The Political Quarterly, Vol. 77, No. 2, April–June 2006

Community Cohesion and Cumulative Extremism in Contemporary Britain

ROGER EATWELL

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world . . .

LIKE Shakespeare's John O'Gaunt in *Richard II*, many citizens of what was later to become known as (Great) Britain have taken great pride in what they saw as the special national characteristics of their homeland. Typically, these have included traits such as social cohesion, a respect for the political system, and a high level of toleration. This picture has even entered the realms of academia: *the* pioneering American social science work on comparative 'political culture' portrayed Britain as a model 'civic culture', based on deferential and consensual values.[1]

This primordialist, rose-tinted view of British culture has been challenged by academics who have pointed to the constructed nature of Britishness. Even more commonly, critics have pointed to less homogeneous and darker features of British society, especially class divisions and the growth of forms of both elite and popular racism as Britain increasingly became a 'multicultural' society after 1945. Nevertheless, class tensions never provided the basis for a significant extreme left and until recently anyone writing a postwar history of British racism would have had to conclude that, unlike in countries such as France, it had never moved beyond the fringes as a political movement.

It is only recently that significant fears have emerged about the growth of *ethnic* extremist politics and threats to what the Home Office has called 'community cohesion'—a term that entered the political vocabulary after the 2001 riots, which pitted largely young whites against Muslims in towns such as Bradford, Burnley and Oldham.[2] Whilst there has been no subsequent similar outbreak of violence, concerns about 'community cohesion' have been further heightened by violence between other ethnic groups, including between Pakistanis and Kurdish asylum seekers in Peterborough in 2004, and in Birmingham during 2005 blacks clashed with 'Asians' ('Asian' is a term which in Britain typically refers mainly to people from Indian subcontinent ethnic backgrounds, though it is important to note that in recent years Muslims have increasingly come from other areas). Whilst notoriously difficult to measure as much depends on reporting and logging, racially motivated attacks are another sign of simmering conflict—with Muslims a major target since the July 2005 London bombings.

The most dramatic events which have heightened fears about the future of peaceful multiculturalism were these terrorist acts by two groups of British Islamic fundamentalists. Whilst only a small number of Muslims were directly involved, a YouGov poll later that month indicated that 13 per cent of British Muslims felt a 'lot' of sympathy with the bombers and 11 per cent a 'little' (55 per cent felt 'none at all'). An ICM poll in early 2006 indicated that a fifth of British Muslims had sympathy with the 'feelings and motives' of the suicide bombers. The

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same poll also found that 40 per cent sought Sharia law in parts of Britain (41 per cent opposed it). Whilst Sharia law should not necessarily be equated with its most extreme forms of punishment (support can, for example, refer to family law),[3] the survey was widely picked up in the British media as indicating an unwillingness to assimilate among a sizeable minority.[4] Among the British population in general, 87 per cent told YouGov pollsters in February 2006 that they expected new terrorist attacks by Islamic fundamentalists and by a 10–1 majority respondents felt that recent events had made them less tolerant.

Recent years have also witnessed the rise of the British National Party (BNP), which has sought to throw off its thuggish image and remodel itself on more electorally successful populist counterparts, especially the French Front National. Signs of this were visible as early as 2001, when the party's new leader, Nick Griffin, won 16 per cent of the vote in the general election in Oldham West. During 2003, the party became the second largest party on Burnley council following a period of 'community politics' which stressed local concerns. And by April 2006, after a well-publicised comment about the growing strength of the BNP by Barking Labour MP and minister Margaret Hodge, a YouGov poll gave the party a record 7 per cent support. The main reason was the feeling that Britain had become a 'foreign country'; second was the desire for tougher action against Muslims 'who want to destroy this country'; third was alienation from mainstream politics. Local studies indicated that in some areas the potential BNP vote was much greater, a point confirmed by the party's gain of 11 seats on Barking and Dagenham council in May 2006.

Following these opening remarks, it is important to stress that I do not seek to refine key concepts such as 'cohesion' and 'extremism', other than to make two observations. First, the Home Office publishes a list of cohesion 'indicators', whose 'headline outcome' is: 'The percentage of people who feel that their local area is a place where people from different ethnic backgrounds can get on well together'; other indicators cover both socio-economic and identity issues.[5] Secondly, and more importantly in the context of this article, it is possible to pose a threat to civil society and liberal democracy without necessarily endorsing violence. Indeed, in recent years electorally successful extreme right groups around Europe have sought to stress their relative moderation, although covertly they may encourage violence and even their peaceful activities can encourage a violent backlash.[6]

Rather, I seek in this article to do two main things. First, I briefly survey ten perspectives about community cohesion and the rise of ethnic extremism. Whilst the arguments to some extent overlap, separating them out in this way serves as a useful heuristic device in showing the multiple causes of both communal division and/or reasons for turning to extremism. Secondly, I seek to highlight the last of these arguments, which I term 'cumulative extremism'—namely, the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms. This is especially important to understanding the recent rise of the BNP, but it also points to resulting reactions among ethnic minorities, which in turn . . .

Immigration

Although Britain had experienced notable historic waves of immigration, in 1945 it was essentially a white society. Significant immigration from primarily the West Indies and Indian subcontinent only began in the late 1940s against a background of postwar full employment, though primary immigration was curbed in the early 1960s by the Commonwealth Immigration Act. According to the 2001

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census, 8 per cent of the British population came from non-white ethnic backgrounds. Initially, this change had caused some tensions: for example, during the 1970s polls indicated that over a quarter of British people supported the 'compulsory repatriation of immigrants', the headline policy of the National Front (NF). There were also notable public order disturbances in primarily black areas, such as Brixton, during 1981 and 1985. However, the NF went down to humiliating defeat in the 1979 general election, and during the 1980s ceased to exist as even a minor electoral force. Although there were specific localised problems such as racial attacks and in 1993 the NF's main successor, the BNP, briefly captured a local government seat in London's East End, in general polls and other sources showed that growing numbers of British people were becoming more tolerant of ethnic diversity.

This began to change during the late 1990s, when immigration began to rise again. As well as familial movements, there was a growth in the arrival of asylum seekers and economic migrants. By 2004 there were 582,000 foreign arrivals, with 360,000 people leaving Britain—a record net inflow, partly as a result of EU expansion. Many workers brought much needed skills, for instance in the NHS, and eased labour shortages, points which led the post-1997 Labour government to accept the need for new immigration. But critics pointed to problems which are overlooked by those who focus unduly on the labour market, such as pressures on community services and local housing. The impact of such changes have especially been felt in a limited number of areas, like Barking and Dagenham where there has been a notable influx—in this case of new immigrants from Africa and Eastern Europe, which has also caused tensions with existing minorities.

New immigration has also added to fears about the growth of ethnic gangs involved in activities such as drugs and illegal immigration (with the latter heightening fears about the accuracy of government statistics for new arrivals). In Keighley, the BNP has made considerable play of allegations that Asian gangs coerced or recruited young white females into prostitution. In Birmingham during 2005, conflict over control of local drug trafficking appears to have been a factor which heightened tensions, although the immediate spark was an unsubstantiated rumour spread by a local pirate ethnic radio station that Muslims had gang raped a 14-year-old black illegal immigrant in a shop (who then allegedly would not report the crime because of fear of the police). The relationship of more recent immigration to criminality is underlined by Home Office statistics published in early 2006 which indicated that more than 1 in 8 in an overcrowded prison population was foreign born.

Issues relating to immigration are undoubtedly an important starting point to understanding the appeal of the BNP and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), which paid considerable attention to immigration from new EU states in the 2004 European elections and whose best result came in Boston, where it won over 30 per cent of the vote in an area where there were notable tensions with migrant workers. However, it is important to stress that public concern with law and order and attraction to authoritarian approaches does not simply focus on ethnic minorities and/or new immigrants. During the 1990s, public order concerns increasingly turned to the behaviour of primarily poor whites, including binge drinking and more serious collective forms of anti-social violence. Revealingly on the last point, the right-wing tabloid newspaper *The Mail on Sunday*'s front page on 9 October 2005 announced: 'Colditz Camps for Families from Hell', whilst an inner page article claimed that 'ASBOs [people on whom an Anti-Social Behaviour Order has

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been placed] to be herded into gated ghettoes'.

Relative deprivation

This highlights the need to focus also on poverty and socially alienated groups. Each of the four official reports following the 2001 riots placed the issue of deprivation at their core. The Burnley Task Force spoke of the role of 'grinding poverty' and noted that the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation indicated that the Daneshouse area was the most deprived area in Burnley and among the worst 1 per cent in England.[7] Daneshouse is a predominantly Muslim area. Muslims make up about 3 per cent of the total British population, and on average are the poorest of the large ethnic minority groups. For example, in 2005, 31 per cent of males had no educational qualification (compared to a 16 per cent British average); and 68 per cent of women were economically inactive (compared to 27 per cent).

Whereas some of the more established groups, such as the Chinese, Hindus and Sikhs, have notable minorities who go on to higher education and/or set up businesses, Muslims remain a strongly working class group by occupation, although a notable minority in areas like Birmingham own small shops. Blacks also tend to be more uniformly working class, although they have wealthy British role models especially in pop music and sport. Whilst there are exceptions, new arrivals too tend to be less skilled workers. These diverse trends appear to be causing growing tensions between ethnic minority groups. For example, in Peterborough in 2004, Mayor Raka Akhtar claimed there were 4,000 asylum seekers in the town, vastly above the official figure and more than local services could cope with.[8]

It is also important to underline that sections of the white community are relatively poor, and lack a sense of hope. The latter point is well captured by a columnist in the local Burnley newspaper shortly before the descent into violence during 2001, which stated: 'Those who think living in Burnley has all the attraction of a des res downwind of Sellafield—or a large cardboard box with a welcome mat outside in Albania—received some good news this week—life expectancy in Burnley is low, so they won't have to put up with it for (too) long.'[9] Indeed, this newspaper quite regularly portrayed a depressing picture of an area in irretrievable decline. For example, it headlined another story on 16 February 2001: 'Town Heading for Third World Status', and claimed that 'Many areas of the town are blighted by burglaries, drug-dealing, muggings, rapes and murder.' Nevertheless, it is possible to find areas which have similar socio-economic characteristics to Burnley, such as Rochdale in northern England, but which have not experienced significant unrest (although more hidden tensions may lurk in such areas).

Moreover, it is important to add that if the point is to explain facets of extremism such as terrorism or BNP voting, then the connection with poverty is very debatable. Some of the British 2005 terrorists did not come from the poorest sections of their community. Similarly, whilst the BNP has relatively low support among the educated and middle classes, its voters do not in general come from the very poorest groups. As a generalisation, about a third of its support comes from the skilled working class (C2) and a quarter from the semi-skilled (D).[10] However, it is important to note that the BNP has often been most successful where it can achieve a sense that it can win, often by external legitimation (for example, through the local media, mainstream politicians, or by independents/minor parties breaking up big party voting beforehand) and where it is capable of making a significant organisational effort.

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Social separation

The official reports of the 2001 urban disturbances also stressed the way in which ethnic communities in some areas live virtually in apartheid-like conditions, with separate housing, schools and so on. One Home Office report begins by stressing the polarisation which existed in many areas, noting that: 'The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident.'[11]

There is some dispute among academics about whether Britain is becoming more 'ghettoised'. Some studies show areas which are becoming more ethnically mixed, accompanied by generally more tolerant views. However, a 2005 study for the Royal Geographic Society indicated that 'Asians', especially Muslims, living in enclaves had increased by more than 30 per cent in ten years. For example, over 13 per cent of those from a Pakistani ethnic background in Bradford live in communities in which they make up over two-thirds of the population. In 2005, a Migration Watch report argued that an important factor underpinning such segregation was social practices, especially arranged marriages: the report claimed that 60 per cent of Pakistani and Bangladeshi marriages in Bradford involved a spouse specifically brought from the subcontinent.

Trevor Phillips, the black head of the Commission for Racial Equality, was another prominent voice in 2005 who pointed to growing ghettoisation, using this as part of a wider attack on what he saw as excessive multiculturalism in Britain. He also pointed to white ghettos. This is an important corrective to the undue focus on ethnic minority areas. However, it is important not just to focus on poorer white community areas in places such as Barking or Burnley. It is also necessary to look at white flight recipient areas, for example parts of Essex which have been 'colonised' by families from London's East End. These may not have seen overt community tensions, but can exhibit strong propensities to BNP voting.

Moreover, it is important to look at the role of micro-communities, such as white pubs or gangs of football 'fans', groups in which social change appears to have heightened a sense of (often English) nationalism. Both have played a significant part in fomenting antagonism and even violence aimed at ethnic minorities. For example, after a much-publicised alleged Asian racial attack on a white Second World War veteran in early 2001, Oldham's 'Fine Young Casuals' football gang, together with hooligans from other clubs, provocatively marched through Asian areas. This provoked a response, and serious fighting broke out again as fans returned after the match through the Asian area. It is important to add that within the Casuals were members of Combat 18 (C18—the first and eighth letters of the alphabet: A[dolf] H[itler]), who sought to foment a wider race war as a way of radicalising apathetic whites.

Identity change

Another issue which has attracted significant attention in recent years is how to create an overarching sense of British identity of the type which helped to hold British society together in the past. For instance, in 2005 Britain's first black archbishop, Dr John Sentamu, argued the need to celebrate key aspects of the country's past. This type of analysis has led to a spate of new policies, such as citizenship ceremonies and tests. Whether these will alleviate alienation among new and existing ethnic minority citizens is another matter.

Arguably the most dramatic recent identity change concerns a section of young Muslim males whose parents or grandparents came to Britain with the first postwar waves of immigration in

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the 1950s or 1960s. Although further work needs to be done on this, some appear to have dropped their 'soft' image in favour or a more oppositional 'hard' image as part of a quest both for personal identity and a reaction against perceived treatment as civic and social inferiors. This has resulted in the rise of a young, more assertive and macho 'Muslim' youth, seeking a new identity through the defence of its 'turf'.

A growing sense of Muslim identity can also be found among more educated young people. A recent report has indicated that several extremist groups, like Al-Muhajiroun, have been recruiting on British university campuses.[12] Whilst it might be thought that the number willing to listen to such messages is low, a British government report stated that Hizb ut-Tahrir organised a 'British or Muslim?' conference in 2003 estimated to have attracted 10,000 people (although it added that 'some of these will have gone expecting an open debate rather than what turned out to be a one sided advocacy of extremism').[13] An important factor explaining this development appears to be a reaction against the process of 'demonisation' in which young Muslim males have come to replace young black men as the object of white fears, a trend which can be traced back to the Salman Rushdie affair and the first Gulf war in 1991.

Another important factor relating to identity change concerns the decline of the generic term 'black' for non-white minorities and increasing focus on difference. Indeed, in 2001 Britain's self-styled 'leading Asian radio station', Radio Sunrise, discussed banning the word 'Asian', a culmination of a long campaign by groups such as the UK branch of Vishwa Hindu Parishad which sought to dissociate itself from Muslims, and newer fears among non-Muslims about being tarred as potential terrorists. In January 2002, the BNP even persuaded two members of the small Shere-e-Punjabi group to participate in anti-Muslim propaganda, with one contributing regular comments to one of the party's newspapers, complete with picture of the columnist wearing a turban! This tactic was also part of the party leadership's new tactic to defuse charges of racism by distinguishing between good 'immigrants' and bad (especially Muslims and new arrivals).

Communal morality

Arguments about communal change usually focus on psychological perspectives which imply some form of pathology. Indeed, a crucial dimension of academic studies of extremism more generally is a lack of empathy, a failure to perceive that 'extremists' do not necessarily perceive themselves as such and/or perceive themselves as moral agents.

For example, Muslims in Britain, like many other minority groups, but unlike much of the indigenous population, remain a notably religious group. This raises two important issues. The first concerns the fact that even among the moderate majority of Muslims there is clearly an alienation from aspects of Western society which are seen as immoral. The second concerns the influence of clerics. Of the 2,000 British-based imams serving 1,400 mosques in 2005, about 1,700 have been educated and trained overseas. A small number of these, such as Abu Hamza, who was convicted in 2006 of racial hatred and incitement to murder, have clearly supported Islamic extremism (though others provide hope for the development of a more liberal Islam). Interestingly, in a Populus poll of Muslims undertaken in December 2005, 6 per cent stated that they 'very much' agreed with his 'general statements or teachings' and 8 per cent that they 'somewhat' agreed (44 per cent answered 'don't know').

Turning to the extreme right, the stereotypical supporter is captured by the 'anti-fascist' 1970s poster which

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asked: 'Do you have half a mind to join the National Front? That's all you need!' However, a recent study of London's East End has offered a more sympathetic portrayal of the factors which might encourage support for the BNP.[14] This portrays a traditional white working class community which was badly affected by welfare policies which were based on need and which therefore helped even poorer newcomers. East Enders tended to see welfare more in terms of rights, which came from past contributions, and/or the suffering of older members of the community in the Second World War. MORI polling indicates that the perception of free riding or being taken advantage of is very strong among potential BNP supporters.

This sentiment is deliberately played on by the BNP. For example, in the 2006 Barking and Dagenham local election campaign, a picture of pensioners was accompanied by quotes such as: 'After paying in to the system all our lives, we shouldn't be shoved to the back of the queue by asylum seekers' and 'We stood up to Hitler during the Blitz. Our generation of East Londoners deserve better than being left to die on trolleys in hospital corridors.'[15] More generally, the BNP romanticises a lost community in which local people helped each other and in which law and order in the shape of the friendly local 'bobby' was always close at hand.

Policing

Policing has often been an important focus of accounts relating to growing community tensions. After rioting in 1981, an official inquiry headed by Lord Scarman pointed to a variety of problems in policing, including stop and search tactics which harassed young blacks (although they affected young whites too, which led to some inter-ethnic collaboration in anti-police violence). However, many critics have argued that whilst some recommendations were addressed, institutional racism within the force was by no means fully eradicated. This was clearly shown by the 1999 Macpherson Report, which looked into police failings following the racial murder of a young black, Stephen Lawrence.

This in turn has led some critics, including a section of public opinion, to believe that the police have more recently become cautious about engaging in any activity which might be considered 'racist'. For instance, in some northern towns like Bradford there have been local fears that the Asian Combat 786 Gang (786 is a numerical representation of Allah) had become untouchable. Blame for such alleged developments often falls on politically correct mainstream politicians rather than the police per se.

Nevertheless, aspects of the troubles in 2001 point to continuing problems within the police in terms of building good communal relations with ethnic minorities. In Oldham, tensions were undoubtedly raised by a police report which stated that the number of racist attacks on whites in the area now outnumbered the reverse crime. Although the report was misleading in a variety of ways (for instance, ethnic minorities accounted for approximately only one in ten local residents), it received widespread local and even national media coverage. Police in Burnley have been criticised for being over-focused on criminal indices (for example, drug dealing), which prevented them from realistically estimating the determination of Asian residents to defend themselves against the perceived invasion of their territory by racist gangs, which the police could probably have prevented had they been monitoring more closely white racist developments.

A variety of changes in the law since 9/11 and related issues of policing have further caused tensions. Many Muslims feel that they have been especially targeted in stop and search operations. There has also been considerable

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resentment about arrests and people held without charge under new anti-terrorism laws. Whilst there have been police attempts to build bridges, such as the Muslim Safety Forum launched in 2002 at the London Central Mosque by prominent Muslim organisations and the Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner, at lower levels tensions appear to be still strong.

Community leadership

Ethnic minority group 'community leaders' come predominantly from the first generations of migrants, and are thus typically relatively old males. Predictably, some critics, especially among the young and women, have queried who such 'leaders' represent. This in turn can encourage a form of traditionalist backlash. An often-missed aspect of the violent protests by Sikh leaders and males in 2004 which led to the withdrawal of the play *Behzti* from the Birmingham Repertory Theatre is that it was not just blasphemous in the eyes of its critics, but it also raised issues about women's exploitation by Sikh males.[16]

The challenge to old leaders can also be seen in the growth of groups which seek to organise Muslims as a political force (a trend which had begun earlier in Belgium through groups like the Arab European League, partly in the response to the rise of a powerful extreme right in the shape of the Vlaams Blok).[17] For instance, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK (MPACUK) on its website on 27 March 2006 criticised Lord Patel in Blackburn for subservience to local MP and Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, and asked 'What kind of traitors to the Ummah would host' Condoleezza Rice, who visited the area with Straw the following weekend.[18] Whilst during the 2005 general election MPACUK and others largely failed to organise a Muslim vote, it is worth noting that Muslim voters were clearly important in the victory of the anti-Iraq war Respect party leader George Galloway over black-Jewish Labour MP Oona King, in London's East End.

It is also important to consider the role of local mainstream political leadership in areas where there are notable ethnic minorities and/or white racist activity. In some cases there is clearly a fear on the part of mainstream parties that taking a lead against racism or favouring minorities could lose votes. In other cases, the problem seems more to be one of denial—a refusal to accept that racist groups in some way need confronting and/or that minority groups face considerable disadvantages. This point can apply not just to local politicians, but also to others who in some way have a role to guide and lead local communities, such as council officials.

In white 'communities', which are often characterised by weak family structures and dwindling church attendance and membership of civil society groups like trade unions, it is often hard to identify any meaningful form of leadership. Therefore in this context, criticism of weak leadership has sometimes focused on the lack of a lead from potential opinion makers like the local media, which in places like Oldham and Burnley in some ways helped to stoke the fires of antagonism prior to the 2001 riots (encouraged in the latter case by shrewd BNP manipulation of the local newspaper through its letters page and other means).[19]

Mainstream 'racism'

Rising immigration around the turn of the new millennium encouraged various national political leaders to take a 'tough' stance. These included the Home Secretary, David Blunkett, and the Conservative leader at the time of the 2001 general election, William Hague. During the 2005 general election, the Conservative party spent the largest part of its advertising budget on themes relating to immigration (£1.5 million), with the partly related

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theme of crime accounting for the second largest sum (£523,000).

These issues were picked up even more forcefully by Tory tabloid newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, together with the *Sun*, which had switched support to Labour in 1997. After 9/11, arguably the main concern was with Islam. The threat from Islamic terrorism featured prominently, and in 2005 the *Sun* gave strong support to Labour's plan to tighten terrorism laws in a way which some saw as a threat to civil liberties. Extremist Muslim clerics also featured regularly: for example, the front page of the *Daily Mail* on 21 January 2003 included a menacing picture of 'Firebrand' preacher Abu Hamza. Whilst this coverage raised legitimate issues about the role of extremists and how to protect society, the overall tone added to growing Islamophobia. The last point can be seen clearly in the *Daily Express* front page headline on 2 November 2005 which claimed that: 'Christmas Is Banned: It Offends Muslims'.

A 2001 report by civil rights groups, led by Liberty, for the UN Human Rights Committee concluded that negative presentation of asylum seekers had not only heightened racial tensions, but led to direct attacks on asylum seekers. A more recent study of both national and local media coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in London has confirmed these general arguments, noting that inaccurate media images are frequent and powerful and harassment was occurring on a daily basis, with a significant potential to 'increase community tension'.[20]

However, there are major debates about the extent to which the media influence rather than reflect views. Recent MORI polling shows that *Express*, *Mail* and *Sun* readers are notably more likely to say that race and/or immigration is the key issue facing Britain. Nevertheless, whilst it seems reasonable to hypothesise that mainstream 'racism' legitimates white concerns and ethnic minority fears, and that the media generally become more influential as people become more socially isolated, there is little by way of direct evidence about the media having a significant causal effect on behaviour. This point can also be considered by examining where local newspapers have specifically sought to counter the BNP, for example the *Barking and Dagenham Post*, whose banner headline on 3 May 2006 read 'Gotcha', which headed an article debunking a series of myths about immigration and crime: the next day the BNP won record support in the area!

External influences

Discussion of the media also raises the important issue of external influences on attitudes and behaviour in Britain. Ethnic minorities in Britain now have a wide choice of media sources, including domestic and overseas based ones. These include major television and web based sources, such as al-Jazeera, through to websites used by extremist groups, which probably attract few viewers—although this does not necessarily mean they are unimportant, as web sources can create a sense of community and purpose among isolated extremists.

More generally, external influences have to be conceived in terms of events. It is not clear yet exactly what relations the July 2005 bombers had with groups abroad, or the exact sequence of their conversion to Islamic extremism. However, the post-9/11 US-led attack on Afghanistan and then Iraq undoubtedly stirred passions among many Muslims. Other external factors have featured in troubles between British Indian and Pakistani communities and between Turks and Kurds: for example, members of the last two groups engaged in low-level street violence in Bristol in 2005.

It is also important not to neglect anti-semitism. Radical Muslim groups like Radio Islam keep up a stream of anti-Jewish propaganda, for instance about

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Jewish media power. Against a background of growing calls for clamp-downs on radical Islamic preachers in Britain, a MPACUK website article in 2005 commented on allowing an Israeli 'hate preacher' into Britain—Rabbi Yosef, who had visited Downing Street in 1999 and who had allegedly 'called Palestinians ''snakes'' and called for the annihilation of Arabs'.[21] The Board of Deputies' Community Security Trust has recorded a growing pattern of anti-Semitic incidents: whereas in the past, rounding up the usual suspects for such attacks involved looking at white extremists, a growing number of Muslims now appear to be involved, often following well-publicised Jewish 'atrocities' in the 'occupied territories'.

The extensive rioting which broke out in mainly immigrant quarters of France in October and November 2005 also attracted considerable attention in Britain. Thus the BNP has announced that: 'the multi-cultural experiment . . . has well and truly failed, and all those European nations which contain a potential fifth-column of inassimilable Muslim and African immigrants . . . must question just how those in charge of law enforcement are today prepared to deal with a similar situation'.[22] In 2006, the BNP saw the violent worldwide Muslim protests against the publication of Danish cartoon depictions of Muhammad as yet further evidence that Britain faced a coming 'clash of civilisations', a point made vividly in its new web-based BNP TV coverage.[23]

Cumulative extremism

An important neglected question concerns how different forms of extremism are constructed in discourse by other extremists and how they relate in the more concrete world. It is important to stress that there are varieties of such interaction. There have even been those on the extreme right who have openly admired Islamic extremism for its fanaticism, especially after the 9/11 attacks, which were seen as striking a blow against the hated USA (and/or Jewish power). David Myatt, whose views have been disseminated widely on the internet, influenced both C18 and apparently the National Socialist Movement terrorist who provocatively planted three bombs in London in 1999, has even converted to Islam.[24] However, predictably the more general pattern is one of extremist animosities fuelling each other rather than fraternisation and understanding.

Bradford in 2001 serves as a good example of how the extreme right helped to provoke tensions among ethnic minorities, which were already producing new forms of radical identity politics that led to clashes earlier in 2001. For some time before the troubles broke out, both the BNP and NF had been active in the area. Although a provocative NF march was banned shortly before the riots began, NF activists still gathered with the intention of fomenting trouble. It is worth adding that also present were extremist 'anti-fascists', who not only sought to encourage Muslim resistance but also to attack extreme right activists and the police, a point openly admitted in the 14 July 2001 issue of the Trotskyite *Socialist Worker*.

Even before the 9/11 attacks, the BNP was increasingly targeting Islam as Public Enemy No. 1 (although the party is conscious of the need to retain a strong 'community politics' dimension where possible, which can mean attacks on other ethnic minorities, especially new arrivals, remain prominent where they have a resonance). For example, in February 2001 the BNP's journal *Freedom* claimed that Islamic extremists were recruiting young Muslims for war against the West, and in the August 2001 issue of *Identity* it was claimed that: 'Hamsa is a Muslim fundamentalist cleric who . . . was caught explaining how he wants militant Muslims to take over towns like Burnley with AK-47s.' More recently,

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Hamsa sermons in Finsbury Park have attracted the attention of the National Front; so too have meetings of Al-Muhajiroun. For example, the NF announced that on 14 May 2004 it would be holding a march to Finsbury Park Mosque, which would stop Abu Hamsa preaching outside in the road. In relation to Al-Muhajiroun, the NF's website announced a counter-meeting in Trafalgar Square for 25 July 2004, warning potential attendees: 'please be prepared for the most hate filled, anti British filth being preached from the capital of the most tolerant and democratic country in the world'.[25] Both rallies were clearly designed to be provocative.

Since the July 2005 London bombings, many within the Muslim community have pointed the finger at the BNP for provoking anti-ethnic minority violence, rather than ask more troubling questions about the Islamic faith and changes within the Muslim community—a point exaggerated by the BNP in its own counter-propaganda. Thus a BNP website article in July 2005 referred to Shahid Malik MP warning about 'gangs of BNP members in pubs' preparing to invade Muslim areas.[26] The MPACUK website provides a good example of repeated references to the threat from the BNP. More generally, whilst the specific term 'clash of civilisations' is used much less frequently than in extreme right propaganda, the idea of a fundamental clash of cultures is strong. This point is increasingly being picked up even in non-extreme right sources. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* on 19 February 2006 published an article claiming that groups like the Islamic Council of Europe are encouraging Muslims not to integrate and to become a majority in some areas, where they can establish Muslim schools, shops, etc. In its more extreme 'Eurabian thesis' form, this argument even claims that Islam will increasingly become important in Europe, both through demographic growth and through mainstream elites appeasing Muslims for electoral and/or public order reasons—a theme which has openly been discussed in the *Spectator* magazine.[27]

Conclusion

Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, noted in *The Times* on 1 October 2005 that Jewish immigrants to Britain had assimilated over the centuries, specifically mentioning how they had adopted Shakespeare, admiring not only his literary skills but also imbuing his patriotic fervour.

Certainly Britain has a long history of integrating Judeo-Christian immigrants, and it is important not to overstate the three broad problems relating to community cohesion which were noted at the beginning of this article. First, moral panics following the 1981 and 1985 riots have proven unfounded, with only 2001 witnessing further significant violence between white and non-white ethnic groups. And whilst lower level racial conflict such as violent attacks should not be minimised, the extreme right prophets of race war seem to lead more a virtual Walter Mitty existence than anything approaching a mass movement. Secondly, the vast majority of British Muslims clearly reject Islamic extremism and accept that they are British. Polls which show a decline in tolerance more generally may simply be a blip: certainly the longer-run trend indicates a growing belief that different cultures enrich British life. Thirdly, support for the BNP should not be overstated outside a small number of areas. Additionally, the party still has an ugly side to it which opens it to delegitimation.[28]

Nevertheless, there are other reasons to be more pessimistic. One which has only been touched upon in passing concerns national identity. As Sachs notes, British leaders were more self-confident during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more capable of setting out a grand vision in which the sun never set

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on the British Empire and in which all could share in her wealth. More darkly, British identity was also founded on the demonisation of the Other. During the twentieth century, the 'beastly Hun' took over from the French as the main bogey, followed later by Soviet communism. Although some argue that Islamophobia currently constitutes a new Other (or rather the renewal of a theme which dates back to the Crusades), such demonisation cannot be developed by most elites, as it is clearly highly dangerous in the context of integrating growing Muslim minorities.

The second reason, which has recurred throughout this article before being specifically picked up in its own section, concerns what I have termed 'cumulative extremism.' Another crucial aspect of the creation of Britain's historic identity is that elites in modern times did not have to try to reconcile two or more extremes (Northern Ireland would be a notable exception), where an attempt to appease one can antagonise the other. Today, public concerns with new immigration and partly related issues, such as crime, encourage at least one of the mainstream parties to promise to be 'tough' on such issues. On the other hand, relative deprivation and other problems affecting some ethnic minority communities seem to call for greater public expenditure and the apparent privileging of people who in some cases are newcomers.

One way of seeking to cut the Gordian knot is for elites to engage in a more sustained attack on the BNP as 'extreme'. However, given that polls indicate that one of the main reasons for voting for the BNP is alienation from mainstream politics, it is far from clear what impact such campaigns would have. Moreover, there are growing other forms of agenda setting, especially in parts of the media, which conform to the BNP's non-consensual vision of the world. In the past, deference and consensus, key aspects of the historic British civic culture, have been crucial to keeping down populist politics.

A final point concerns violence rather than voting. Whilst there is a group in the BNP which believes that it can become a significant electoral movement in the near future on the basis of the trends analysed above, there are others both within the party and especially in small extreme right groups who are still addicted to more violent ways. In some cases this reflects individual pathology, but there has always been a coterie of extreme right 'theorists' who hold that significant ethnic conflict in Britain will be necessary to transform the electoral landscape. The very rise of the BNP heightens not only minority fears, but also the chances of some form of violent reaction. Moreover, changes within both domestic ethnic minority communities and the international scene have brought such a nightmare a little closer to reality.

Notes

1 G. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture*, Little Brown, Boston, 1963.
2 See, for example, two of the Home Office inquires into the disturbances: *Community Cohesion* [The Cantle Report], HMSO, London, 2001; and *Building Cohesive Communities* [The Denham Report], HMSO, London, 2001.
3 www.islamic-sharia.co.uk/main.html
4 Commissioned for the *Sunday Telegraph*, it featured in other sources such as the *Manchester Evening News*, 19 February 2006.
5 www.local-pi-library.gov.uk/documents/CommunityCohesionIndicators.pdf
6 R. Eatwell and C. Mudde, eds, *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge*, Routledge, London, 2004, which includes a chapter analysing how the BNP changed after Griffin became leader.
7 *Burnley Speaks, Who Listens?*, Burnley Task Force, Burnley, 2001, p. 7.
8 *Peterborough Today*, 16 December 2004.
9 'Straight talking with Barry Ayrton', *Burnley Express*, 2 March 2001.

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10 I am grateful to Bobby Duffy, Research Director of Ipsos MORI, for supplying me with unpublished aggregate poll information on support for the BNP. See also *539 Voters' Views: A Voting Behaviour Study in Three Northern Towns*, Joseph Rowntree Trust, York, 2004; and *The Far Right in London*, Joseph Rowntree Trust, York, 2005.
11 www.homeoffice.gov.uk/reu/community_cohesion.pdf, p. 9.
12 A. Glees and C. Pope, *When Students Turn to Terror*, Social Affairs Unit, London, 2005.
13 www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2004/muslimext-uk.htm
14 K. Gavron, G. Dench and M. Young, *The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict*, Profile Books, London, 2006.
15 *BNP Barking and Dagenham Patriot*, 2006.
16 Information supplied in interview with a female member of the cast, March 2005.
17 See www.arabeuropean.org/vision.php
18 www.mpacuk.org/content/view/2/1481/101/
19 S. Smith, *How It Was Done*, Heretical Press, Burnley, 2004.
20 ICAR, *Media Image, Community Impact*, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK, London, 2004.
21 www.mpacuk.org/content/view/4/1007/103/
22 www://bnp.org.news_detail.php?newsId=609
23 The BNP leadership had for some time featured Samuel Huntington's well-known book by this title: for example, see Griffin's review and discussion of geopolitical trends in the BNP's monthly, *Identity* February and March 2002.
24 On Myatt see www.davidmyatt.portland.co.uk/texts/my_conversion_to_islam.htm
25 www.natfront.com.natacts.html
26 www.bnp.org.news_detail.php?newsId=415 and www.bnp.org.uk/news_detail.php?newsId=425
27 For example, R. Liddle, 'The crescent of fear', *Spectator*, 12 November 2005.
28 For example, the 'anti-fascist' magazine *Searchlight*'s DVD, *The BNP Unmasked*, used in campaigning for the 2006 local elections, states on its cover that it 'proves they are the same Nazis they always were'. The BNP has replied by smearing Searchlight, for example claiming on its web page on 3 May 2006 that the organisation was founded by 'East London Jewish Marxists', and that 'the spiritual father of the 62 Group (from which Searchlight sprang), Harry Bidney had convictions for living on immoral earnings of prostitutes, and had a liking for young boys'.

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