resentment and actually encourages division by fostering identity politics?'

On 7 July 2024, the topic of 'The Moral Maze' was: 'What do the riots say about Britain?' The broadcast was introduced with reference to the previous week of 'brutish, hate-filled riots' that had been 'a disturbing time for Britain's minority communities'. What had started as a protest against the murder of three little girls in Southport had swept the country for days, fuelled by the spread of misinformation on social media. The cause of the anger was starkly contested. For some, the perpetrators were racist far-right agitators and opportunist thugs, their anger whipped up by populist politicians and commentators. For others, the riots represented a deeper unease about successive immigration and social policies that had left people feeling 'ignored, marginalised, even despised by politicians and mainstream media'. The ideological divide was between those who saw 'diversity as strength' and those who believed unlimited tolerance breeds its own intolerance. Burning cars, racist graffiti, violent looting and attacks on the police and Muslim communities were, within days, met with a fightback: communities came together to help in the clear-up, show solidarity with their Muslim neighbours and make clear their opposition to racist hatred. If, the programme asked, there is more that unites us than divides us, what should we be doing to improve relations between communities?

What can be drawn from these two programmes broadcast eight years apart? Surely, the fact that, in the UK, there remains a stark difference between the experience of and attitudes towards communities that have, often in previous generations, become fully assimilated into British society and of communities that have integrated but are still regarded as 'foreign', 'different' and even a threat to the mainstream population.

A study of the relationship between income and fertility in 'extremely culturally different groups' in the USA who 'generally speak non-English languages at home', namely the Amish (Pennsylvania Dutch) and ultra-orthodox Jews (Yiddish) (More money, more babies, ifstudies.org), found that women in richer households in these groups have fewer children but that the massive fertility differences observed for such women in these communities are *overwhelmingly* driven by cultural differences, not by differences in economic resources. Here again, we see the consequences of a lack of integration on the part of different groups within the larger society.

In some societies, the need to assimilate has been, in a sense, bypassed by a form of pluralism. One of the most notable long-standing examples is Switzerland, where the three major ethnic and language groups are largely concentrated in separate cantons, each enjoying a significant measure of local control within a democratic federation.

## TRANSNATIONALISM AND DISSIMILATION

In their article 'National assimilation and/or cosmopolitan transnationalism? Impending transnationalism among the upwardly mobile children of refugees', Karimi, Thompson and Bucerius (2024) assess 'whether assimilation theory or the transnationalism framework would best capture the specific experiences of young Somali–Canadians in terms of veering toward the Canadian nation-building project or a global cosmopolitan lifestyle'. Based on their findings, they caution against making quick judgments about the rise and fall of nations and transnationalism, encouraging instead 'a more nuanced understanding of how assimilation and transnationalist practices do not necessarily play out in either/or fashion, but rather can (and do) operate simultaneously to shape experiences and life trajectories in the host country.'

Their findings align with assimilation theory, which postulates that, with the passage of time, assimilation towards the nation increases and transnational connections decline. The authors observe that, 'given the recent experiences of varied national responses to a global pandemic, the construction of border walls and fences, and the increasing numbers of migrants and refugees, it is perhaps not surprising that the nationalism–globalization showdown is once again at the center of public and academic debates.' On the one hand, they point out, 'various iterations of assimilation theory anticipate that immigrants and their offspring will adopt the norms and practices of the destination society. They will "join the nation".' On the other hand, 'the transnationalism framework challenges assimilation theory's claim that immigration necessarily leads to the severing of ties with origin countries.' Rather, transnationalism proposes that visits to their origin country and access to information and communication technologies enable immigrants and their children to simultaneously belong to and connect with both their destination and their origin country.

The authors' research with first-generation Somali–Canadians who had fled war-torn Somalia and arrived in Canada in the 1990s, often via refugee resettlement programmes, identified 'an impending future-oriented desire for broader transnational connections among the participants'. Their data 'generally support assimilation theory's prediction of second-generations' assimilation into the host society'. Indeed, with the passage of time, a process of 'dissimilation' quickens and second-generations' transnationalism declines. Their findings imply that, 'for those coming from refugee backgrounds, assimilation takes place while transnationalism may become dormant and remain so until activated'. What would be required to activate transnationalism would be conditions of relative safety and stability in the origin country.

## SEGMENTED ASSIMILATION

A particularly interesting aspect of assimilation and integration is segmented assimilation. Breier in his thesis did not consider this, instead treating newcomers or immigrants as a more or less homogeneous group and focusing on whether they assimilated into the host societies or rather fell into the 'identity assertion' category. In the hundred years since he wrote the thesis, almost all societies have become much more diverse, with earlier or later immigrants, first- and subsequent-generation immigrants, arriving from a host of origin countries and for a multitude of reasons. Our analysis of assimilation must necessarily be more nuanced now.

Segmented assimilation theory recognises that, where there is a high level of diversity in the destination society, there are different paths by which new immigrants may assimilate. These may include classical assimilation and upward mobility, downward assimilation and incorporation into the lower class or economic advancement while maintaining a strong ethnic identity and embeddedness in an ethnic community (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Classical assimilation theory essentially equates assimilation with upward mobility for immigrants and their offspring, each subsequent generation achieving higher social and economic status as it becomes more culturally

and linguistically similar to the middle class of the host country. Research on newer immigrants, however, suggests that assimilation may no longer have such a straightforward relationship with upward mobility (Rumbaut, 1997).

In their article 'The social context of assimilation: testing implications of segmented assimilation theory' (2011), relating to the United States context, Xie and Greenman observe the 'truism' that new immigrants differ from the old immigrants. They explore the extent and significance of the differences, conceptualising them in 'two important dimensions: changes in the immigrants themselves and changes in America as a host society'. With regard to the first dimension, new immigrants have historically been considered racial/ethnic minorities (European immigrants such as the Irish, Jews and Italians) and some still are (immigrants from South America or Asia). Are racial/ethnic barriers to assimilation for the new immigrants higher than or qualitatively distinct from earlier barriers?

In terms of changes in America as a host society, Xie and Greenman note, the new immigrants have been entering the country 'during a period when demand for semi-skilled and skilled labor has been substantially reduced by changes in the economy. … the assimilation and upward mobility of the 1890–1920 wave of immigrants were facilitated by the manufacturing-based economic expansion of that time period, while today's service-based postindustrial economy, in which hourly service jobs pay much less than those in manufacturing, is less favorable for the incorporation of new low-skill workers.' '[T]he present wave of immigration shows no sign of stopping – as immigrant communities are continually replenished with new, unassimilated first-generation members … [which] may make complete cultural assimilation less likely for contemporary immigrant groups than it was for earlier groups.'

How do these circumstances impact classical assimilation theory? Possibly less than might be imagined. Contemporary immigrants may not be significantly different from earlier groups. Earlier immigrant groups from Europe often did not fully assimilate until the third or fourth generation; thus, the limited assimilation seen among second-generation immigrants today is perhaps not surprising. Civil rights legislation and widespread acceptance of the ideals of multiculturalism have facilitated the incorporation of new immigrants. There is evidence (Kasinitz et al., 2008) that second-generation immigrants 'feel little conflict between their parents' culture and "American" culture, but instead free to mix and match different pieces of each cultural repertoire.'

## IDENTITY POLITICS

In the 21st century, the issue of identity politics has come to the fore. According to Frank Newport (2021), identity politics 'generally refers to people evaluating issues through the lens of their association with a specific group. This in turn means that approaches to issues, politicians and political parties revolve around how those things affect the relevant group or groups.'

Identity politics may also be defined as 'a subset of politics in which groups of people with particular shared racial, religious, ethnic, social or cultural identity' or sexual orientation seek to promote their own specific interests or concerns, moving away from traditional broad-coalition party politics (Power, 2019). Identity politics is believed to have played an important role in advancing civil rights for many minority groups. However, groups that feel threatened may become more defensive, more punitive, more tribal and more adversarial, creating division between themselves and other groups.

A further description stresses an *anti-authoritarian* 'political and cultural movement that gained prominence in the USA and Europe in the mid-1980s, asking questions about identity, repression, inequality and injustice and often focusing on the experience of marginalised groups' (Tate Art,

Identity politics). Criticisms of identity politics tend to centre on ways in which it is positioned by its promoters and on the assumption that people who are not in particular identity groups cast those who are in a negative light. Backlashes are also created among those who take issue with what the identity assertion of a particular group may mean for the rest of society.

It is argued that 'the dramatic rise of identity politics in mainstream politics is often regarded as both a cause and effect of the rise of populism across the globe' (Power, 2019).

Marilynn B. Brewer (2001) of the Department of Psychology, Ohio State University, discusses the various definitions of social identity as used in different theoretical frameworks. Social identity, she writes, is 'a concept that has been invented and reinvented across the social and behavioral science disciplines to provide a critical link between the psychology of the individual and the structure and function of social groups.' She draws distinctions among 'person-based identities, relational (role-based) identities, group-based identities, and collective identities' and calls for an integrative theory that draws on all four definitions interactively. For the present purposes, person-based social identities form the most relevant category. The term 'is intended to refer to definitions of social identity that are located within the individual self-concept. In this usage, social identities are aspects of the self that have been particularly influenced by the fact of membership in specific social groups or categories and the shared socialization experiences that such membership implies.' Thoits and Virshup, in their article on the forms and functions of social identities (1997), discuss two conceptions, 'the "me's" and "we's" or for variety, "individual-level" and "collective-level" identities' and 'raise questions about the relationships between individual-level and collective-level identities'.

Carl Benjamin is a British right-wing YouTuber and political commentator. An anti-feminist, he is also an advocate for Brexit and a critic of Islam, and has argued for a reduction in immigration to the UK from majority Islamic countries. In a discussion on his YouTube channel (https://www.buzzfeed.com/markdistefano/benjamin-akkad-racial-statements), he produced a rambling explanation of 'resentment' towards Jews and 'identity politics'.

'Jewish people do very well in our societies,' he says. 'That's to their credit, they work hard. It's not that this is illegitimately gained. But then I can see why people are resentful that successful, rich, well-off people, who are well connected, who are socially very advanced, are then playing the game of identity politics as well.' He finds this to be 'unfair' and denies that his remarks are anti-Semitic.

In an article entitled 'What Nigel Farage gets wrong about British Muslims' (Ehsan, 2024), Dr Rakib Ehsan, a researcher specialising in British ethnic minority socio-political attitudes, writes: 'There is a growing body of research which shows that levels of anti-Semitism are relatively high in British Muslim communities when compared to the general public.' … 'a minority at pro-Palestinian demonstrations have been responsible for chanting anti-Jewish slogans and displaying pro-terror paraphernalia. And, while we should not trivialise the far-right extremist threat, 'the principal terror threat faced by modern Britain comes in the form of Islamist extremism'. Indeed, 'the UK continues to struggle to get to grips with Islamist extremism'. But what Ehsan takes issue with is 'the grand-sweeping generalisations of British Muslims and failing to see any good in many of these patriotic, community-spirited, and family-oriented communities'.

The most critical point, according to Ehsan, is 'what on Earth are we expecting socially conservative Muslims to "integrate" and "assimilate" into? More than three in five British Muslims are of the view that overall, most people in Britain put their individual interests above the needs of their family members and the wider community. Who could blame them?' 'The rise of materialistic individualism and secular godlessness has contributed to a fundamental loss of civic responsibility and community spirit.'

In another piece (2023), Ehsan reports on tensions between minority groups in Britain, observing that, '[w]hile apparently progressive politicians in the inner cities continue to repeat empty platitudes such as "diversity is our strength", the failure to integrate ethnically diverse communities carries significant risks to public order.' Social and economic tensions between non-White communities is not new. Rather, they 'serve as yet another reminder of the complexities of modern Britain and the fact that diversity is by no means an unadulterated good.'

## CONCLUSION

Going deeper into some of these issues, such as identity politics and racial tensions, would stray too far from the original purpose of this article, namely to start from concepts of national assimilation, as set out in Breier's 1925 thesis, and compare such concepts with those of today. Branching out from Breier's ideas has led me into a multitude of strands of thinking related to nations, nationhood, assimilation and identity, reflecting the extremely diversified world that we live in 100 years on.

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