

## GATEWAY DOCUMENT 4.4

# Hatred based on religion, ethnicity or 'race' especially when given religious justification

## WHY IS THIS RELEVANT TO *REsilience*?

When we talk about people belonging to different 'races' we are using a word that is very imprecise. Indeed, in 1950 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a paper called *The Race Question* which rejected, on scientific grounds, the idea that the word 'race' had any real meaning when applied to human beings and recommended that we should instead speak of 'ethnic groups'. Wikipedia defines an ethnic group as 'a group of people whose members identify with each other, through a common heritage that is real or assumed'.

Of course there are differences between people such as skin colour, hair texture and other physical characteristics that allow us to use rough and ready categorisations of people through terms like 'African Caribbean', 'Anglo Saxon' or 'Asian' (although 'Asian' is used differently in Great Britain from in the USA – for us it refers usually to people from the Indian sub-continent whereas Americans usually intend people from Vietnam, China, Japan or the Philippines). All the time such characterisations are used simply to describe appearance there is probably little harm done.

However, from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century many writers, including some scientists, maintained that different 'racial types' are characterised by different moral and intellectual endowments, with white people, especially Northern Europeans, being seen as the superior race, and then other 'races' ranked in some sort of order but always with sub-Saharan Africans coming at the bottom of the list. Such spurious theories were used as justification for the enslavement of black people and later discriminatory laws against them – e.g. the 'Jim Crow' laws of the USA, and apartheid in South Africa.

The Indian 'Caste' system is sometimes another cause of division, discrimination and violence. Many Hindus argue that caste is much misunderstood and that it either has no intrinsic basis within Hinduism, or that it was a social arrangement suitable to earlier times but irrelevant in the twenty-first century. In reality, caste remains an important social reality for many people of Indian background, Hindus but also Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and

Sikhs<sup>1</sup>. Certainly among Hindus there is evidence that rigid adherence to caste is weakening, particularly among the young, the more educated, and within cities. It is perhaps worth considering the ways in which some of the features of the caste system are mirrored within the English class system.

In recent years new scientific discoveries and understanding have gone a long way towards disproving biological links between 'race' and intellectual or moral endowment. However, outdated stereotypes persist in some people's minds.

England, like the rest of Britain, has made impressive progress in recent years in eliminating discrimination against people on grounds of race, religion or ethnicity, both legally and, perhaps more importantly, in society more generally. However, serious prejudice and discrimination was suffered in this country by Jews, the Irish, Travellers<sup>2</sup>, and people of colour, until relatively recently. Immigrants arriving in Britain in the sixties found some landlords blatantly advertising accommodation with the proviso 'No blacks, no Irish, no dogs'! Attitudes of hostility to foreigners, particularly non-Europeans, are perpetuated in the political agenda of organisations like the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League (EDL). Historically, many fascist or far-right organisations have been overtly anti-semitic. More recently, their hostility has been directed at immigrants generally and at Islam in particular, and the EDL has gone so far as to form a 'Jewish Division' and declare its support for the state of Israel. Such groups as the BNP and the EDL may appeal to some young people, particularly to white, working-class boys. It is important that schools generally, and teachers of RE in particular, are prepared to engage with the arguments put forward by organisations that foment hatred and discrimination and help students to recognise the basis of the arguments such organisations advance. The aim of *REsilience* is to help teachers build their confidence to do just this.

Whilst there are clear differences between extremist race hatred and religiously motivated terrorism, many people see similarities between them as well. For example, the narrow stereotyping focus of the English Defence League is similar to that of the Al Qaeda movement that uses religious justification for its philosophy of hatred against the 'Zionist-Crusader alliance'. *REsilience* aims to help teachers to address such unilateral views and their implications, whatever their starting point. The context is one where schools take a positive view of social diversity and wish to celebrate it whilst acknowledging that differences of beliefs and values are also present. Teachers of RE can help students to become more aware that most Muslims are not terrorists or supporters of terrorist activity and that stereotyping of particular ethnic, cultural and religious groups is unjust and damaging to all

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<sup>1</sup>. The great Indian political leader Dr Ambedkar led half a million 'untouchables' in conversion to Buddhism. Whilst caste has no formal role in Christianity, Islam or Sikhism many followers of those religions are aware of their caste origins and this will influence place of worship or choice of marriage partner. Goan Roman Catholics report that certainly until relatively recently, and perhaps still, they are careful to take communion in order of caste hierarchy so as not to violate the system of purity and pollution which is at the heart of the caste system.

<sup>2</sup>. 'Traveller' here refers to those who, whatever their ethnicity, culture or background, and whether settled or mobile, belong to communities that are characterized by a nomadic way of life.

concerned. For most Muslims, the sense of being a member of the *ummah*, or worldwide community of Muslims, is an important part of their identity, for some it may be the most important part, but this is a situation mirrored in other religions and loyalty to a transnational religious grouping is in no way incompatible with loyalty to a nation state.

## KEY QUESTIONS

### How can this help teachers and students to increase their understanding of contentious issues?

Exploration of this topic should focus on helping students to understand that in all groups, whether racial or religious, there is diversity. Racial or religious hatred is usually based on a stereotype of the hated group that can always be shown to be invalid if the diversity within such a group is recognised. However, hatred is not based only on rational considerations and other social and psychological factors need to be explored – e.g. how society can hear and take account of the views of people who feel disempowered and who consequently look for individuals or groups to blame for their situation.

Students should be helped to understand that racial or religious hatred often has many different origins, causes and manifestations and may involve a spectrum of moral grey areas as well as the more clear-cut polarisation between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

### Why is this a contentious topic?

This topic is contentious because it brings together competing claims which are hard to reconcile. There is the message, on the one hand, that racism is wrong. That is often linked with statements such as ‘immigration is not a problem’ or the related position that to argue against immigration automatically amounts to racism. This is reinforced further by the situation in schools where teachers strive to see all the students they serve as equally worthy of help, protection, and as having equal rights to flourish as human beings irrespective of whether they have an immigrant or indigenous background. It makes it difficult to treat immigration and the problems that sometimes accompany it as ‘controversial’. So the tendency, in many materials produced for schools, is simply to imply that immigration is good and everyone should welcome difference as enriching and as something that adds variety to their lives despite the reality, for some people, that the low wage labour offered by itinerant or immigrant workers is a genuine threat to their livelihoods. *Overall*, at a macro level, immigration may be good for jobs and the economy but at a personal and local level it can create tensions and real resentment. Such concerns may be genuine and cannot simply be dismissed as veiled racism.

There are other causes of race hatred. Groups compete for resources (water, land, identity and so on) and the struggle for survival may erupt in conflict and war. Such situations engender all kinds of hostility and race-related hatreds. Even when they occur elsewhere in the world (e.g. Kashmir, Darfur, Israel/Palestine), they can foster race hatred that British citizens experience. This is not just about stereotyping. Is it not understandable to hate

people of a different group if you are a refugee in this country having seen your parents killed by members of that group?

Teaching, therefore, needs to treat the subject in a way that is realistic and recognises its controversial nature.

### **Why is RE relevant to this topic?**

In some cases people expressing hatred of this kind blame religious groups rather than those identified by race for the perceived ills of society. Some people attempt to justify attacking those whom they define as enemies because they characterise some religions, especially Islam, as culturally incompatible with prevailing social values in the UK. In other examples, selective versions of religious teachings have been used to justify racism, as with the apartheid regime in South Africa.

However, many attacks on Christianity and Islam (and indeed some on other religions) are simply rooted in strong disagreement with particular doctrines or practices. They are not simply 'race hatred with a religious justification'. Unless there is a recognition of this and discussion of the difficult interrelationship between criticism on the one hand, and prejudice and hatred on the other, students may feel they are being told that it is unacceptable ever to be critical of the religious beliefs of someone else. The most important point is that students should avoid stereotyping and aggressive dismissal of others' views and learn courteous ways to disagree and ways to find common ground and understanding.

### **What classroom challenges might arise in RE?**

Some students may:

- identify with racist views themselves or have parents who hold such views; they may be unwilling to take part in discussions where all students are accorded equality and respect and the opportunity to express their views;
- be unwilling to recognise diversity within religious and racial groups (including their own);
- feel their white British identity is being undermined or challenged by social changes they see in a negative light;
- feel that their disagreement with some or all religious ideas is being unfairly characterised as racial or religious hatred;

It may be difficult to establish the most appropriate terminology for classroom use without being offensive.

### **How can teachers address such challenges?**

- Teachers can plan activities that illustrate the diversity of racial and religious groups.
- Students can be guided to develop understanding of the changing nature of personal identities, including their own.

- Teachers can help students come to understand the nature of demonisation which underpins racial and religious hatred.
- Teachers can give public recognition to the need for all people of any age to have their distinctiveness acknowledged and their needs met, whilst also recognising the commonalities people share – students can learn from this exemplary behavior.
- Students and teachers can discuss use of terminology, using a resource such as the Britkids website (see Signposts below).

## NEXT STEPS

### Signposts for further reading

For religious justification of apartheid in South Africa:

<http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/christ/cep/drdsa.html>

Crombie, B and Rowe, D (2009) *Dealing with the British National Party*, Citizenship Foundation. Available on [www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/news.php?n783](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/news.php?n783)

Gaine, Chris (1995) *Still no problem here*, Trentham Books

Knowles, E and Ridley, W (2006) *Another spanner in the works: challenging prejudice and racism in mainly white schools*, Trentham Books

Richardson, Robin (2004) *Here, there and everywhere. Belonging, identity and equality*, Trentham Books

Richardson, Robin (2004) *Islamophobia: issues, challenges and action*, Trentham Books and the Uniting Britain Trust

### Signposts for further resources

[www.britkid.org](http://www.britkid.org) Accessible site for young people (but also has teachers' section) 'about race, racism and life' giving factual information about these issues as well as perspectives of young people from a range of backgrounds. Useful section on terminology to aid understanding and discussion.

[www.wdwtwa.org](http://www.wdwtwa.org) Website of 'Who do we think we are'<sup>3</sup>, which explores ideas about diversity and distinctiveness in an education context. It includes a range of classroom resources in the citizenship section as well as links to other relevant websites

[www.thecst.org.uk](http://www.thecst.org.uk) The Community Security Trust believes that the fight against anti-semitism and terrorism is an integral part of safeguarding wider democratic British society

<sup>3</sup>. The website [www.wdwtwa.org](http://www.wdwtwa.org) is now defunct but many of the materials that were on that site can now be found on the sites of the Association for Citizenship Teaching, the Citizenship Foundation, the Historical Association, the Royal Geographical Society and the Schools Linking Network. Other related resources can be found at, the website of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympics Games, <http://www.london2012.com/get-involved/education/index.php>

against extremism and hatred. The website documents anti-Semitic attacks in Britain and Europe and works to raise public awareness and understanding of such racial and religious hatred.

[www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk](http://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk) Many citizenship education resources are also relevant here.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/898668.pdf> *Face to face and side by side* (2008) Communities and Local Government. This document sets out the policy of the previous Government on how faith communities, Government and wider society can work together, at all levels, to encourage and enable greater local activity which brings people with different religions and beliefs together. The framework contains examples of effective practice, practical suggestions for communities and local authorities and links to further sources of support and guidance.

### **Signposts for further action**

This will depend greatly on school context. Schools may wish to review policies on reporting of racist incidents and to ensure a common understanding amongst staff about how such policies can be implemented effectively. This might include staff training on statutory requirements in this area.