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Cowden, S. & Singh, G

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Community Cohesion, Communitarianism and Neoliberalism:

Stephen Cowden and Gurnam Singh

Abstract

This paper seeks to discuss how and why contemporary policy discussions around 'Community Cohesion' have almost completely displaced liberal multiculturalist and anti-racist approaches. Hence the basis of fostering the co-existence of communities is now a much narrower focus on the promotion of 'British values' and, in the case of minority communities, through a 'faith' agenda. The paper argues that these developments derive directly from the predominance of the doctrine of communitarianism within both New Labour and Conservative policy circles. The authors begin by examining the rise of communitarianism and its manifestations within the contemporary policy terrain. The paper then moves to discussing the way communitarian policy agendas have converged with neoliberal social and economic policy, creating a discourse of 'conditional citizenship' for minority communities more generally but Muslim communities in particular. This is caused by the way faith based approaches are encouraged on one hand, but in the context of transnational Islamist terror, allow these same communities to be primarily identified with concerns around 'security' and 'radicalisation'. The paper discusses the *'Trojan Horse Schools'* affair in Birmingham in 2014 as an example of this. We conclude by arguing that this policy convergence has created the context for divisive and dangerous moral panics about Muslims and their apparent inability to accept 'British values'. In response, it is argued that there is an urgent to refocus the debate toward secular approaches in policy, alongside looking at the specific economic and social conditions that are the root cause of breakdowns in community cohesion.

Key words: Communitarianism, Community Cohesion, Neoliberalism, Multiculturalism, 'Trojan Horse Schools'

Introduction

Though many areas of social policy are contested along ideological lines, there are few people who would disagree that building a cohesive society is critical policy area for any government. However, if there is consensus on the importance of social cohesion, this is not the case when it comes to questions related to the causes of social in-cohesion and policy options that follow for building a cohesive society. Addressing this question in a speech in the ethnically diverse area of Lozells in Birmingham on January 2007, former British Conservative leader David Cameron asserted that community cohesion was:

...not a new challenge for our country [but]...a question that is as old as humanity itself: how do we live together. Throughout our history, there have been moments when that question has become more important, when people from other parts of the world have come to this country and made it their home. Each time, over time, we have found the answer to the question of how we live together. We have kept our country together, and we have moved forward together by having faith in the things which make Britain great. And there's something else we need to remember. When there have been tensions, when things threaten to divide us, we've always reacted in a very British way. We haven't been hysterical. We haven't lost sight of the British way of doing things. We've been calm, and thoughtful, and reasonable. That is the British way, and that's the way we should face the challenge of this moment, today. (Cameron, 2007).

How has it come to be that this invocation of 'the British way of doing things' has become so important? Many commentators have noted the shift to a new policy common-sense from the early noughties onwards whereby Britain was seen to have moved 'too far' in the direction of multiculturalism for the collective good (see for e.g. Shukra et al. 2004; Kundnani, 2007; McGhee, 2008; Cowden & Singh, 2011). The 2001 riots in the northern mill towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham and the subsequent report by Ted Cantle on 'Community Cohesion' (2001), offered the rationale for this turn, with Trevor Philips, then head of the Commission for Race Equality, providing additional legitimacy with his own claim that multiculturalism had come to 'suggest separateness' (Shukra et al. 2004:187). Alongside this new language of cohesion came, as Cameron's speech above demonstrates, a new language of 'nation'. This was not so much a regression to an old style imperial triumphalism, but rather one which offered acceptance to diverse groups *on the condition* of being able to demonstrate the embrace of 'British values'.

As the language of 'liberal multiculturalism' (Parekh, 2002) has waned over the past 15 years, a new compact has developed in the policy landscape between 'British values' and the discourse of 'community cohesion'. One of the main effects of this is to have legitimised concerns about the impact of immigration, which went on to become a major theme in the UK General Election in 2014 and to an even greater extent in the EU Referendum of 2016. These concerns were expressed most blatantly in the stridently regressive nationalism of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), but both of these events were marked by the lack of leading political figures, despite the overwhelming evidence, being prepared to make a positive case for immigration. As

Kieran Tharper argues, following ‘decades of simmering instability’, the denouncement of ‘multiculturalism as an unrealistic cosmopolitan ideal’ suggests that ‘a stubborn gut feeling in the less tolerant side of the British psyche’ continues to bubble ‘beneath the surface’ (Tharpar, 2014), a point which has only been emphasised further by the language of the ‘Leave’ campaign in the 2016 EU referendum. In this paper we want to consider the way in which contemporary political currents are fuelling new and potentially extremely destabilising moral panics about migrants, foreigners, the economy and Britishness. In particular, we argue that the shift in political discourse away from liberal multiculturalism toward a language of ‘social and community cohesion’ laced with a neoliberal logic, has created a dangerously divisive polity, and that those who have promoted this policy have no idea of how to solve the problems they have themselves created.

A key starting point in terms of considering the problems with the policy discourse of ‘social cohesion’ lies in the things that are *not* referred to. Here we are specifically referring to ongoing rise in poverty and social inequalities, which are a consequence of the relentless pursuit of neoliberal market-based social and economic policies. Not only have these stripped away the welfare and support services on which the most vulnerable populations - women, minorities, disabled people, displaced people - rely, but as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, represent a ‘mode of production...based on the *institution of insecurity*’, as a deregulated financial market fosters an increasingly casualised labour market (2001:29). Anxieties about cohesion swim in a sea of material insecurity. A 2014 report by charity Oxfam entitled *Working for the Few* (2014) demonstrated this with the astonishing figure that ‘almost half of the world’s wealth is now owned by just one percent of the population’, while the ‘bottom half of the world’s population owns the same as the richest 85 people in the world’:

The massive concentration of economic resources in the hands of fewer people presents a significant threat to inclusive political and economic systems. Instead of moving forward together, people are increasingly separated by economic and political power, inevitably heightening social tensions and increasing the risk of societal breakdown (2014:3)

While there is some limited policy discussion of the consequences of poverty for the ‘White Working Class’ (see for e.g. House of Commons Education Committee, 2014), when this involves ethnic minority communities it is addressed not as an issue of inequality or discrimination, but in terms of the relationship between ‘cohesion’ and ‘faith’. The role of ‘faith’ comes to be pivotal when discussing Muslim communities particularly, not just because it is seen to define these communities, but because it also comes to be seen as the primary source of cohesion within these communities. However, in the context of ongoing transnational Islamist terrorism, this same set of enthusiasms rapidly flips over into an acute anxiety about ‘radicalisation’ and ‘security’. There is thus a curious double movement where on one hand faith is held up by politicians, policy makers and religious leaders themselves as a great and positive force in the promotion of social cohesion. But as ongoing revelations of ‘jihadi brides’ and Asian youth travelling to Syria to join ISIS continue to hit the headlines, the prominence of Islam comes to be seen as evidence of how these communities are insufficiently ‘British’ and thus a source of social in-cohesion. In public life, Muslims now have to justify themselves, and it is this results in what Van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel (2011) describe as ‘conditional or earned citizenship’.

This paper aims to unravel the process by which we have come to this strange and dangerous place. We begin by identifying the ideology of communitarianism as the key source of these policy shifts. We argue that the displacement of liberal multiculturalism as a discourse of citizenship by the concept of social cohesion has arisen as a result of the influence of communitarian thinking. We then go on to discuss the way this narrative, problematic in itself, has been overlaid by the rise of transnational Islamist terror. We argue that this is a phenomena which needs to be understood as a distinctive form of reactionary politico-religious mobilisation (Cowden & Singh, 2011). However within the 'British values' based communitarian paradigm, this comes to be understood as a problem of British Muslim communities being insufficiently 'British'. This is a construction which ends up reproducing the very form of 'othering' it claims to want to avoid, while at the same time being silent on the material causes of social dislocation and insecurity, which we situate in neoliberal economic policies. We conclude the paper by discussing the 2014 'Trojan Horse Schools' affair in Birmingham as a manifestation of this convergence.

Communitarianism and the neo-liberal state

Margaret Thatcher's claims that there is 'no such thing as society' has often been represented as the *sin qua non* of neoliberal social policy, and in seeking to characterise 'the march of the neoliberals' Stuart Hall has argued that:

Neoliberalism is grounded in the "free, possessive individual", with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive. The welfare state, in particular, is the arch enemy of freedom. The state must never govern society, dictate to free individuals how to dispose of their private property, regulate a free-market economy or interfere with the God-given right to make profits and amass personal wealth. State-led "social engineering" must never prevail over corporate and private interests. It must not intervene in the "natural" mechanisms of the free market, or take as its objective the amelioration of free-market capitalism's propensity to create inequality (Hall, 2011)

While Hall's characterisation of the individualism that dominates neoliberal thinking captures an essential aspect of this, it would be a mistake to see this as expressing the limits of neoliberal thinking. Indeed, many advocates of neoliberal economic and social policy, have expressed concerns about both the possibility and actuality of social breakdown and disorder resulting from the unleashing of market forces. Tony Blair and New Labour could be seen as the prime example of this and their attempt to synthesise neoliberal economic and social policy with a concern with 'community', 'values' and questions about the nature of social bonds needs to be understood as a distinctive development of neoliberal thinking in its own right. The significance of this influence was demonstrated by the extent to which the Conservatives under David Cameron sought to emulate this approach. More recently the new Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May in her first statement as Prime Minister extolled the virtues of 'one-nation government' and played heavily on the theme of social exclusion and inequalities (May, 2016), though not unsurprisingly without mention of the failings of

neoliberal policy or the dramatic increase in hate crime in the wake of the Brexit vote¹.

The origins of communitarianism lie in the work of the classical sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies and his hugely influential text *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), generally translated in English as ‘Community and Civil Society’ (2001). Tönnies was interested in understanding the nature of the social ties that bound people together in a period of emergent capitalism. He saw the social ties located in personal face-to-face relationships and social interactions as the moral basis of community life (*Gemeinschaft*), counterposing these to the formal rules of society (*Gesellschaft*), typified by modern, cosmopolitan societies where social relationships were impersonal and often conducted through indirect forms of interaction in the form of state bureaucracy or large industrial organizations. While Tönnies saw himself as politically on the Left, his essentially negative characterisation of the way traditional bonds of family, community and religion were being displaced by more impersonal societal forces contained within it a deep vein of backward looking romanticism (Bond 2013). It is this essentially romantic conception of the ‘traditional community’ that communitarianism aims to reconstruct in our own time.

The founder of contemporary communitarianism is the Israeli-American sociologist Amitai Etzioni. Etzioni, who describes his work as the direct descendant of Tönnies, argues for a social policy based on the idea that ‘much social conduct is, and that more ought to be, sustained and guided by the informal web of social bonds and by the moral voices of the community’ (Etzioni, 1998: xii). Summarising the broad range of thought associated with this view, Daniel Sage argues that the starting point for communitarianism is acceptance of a theory of the self as an inherently social entity which is born into group identities and thus a strong desire for community. It follows that ‘if humans are intrinsically social, then desirable goods will flow from strong communities’ (Sage, 2012:367). Strong communities help to prevent social isolation and alienation and therefore become the basis upon which social stability and cohesion are to be promoted. It follows that the social policy approach from a communitarian perspective, as Driver and Martell (1997: 29) argue, is one that ‘recognizes the embeddedness and interdependence of human life, and promotes social and civic values above individual ones.’ Communitarianism thus presents itself as an alternative to both a state dominated Fabian social democracy on one hand and classical liberal-individualist conceptions of society on the other. In the face of contemporary social breakdown, rather than an ever-increasing volume of allegedly ‘ineffective’ forms of state intervention, what is needed instead is the facilitation and development of the ‘moral bonds of community’ (Etzioni, 1998: xii-xiii).

Sage has argued that communitarianism was attractive to Blair and New Labour as it offered a ‘third way’ between the individualism of the Thatcherite free market but which did not involve ‘resorting to the statist arguments of the old left’ (Sage, 2012: 368). Etzioni himself has cited Tony Blair as a promulgator of his programme (Etzioni, 1998: x) with Blair returning the compliment (Guardian, 12/1/2006). However, it was

¹ This rise was described by Mark Hamilton, head of the National Police Chief’s Council (NPCC) as ‘the worst spike’ in hate crime where “some people took it as a licence to behave in a racist or other discriminatory way” (Guardian, 11/7/2016)

only after the 2001 riots involving Asian youth in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in Blair's second term of office that this language became so central to New Labour, with the riots offering the evidence on which this policy turn was based. The Cattle Report (Cattle, 2001), commissioned by Home Office Minister David Blunkett to investigate the causes of the riots, does not contain any reference communitarian ideas as such. However, as David Robinson has noted, the diagnosis of the causes of the riots - ethnic segregation, limited cross-cultural interaction and an absence of shared identity and values between groups – reproduced the theme of the erosion of community life which is so central to communitarian approaches (2008: 16-17).

The ongoing significance of the communitarian agenda is further demonstrated by the way, having been placed on the policy agenda by New Labour, the Conservatives felt the need to have their own communitarian philosopher-king, a role played by the 'Red Tory' Anglo-Catholic philosopher Philip Blond. His 2010 book *Red Tory: How Left and Right Have Broken Britain and How We Can Fix It* sought to define the basis of social breakdown in very similar terms to Etzioni but with a far more conservative attack on Fabian social welfare:

the state, instead of augmenting the social world as it was, nationalised a previously mutual society and reformed it according to an individualised culture of universal entitlement. Dispensing resources and services became a managerial task founded on a centralised and utilitarian account of need, rather than a locally specified service that could establish mutual and reciprocal arrangements better suited to the needs of recipients and their communities. The citizenry was treated as a homogenous mass to be serviced, rather than a diverse web to be entangled. (2010: 282)

The romantic harking back to the world of *Gemeinschaft* is even more pronounced in Blond's praise of the 'medieval network of a predominantly horizontal communal and social order, exemplified by the church but also including guilds and agrarian communities organised around differential property relationships (Blond, 2008). While the latter has not quite made the Conservative Party manifesto, Blond was closely involved as an advisor to the Conservatives (Mail Online 9/8/2009) in their first term of office in coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Many commentators have noted his influence on Conservative strategist Steve Hilton, a close ally of David Cameron during this period. The 'Big Society' initiative was the brainchild of Hilton and represented perhaps the high point of Conservative communitarian thinking (Sage, 2012, Corbett & Walker, 2013). Many commentators have noted the decline of this initiative in the second term of David Cameron's administration, and Caroline Slocock has suggested that this is an ironic consequence of the impact of austerity on the charitable and voluntary sector (Slocock, 2015), expected to the take over from state provided services. However, the fundamental continuity throughout all of these changes in Conservative policy and personnel lies in the focus on the binding moral force of 'British values'.

Another significant manifestation of the communitarian tendency was 'Blue Labour'. This developed out of the thinking of a grouping of Labour MPs and intellectuals concerned with revitalising social democratic thinking following the Labour defeat in the 2010 General Election. Key figures in the group were Lord Maurice Glasman, Labour intellectuals such as Jonathan Rutherford, Stuart White and Marc Stears and

MP John Cruddas, seen as being on the left of Labour, and James Purnell, from the Blairite wing of the party. A key concern of Glasman's work is his critique of the way Fabian state managed welfare, driven by science and professional expertise, has displaced those alternative forms of socialism based on self-organised mutuality and co-operation (Glasman, 2011:15). He has argued for a return to those aspects of the socialist tradition 'that place reciprocity, association and organisation as fundamental aspects of building a common life' (ibid: 34). In a similar vein, Jonathon Rutherford argued that 'without the shared meanings of a common life, there is no basis for living a life of one's own' (2011: 90). Despite the way both Blue Labour and Red Tory shared the critique of the bureaucratic rationalist State, Blue Labour was distinct from the latter in seeing the threat to 'social relations and community togetherness also emerging from the disruptive forces of the free market, while building a state which helps support and foster social goods' (Sage, 2012:373). The Blue Labour tendency had a significant influence on Ed Miliband during the period of his leadership of the Labour party, however the defeat of Labour in 2015 and subsequent election of Jeremy Corbyn as party leader appear to have eclipsed this grouping, at least for the moment.

What we have sought to characterise so far is the extent of the communitarian turn, and the way this has come to represent a new common-sense at the policy level. We noted earlier that this shift was accompanied, in both New Labour and Conservative administrations, with a deep commitment to neoliberal free market economics. It is necessary to say something more at this stage about the way this two fit together as we believe this is crucial in understanding the present situation. Our argument is that despite the apparent opposition of these approaches – the neoliberal focus on the 'free possessive individual' versus communitarian ideal of 'communal moral bonds' - both doctrines share crucially significant ground. Firstly, both are ideologically anti-statist in the sense that they regard state intervention and state welfare as having 'failed'. This of course remains an ideological position as in practice the state remains strong as a means of upholding the status quo in power relations. The second key area of convergence which lies in the way both situate the notion of 'responsibilisation' at the core of social policy. Whether this concerns the neoliberal notion that 'individuals and individual choices [lie at] the heart of social problems' (Bochel, 2011: 21) or the focus on the 'moral bonds of community' in communitarianism, at the core of both doctrines is the expectation that people need to 'take responsibility' for their predicaments and difficulties. As Dhaliwal and Patel have noted, this allows social breakdown to be reframed as essentially a problem of 'interpersonal interactions and values'; allowing questions of material inequalities and state power to be displaced from the policy discourse (Dhaliwal and Patel, 2012:176).

Van Houdt, Suvarierol and Schinkel (2011) have developed this discussion further by pointing to what could be seen as a third important key terrain focussed on the question of citizenship. They argue that the social democratic conception of citizenship was as a set of 'prima facie rights'. With the rise of communitarian paradigms, this moves away from positive rights toward a conception of citizenship as 'a prized possession that is to be earned and can be lost if not properly cultivated' (2011:408). It is in this sense of citizenship that these authors identify a key convergence of the two discourses, characterising 'neoliberal communitarianism' as a strategy for 'managing citizenship'. Individuals now need to earn membership of the nation-state through demonstrating understanding and adherence to 'cultural and moral criteria', understood as core expressions of national identity. The communitarian underpinnings of 'earned

citizenship' are manifest in this demand to demonstrate loyalty to dominant community values, as well as in creating an ideal image of the active citizen and the contributions they are expected to make to society (2011:416).

Multiculturalism in this sense can be understood as a social democratic response to black and anti-racist mobilisation as in it occurred in the UK in the 1970-80s and for all the problems with the 'saris, somasas and steel drums' approach, there was a language of rights and justice that has been lost in the communitarian discourse of 'British values', which now runs throughout UK social policy. The Cantle Report initiated this shift in the way it entirely passed over the material realities of industrial decline, 'white flight' and institutional racism (Kundnani 2007:123), locating the problems at the level of the decline of 'shared values'. Cantle's first recommendation (from a total of 70) typified this, calling for the 'rights and responsibilities of citizenship to be formalised into statement of allegiance' (Cantle, 2001:46). Citizenship ceremonies for newly arrived migrants to the UK now include these very declarations of allegiance to the British state and monarch. Similarly running through the counter-terrorism strategy PREVENT, presently incorporated into the curriculum of all UK secondary schools, is the definition of extremism as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values such as democracy, the rule of law and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (Prevent Parent Leaflet, 2015). The problem with this lies in the way it assumes a consensus on these issues, at the same time as failing to actually ask what it is that needs to be 'prevented'.

We would characterise the Islamic fundamentalist movements that are the primary object of concern here as politico-religious movements which 'construct a single version of collective identity as the only true, authentic and valid one, and use it to impose their power and authority over 'their' constituency' (Imam, Morgan & Yuval-Davis, 2004:x). However, by suggesting that the primary problem with Islamic Fundamentalism is that it is not 'British', we entirely lose the reality, powerfully captured by writers such as Karima Bennoune, that the main victims of this authoritarianism are Muslims themselves, primarily women. It is also the case that Muslims constitute a significant component of the resistance to this fundamentalism (Bennoune, 2013). While PREVENT decontextualises the issue of what fundamentalism actually represents politically, so it does equally with the question of 'British values'. While democracy, the rule of law and tolerance are undoubtedly important, it is not clear how these are specifically 'British'; they could be considered to be universal democratic norms. We might also ask how were such values expressed in the transatlantic slave trade or the colonisation of indigenous peoples in Australia and North America? Equally how do we understand the closeness of the alliance between Britain and Saudi Arabia, whose state has globally sponsored the violently puritanical Wahhabi ideology which has provided the 'fertile soil in which extremism can flourish' (Armstrong; 2015). But these difficult questions are now to be swept under the carpet as we are all required, as David Cameron puts it, to have 'faith in the things which make Britain great' (Cameron, 2007).

Faith and Community Cohesion

As we have argued elsewhere (Cowden & Singh, 2015) in a context where there is seen to be 'no alternative' to the mantra of global competition, and state based welfare and social protection systems are being dismantled, a new social imaginary of the

‘functional’ and ‘dysfunctional’ individuals and communities has emerged. This strategy of ‘conditional and earned citizenship’, manifest through a continuous focus in both the media and in government policy on the need for people need to ‘take responsibility’ for their lives, allows the structural dimensions of people’s life situations to be conjured out of existence within the political imaginary. This discourse of ‘good’ functional communities and dysfunctional ‘others’ was most clearly played out in the official responses to the 2001 riots in northern England. The then Prime Minister Tony Blair spoke of these as being essentially about ‘thuggery’ and criminal acts. This narrative was further reinforced by some Asian ‘community leaders’ who publicly denounced the young rioters as lacking discipline and exhibiting ‘the effects of westernisation and a decline in traditional Muslim values’ (Kundnani, 2007). This was a significant moment for pointing the way in which the state could enlist communities of ‘faith’ as offering a potential solution to the erosion of the moral bonds of community discussed earlier, while at the same not reverting to the ‘state multiculturalism’ which was being denounced as a cause of social segregation. Dhaliwal and Patel (2012) have noted that such sentiments reflected part of an overall policy shift where ‘multiculturalism’ morphed in ‘multi-faithism’; representing the consolidation of religious organisations in public policy, even though this was often expressed in non-religious language concerning the reconstruction of ‘the social’ (Dhaliwal & Patel, *ibid*: 174). The New Labour years bore witness to the state enthusiastically welcoming faith based groups as offering Social Capital (Halpern, 2005) and a vital contribution to questions of citizenship and cohesion. In June 2008 Malcolm Duncan, head of an influential new Christian think-tank ‘Faithworks’ was invited by then PM Gordon Brown to 10 Downing Street, where Duncan asserted that:

People of faith are making a vital contribution to the United Kingdom. It is impossible to talk about community cohesion, joined up service delivery or strong and sustainable partnerships without understanding this (Sanderson, 2008).

The Conservatives ‘Big Society’ initiative also had a significant ‘faith’ dimension. In 2010 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Eric Pickles met with the Archbishops of Westminster and Canterbury and claimed that while ‘some see religion as a problem that needs to be solved; the new Government sees it as part of the solution’ (gov.uk, 19th July, 2010). Possibly not wanting to be outdone, the then Chairman of the Conservative Party Baroness Sayeeda Warsi made her own claim that:

. . . if anyone suggests that this government does not understand, does not appreciate, does not defend people of faith, dare I even say, does not ‘do God’, then I hope my schedule this week will go some way to banishing that myth. (BBC News, 2010)

Discussing New Labour’s promotion of ‘faith schools’ Gamarnikow and Green have pointed to the way this policy involves a ‘curious sleight of hand which turns the faith ethos of faith schools, their sacred distinctiveness, into a marker of profane, market-oriented educational desirability’ (2005: 26). Our argument follows similarly lines to this; where the profane objective of community cohesion has landed upon ‘communities of faith’ as the ideal means of delivering this agenda. The argument presented here is that this derives directly out of the communitarian narratives. There are a number of significant problems with this which have very specific implications

for women, and particular women within black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. Firstly, the communitarian approach offers an entirely uncritical sense of faith communities as essentially benign. Such an approach is completely silent on the historical, ideological and material conditions in which religious identities and the social relations, which accompany them, are being produced, asserted and in many cases imposed. Chetan Bhatt has argued that this inability to talk about the ‘will to power’ inherent in the rise of religious identification is made possible through what he calls a ‘mesmerising culturalism’ which allows the suspension of ethical judgement regarding religious organisation and mobilisation (Bhatt, 2006: 99). Similarly, Dhaliwal and Patel have argued that many religious movements within minority communities present themselves as

...subjected to racist structural discrimination, and locate their concerns within narratives about racialisation. This enables religious right formations to locate themselves within spaces of left and human rights activism. In turn women’s and LGBT concerns are either marginalised or obscured from view (ibid: 173)

Faith community leaders in BME communities, who are almost entirely male, come to occupy a pivotal role in the interface with the state; as they are seen to be spokespeople for the religiously defined concerns of these communities, and additionally because they lead the organisations that are thought of as maintaining cohesion within these communities. But is there any real evidence for these assumptions? David Robinson noted in relation to Cattle’s report on the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham that there was really no substantial evidence to justify the adoption of ‘cultural explanations’ over consideration of ‘wider structural processes’ (Robinson, 2008:260). In a similar vein Dhaliwal and Patel have described a major study carried out by Southall Black Sisters into the religious identification of women of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim who have used their services in Southall in West London (ibid:181-184). They note regarding their findings that:

When asked to think of measures, which would promote social cohesion, every woman spoke of equality, respect and positive appreciation of difference. None asked for a greater role for religion or faith-based groups in public life. In fact, every single woman was firmly against the proliferation of faith-based schools or faith-based laws and institutions as they believed such developments would have a divisive and detrimental upon future society (ibid: 184)

Community based research like this is revealing for the way it offers such a definitive rebuttal of the cultural-communitarian orthodoxy which dominates the policy horizon in the UK. The findings also demonstrate the respondents’ prescience in anticipating the divisive nature of the extension of faith based initiatives since this was exactly what was played out in Birmingham in 2014 in what was known the ‘Trojan Horse Schools’ Affair.

The ‘Trojan Horse Schools’ affair originated in a memo, leaked to the press in March 2014, which described an organised attempt by Salafist groupings to gain control over a series of schools in Asian areas of the city and introduce an ultra-conservative form of Sunni Islam into these. One of the alleged authors of these documents was Tahir Alam, who was at that stage Director of the Park View Educational Trust, an Academy Chain which ran three schools in Birmingham, but who had previously been chair of

the Muslim Council of Britain's (MCB) Education Committee where he was the co-author of a document concerned with how schools should engage with a Muslim faith ethos. What was most revealing in the whole affair was the way in which the positive belief in the value of involving religious bodies in education so easily flipped over into concern with radicalisation and extremism. Following allegations by Ofsted chief Michael Wilshaw that teachers and school governors who opposed this agenda were being intimidated from speaking out, then Education Secretary Michael Gove appointed Peter Clarke, the former head of the Metropolitan police's counterterrorism command to investigate; again the choice of an investigator with a background in counterterrorism rather than education further demonstrates the contradictions on governmental thinking. While the letter which sparked the affair was subsequently found to be a forgery and Clarke himself found that there was 'no evidence to suggest that there is a problem with governance generally' nor any 'evidence of terrorism, radicalisation or violent extremism in the schools of concern in Birmingham', he nonetheless saw significant evidence of attempts to impose Salafist principles in the schools which he investigated, describing an 'intolerant Islamist approach that denies the validity of alternative beliefs, lifestyles and value systems, including within Islam itself' (Clarke, 2014). Despite the media feeding frenzy around issues of terrorism, what completely disappeared in media and government accounts were the educational and pedagogical implications of this puritanical form of religious fundamentalism, not least in the limitations placed on girls, as well as in attitudes to LGBT pupils and staff. Evidence concerning Adderly school in Saltley showed examples which were typical of the way fundamentalist religious groups operate, as Salafist parents, working alongside staff who shared their views, sought to impose their politico-religious dogma on the rest of the school community through complaining and objecting to what they called impure and 'non-Islamic' elements in the children's education. A school governor at Adderly, Kadir Arif, described the way these parents attacked the school and its board of governors over things such as celebrations of Christmas, Easter and Diwali, as well as mixed swimming classes (Birmingham Mail, December 2015).

What also remained hidden in this media driven hysteria was the way the opportunity for religious fundamentalists to push their agenda in the schools was provided by government policy itself. The Conservatives' academy programme welcomed organisations like the Park View Academy Trust to take over schools from Local Authorities as a part of their agenda of 'raising standards'; in effect this is a programme to steadily privatise the secondary education system. It is important to remember that businessman Tahir Alam's Park View Educational Trust would have been approved by the Local and Central government as part of this agenda, and there is no doubt that it would have been seen as entirely appropriate that the promotion of the Islamic faith in these schools would have been seen as a contribution to the problem of social cohesion in those economically deprived areas of Birmingham. This created the space for organised Salafist parents and staff to challenge multi-faith celebrations and push for segregation of classes along the lines of religion and gender. For all the bizarrely conspiratorial aspect of the Trojan Horse schools' affair, it did demonstrate the extent of staff and parental objection to this. However once the schools became the focus of a media driven moral panic, it was the 'Muslim' nature of the schools which came to be seen as the problem, rather than the specific impact of fundamentalism as such, and the reasons why inclusive and secular approaches had been displaced. Just as in the PREVENT policy, the whole question of what fundamentalism actually is was lost in

the wider message that Muslims as a whole are insufficiently 'British', fuelling fear, suspicion and racist violence.

It is clear from our discussion so far that we believe one of the fundamental problems in this area lies in the way Muslim communities and societies are seen as an undifferentiated whole, and one that is often in thrall to fundamentalism. Yet the opposition that Salafist parents and staff provoked in Birmingham demonstrates how this was not the case. Given this we feel it is particularly problematic that some academics have sought to characterise these issues fundamentally as an expression of 'Islamophobia'. The work of sociologist David Miller et al (2015) is an example of this, arguing that 'we need to understand that it is the state itself and its machinery of surveillance and repression that is at the forefront of ensuring that Muslims are collectively pushed to the edge of public life' (2015 3/3). While there is no denying the intensity of racism being targeted at Muslim communities at the moment, we would strongly reject the idea that these conflicts can be characterised simplistically as expressions of 'Islamophobia'. Firstly, the term assumes a single Islam which is being persecuted by the British state and media. Our reading of the Trojan horse affair is of a conflict between different versions of Islam; where fundamentalist Salafist ideas were opposed by other Muslims. The role of the state, rather than being persecutory of 'Islam' or 'pushing Muslims to the edge of public life', demonstrates rather the way conservative religious groups and institutions are taking the opportunities offered by neoliberal policies, such as those concerning 'faith schools' or the Conservatives programme of Academicisation. Indeed, the stated intention of the latter is to remove schools from the 'bureaucracy' of Local Education Authorities, which crucially includes equalities provision which would prevent gender and religious segregation.

In a broader sense we would argue, following Yuval-Davis (2014) that the term 'Islamophobia' confuses the issues by conflating legitimate criticism of religious arguments and institutions with hate and hate crime. We also feel that the concept of 'Islamophobia', which literally translates as 'hatred or dislike of Islam', is simply inadequate to make sense of the profound and multiple tensions which Muslim communities are experiencing, which are based in complex historical and economic processes, such as de-industrialisation and changes in patterns of migration, work and family structure. We would also argue definitively that at the root of moral panics like the 'Trojan Horse Schools' affair are the contradictions of state policy. For all the inadequacies of Clarke's report on the Trojan Horse Schools affair it is revealing in the way he showed how many Muslim parents did not want their children's education dominated by the sort of puritanical faith ethos that was present in many of the schools investigated (Clarke, 2014); yet it was this divisive policy that was imposed on them, and following revelations about this, the entire community was pathologised. It is in this way that the largely secular aspirations of Asian communities wanting a decent life for themselves and their children remain trapped within and then punished by the policy contradictions of 'neoliberal communitarianism'.

Conclusion

We are increasingly witnessing an alarming rise in attacks on migrants and minorities of all faiths across the globe, alongside increasing violence against women, often religiously inspired or justified. Furthermore, as a reaction to the combination of increasing social insecurity institutionalised by neoliberal economic policy and ongoing

Islamist terrorism, we are seeing the increasing popularity of a right wing nationalist politics blaming migrants for economic problems and asserting the incompatibility of Muslims, many of whom have lived in Europe for 2-3 decades, within a 'European' polity. We have argued that a state that seeks to value 'difference' and facilitate integration is certainly more desirable than one that functions to ignore or worst still obliterate minority cultural identities, but we also think that if you want this cohesion, it is crucial to ask the more fundamental question of what it is that divides people.

The argument we have presented in this paper concerns the way mainstream political parties of the left and right have converged not just around the logic of neoliberalism, but equally in the embrace of communitarianism. As the social consequences of inequality and insecurity become increasingly apparent, the latter offers the Conservatives a crucial legitimisation device, demonstrated by their ongoing commitment to 'one-nation Conservatism' and the appeal to 'British values'. However for the parties of the left who are seeking to reclaim an agenda of integration and cohesion, it appears to us that there is an urgent need to move beyond the preoccupation with cultural and religious identities and start talking about the material realities of poverty, unemployment, gendered violence, and the need to fight for secure working conditions, decent healthcare and inclusive public education. In order to achieve this, the left desperately needs to recover a language of universality (Assister, 2016), of democratic rights and of the politics of secularism. The latter must not be an anti-religious programme, but rather needs to be about separating the right to personal beliefs from a public sphere that must be an inclusive space. Without such a secular agenda, we remain trapped within divisive faith based approaches, which while benefiting patriarchal religious leaderships, situate the very communities they claim to speak for as disinclined to integrate in 'British ways', and thus as victims of moral panics and hate crime. This is a process which has displaced social justice and rights based approaches, and it is crucial that these are brought back onto the agenda. The development of this has to be part of an approach which poses an alternative to the ongoing manufacture of insecurity across the board, with a focus onto the specific economic and social conditions which actually cause this.

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