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**The Paradox of Britain's Isolation from Europe and its Close Relationship  
with the Commonwealth of Nations**

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## **Dedication**

*This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents who have supported me and have been by my side throughout these years. To my father (may he rest in peace), who was a source of encouragement and motivation; I would not have been where I am today if it was not for you.*

*To my mother, I cannot thank you enough for your love, wisdom, and care.*

*To Allah, who gave me strength and patience to go through hardships.*

*To my brother Mohammed louai, who has helped me and inspired me when I needed it most.*

*To my dear friends and classmates, who have made this journey unforgettable.*

*And finally, to myself, for the efforts, discipline, and hard work I have put in my education.*

*Thank you all.*

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*Moreover, I would like to express my gratitude and thank all of the teachers who took part in teaching the literature and interdisciplinary approaches branch. Thank you for all the knowledge you provided us with, this journey would not have been complete without your guidance.*

## **Abstract**

Brexit was an event that shocked the world. The fact that a European country like the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union surprised many people. The kingdom preferred isolation from Europe despite the fact that it is a European country with European characteristics. However, Britain had a different attitude towards the Commonwealth of Nations. The latter received a friendly attitude from Britain as it was in favor of strengthening the relationships between itself and the Commonwealth members. The kingdom also embraced the diversity of cultures within this association and welcomed its members in the British territory. This creates a researchable paradox which can be investigated. Hence, this dissertation addresses the paradox of Britain's isolation from Europe and its embrace of closeness and diversity within the Commonwealth of Nations. This work aims to investigate such paradox and clarify why the UK wanted to isolate itself from Europe and remain close to the Commonwealth. This research asks the question of how come Britain chose isolation from Europe but stayed close to the Commonwealth of Nations while embracing the diversity of its members. One possible answer that can be provided to such a question is that Britain did so because it served its interests. This research demonstrates that maintaining close ties with the Commonwealth of Nations served Britain more than remaining in the European Union. This work also confirms that Britain stayed close to the Commonwealth and isolated itself from Europe because that was more convenient to the kingdom.

**Keywords:** Britain, cultural diversity, Brexit, Commonwealth of Nations, Europe.

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

BF: Britain First

BNP: British National Party

EDL: English Defence League

EEC: European Economic Community

EU: European Union

MHCLG: Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government

MPs: Members of Parliament

MSP: Member of Scottish Parliament

SNP: Scottish National Party

UK: United Kingdom

UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party

USA: United States of America

WWII: World War 2



### **General introduction**

The United Kingdom is known as one of the leading first world countries that has power and dominance. Its power is usually linked to the famous British Empire. Britain's dominance of one third of the globe in the past empowered it and has contributed to making it the modern Britain as we know it today. This empowerment has ultimately influenced Britain's relations with the rest of the world and has pushed it to choose isolation from Europe through the Brexit, an event which shocked the entire world.

However, this isolation was only towards Europe and not the rest of the world. As it is known, Britain has kept close ties with its former colonies through the Commonwealth of Nations. In this association, Britain has always been optimistic about maintaining close relations between itself and the countries of the Commonwealth. Unlike Europe, the Commonwealth countries did not receive hostility from Britain. In fact, the Kingdom embraced the rich diversity of these countries and welcomed them in the British lands. This creates an interesting paradox that is worth researching. Therefore, this dissertation is about the paradox of Britain's isolation from Europe and its embrace of closeness and diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations.

This research aims to investigate such a paradox and to find answers to the following questions:

1. How come did Britain choose isolation from Europe but chose to keep close relationships with the Commonwealth of Nations?
2. Why did the UK embrace diversity in the Commonwealth but refused to do so in the European Union?

In this regard, the first possible hypothesis for these questions is that Britain chose isolation from Europe because it has always considered itself different from Europe, especially since the British describe their country as an "island country". The second hypothesis suggests that Britain embraced diversity in the Commonwealth because it benefited from it and it served its personal interests better than Europe.

## General Introduction

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In order to answer the proposed research questions and find out whether the suggested hypotheses are correct or wrong, this dissertation is divided into three chapters and each chapter will deal with the theme of this research in different ways.

The first chapter is entitled Historical Background. It highlights the history of Britain's isolation from Europe and provides a definition of some important terms. These terms include: Brexit, British exceptionalism, Euroscepticism, and the Commonwealth. This chapter aims to provide a background to this research in order to explain and clarify the theme of this dissertation.

The second chapter is entitled the Commonwealth of Nations and Cultural Diversity. It focuses on culture, cultural diversity, the Commonwealth of Nations, how the UK embraces diversity in this association, and the reasons behind it. This chapter aims to provide an insight on this association as well as cultural diversity.

The third and final chapter is entitled Contemporary UK and Cultural Diversity. This chapter focuses on twenty first century UK, its diverse society, and ways the kingdom deals with diversity. This chapter also sheds light on diversity in the British political sphere and includes two case studies as examples of this diversity. The first is a case study of the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and second is the Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf. The third chapter also highlights Britain's openness to diversity vs. its hostility towards it.

# **Chapter One: Historical Background.**

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## **Introduction**

The United Kingdom<sup>1</sup> is famously known for its power and influence across the world. Such strength is rooted in its historical empire and its modern relationship with its former colonies, or the Commonwealth. The latter is considered by many historians as the modern British Empire. The Commonwealth of Nations is a free association that includes former British dependencies as well as countries that have no link to British rule. Britain supports integration within this organization and values its relationship with the Commonwealth members. However, despite Britain's close relationship with the Commonwealth of Nations, the kingdom has a different relationship with Europe. Its reputation of being distant from Europe is well-known and this position was different from other European countries that had close relationships with each other. Britain's relationship with Europe came to an end when the Brexit happened and when the kingdom left the European Union in 2020. Hence, the British attitude towards Europe was not the same towards the Commonwealth of Nations. This creates a paradox that requires investigation. In order to understand this paradox, it is necessary to search deeper in British history and get familiar with what events took place in the past. Therefore, this chapter is a historical background which highlights and defines certain concepts like the history of Britain's isolation from Europe, Brexit, British exceptionalism, Euroscepticism, and the Commonwealth of Nations. This chapter aims to provide a background to this research and important information about key concepts in this dissertation.

## **1. The History of Britain's Isolation from Europe**

The United Kingdom and Europe have a different relationship from that of Europe and the rest of the European countries. Britain's attitude towards Europe during the 19th and early 20th century was mainly characterized by a policy of isolation, or as it was called by many a "splendid isolation". The latter is a term describing Britain's policy of diplomatic isolation from Europe between 1895 till 1902(Veldeman 41). During the 19th century, the UK was economically and politically thriving. It was the greatest naval power in the world, the first industrial power, and a powerful colonial power. This pushed Britain to choose isolation from Europe and refrain from forming alliances or having relationships with other powers (Veldeman 40).

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this research, Britain and the UK will be used interchangeably.

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Christopher Howard stated that Britain chose the policy of isolation, refused to be involved in any “entanglements” with others, and favored the freedom from such obligations (81). The country could go to war along European countries but only out of support not because of a signed commitment (Howard 81). Howard maintained that isolation may simply imply weakness or lack of allies and friendships with other countries (77). However, in Britain’s case, it meant power because it was a chosen isolation not an accidental one (79). On 26 February 1896, the first lord of the Admiralty Viscount Goschen said in a speech at Lewes:

There are two kinds of isolation. There may be the isolation of those who are weak and who therefore are not courted because they can contribute nothing, and there is, in the other hand, the isolation of those who do not wish to be entangled in any complications and will therefore hold themselves free in every respect... Our isolation is not an isolation of weakness, or of contempt for ourselves; it is deliberately chosen, the freedom to act as we choose in any circumstances that may arise. (Qtd in. Howard 80)

What Goschen meant by these words is that Britain preferred to be isolated from Europe and was not forced to do so. This means that Britain was powerful enough to choose isolation over a close relationship with European countries. There was a time when Britain signed some treaties with some European countries, however, the country isolated itself from them (Howard 83). Britain was bound by these treaties like many European countries. The reason behind helping Europeans despite its isolation was because Britain had signed certain treaties in the past which included commitments and guarantees towards some European countries.

Howard mentioned one example of this, the treaty signed in 1855, which Britain signed with France and Sweden (84). In the treaty, Britain was obliged to help in defending Swedish lands against Russia (Howard 84). However, despite these binding treaties, Britain kept its distance and isolation from Europe (Howard 86). Even with the existence of alliances later, Britain did not belong to any and it kept its distance from its European neighbors (Howard 86).

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### **1.1. Reasons behind Isolation**

Britain had many reasons behind its isolation from Europe. The British Empire is one of the main reasons that made Britain choose the path of isolation. Marie Christine Veldeman stated that Britain was a powerful colonial power and had the largest empire in the world (39). The latter had been described as “the empire on which the sun never set” (Veldeman 39). This empire made Britain a global power, which allowed the country to rely on it heavily and ignore Europe for some time. Therefore, the British political leaders favored isolation.

Howard stated that many British politicians were against the idea of alliances (82). Sam Wilson added that Britain’s geographical position as an island and its imperial past were factors that contributed to its isolation from Europe (“Britain and the EU”, BBC News). Britain has lived in isolation protected by its Navy and by relying on its Empire (“Britain and the EU”, Wilson, BBC News).

Veldeman argued that the history of Britain and Europe’s relationship was characterized by a focus on global market rather than Europe, British victory in two world wars, as well as Britain’s negative attitude towards Europe as a result of two world wars and unstable relationships (49). Britain has always been different from the rest of Europe and this pushed it to choose isolation. Even when the kingdom decided to join Europe, it was for the sake of its own interests (Veldeman 55).

### **1.2. Allied but Isolated**

Britain thrived in its isolation; nevertheless, this situation did not last long. Veldeman argued that, in the 20th century, Britain had to come out of its isolation because of the European threat (42). Germany, Russia, and France had threatened its power because they were gradually developing and had more power than before (Veldeman 42). Germany was Britain’s competitor, and the latter feared that the former would dominate Europe (Crozier 14). Hence, Britain started considering the idea of forming alliances. This was merely a strategic idea which served British interests of protecting its empire and having more power (Veldeman 43).

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World War I meant that Britain was not completely isolated from Europe because it formed alliances like the Triple Entente (Veldeman 44). However, despite fighting along its allies, Britain was not fully committed to them. Because once the war was over, it went mainly focusing on its empire rather than on Europe. In fact, the kingdom had isolated itself once again (Veldeman 45). Britain's fear of the German power characterized the British fear of European integration (Crozier 15).

Veldeman stated that the only commitment which Britain had towards Europe was its attempt to calm down Germany by revising the terms of the Treaty of Versailles (46). Then, when World War II started, Britain allied with France and other central and eastern European countries to fight against Germany. Nonetheless, this alliance did not last long because Britain was left alone to fight Germany, and this made it lose interest in a federal Europe (Veldeman 46). As a result, when the war ended, Britain prioritized its relationship with the USA through the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949 and the policy of Atlanticism<sup>2</sup>. Britain was once again isolated from Europe and was reluctant towards European integration.

### **1.3. Joining the EEC and Britain's Membership**

Veldeman maintained that Britain did not join the European Economic Community (EEC) when it was first created in 1957 (48). This came as a result of its perception of itself as a global power (Veldeman 48). In addition, Britain prioritized strengthening its ties with the Empire and the Commonwealth rather than Europe (Veldeman 48). However, the 1960s were different because British hostility towards Europe started to fade. Its economic decline and the prosperity of the European Community urged Britain to join the EEC (Veldeman 48). This shows that Britain joined Europe because of its economic interests. This was a strategic move to serve British interests, because Britain did not share the same European ideal as the other members did (Veldeman 48). Nonetheless, Veldeman stated that Britain's entry to the EEC was a special one.

The British attempts to join the EEC were vetoed by the French president Charles De Gaulle in 1961 and 1967 (Veldeman 48). The kingdom was not able to join the community until 1973 when De Gaulle was out of presidency (Veldeman 48). Despite membership of the EEC, most of the British population as well as members of the dominant political parties were

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<sup>2</sup> Atlanticism: is an approach of military collaboration between European countries and the USA ("Atlanticism", Merriam-Webster).

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against the idea of European integration; and the British Political leaders did nothing to make Britain's relationship with Europe any better (Veldeman 49). The governments of Margaret Thatcher<sup>3</sup> and John Major<sup>4</sup> are examples of this. Initially, Thatcher was in favor of European integration (Veldeman 49). Then, she showed hostility against the idea of a federal Europe and was against the idea of more integration (Veldeman 50). Britain was not a signatory of the Schengen agreement<sup>5</sup> nor did it adopt the single currency during its membership (Veldeman 51).

This demonstrates that in spite of its membership in the EEC, Britain favored isolation from Europe. The government of John Major had similar attitudes towards Europe. He opted out of a Social Chapter and the Economic and Monetary Union (Veldeman 51). Also, the Maastricht Treaty<sup>6</sup> that created the European Union was signed in 1992, but it was not signed by Britain until 1993 (Veldeman 51). Veldeman stated that, during this period, Euroscepticism was growing within the Conservative Party (51). Veldeman added that Eurosceptics attacked the European Union (EU) and blamed it for limiting Britain's freedom in the global context and for forcing integration which the kingdom was not a fan of (51). Veldeman argued that the British leaders have always prioritized national interests over European interests (53) by protecting national sovereignty and national identity (Veldeman 56).

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Thatcher: a former British Prime Minister (1979- 1990). She was a Conservative Party politician and the first female prime minister in Europe ("Margaret Thatcher", Young, Britannica).

<sup>4</sup> John Major: a British prime minister from 1990 to 1997. He was a politician from the Conservative Party and a public official ("John Major", Britannica).

<sup>5</sup> Schengen Agreement: a universal agreement that was first signed by Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands in 1985 in Schengen, Luxembourg. The purpose of this agreement was to allow free movement of people within the Schengen area and decrease the level of border controls ("Schengen agreement", Ray, Britannica).

<sup>6</sup> Maastricht Treaty: commonly known as the Treaty on European Union. It is an intercontinental agreement signed by the leaders of the countries of the European Community in 1991 in Maastricht, Netherlands. This treaty formed a European Union (EU) and introduced many things such as the Euro, which is the common currency of the EU ("Maastricht Treaty", Britannica).

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### 2. Brexit

The term Brexit can be simply defined as the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU, which followed the 2016 referendum as well as several negotiations between the kingdom and the union. However, this was not a simple event. Tim Oliver stated that Brexit marked a turning point in Britain's history (Ch.01 p.01). He added that this is not just one event, but more specifically a series of events which involved many people and took place in Britain, Europe, and the rest of the world (Ch.01 p.01). This word is a compound noun which came to be formed through mixing together two words "Britain" and "exit" (Oliver Ch.01 p.07).

Oliver considered the word Brexit inaccurate, because the UK is the one leaving the EU not Britain, which is a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Ch.01 p.07). The word Brexit was first used in 2012 to refer to Britain's potential exit from the EU. It was inspired from the term "Grexit" which means the possible exit of Greece from the Eurozone (Wallwork Ch.01 p.13). Nicholas Wallwork stated that the results of the 2016 referendum were shocking to the entire world, and that Europe had been the most divisive issue in Britain (Ch.01 p.07). As a result of these divisions, the Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron<sup>7</sup> had first promised the British people a referendum on EU membership in January 2013, during his famous "Bloomberg speech"<sup>8</sup> (Clarke et al. Ch.01 p.02). After the general election of 2015, the Conservative Party demanded to negotiate with the EU about a new arrangement, after which it would proceed to hold a "leave or remain" referendum (Clarke et al. Ch.01 p.02).

Finn Laursen argued that the Brexit referendum divided the country into two: the leave and remain campaigners, i.e. between those who used sovereignty, money, immigration as arguments to leave the EU and those who used economic arguments to remain in the union (42). Laursen stated that the referendum took place in June 2016, and the results were 51.9

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<sup>7</sup>David Cameron: a former British Prime Minister from 2010 until 2016. He was a leader of a Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2015) who became a Prime Minister of a Conservative government in May 2015 ("The Rt Hon David Cameron", GOV.UK).

<sup>8</sup> Bloomberg speech: a speech given by the former Prime Minister David Cameron at Bloomberg, in 2013, for the purpose of discussing the future of Europe and the European Union ("EU speech at Bloomberg", GOV.UK).



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percent of British voters voted to leave the EU, while 48 percent voted to remain (43). Which initiated the negotiation of a withdrawal agreement (45). Finally, on 31 st January 2020, Britain officially left the EU (Laursen 63).

### **2.1. Reasons behind Brexit**

Wallwork provided some reasons why people wanted the UK out of the EU. The first reason is financial contributions to the EU (Wallwork Ch.02 p.34). Eurosceptics think that Britain gave more to the EU than it received. However, Wallwork stated that the UK is one of the biggest contributors in the EU because it is one of the rich countries of Europe (Ch.02 p.35). This does not mean that the UK did not benefit from the EU, on the contrary, it benefited from trade within the EU and an increased flow of investment (Wallwork ch.02 p.35).

The second reason why people wanted Britain to leave the EU is the free movement of people (Wallwork Ch.02 p.36). The public opinion was against immigration from Europe due to the influence of Eurosceptic political parties. Wallwork stated that the British people felt that European immigrants were only coming to the UK for the benefits which the country provided (Ch.02 p.36), and that they were stealing their jobs (Ch.02 p.37). But Wallwork explained that immigrants were paying more taxes than they were receiving in return (Ch.02 p.37). In the same vein, both of Robert Holland, Adrian Favell and Roxana Barbulescu mentioned that immigration was claimed to be a key reason for Brexit by the leavers. Holland argued that, reducing immigration from Europe meant that the UK would receive more culturally diverse immigrants from around the world. This means that the UK would become more culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse than before (Habermann 35).

Favel and Barbulescu discussed how the United Kingdom Independence Party<sup>9</sup> (UKIP) has always seen immigration as a threat (Diamond et al. 118) especially to Britain's sovereignty (Diamond et al. 119). Nevertheless, Favel and Barbulescu stated that this was exaggerated. European immigrants were mostly professional, highly skilled and educated people (Diamond et al. 120). Favell and Barbulescu explained that the idea of "mass

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<sup>9</sup>United Kingdom Independence Party: a British political party that was created in 1993. It adopts a populist libertarian ideology which is based on the British withdrawal from the European Union ("United Kingdom Independence Party", Ray, Britannica).

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immigration” was used to arouse fear and concern in the British public. Therefore, they concluded that public concerns about immigration were a reason behind Brexit (Diamond et al. 120).

Another reason for leaving the EU is the issue of trade that the UK imports from the EU more than it exports to the EU. This heavy reliance on the EU presented a problem to most people (Wallwork Ch.02 p.37). The last and most important reason is UK’s sovereignty. Wallwork argued that with more power in the hands of the EU, Eurosceptics believed that the public never voted for a federal Europe (Wallwork Ch.02 p.38).

Robert Holland also discussed key reasons for Brexit. He believed that the main reason was deeply rooted in British mentalities. Holland stated that it was the sense that the UK was being intruded. British public opinion concluded that the UK’s membership in the EU meant a loss of control over its own sovereignty and that it needed to take back control (Habermann 30). This belief was the core of Brexit (Habermann 30). Holland also argued that the reason behind Brexit is that Europe had created divisions within British political parties (Habermann 32). Holland added that Brexit can be explained by its geographical position as a country situated on the edge of the European continent, its difficult experiences in wars, its history with European rivals, its imperial history, and nativism (Habermann 22). Holland explained that Brexit campaigners claimed that leaving the EU would allow the UK to be a globalist country (Habermann 22).

Ina Habermann provided a different justification for Brexit. She argued that most of people’s anger towards the EU was cultural, political and historical despite the fact that the EU is a political and economic organization (Habermann 02). As Robert Eaglestone said:

Brexit is not only political, economic and administrative: perhaps most significantly it is an event in culture, too. Brexit grew from cultural beliefs, real or imaginary, about Europe and the UK; the arguments before, during and after the referendum were- and are- arguments about culture; its impact on the cultural life of these islands may last for generations. (Qtd in. Habermann pp.02-03).

Meanwhile, John Macejka believed that Britain’s ability to leave the EU is rooted in British exceptionalism (07). He suggested that the latter is the reason behind the Brexit (Macejka 08). Macejka maintained that British exceptionalism explains why Brexit was

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a good idea to the British (09). Kevin O'Rourke argued that some provide an economic explanation for it, while others give a cultural explanation (Ch.09 p.02). O'Rourke stated that the former see it as a result of globalization, technological development, or some damaging economic factors. The latter consider it as a result of racism, nationalism, xenophobia, and more forms of cultural conservatism (Ch.09 p.02). O'Rourke also mentioned Anglo-centric explanations for Brexit, like British Eurosceptics (Ch.09 p.03). However, Oliver suggested that Brexit can be traced back to the history of relations between the EU and the UK (Ch.01 p.08).

### **2.2. The European Union and the UK**

As it was mentioned previously, the UK entered the European Union or the EEC late. According to Oliver, during its membership, Britain was described as an awkward partner, and this proved that Brexit was inevitable (Ch.02 p.31). The UK was always skeptical of European integration and this is clearly demonstrated in its rejection of many decisions made by the EU and its opt-outs of several policies. When it became a member of the EEC, Britain was called the two-faced European and an awkward partner throughout its membership in the EU (Oliver Ch.02 p.31). It struggled to fit in the EU since it was giving more money than receiving it (Oliver ch.02 p.34). Then, the first referendum was held in 1975 to discuss Britain's membership in the EEC. Holland believed that the UK had a delayed entry to the European Community, and its membership was encouraged by the USA (Habermann 24).

Robert Holland added that this sentiment did not go unnoticed by the other European countries and the problems of integration were at the heart of the Treaty of Rome<sup>10</sup>. The UK was not included because it had excluded itself from any European integration. The former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan applied to sign the Treaty of Rome in 1961, but, it was only until 1973 that the UK was able to join the EEC (Habermann 25). Holland mentioned that this membership helped the British government to deal with the challenges facing social and economic reform. The UK was able to reform its economy and society despite all the strikes and pressure from labor unions (Habermann 27).

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<sup>10</sup>Treaty of Rome: a treaty that founded the European Economic Community which was signed in 1957, in Rome, Italy ("Treaty of Rome", European Parliament).

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The Maastricht Treaty that created the European Union was signed in 1992, but it was not signed by Britain until 1993 (Veldeman 51). Since then, Britain was a member of the EU and enjoyed many opt-outs from the EU policies. The country also vetoed many EU decisions, which led to the Brexit.

### **3. British Exceptionalism**

Andrew J. Crozier stated that British exceptionalism goes back to attitudes which existed before and after the Napoleonic wars<sup>11</sup> (10). He added that this exceptionalism was reinforced by the British Empire, and Britain's victory in two world wars (10). Despite the weakened state of The UK after its involvement in the wars, and the loss of its imperial power (Crozier 10), British superiority and exceptionalism did not decrease (Crozier 22).

Ros Taylor maintained that British exceptionalism goes back to several centuries ago and it has adapted to different policies (01). It came to being as a result of Britain's demand of the freedom to do what it wanted without any control in Europe in order to practice free trade through imperialism<sup>12</sup> in the 19th and 20th century (Ros 01). Srjdan Vucetic stated that this policy was chosen by the British elites in order to free up Britain's resources for building its empire as well as free trade. He added that they justified this policy by speaking about Britain's uniqueness, and claiming that Britain is not just another European country ("In Search of British Exceptionalism", Vucetic, E- International Relations).

Peter Nedergaard and Maja Friis Henriksen stated that the UK has always had a tendency to do things differently or go through a different direction than the majority (Diamond et al. 134). Nedergaard and Henriksen added that British exceptionalism was expressed by the French President Charles De Gaulle in 1963 when he rejected Britain's membership in the EEC (Diamond et al. 135). Also, Andrew Glencross explained that British

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<sup>11</sup>Napoleonic Wars: a number of wars between France and other European countries that ended up with French dominance of the majority of the European continent. These wars lasted for a period of 23 years which ended in 1815 ("Napoleonic Wars", Britannica).

<sup>12</sup>Imperialism: an act or policy of extending dominance and control of one country over another, whether directly through colonization, or indirectly through taking political and economic control of other countries ("Imperialism", Britannica).

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exceptionalism is manifested in the four decades long debate over EU membership or the “neverendum” (03).

He added that the special aspect of Britain’s stance is that British politicians publicly talk about the possibility of leaving the EU (Glencross 04). Macejka argued that Britain is the exception of Europe. He explained that Britain’s historical colonial and financial domination and its superiority in Europe gave the British people the sense of being the only European exception (Macejka 01). In the same vein, Fredrick Cowell argued that British exceptionalism is rooted in British history, that it reflects a post-imperial mentality and a belief in British superiority (18).

### **3.1. Examples of British Exceptionalism**

Nedergaard and Henriksen provided some examples of British exceptionalism. The first is the common law<sup>13</sup> system which is a different legal system than the European one (Diamond et al. 135). The second example is Britain’s decentralization of power<sup>14</sup>. The country has a power sharing system that forbids putting absolute power in one area of the government (Diamond et al. 137). Having no written constitution<sup>15</sup> also makes the UK distinct from the other European countries (Diamond et al. 141). Another example is the British Parliament<sup>16</sup> which remains an exceptional one with its characteristics that are distinct from those of the European Parliament.

Nedergaard and Henriksen also stated that Britain is exceptional due to its focus on its navy and overseas unlike the other European countries which were focused on their armies. It had always prioritized its navy even when it had a powerful army (Diamond et al. 137).

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<sup>13</sup>Common law: is the core of customary law, based on judgments and incorporated in reports of decided cases which have been managed by the common-law courts of England since the Middle Ages. The legal system of the USA and the majority of the Commonwealth countries was derived from this (“Common law”, Kiralfy et. al, Britannica).

<sup>14</sup>Decentralization of power: it means distributing power and putting it in different areas of the government (“Decentralization”, Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

<sup>15</sup>Unwritten constitution: The UK constitution comprises of the regulations that constitute the government institutions, manage the relations between such institutions, or administer the relationship between the government and the people. Such laws are not organized in one written document (Political and Constitutional Reform Committee 05).

<sup>16</sup>British Parliament: is the legislative branch of government of the United Kingdom. It is a law maker body which is comprised of two houses, the House of Lords and the House of Commons (“Parliament”, Britannica).

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Another example of British exceptionalism is prioritizing property rights and individual rights in the Parliament rather than in a constitution, which provides flexibility to the parliament (Diamond et al. 138). The industrial revolution is also an important example of British exceptionalism. Nedergaard and Henriksen explained that it first occurred in England in the late 18th century- early 19th century. They added that this revolution affected British society from all aspects (Diamond et al. 139).

Through the years, the UK gradually granted voting rights for its citizens. Nedergaard and Henriksen mentioned that this slow introduction of democracy is peculiar to the UK, because the rest of Europe had witnessed drastic changes when they decided to take the path of democracy (Diamond et al. 140). Nedergaard and Henriksen added that fighting and winning two world wars also made the UK exceptional in Europe (Diamond et al. 140). A significant example of British exceptionalism mentioned by Nedergaard and Henriksen is the British Empire and its peaceful dismantling which happened as a result to giving the countries their independence. This makes Britain unique from the rest of Europe (Diamond et al. 141). Finally, Nedergaard and Henriksen mentioned Neoliberalism<sup>17</sup> as an example of British exceptionalism. It was introduced by Margret Thatcher and implemented in her government. The UK benefitted from it because it had increased its economic growth (Diamond et al. 141).

In addition to this, Crozier mentioned what Castlereagh said as a manifestation of British exceptionalism. Castlereagh explained the British stance and said: “the fact is that we do not feel and cannot feel alike on all subjects. Our position, our institutions, the habits of thinking and the prejudice of our people, render us essentially different.” (Qtd in. Crozier p.02). This demonstrates how British people feel exceptional and different from the rest of Europe. It also shows their sense of British exceptionalism and superiority.

Crozier mentioned another manifestation of British exceptionalism which was during the reign of King Henry VIII<sup>18</sup>, when Britain rejected papal domination (03). The phenomenon of

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<sup>17</sup>Neoliberalism: a philosophy that prioritizes the importance of competition in the free market. Neoliberalism is defined by the principle that considers economic development as the way to achieve human development, its trust in free markets, the importance of minimum government interference in economic and social issues, and its focus on the freedom of trade (“Neoliberalism”, Smith, Britannica).

<sup>18</sup>King Henry VIII: was the king of England from 1509 until 1547 and belonged to the House of Tudor. His reign was characterized by the start of the English Renaissance and English Reformation (“Henry VIII”, Morrill et al, Britannica).

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British exceptionalism had a significant role in shaping the British attitude towards Europe and the EU from 1950s onward (Crozier 19). Macejka believed that splendid isolation is an example of British exceptionalism. This isolation gave rise to a country that is culturally and economically different from the rest of the European countries (Macejka 02).

### **4. Euroscepticism**

David Baker and Pauline Shnapper stated that the term Euroscepticism was invented in the 1980s, to refer to Margret Thatcher's attitude towards the European Community. Then it was used to describe the Conservative Party's anti-European wing when it opposed the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (61). Baker and Shnapper suggested that Euroscepticism is related to Europhobia, which is complete opposition towards European integration due to different political, economic, social, or cultural reasons (62). Euroscepticism is a term used to depict individuals who are skeptical of European integration or are against it ("Euroscepticism", European Center for Populism Studies).

Michael Ray defined Euroscepticism as a European political belief that supports withdrawal from the European Union ("Euroscepticism", Britannica). He added that Eurosceptic political parties are generally in favor of immigration controls and the dismantling of the EU structure ("Euroscepticism", Ray, Britannica). Euroscepticism became popular after the Maastricht Treaty was signed. Gradually, this policy became the main ideology of the European political parties ("Euroscepticism", European Center for Populism Studies).

#### **4.1. Euroscepticism in Political Parties**

Euroscepticism appears in all political parties be they conservative (right wing) or radical (left wing). The latter are focused on economic problems while the former generally focus on issues like nationalism<sup>19</sup> and immigration ("Euroscepticism", European Center for Populism Studies). Ray stated that Euroscepticism has always existed among British public, and they have not been optimistic about Britain's membership in the EU ("Euroscepticism", Britannica). According to Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, Euroscepticism moved from

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<sup>19</sup>Nationalism: a belief founded on the assumption that the allegiance of a single person to the country is superior to any other interests ("Nationalism", Kohn, Britannica).

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being scepticism about economic integration to concerns about national identity after the Maastricht Treaty (04). Most of the main European political parties, chiefly British and Scandinavian, are Eurosceptic and mainly defend their national interests (Hooghe and Marks 04).

Hooghe and Marks also argued that Britain is characterized by its national, cultural, and economic opposition towards European integration (04). They maintained that British mainstream political parties have become home for Euroscepticism (Hooghe and Marks 04). Since the early 1970s, the latter has only existed within the Labor Party; however, it emerged in the Conservative Party<sup>20</sup> around the 1980s (Hooghe and Marks 04). Euroscepticism in Britain was more about concerns over identity than economy (Hooghe and Marks 04). Finally, according to Lauren McLaren, Euroscepticism is motivated by cultural threat, economic concerns, and institutional distrust (Hooghe and Marks 05).

### **4.2. Hard and Soft Euroscepticism**

Euroscepticism is twofold, hard and soft, and European parties are divided into hard and soft Eurosceptics (“Euroscepticism”, European Center for Populism Studies). Ray suggested that Hard Eurosceptics oppose European integration completely and prefer withdrawal from the EU (“Euroscepticism”, Britannica). They advocate withdrawal from the EU (“Euroscepticism”, European Center for Populism Studies). Hard Eurosceptics have a tendency to view Europe according to their ideology and values (Baker and Shnapper 63). Michael Ray provided one example of hard Eurosceptics which is the United Kingdom’s Independence Party. It became a popular and a successful hard Eurosceptic party which advocated anti-immigration and the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. Despite the fact that UKIP is not among the main political parties of the UK, its Euroscepticism received support from the Conservative Party.

On the other hand, soft Eurosceptics support European integration under certain conditions but qualify it according to political, ideological, ethnic or geographic lines.

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<sup>20</sup>Conservative Party: a British political party that is one of the two dominant parties in the United Kingdom. Its governing principles consist of encouraging personal property and business, preserving a powerful army, as well as maintaining traditional cultural principles and establishments (“Conservative Party”, Webb et. al, Britannica).



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Examples of soft Eurosceptic parties are the Northern League<sup>21</sup> of Italy, National Front<sup>22</sup> of France, and the Dutch Party for Freedom<sup>23</sup>. Ray maintained that Eurosceptic parties across Europe took Britain's withdrawal from the EU as an opportunity to hold referendums in their own countries in order to discuss membership of the EU ("Euroscepticism", Britannica).

### **5. The Commonwealth of Nations**

The Commonwealth is a free association that includes the United Kingdom and former British dependencies, as well as countries that have no link to British former colonial rule. Its members are 56 independent countries which come from all over the world and they gather for the sake of their shared interests concerning economy, society, culture, politics, and peace. These countries come from all over the world, from Asia, Africa, the Pacific, the United States of America, and Europe ("The Commonwealth", TheCommonwealth.org). Saul Dubow and Richard Drayton stated that the Commonwealth emerged in the 1880s, when the initial meetings of colonial prime ministers were held (08). It was later reformulated due to the First and Second World War, when it became more important as an international association (Dubow and Drayton 08).

According to Britannica, the Commonwealth of Nations or the Commonwealth was previously known as the British Commonwealth of Nations (1931-1949). The British former colonies decided to keep a friendly relationship with the UK and they recognized the British monarch as the leader of their organization. The Commonwealth was an outcome of the British Empire. Because the empire applied the system of "responsible government", in which the colonies were self-governing but still dependent on the British Crown. After getting their independence, many countries became members of the Commonwealth ("The Commonwealth", Britannica). Dubow and Drayton added that, since 1949, the

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<sup>21</sup> Northern League: a political party in Italy commonly known as Lega Nord. It is a soft Eurosceptic party. It supports the establishment of a new government which would consist of Italy's rich northern regions and the use of the lira ("The League", Britannica).

<sup>22</sup> National Front: National Rally is a French political party created in 1972 by François Duprat and François Brigneau. An extremely Conservative party which promoted French nationalism and limiting immigration ("National Rally", Ray, Britannica).

<sup>23</sup> Party for Freedom: a Dutch political party which is known as PVV or Partijvoor de Vrijheid. It is famous for supporting policies that are against immigration and Islam ("Party for Freedom", Britannica).

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Commonwealth was transformed from consisting of merely White Dominions to an international organization which consisted of several independent countries (08).

Helen Canton stated that the Commonwealth does not have a central government nor any binding rules or obligations (498). This organization is characterized by its lack of a formal constitution, no legal obligation between members, and they are led by their shared interests, traditions, and institutions (“The Commonwealth”, Britannica). Furthermore, Hedley Bull stated that the members of the Commonwealth have shared experiences and history with each other (581). He explained that they have inherited some institutions from the British Empire and have economic, military and cultural interests in common (Bull 581).

Bull suggested that the purpose of the Commonwealth is to be an exemplary of race relations and to help develop underdeveloped countries (582). It is a symbol of the British Empire, which despite the Commonwealth countries’ independence, many of them feel mostly British (Bull 582). Bull argued that the Commonwealth is more important to the British government than to its members (583). He believed that Britain is mainly interested in maintaining this organization because it allowed the British to keep their image of being the most powerful country in the world (Bull 583). Bull maintained that the Commonwealth's main tenet was always present within the empire, and the latter had prepared for the Commonwealth (586). Bull suggested that this association serves as a justification for colonial rule to the world, as well as a proof of the willingness of Britain’s former colonies to remain under its rule (586).

### **5.1. The Old and the New Commonwealth**

Eva Namusoke stated that there are two Commonwealths. The Old Commonwealth as in ‘White Dominions’, and the New Commonwealth, which is composed of White Dominions and the rest of the commonwealth (Namusoke 464). The old commonwealth is made up of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, while the new Commonwealth includes the rest of the countries besides the Old Commonwealth. Alexander Brady stated that after the Second World War, the Commonwealth has changed drastically. It has no written constitution, little political institutions which belong to it, and hardly any written goals (Brady 62). Brady maintained that Nationalism had different forms in the old Commonwealth and the new Commonwealth (66).

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The old Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) inherited British political and cultural features to a great extent. These countries felt mostly British and the development of self-government in such areas did not weaken the political relationship with one another or with the mother country (Brady 66). Before 1939, the Commonwealth was united by the feelings of nationality related to institutional forms of British tradition. The sense of union between the self-governing states kept its form because they believed that their political freedom required their cooperation (Brady 66). Before WWII, the Commonwealth was characterized by a strong feeling of unity which was mainly based on attachment to Britain rather than to the Commonwealth. New Zealand witnessed this in greater amount because all forms of its culture were linked to that of Britain (Brady 67).

### **5.2. Comparison between the New and Old Commonwealth**

Brady stated that the New Commonwealth has kept few principles of the old Commonwealth. He discussed similarities and differences between the Old and New Commonwealth (67). Brady explained that the former's members follow the same political system, take cases to parliamentary establishments, seek the opinion of each other concerning their common interests, and work together when needed (67). Despite these similarities, Brady maintained that the New Commonwealth is more different. He explained that it has transformed from being only multi-national<sup>24</sup> to being multicultural<sup>25</sup> as a result of the new membership of Asian and African states (Brady 67). The Post-War Commonwealth consists of countries which have different political systems than the British one, and membership is now allowed without the condition of having loyalty to the Crown (Brady 67). The New Commonwealth has also less absolute control, is less closely joined, and overall is less committed to the idea of an association of people who share the same opinions (Brady 67). It also includes countries that do not get along like India and Pakistan, which became members despite their conflict over lands.

The Commonwealth is no longer active in defense, and the notion of having a shared policy of defense has almost disappeared (Brady 67). Its members can be neutral during wartime as well as peacetime (Brady 67). However, Brady stated that the British influence has

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<sup>24</sup> Multi-national: a term that refers to more than two states (“Multinational”, Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

<sup>25</sup> Multicultural: a word that means different cultures (“Multicultural”, Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

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not disappeared in the commonwealth (68). All members prefer to take advice from Britain and work with the kingdom due to its past experience in wars (Brady 68). Apart from the British political legacy, Brady added that the members of the Commonwealth share economic interests (68). The British Empire was a commercial power and this led to the establishment of strong economic ties between the mother country and its colonies, which still exist despite getting their independence (Brady 68). Most of Commonwealth trade is conducted within the organization itself, and the majority of it is between the countries and Britain more than between the members themselves (Brady 68). Raw materials as well as food are sent in large amounts from the Commonwealth States to Britain (Brady 68). This demonstrates why these ties between Britain and the Commonwealth are important (Brady 69).

However, Brady stated that Canada is different from the rest of the members because it has more economic ties with the USA than with Britain or the Commonwealth (69). In addition to economic benefits, Brady maintained that the Commonwealth has political advantages. After the Second World War, every country realized that it needed the aid of others when necessary, and that no country was powerful enough to stand alone (Brady 70). Britain's power and global influence could help the members politically and provide protection for them. Brady suggested that the members' ability to have closer ties, and benefit from this economically and politically without much commitment, distinguish the Commonwealth from any other association (71).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter has provided a brief historical background and a context in which the topic of this dissertation takes place. It discussed the history of Britain's isolation from Europe as well as basic concepts which are essential to this dissertation such as the Brexit, British exceptionalism, Euroscepticism, and the Commonwealth. Each concept has been defined and provided with the necessary information as well as with its historical context. This is done in order to understand what will come in the following chapters. This chapter has dealt with concepts that are linked and necessary for this dissertation. They are also connected with the remaining chapters. Therefore, the next chapter will be about the Commonwealth.

### **Introduction**

As it was mentioned in the first chapter, the Commonwealth witnessed a transition from being a British Empire in the past to being an organization of former British colonies. Such transition proved to the world that former colonies and a former colonial power can live in peace. The number of the countries that make up the Commonwealth make up one third of the world's population, meaning that cultural diversity is inevitable in this association. This diversity and multiplicity of countries provides the stage for a rich cultural diversity which is characterized by different languages, traditions, and religions. Cultural diversity affects every place in the world and it is what makes up our world. The Commonwealth of Nations is a good example of cultural diversity and tolerance of such diversity. This association is an example of culturally diverse communities that have distinct cultures and co-exist within one organization. The Commonwealth is not only characterized by its geographical diversity but also by its cultural diversity. Therefore, this chapter deals with the Commonwealth of Nations and cultural diversity. It sheds light on cultural diversity as well as the Commonwealth of Nations, the link between them, the history of this association and its culture, forms of cultural diversity in the Commonwealth, the role of Britain in embracing cultural diversity in the association, and the reasons behind it. This chapter aims to provide an insight on cultural diversity and its link with the Commonwealth of Nations.

### **1. Definition of Culture**

Culture is a complex term that cannot be easily defined due to its fluidity. The meaning of this word changes through time and is never stable. Culture exists where humans exist, and one cannot find culture without humans. Many scholars have defined culture and have provided us with different perspectives of culture. T.S. Eliot argued that the meaning of the word "culture" differs according to what we refer to and whether we take into consideration the development of a single person, a group, or a society (01). Eliot believed that culture is composed of these three aspects. He added that an individual's culture depends on the culture of the group, and the latter is dependent on the culture of the entire society to which the group belongs (01).

An individual's culture cannot be separated from the culture of the group and the latter cannot be separated from the culture of the society, and the ideal way would be taking into consideration all of the three aspects of culture (Eliot 04). Culture can only be achieved if

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groups who are involved with a certain activity of culture share similar interests, and cooperate(05).

Eliot also discussed the fact that culture and religion influence each other and cannot be separated from each other. He argued that culture may influence the development of religion or vice versa (10). Culture is the embodiment of a religion of a community (11).

On the other hand, Birukou et al. suggested that culture is a changeable concept. They believed that culture is acquired, belongs to groups of human beings, and its meaning covers a vast range of facts such as standards, principles, common meanings, and repetitive means of behavior (03). Birukou et al. added that many definitions share the fact that culture is made up of something that is common and/or learned by a group of individuals. However, its meaning differs from one definition to another (04). Birukou et al. suggested that the content of culture is a series of traits that may be associated with behavior, facts, concepts, beliefs, standards...etc (04). They explained that a group's culture is the consequence of the people being part of that group. But, different groups can have cultures in common to a certain degree (09).

Christoph Brumann also provided a definition of culture. He defined it as the people's ability to share particular non-intrinsically inherited ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with other human beings who they are in social contact with (06). Brumann also provided a specific definition of culture which explains it as the series of certain learned patterns that are peculiar to a specific group of individuals who are implicitly or explicitly included (06). Brumann added that cultures are constantly constructed, and that they may have no real boundaries except those that human beings assign to them (06). To conclude, culture is what a group of people share and it is distinct as it varies from one place to another. It is something that defines people and where they come from. Culture constructs and shapes the identity of a certain group of people.

### **1.1. Aspects of Culture**

Culture is characterized by some aspects or features, and these vary from one culture to another. Every culture has its own distinct elements which constitute its identity and differentiate it from other cultures. These elements characterize a particular group of people, vary from one group to another, and form their distinct way of life. Austin Valenzuela stated that cultures have aspects that are represented in distinct ways, and that such distinctions

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differentiate between cultures allowing people to have different ways to co-exist. Valenzuela also mentioned that elements of culture are: symbols, languages, norms, beliefs, and principles (“Elements of culture”, Valenzuela, Study.com).

Symbols are found in every culture and are things that represent something other than its real meaning. People who belong to a certain culture can associate an object, sound, image, or gesture with a particular meaning. These symbols vary from one culture to another. A second aspect of culture is language. Language is the specific way of communication people use with each other and it differs from one group of people to another. It allows people to share their thoughts and communicate with each other freely. Valenzuela also mentioned norms as an important aspect of culture. He stated that they are the standards according to which people of a certain culture live. Every culture has its own norms that each individual respect and live by. The final aspect of culture mentioned by Valenzuela is values and beliefs. He stated that cultural values are principles and beliefs shared by a specific culture. These values influence a culture’s worldview and affect the way its people live (“Elements of culture”, Valenzuela, Study.com).

### **2. Definition of Cultural Diversity**

The world is made up of multiple cultures that exist in societies and that is named cultural diversity. Cultural diversity means the existence of several cultures that are different from each other and the recognition of this difference as well as the acceptance of it among the individuals living in a society. Cultural diversity involves ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language...etc (“What is cultural diversity”, deBara, Hourly). Caleb Rosado provided a definition for cultural diversity and says:

Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society (Rosado 02).

Diversity has to do with how people are different from each other and how such differences define them and distinguish them from each other. However, cultural diversity does not encourage separation or superiority of one group over the others. On the contrary,

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cultural diversity aims for accepting all differences and embracing them as well as celebrating them. It advocates for inclusion of all cultures.

Jaime Durison defined cultural diversity as acknowledging the existence of several cultures within one society, as well as accepting and respecting this diversity under all circumstances (“What is cultural diversity”, Study.com). He added that it is the belief that societies consist of different people who come from different ethnic backgrounds and have distinct cultures as well as traditions, values, and beliefs.

Durison maintained that in order for a society to be culturally diverse it has to embrace these elements of each of its individual cultures and work towards including these cultures in all important activities and events. Durison stated that cultural diversity is about inclusion not exclusion. It includes all cultures without exception and promotes for a diversified environment where people from different groups feel included, respected, and accepted in their society (“What is cultural diversity”, Durison, Study.com).

Richard T.Ashcroft and Mark Bevir stated in their book called Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth that cultural diversity can sometimes be named as multiculturalism (Ch.01. 01). They defined it as the different strategies that appeared after the Second World War to address social diversity (Ch.01. 01). They argued that it is impossible to provide one definition of multiculturalism because its meaning differs from one context to another (Ch.01. 02). Ashcroft and Bevir stated that the issue of managing the contact of different cultures became well known after WWII (06). They maintained that cultural diversity and awareness of it increased due to decolonization (Ch.01 06).

### **3. Cultural Diversity of the Commonwealth of Nations**

The Commonwealth of Nations is famously known for its cultural diversity, and this association takes pride in promoting and embracing its member’s cultural diversity. Ashcroft and Bevir stated that multiculturalism takes different forms in different Commonwealth countries, but, it mainly deals with the issue of managing diversity (Ch.01. 03). They maintained that politically, multiculturalism refers to immigration after WWII and the policies or laws made to facilitate it (Ch.01. 03). The Commonwealth is a suitable example of cultural diversity due to its rich cultural background.



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However, cultural diversity of the Commonwealth is a post-colonial phenomenon that is based on the assembly of different national cultures under the basis of equality (Natarajan 705). Meaning that, such cultural diversity was merely a product of decolonization. The Commonwealth was once called the British Commonwealth of Nations, and indeed it was as such (The Editors of Encyclopedia of Britannica). During colonization, every colony under the rule of Britain had only one culture, a British culture. Culturally speaking, the British Commonwealth was merely British during colonialism. Then, thanks to decolonization, the Commonwealth had multiple individual cultures that represented it. Therefore, a brief historical context is needed to fully understand this transition from a British culture to a diversity of cultures.

### **3.1. The History of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Culture**

When the British Empire came to its end, the British colonies were slowly gaining their independence. When these countries got their independence, they wanted to keep close ties with Britain; therefore, the Commonwealth of Nations was created (“Commonwealth”, Britannica). The Commonwealth members agreed on a free organization which accepted the British monarch as the leader of the Commonwealth (Kirby 42). The Commonwealth transitioned from having a British culture to being culturally diverse. It witnessed an evolution from a white dominion<sup>26</sup> to a multiracial and multicultural association (Cros 75).

Therefore, cultural diversity in the Commonwealth was a consequence of decolonization. During colonization, countries of the British Empire had one common culture, a British one. Their individual cultures were dismissed and subordinated while they were replaced by the British culture. However, after decolonization, these countries had the chance to represent their different cultures in the Commonwealth. Natarajan stated that Commonwealth multiculturalism came as a consequence of past colonial hierarchies; it acknowledged and legitimated the artistic production of the independent countries (707). Natarajan added that some states found it easy to create their forms of culture like Australia and India. However, other governments like Canada and Nigeria found it challenging due to internal diversity, which made the creation of postcolonial cultures difficult (Natarajan 707).

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<sup>26</sup>Dominion: refers to the status of every British Commonwealth country before 1939. These countries included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa, Eire, and Newfoundland (“Dominion”, Britannica).

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Culture in the Commonwealth is a difficult subject to be described precisely due to its largeness, complexity, and ongoing change. The national cultures of its member countries demonstrate the difficulty of viewing culture as being merely one culture. The existence of cultural diversity within these countries can diminish the idea of a “Commonwealth culture”. The diversity of cultures in the Commonwealth is demonstrated through the propagation of literature, art, music...etc between Commonwealth member states (The Round Table 107). The Commonwealth is seen as a mixture of several cultures and not one shared culture. There is not one Commonwealth culture because the diversity of cultures within this association cannot be ignored; in fact, it is what makes up the Commonwealth in itself (The Round Table 110).

To sum up, cultural diversity came as a result of decolonization. The latter gave rise to many individual cultures of each Commonwealth state and every country had its own culture with its unique customs and traditions. Such a cultural diversity defined the Commonwealth of Nations as a multi cultural association which embraced cultural diversity and operated to sustain as well as to preserve this diversity.

### **4. Forms of Cultural Diversity of the Commonwealth of Nations**

Cultural diversity of the Commonwealth is manifested in its traditions, arts, customs, and is celebrated in events like the Commonwealth Games and Commonwealth festivals. Cultural diversity is celebrated in the Commonwealth and is considered to be among the most important pillars of the Commonwealth of Nations.

#### **4.1. The Commonwealth Arts Festival of 1965**

After decolonization, Commonwealth countries had the chance to represent their different cultures and backgrounds. One means of representing this cultural diversity was the Commonwealth Arts Festival of 1965. This allowed Commonwealth members to demonstrate their postcolonial identities and cultures, and they proved that the Commonwealth is culturally diverse. Radhika Natarajan stated that the Commonwealth Arts Festival of 1965 was significant to post-colonial interaction between Britain and its former colonies (705). Britain held the festival for three weeks, in which artists, musicians, dancers, and writers from the Commonwealth of Nations represented their individual cultures (Natarajan 705). The latter provided a picture of a culturally diverse Commonwealth (Natarajan 705). This festival was a celebration of the Commonwealth, it was held in September 1965 in Britain, and it lasted three weeks (Natarajan 705).

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Artists from twenty four countries went to Britain for this festival. The Commonwealth members sponsored what was presented in the festival, from musical performance, visual art, poetry reading, and writers meetings...etc (Natarajan 705). The Commonwealth Arts Festival was an opportunity for international relationships (Natarajan 705). This festival validated national cultures of the Commonwealth members, and cultivated a Commonwealth multiculturalism which depended on equality and accepting differences (Natarajan 706).

This festival was an international as well as a post-imperial product; it was transnational because Commonwealth members had representatives who presented their cultures and showed their international stance (Natarajan 707). The festival allowed the independent countries of the Commonwealth to present their new individual cultures (Natarajan 707). The Commonwealth Arts Festival was organized and held for the purpose of demonstrating the power and unity of the Commonwealth in its cultural diversity (Natarajan 709). In addition to this, the purpose of bringing artists from the Old and New Commonwealth was to demonstrate an acceptance of differences; that there were different cultures in the Commonwealth but were all treated equally (Natarajan 709).

The Commonwealth Arts Festival provided a chance for Commonwealth countries to display their cultures that have been disregarded during colonization. The festival allowed them to gain legitimacy and validation of their cultures (Natarajan 714). It also gave these countries a chance to represent their national identities, and deny British colonial culture in order to embrace cultural diversity (Natarajan 722). The festival also helped the countries of the Commonwealth by attracting international interest (Natarajan 723). Britain's role in the Commonwealth Arts Festival was a different one. Britain did not have a controlling role during the festival, in fact, its role was to facilitate things and be the audience for the festival (Natarajan 723). This festival served as a transition from the British Empire to the Commonwealth (Natarajan 730).

### **4.2. The Commonwealth Games**

The Commonwealth Games are among the famous world events of sports, in fact, they are the second sports event in the world (Lockstone and Baum 501). This event combines competition with culture and friendship (Lockstone and Baum 501). It uses sport to bring together people from the Commonwealth and aims to bring them closer. Kobierecki stated

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that the Commonwealth Games is an event which is multi-sport, and includes athletes from all countries of the Commonwealth of Nations that compete in different sports (37). The games take place every four years and involve different types of sports like gymnastics, swimming, weightlifting, cycling...etc (Kobierecki 37). This event initially took place in 1930 in Canada, and it was named the British Empire Games (Kobierecki 38). Since then, the games have been held in different Commonwealth states and the event's name has been changed into its present name (Kobierecki 39).

The Commonwealth games are a significant event because it promotes competition, friendship, and deepens relationships between athletes as well as the countries of the Commonwealth (Kobierecki 39). The Commonwealth Games serve as a means of maintaining and strengthening ties between the members of the Commonwealth (Kobierecki 41). This event is also a celebration of cultural diversity of the Commonwealth. It does so by representing the different cultures of each Commonwealth country. And this provides an opportunity for them to make friendships with each other, appreciate, and learn more about the other cultures of the Commonwealth of Nations. To sum up, the Commonwealth Games serve to strengthen ties and relationships between Commonwealth members, as well as to advocate for more cooperation between them. Therefore, as much as the Commonwealth Games is a sports event, it is also a cultural event because it embraces cultural diversity and celebrates it.

### **4.3. World Day for Cultural Diversity**

World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development is an international day for celebrating cultural diversity of the world ("World Day for Cultural Diversity", United Nations). It was created by the United Nations General Assembly that has marked its date on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May ("World Day for Cultural Diversity", United Nations). The World Day for Cultural Diversity is another important event which honors cultural diversity of the Commonwealth of Nations.

As a multicultural association, the Commonwealth commemorates this day by recognizing its members' cultural diversity. This day is remembered by the countries of the Commonwealth through embracing their cultural backgrounds, heritage, and the rich diversity of cultures within the Commonwealth of Nations ("World Day for Cultural Diversity", The Commonwealth). They do this by hosting cultural festivals and events which embrace cultural diversity of their respective countries. This allows them to raise awareness of cultural

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diversity and its importance in the Commonwealth of Nations. To sum up, the Commonwealth of Nations celebrates the World Day for Cultural Diversity in different ways to raise awareness and promote cultural diversity as well as to embrace it among its member countries.

### **5. Britain's Embrace of Cultural Diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations**

According to what was mentioned above, one might conclude that the UK had a significant role in managing and embracing cultural diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations. The British role cannot be simply ignored, as the kingdom contributed to a great extent in prioritizing cultural diversity in the Commonwealth. This role was mainly about embracing cultural diversity, celebrating it, and facilitating matters that are concerned with it. Britain's embrace of cultural diversity in the commonwealth is demonstrated through many aspects. This includes hosting Commonwealth cultural festivals, Commonwealth Games, promoting cultural diversity in education through student exchange programs. Cultural festivals serve as a window to different cultures because they provide the viewers with an insight on the cultures of the Commonwealth. This enables them to learn more about different cultures and the diversity of the Commonwealth. Britain aimed for inclusion of all cultures in these cultural festivals and demonstrated an acceptance of differences.

Another form of celebrating cultural diversity is the Commonwealth Games. As it was mentioned previously, the latter is a cultural event where cultural diversity is celebrated. The UK used this event to embrace cultural diversity of the Commonwealth because sports are a means of bringing nations closer.

Britain also embraces cultural diversity through promoting it in education. It provides fully funded scholarships for Commonwealth citizens to promote for cultural diversity in education. Commonwealth Scholarships are funded scholarships for Commonwealth students who cannot afford studying in the United Kingdom ("Commonwealth Scholarships", BRITISH COUNCIL). One example of these scholarships is the Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships<sup>27</sup>. Britain also provides student exchange programs for Commonwealth citizens. It aims for supporting and raising awareness of cultural diversity through these programs. Cultural diversity in education allows each student to express their

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<sup>27</sup>The Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships are two years scholarships to get a Master's degree in Commonwealth countries, which aim for learning about different cultures of the Commonwealth and making change (THE ASSOCIATION OF COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITIES).

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own culture with pride. Britain was able to embrace cultural diversity in the Commonwealth and this was done through demonstrating an acceptance of differences, acknowledging the cultural diversity of this association, focusing on inclusion, embracing diversity in all institutions, and making cultural diversity a priority of the Commonwealth.

### **6. Reasons behind Britain's Embrace of Cultural Diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations**

Britain's embrace of cultural diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations has some underlying reasons behind it. It is known that colonial powers have always gravitated towards some means of maintaining ties with their former colonies. In this way, they are able to exploit and benefit from the latter in a peaceful way. As it is known, the British Empire set the stage for the Commonwealth of Nations, and the diversity of cultures within this organization was a result of such empire as well as decolonization.

The empire was comprised of people from all across the globe with distinct cultures that shared a common British culture in the past, and the Commonwealth is about managing post-colonial relations with British former colonies. This implies that the UK had to embrace the Commonwealth's in order for the association to prosper. The British government knew that maintaining relationships with its former colonies required this, and since the countries of the Commonwealth share the same history with Britain, it was easy for it to embrace and tolerate cultural diversity of its former dependencies.

As a former colonial power, the UK could not let go of its empire and it was in favor of preserving it. So, it was easy to embrace the Commonwealth's cultural diversity as long as the kingdom was still dominating it. Another reason behind Britain's embrace of cultural diversity within the Commonwealth of Nations is British exceptionalism. This concept characterizes the United Kingdom and its identity as the head of a multiracial and multicultural association. Britain's commitment to the Commonwealth and its embrace of cultural diversity was fueled by British exceptionalism. As it was mentioned in the first chapter, the latter involves the British self image after World War II which revolves around many things and being the head of the Commonwealth as well as embracing cultural diversity is one of them. Ashcroft and Bevir argued that British exceptionalism inspired the increase of immigration to the UK after WWII, and it was the reason behind embracing cultural diversity (36).

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This exceptionalism advocates for distinct values such as celebrating cultural diversity. The UK wanted to have a good reputation as a country that accepts, respects, and embraces cultural diversity. Another key reason is decolonization and the fall of the British Empire. The latter weakened Britain which pushed the government to embrace cultural diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations, and this has served its interests. Ashcroft and Bevir maintained that cultural diversity and awareness of it increased due to decolonization (06).

One important reason behind Britain's embrace of cultural diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations is the country's rich diversity of cultures. After 1945, the United Kingdom became multicultural due to the fall of the Empire (Ashcroft and Bevir 25). This was a result of the rise of immigration from British former colonies during the twentieth century ("Migration's effect on Britain", BBC). These immigrants brought their cultures to Britain which led to a culturally diverse society ("Migration's effect on Britain", BBC). The British government realized the importance of these cultures in developing the country in many aspects, so, it embraced cultural diversity.

Another important reason is the importance of culture in the Commonwealth of Nations. Culture is not something that can be overlooked in the Commonwealth, it is what defines it and it is the core of this association. This organization is culturally diverse, a fact that no one can ignore. Therefore, Britain had no other choice but to embrace this cultural diversity in order for the Commonwealth to thrive. As the head of the Commonwealth, the United Kingdom embraces cultural diversity in the association and encourages the countries of the Commonwealth to cooperate and embrace this diversity. To conclude, Britain's embrace of cultural diversity stems from its imperial past, self-interests, its sense of British exceptionalism, its multicultural society, and the importance of culture in the Commonwealth of Nations. This made it easy and necessary to celebrate and tolerate the cultural diversity of the Commonwealth of Nations.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter has provided some insight on the Commonwealth of Nations and cultural diversity. It defined concepts such as culture and cultural diversity and discussed cultural diversity in the Commonwealth. This chapter has also discussed how Britain embraced cultural diversity in the Commonwealth and the reasons behind it. Therefore, the following chapter will be about contemporary Britain and its cultural diversity.

## **Chapter Three: Contemporary UK and Cultural Diversity.**

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### **Introduction**

Cultural diversity affects every place in the world and almost all countries are culturally diverse. Every country in the world has at least one minority group, these minorities create multicultural communities within each country. One example of this is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The latter is known for its diverse society that is made up of different cultures from all around the world. Meaning that, diverse individuals coexist within one country. Cultural diversity had its effects on Britain as the country transformed into a multicultural society. This society is composed of different ethnic groups who have distinct cultures and traditions. These groups are what make up modern-day British society. Therefore, this chapter is about nowadays Britain and cultural diversity. It aims to shed some light on cultural diversity of contemporary Britain, ways in which Britain deals with cultural diversity and diversity in the political sphere. This chapter will also deal with the case of the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf as examples of cultural diversity in politics, and will address Britain's openness to diversity vs. its hostility towards it.

### **1. Twenty First Century UK**

Britain is a country famously known for its cultural diversity. Modern UK is composed of different ethnic groups which render it a diverse country with a rich cultural background. According to the 2021 census, the percentage of the white population in England and Wales was 81.7%, a percentage that was roughly 86% in 2011 but has decreased in a decade, only. Meanwhile, the population of ethnic minorities has witnessed growth over the years, it went from 14% in 2011 to 18.3% in 2021(Booth et al.). This demographic change has also influenced religion in Britain. The 2021 Census has also demonstrated that dominant religions have changed in Britain, and Christianity is no longer the dominant religion. The census results show that 46.2% are Christians, and 53.8% are either people from other religions or have no religion (Booth et al.).

The cause behind this change is post-war immigration. Indeed, after the Second World War, Britain witnessed an arrival of many immigrants who have changed its nature (Ashcroft and Bevir, *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain* 01). During the post-war period, there was labor shortage in Britain and there were many job opportunities (Lowe Keith). Therefore, the



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British Nationality Act 1948 gave citizens of the empire and Commonwealth the right to immigrate to Britain (Ashcroft and Bevir 05). As a result, many people migrated to Britain and settled there. After this first wave of immigration, more immigrants and asylum seekers came to Britain. Moreover, in 1992, Britain joined the EU which allowed Europeans to come and settle in Britain (Lowe Keith). This settlement of foreigners brought new cultures to Britain which influenced its culture and made the country culturally diverse. The British society has transformed from being mainly white, culturally British and Christian to a society made up of cultures and nations from all parts of the world (Ashcroft and Bevir, Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain 01). This diversity has enriched the British culture, and made Britain one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world.

### **2. Cultural Diversity in Twenty First Century UK**

One of the most diverse cities in Britain is London. According to Wood et al, the people of London speak more than three hundred languages and the city of London comprises of minimum fifty nonnative communities (p.01). The city contains nearly all races, cultures, and religions of the world. The rest of Britain is also diverse; however, London is more diverse (Wood et al. 01).

Cultural diversity affects every aspect of the British life, and one aspect is art. Nowadays, most of the famous British artists have mixed origins. According to Akram Khan, about 40% of British artists come from minority ethnic groups or have immigrant background. These artists often have a mixed heritage of different cultures which they try to represent through art, and this contributes significantly to the British culture. Khan stated that the cultural fields where Britain has witnessed most diversity are food, music, and sports (“Ethnic Diversity Makes Britain’s Culture Great”, The Guardian).

British attitudes towards diversity have also changed throughout the years. According to a recent study, England and Wales are now less racially divided than before. According to data from the 2021 census and the data gathered from these two constituent parts of Britain, researchers discovered that individuals from different ethnic groups are now living in the same neighborhood more than ever (Nagesh). The study conducted by Dr Gemma Catney demonstrates that people are becoming less intolerant. She said: “What we're seeing is increasing levels of people living together or next door to each other, and that indicates a level

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of tolerance - something that's happened really naturally over time without major government interventions on integration.” (Qtd in Nagesh).

Researchers of this study have found out that the level of discrimination became low and that of diversity became high, both in big cities as well as small towns (Nagesh, “Ethnic Segregation in England and Wales”, BBC News).

### **3. UK Dealing with Cultural Diversity in the Twenty First Century**

The British population is characterized by its rich cultural background. Since this diversity is crucial for the country’s development, the British government has implemented some policies in order to deal with cultural diversity. The latter include multiculturalism, anti-discrimination laws, integration policies, community cohesion, and embracing diversity in education.

#### **3.1. Multiculturalism**

Von Meien stated that multiculturalism is a term that has several meanings; one of them is the state of a diverse society. This means the peaceful and equal co-existence of many cultures within one country without the dominance of one culture over the other. Another meaning for multiculturalism is a governmental policy for dealing with cultural diversity in a certain society which emphasizes respect and tolerance for cultural differences, which means taking effective measures to achieve a culturally diverse society and to ensure the best co-existence in a multicultural society. Multiculturalism is an official policy in Britain (Von Meien).

According to Ashcroft and Bevir, multiculturalism is associated with the concept of giving minority groups their rights, like the preservation of minority languages or particular ways of political representation (Ashcroft and Bevir, *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain* 03). Contemporary British multiculturalism appeared as a result of the arrival of colored migrants after the Second World War (Ashcroft and Bevir, 04). This term refers to cultural diversity and policies that address it (Ashcroft and Bevir 08). The British government has granted minority groups their rights, encouraged their languages and religions, and embraced cultural practices (Wood et al. 03).

### **3.2. Anti-Discrimination Laws**

The British government has also applied several laws to reduce discrimination and embrace diversity. Discrimination is illegal in Britain, and the law prohibits any type of discrimination. One example of anti-discrimination laws in the UK is The Equality Act 2010. This law protects all citizens from discrimination whether at work, education, or any other aspect of the daily life. This discrimination has many types, such as age, gender reassignment, sex, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity (“Discrimination: Your Rights”, GOV.UK). Discrimination has different forms as well. It can be direct, indirect, victimization, or harassment (“Laws on discrimination in the UK”, CMS Law). Direct discrimination happens when someone is being discriminated against directly because of a certain aspect that is protected by the Equality Act. While indirect discrimination is when laws or policies are made in favor of one group only making the other groups with protected rights feel disadvantaged (“Anti-discrimination laws”, L&E Global).

Before the Equality Act, there were other acts that forbade discrimination. These former anti-discrimination laws include the Race Relations Act 1976, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (“Discrimination: Your Rights”, GOV.UK). Each of these acts used to forbid discrimination whether on the basis of race, sex, or disability in the workplace, education, or other areas of life. However, such acts were summarized under one law which is the Equality Act.

The Equality Act 2010 is a law that brought all anti-discrimination laws under one act that protects individuals from discrimination at work or at any situation in life. This act demonstrates the illegal ways of treating people and also states the different types of discrimination, the people who are protected from discrimination, and the actions taken against discrimination (“Discrimination: Your Rights”, GOV.UK). Anti-discrimination laws were designed to protect citizens from any form of discrimination. These legislations were implemented by the British government to fight against social inequalities and unequal treatment in all aspects of life.

### **3.3. Integration Policies**

Another way Britain deals with cultural diversity is through integration policies. According to Broadhead and Spencer, the latter refer to policies made by the British

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government for immigrants when they reach Britain (“Policy Primer: Integration”, Migration Observatory). Integration is a series of actions that comprise taking part in the labor force and social institutions, interacting socially, altering attitudes, cultural practices, and participating civically (Broadhead and Spencer). The aim of an integration policy is to facilitate the arrival of immigrants to Britain, and it is concerned with what happens to them after they enter the kingdom. In Britain, there is no national structure of integration policy. Each part of the UK has established its own way of integrating immigrants (Broadhead and Spencer).

The Labor government came up with community cohesion Agenda in 2001 which focused on ethnic minority issues, and in 2007, there was a Commission on Integration and Cohesion report. While in 2012, the government came up with a strategy paper named Creating the Conditions for Integration. In 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) released an Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper which was followed by an action plan for England in 2019. The British government developed more national policies of integration such as choosing five local integration areas in England supported by MHCLG to promote integration approaches. Moreover, integration is funded by the Controlling Migration Fund (Broadhead and Spencer, “Policy Primer: Integration”, Migration Observatory).

### **3.4. Community Cohesion**

Community cohesion is another way Britain deals with cultural diversity. It means that the government encourages community cohesion through creating an inclusive society. This includes programs and policies that bring people together, such as community events and volunteering opportunities. In Britain, the government and local authorities have done a lot to achieve community cohesion, and this means various public services (Local Government Association 05). Community cohesion refers to a society which has a common goal with a sense of belonging shared by all its members. In addition, such a society embraces diversity and values cultural differences. In this society, people from different backgrounds have the same opportunities in life, and they are encouraged to build strong relationships with each other in the workplace, schools, and within communities. Encouraging community cohesion means paying attention to fractures, eliminating barriers, and supporting positive communication between people (Local Government Association 07).

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The government has taken numerous measures to promote community cohesion. It provides funding for community projects that bring people from different backgrounds together and address social issues. As stated by Chaudhry, the British government included community cohesion in the national education curriculum, and introduced the Education and Inspection Act in 2006 which obliged schools in England to promote community cohesion (06). The government also funded research in the field of community cohesion (Chaudhry 06). It created the Equality and Human Rights Commission that advocates for equality and human rights for everyone (Chaudhry 08). The British government established the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in 2006 as a separate body to find out how communities are getting along and what to do to bring them together (“About Community Cohesion”, TedCantle).

### **3.5. Embracing Diversity in Education**

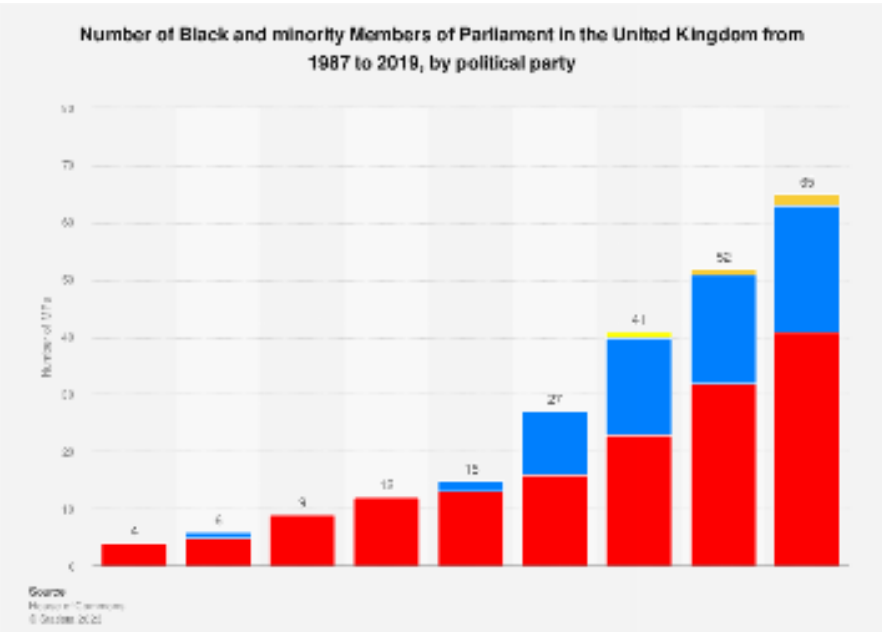
An additional way of dealing with cultural diversity in Britain is embracing diversity in education. This is reflected in the British education system and curriculum. The government also encourages schools to embrace cultural diversity. In this vein, the government has implemented several policies in order to promote cultural diversity in education. In 2014, the new National Curriculum was introduced to schools in England (Alexander and Weekes-Bernard 478). This curriculum includes teaching cultural diversity and world history. According to Harris and Clarke, diversity is an essential part of the newly updated history National Curriculum in England (159). The latter explains that: “Pupils should explore cultural, ethnic and religious diversity and racial equality. Diversity exists within and between groups due to cultural, ethnic, regional, linguistic, social, economic, technological, political and religious differences.” (Qtd in Harris and Clarke, 159).

The National Curriculum demonstrates the necessity to teach a diverse history that involves the history of various ethnic groups (Harris and Clarke 159). British schools also celebrate several cultural events throughout the year. For example, they celebrate Culture Day, for instance, in Bristol; the school of John Cabot Academy celebrates Culture Day every year. This day is dedicated to embracing cultural diversity of its students and teaching about different cultures (Miller, “Bristol School with Day Dedicated to Celebrating Diverse Cultures”, BristolLive).

**4. Diversity in the Political Sphere in Twenty First Century UK**

Cultural diversity in the political sphere means the representation of different cultures in the government and political institutions. In the UK, this representation is not always present despite the country’s rich cultural background. However, due to the increase of ethnic minority population in the kingdom, they are now more represented in political and public institutions than before. After the 2019 General Election, Members of the House of Commons from ethnic minority background made up 10%. After 2010, Members of Parliament from minority ethnic backgrounds have increased in numbers at every general election. In fact, 44 out of 66 MPs are Labour and 23 are Conservative. There are only two Liberal Democrat MPs from ethnic minority backgrounds. The number of the Members of the House of Lords from minority ethnic background was 55 in September 2022 (7.3%). The following figures (Fig.1) and (Fig.2) highlight such status:

**Figure 1: Number of Black and minority MPs in the United Kingdom from 1987 to 2019, by political party.**



Source: ‘Non-White MPs in UK Parliament by Party 2019’. *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1123206/non-white-mps-in-uk-parliament-by-political-party/>. Accessed 25 May 2023.

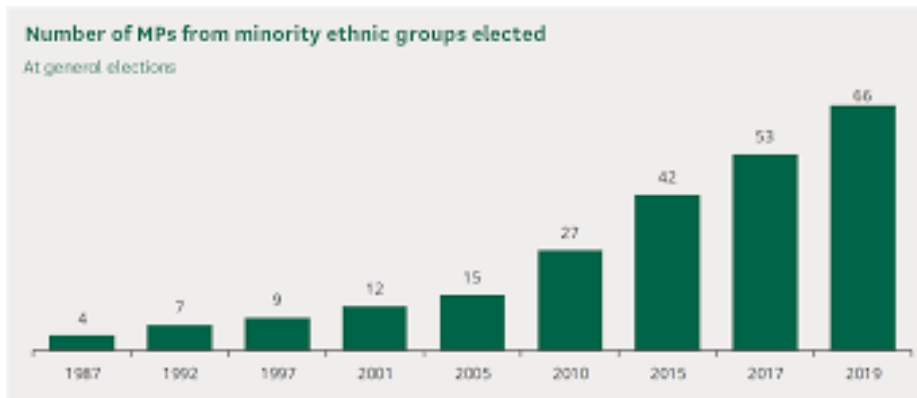
This figure shows the number of MPs from ethnic minority background in each of UK’s political parties. There is a significant increase in these numbers throughout the course

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of the years from 1987 to 2019. This reveals how diversity slowly started to be present in the British political parties.

**Figure 2: Number of MPs from minority ethnic groups elected.**



Source: *Ethnic Diversity in Politics and Public Life*. Uberoi, Elise, and Matthew Burton. May 2023. *Commons library. Parliament.UK*.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01156/>.

This figure shows the rise of the number of ethnic minority MPs in the UK. It demonstrates how this number slowly increased throughout the years till it reached 65 in 2019. This slow increase is a proof that it took a long time for ethnic minorities to be in the political sphere.

Also, four Cabinet Ministers are from minority ethnic background: the Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury Rishi Sunak, the Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, the Home Secretary Suella Braverman, and the Secretary of State for International Trade Kemi Badenoch (Uberoi and Burton 05).

From September 2022, 4.5% of the Scottish Parliament's members and 5% of the Welsh Parliament's members are from ethnic minority background. However, none of the Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly are from an ethnic minority background. According to the numbers of ethnic minority Members of the Parliament, ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in politics despite the rise of their numbers throughout the years. The then Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and 32% of the Members of the London Assembly have ethnic minority backgrounds. However, the degree of ethnic minority representation in

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politics differs from one place to another and it is not the same in all of Britain. Some places have no one from an ethnic minority background in the government (Uberoi and Burton 06).

According to data, ethnic minority representation is low in jobs with a higher pay grade (Uberoi and Burton 07). On 25 October 2022, Rishi Sunak became Prime Minister and created a government comprised of four Cabinet Ministers from ethnic minority backgrounds, including himself. Meaning that, three out of the four Great Offices of State are taken by minority ethnic groups (Uberoi and Burton 22).

In spite of the increase of ethnic minority numbers in the political sphere, these minorities are still under represented and data has demonstrated that candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds still deal with discrimination at the level when they are selected (Sobolewska and Shankley, "Politics and Representation", Bristol University Press Digital). Also, the Members of the Parliament from ethnic minority backgrounds do not represent all ethnic groups because they may belong to the same class (Sobolewska and Shankley). According to Sobolewska and Shankley, most of the 52 ethnic minority MPs who were elected in 2017 were from the same class background which means there was not enough representation of ethnic minorities. The number of ethnic minority population in Britain does not match the number of ethnic minority MPs.

Despite the fact that ethnic minority MPs acquire seats in both sides of the Parliament, inequality still exists in the political sphere. While some ethnic groups are represented in politics, others like Chinese people and people from Black Caribbean origins are underrepresented (Sobolewska and Shankley, "Politics and Representation", Bristol University Press Digital). Therefore, there is still a lack of cultural diversity in the British Parliament.

### **4.1. The Case of the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak**

British politician Rishi Sunak is the Prime Minister of Britain and has been the Head of the Conservative Party since October 2022. He is the Prime Minister of Britain, the First Lord of the Treasury, the Minister for the Union, and the minister for the Civil Service ("The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak", GOV.UK). Sunak is British and was born in Southampton, England in 1980. The fact that Sunak is the first person of color, Hindu, and from an ethnic minority background who served as a British Prime Minister says a lot about Britain's diversity. Sunak



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is an example of diversity in the United Kingdom and the British political sphere. He has an immigrant background since his parents immigrated to Britain in the 1960s. Rishi Sunak also has Indian origins due to his grandparents and parents who were Indian. His father worked for the National Health Service and his mother was a pharmacist. Thanks to them, Rishi Sunak went to Winchester College, a private school where six chancellors of the Exchequer studied in. He also graduated from Oxford and Stanford University. Sunak worked in finance before becoming a politician. He had a job in a banking company as well as a hedge fund (“Rishi Sunak”, Wallenfeldt, Britannica).

It was only until 2010 that he joined the Conservative Party and started working for them. This is when he became familiar with Policy Exchange, and in 2014, he was the leader of Black and Minority Ethnic Research Unit. Sunak was selected as the candidate of the Conservative Party for the House of Commons. Later, he was elected in 2015 and became a Member of the Parliament as a Eurosceptic and a big supporter of the Brexit. Rishi Sunak was elected again for Parliament in 2017 and 2019. He was a member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee and parliamentary private secretary at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy from 2015 to 2017. Sunak was assigned to his first post in the ministry as undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in 2018. A year later, he became chief secretary to the Treasury (“Rishi Sunak”, Wallenfeldt, Britannica).

In 2020, Sunak became the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and during this period, he had to deal with the pandemic of COVID-19 and the challenges it posed on the United Kingdom. However, Sunak did not stand still because he attempted to reduce the economic and human damage caused by the pandemic. One of the things he did was creating an economic-support program which gave about £330 billion for businesses and employees as salary aids to help them during lockdown. In 2022, Sunak was one of the two candidates who were elected for the position of the leader of the Conservative Party. However, the voters for Sunak made up 42.6% of the vote making Liz Truss<sup>28</sup> the head of the Conservative Party.

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<sup>28</sup> Mary Elizabeth Truss is a British politician who was the prime minister of the United Kingdom and head of the Conservative Party in September 2022 and she resigned after six weeks of being in office. The UK witnessed many financial problems when Truss was prime minister, thus, she served for the shortest period in history (“Liz Truss”, Wallenfeldt, Britannica).

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Nevertheless, Truss stayed in this position for about six weeks only and was later replaced by Rishi Sunak. This paved the way for Sunak to be the Prime Minister of Britain. (“Rishi Sunak”, Wallenfeldt, Britannica).

In spite of having an immigrant background, Rishi Sunak displayed an anti-immigration attitude. The Prime Minister came up with an immigration policy to reduce illegal immigration to the UK. One of the main priorities of 2023 that Sunak has highlighted is putting an end to small boats and preventing them from crossing the English Channel. The prime minister has promised this to the public and in order to keep his promise, the Illegal Migration Bill has been published. This bill is problematic because it presents numerous problems. The UK has an agreement with Albania about the return of Albanian people to their home country. Nevertheless, the kingdom does not have this kind of deal with the EU, so, the UK cannot send people there. Hence, the government plans to take illegal immigrants to Rwanda since it is a safer for them (“Hurdles in the race to pass Migration Bill”, Lockhart and Casciani, BBC News).

Also, the Illegal Migration Bill breaks many human rights which make it mostly unlawful. This includes putting people in jail for 28 days before deporting them to their countries, separating kids from their parents, treating them inhumanely...etc. In addition to this, the Migration Bill attempts to forbid immigrants from defending themselves against being locked up and deported from Britain using the Human Rights Act. This bill poses a challenge to Rishi Sunak who believes that stopping the boats will discourage people from coming to the UK illegally which will ultimately decrease the number of boats. However, the prime minister has to prove the success of his plan before the next general election in 2025 (“Hurdles in the race to pass Migration Bill”, Lockhart and Casciani, BBC News).

Sunak’s policy regarding immigration demonstrates a negative attitude towards immigrants which explains his stance on immigration. One factor that explains this is that Sunak could be more focused on protecting the economy and his country rather than protecting immigrants. The prime minister stated that he is focused on attracting skilled immigrants instead of untalented employees. This means that protecting the interests of British workers and controlling the job market is a reason behind limiting immigration (“Five reasons that explain Sunak’s stand on immigrants”, Mandal, ThePrint). This is another way for Rishi Sunak to show that he is British regardless of his origins.

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Despite his British origins, Rishi Sunak is usually depicted by the media as an Indian and his Indian origins are always mentioned although he was born and raised in Britain. This way, Sunak's feeling of Britishness has been disregarded. According to Ashcroft and Bevir, the meaning of Britishness has been expanded to include non-whites based on their sense of nationalism (Ashcroft and Bevir, *Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain* 07). Nevertheless, Rishi Sunak is still considered an Indian before being British. He has always been described by the media as a colored person, an Asian, and a Hindu. To illustrate, Jeff Wallenfeldt stated in an article that: "Sunak stood to be the first person of color and first Hindu to lead Britain." (Wallenfeldt, "Rishi Sunak", *Britannica*). This shows how Sunak's ethnicity and religion are used to describe him as the first British Prime Minister from an ethnic minority instead of only depicting him as a British leader.

Furthermore, Hashi Mohamed described Rishi Sunak as "the first Asian Prime Minister of the UK". Despite the fact that Sunak is European, the media still portrayed him as an Asian. Hashi added that: "Sunak has still defied the odds as an Asian man to make it to the highest position in the land." (Hashi, "Rishi Sunak is Britain's First Asian Prime Minister", *The Guardian*). This means that the Prime Minister is depicted according to his origins as an Indian rather than his British origins. Hashi also stated that:

Sunak, like so many other black and brown rising stars in the Conservative party, appears to suffer from the syndrome of feeling the need to demonstrate that they love Britain slightly more than the rest of us: that they have a particular duty to defend their country more; that they must show a different level of appreciation for it ("Rishi Sunak is Britain's First Asian Prime Minister", Hashi, *The Guardian*).

What Hashi Mohamed meant by these words is that Sunak tries to demonstrate his feeling of Britishness more than the rest of the British people to prove that he is indeed British. And this notion of proving oneself is particularly associated with non-white people. Sunak maintained that: "I am thoroughly British, this is my home and my country, but my religious and cultural heritage is Indian, my wife is Indian. I am open about being a Hindu." (Qtd in Tavernini). This demonstrates that his Britishness comes first and before his Indian roots. Also, Maria Tavernini stated that Sunak has never used the Indian card in his campaign, despite having Indian origins and being Hindu (Tavernini, "Rishi Sunak",

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ResetDOC). This means that Sunak is more interested in demonstrating his Britishness rather than his Indian roots.

### **4.2. The Case of the Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf**

Scotland's new First Minister is Humza Yousaf, who became the sixth first minister of the country. Humza Haroon Yousaf was born in 1985 in Glasgow, Scotland. He is a politician, a leader of Scottish National Party (SNP)<sup>29</sup> since 2023, and the sixth first minister of Scotland. He is a Muslim and has Pakistani origins, which makes him the second Muslim leader of a main British political party and the first non-white person from an ethnic minority background who became the First Minister of Scotland. Humza Yousaf's parents were immigrants who came from Pakistan and Kenya in the 1960s. His father was the first colored person to join the SNP in 1979. Yousaf went to the private Hutchesons' Grammar School in Glasgow and the University of Glasgow where he received a degree in politics ("Humza Yousaf", Wallenfeldt, Britannica).

He joined the SNP in 2004 and started his political profession in 2007 when he got a job of an office manager and assistant of the SNP's Bashir Ahmad<sup>30</sup>. Starting from 2009, when Ahmad died, Humza Yousaf worked for many SNP Members of Scottish Parliament (MSP). Then, he was elected for MSP for the Glasgow area in 2011. Yousaf became minister for external affairs and international development in 2012, which made him the first colored person and Muslim to be part of the Scottish government. He was transport minister from 2016 till 2018, then, he served as justice secretary in 2018 when he was in charge of introducing the Hate Crime and Public Order Bill in Scotland. The latter created the new crime of causing hatred on the basis of age, religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity. In 2021, Humza Yousaf became secretary for health and social care.

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<sup>29</sup> The SNP is a Scottish political party that is nationalist and wants independence from the UK. It was created in 1934 as a union of the National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party ("Scottish National Party", Broughton, Britannica).

<sup>30</sup> Bashir Ahmad was a politician who became the first Asian and first Muslim member of the Scottish Parliament in 2007. He was elected among the four SNP regional members who represented Glasgow, and he campaigned for Scottish independence ("Bahir Ahmad", Saeed, The Guardian).

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When Nicola Sturgeon<sup>31</sup> the former leader of SNP decided to resign, Yousaf was chosen as her replacement and he was elected as the First Minister of Scotland (“Humza Yousaf”, Wallenfeldt, Britannica). As he said: “We should all take pride in the fact that today we have sent a clear message, that your color of skin, your faith, is not a barrier to leading the country we all call home.” (Qtd in. Wallenfeldt, Britannica).

This implies that diversity has reached every part of the United Kingdom even its government. Meaning that Britain as a whole is an example of a culturally diverse country with a rich diverse society. The First Minister wishes that minority groups in the UK would feel inspired by him because his journey started from fearing that he could not fit in Scotland and ended with becoming the leader of the Scottish government (“Humza Yousaf confirmed as Scotland’s new first minister”, BBC News).

This inspiring moment is an example of diversity in the United Kingdom as a whole and not just in England. As Mr. Ross, an opposition leader at Holyrood<sup>32</sup>, said: "With both the first minister and the prime minister representing the UK's diverse communities, this sends a strong, positive message to everyone that there are no barriers to what you can achieve in this country." (Qtd in. BBC News). This shows how far diversity has spread in the UK and how the government has become culturally diverse. It is now common to see people from ethnic minority groups in the British government rather than only seeing white people.

### **4.3. Britain’s Openness to Diversity vs. its Hostility towards It**

All of what has been mentioned previously shows that Britain’s openness to diversity is still a controversial topic. It is true that the kingdom embraces its society’s rich diversity, nevertheless, that does not mean every British individual shares the same attitude. To illustrate, one takes the example of some British political parties that are against integration, immigration, and diversity. These include: the British National Party (BNP), the English

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<sup>31</sup> Nicola Sturgeon is a Scottish politician who was the First Minister of Scotland and head of the SNP from 2014 to 2023. She was the fifth leader of Scotland and the first female leader since the Scottish government and parliament were established (“Nicola Sturgeon”, Kellner, Britannica).

<sup>32</sup> Douglas Ross is a politician who became Scottish Conservative Member of Parliament for Moray in 2017 and he was re-elected in 2019. Ross was also Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland from 2019 to 2020 (“Douglas Ross MP”, GOV.UK).

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Defence League (EDL), and Britain First (BF). The British National Party and English Defence League are political parties that had the same ideology which is mainly anti-Islam and they both supported Islamophobic ideas. The EDL was focused on being a street movement while the BNP shifted its focus towards being a legitimate political party in elections. The BNP came to its end in the May 2014 European elections when it lost all of its seats in the European Parliament. The EDL reached its end after both of its leader Tommy Robinson and co-leader Kevin Carroll resigned in 2013 (Allen 354).

As a consequence, Britain First came as a replacement to these political parties because it shares the same anti-Islam ideology. This group was active in streets and gained political legitimacy like its predecessors. It organized street movements against Muslims, used social media to show these movements, and wanted to be politically legitimate (Allen 355). Britain First became focused on Muslims only after the murder of Lee Rigby, a British serviceman, in 2013 (Allen 356). BF is an extremely conservative, Islamophobic, anti-foreign political party that was created in 2011 by ex-members of the British National Party. This group was founded in Northern Ireland by Jim Dowson and Paul Golding. Britain First is Britain's main Islamophobic street movement and the members of this group use social media to spread their racist ideology ("Britain First: What You Need to Know", ADL).

This party did not receive much support in elections, having candidates in Wales and Scotland who only got 0.9% and 1.02% of the vote in the London mayoral elections. However, in England, BF focused on merely supporting and voting for the UKIP or the English Democrats. Britain First is characterized by its populist nationalism, its goal of protecting the British Union and its sovereignty, as well as embracing the individual cultures of each of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. This party also promotes for preserving British traditional culture with its values and traditions (Allen 356). Britain First rejects multiculturalism and diversity. They think that ethnic minorities were given special treatment, contrary to real British citizens who came in the second place in housing, employment, education...etc. The fact that BF distinguishes between real and fake British citizens demonstrates their belief in white superiority (Allen 357).

This group is also known for its invasion of mosques and abuse of Muslims. Its members invaded mosques, treated Muslims badly, and forced them to read the Bible (Allen 358). However, the government did not react to the actions of Britain First because it seemed

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that they did not break any law. Only some politicians reacted to BF's actions by criticizing them and advising Muslims to stay calm (Allen 359).

Britain First is anti-immigration and promotes for an anti-foreign message, which advocates for putting an end to immigration except for some cases. This party has a strong online existence especially regarding the number of their followers. Nevertheless, Britain First did not do well in elections. Mr. Golding got only 1.2% of the vote when he participated in the 2016 London election to be a mayor. In 2017, BF failed to register in the elections on time. This group got their Facebook page deleted by the application as a result of their violation of community standards. Also, Mr. Golding and Jayda Fransen, the deputy leader of the party, were considered guilty of religious harassment ("Far-right group registers as political party", BBC News). The actions of this group and others demonstrate hostility towards diversity, express hatred, racism, and intolerance. Despite the fact that the British government punishes racists and has implemented laws against discrimination, there are still people who reject diversity and believe in superiority.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter has provided some insight on modern Britain and cultural diversity. It has focused on the twenty-first century UK, its diverse society, and has also highlighted diversity in the British political sphere. The latter has been provided with two examples which are the case of the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the First Minister of Scotland Humza Yousaf. Overall, this chapter has discussed cultural diversity in contemporary UK and the different aspects of it.

### **General Conclusion**

As mentioned previously, the aim of this dissertation is to investigate the paradox of Britain's isolation from Europe and its embrace of closeness and diversity in the Commonwealth of Nations. Therefore, this study has provided a historical background to understand Britain's relationship with Europe and the Commonwealth of Nations. This background has defined some terms which are necessary to understand the remaining chapters. This research has also shed light on the Commonwealth of Nations and cultural diversity. It focused on concepts like culture, cultural diversity, and diversity of the Commonwealth of Nations. This research has also discussed Britain's embrace of cultural diversity in the Commonwealth and the reasons behind it.

This study ends with a discussion of contemporary Britain and its cultural diversity. It focuses on Britain's diverse society, diversity in British politics, and provides two case studies of the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf. These cases have demonstrated the extent to which Britain is culturally diverse, despite the fact that ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in the British political sphere.

In light of what has been discussed in this dissertation, it appears that Britain chose isolation from Europe because it has always considered itself isolated from the rest of the continent, whether through its traditions or its way of life. As a result, Britain gravitated more towards the Commonwealth of Nations. Since the members of this association share much in common, it was easier for Britain to keep close ties with them and embrace their diversity. In addition, the UK is the head of the Commonwealth which means it still has a certain power over its constituents and this has facilitated many things for the kingdom. This made Britain able to ignore Europe and attach itself to the Commonwealth. The notion of promoting diversity also served the UK because it has a diverse society. Therefore, this research proves that Britain maintained close relations with the Commonwealth of Nations because it served its interests and all what has been discussed in this dissertation confirms the hypotheses highlighted earlier.



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