Securitization, Urban Policy and “The Community”

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This article places recent debates about community cohesion and securitization in a wider context; it situates assumptions about the “threats” posed by particular communities against the backdrop of urban policy and urban social change in the UK. It reveals the way marginalised “communities”, minority ethnic group and white working-class, were imagined in New Labour’s urban regeneration policies and how they are invoked in the more recent Conservative-led coalition’s proposed social and regional policies and their accompanying rhetoric. The discussion also makes an assessment of the likely impact of recent economic and social policies for neighbourhood change, instability and “security”. It is argued that the ways urban communities have been conceptualised reflect, at best, a neglect of the structural determinants of urban social life and at worst a deliberate attempt to downplay such concerns underpinned by a deeply rooted preoccupation with the problem of rather than the problems faced by marginalised communities.

Introduction

In the first decade of the 21st century the idea that Muslim communities constitute a “threat” to Britain’s security as a nation and that communities choose to “self-segregate” and are living “parallel lives” (Cantle 2001, 9) separate from their white neighbours has become “common-sense”. The New Labour governments’ responses were to securitize further the borders and to extend and intensify surveillance and internal controls (Brown 2010; Pantazis & Pemberton 2009). Government interventions not only misidentified the causes of “segregation” but the discourses themselves, as well as securitization practices they gave rise to, were deeply counterproductive (Communities & Local Government Committee 2010; Evans 2011). The Conservative-led coalition government continued in very much the same vein: addressing a security conference in Munich on 5th February 2011 the Prime Minister blamed “state multiculturalism” for encouraging separation and segregation. In his view, “we have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values”. While asserting that he was alive
to the distinction between Islam and “Islamic extremism” (BBC 2011a) he made no challenge to Islamophobic constructs.

The discourses around immigration control historically have been punctuated with the idea that migrants, especially poor ones, constitute a threat to the “nation” and the “security” and “character” of Britain. Although migrants have been held responsible for the racism of white Britons, public disorder, lack of urban resources – especially housing – and insanitary urban environments (Smith 1989), the nature of the “threats” posed to the national or urban order has undergone some shifts over time and between minority ethnic groups (Rabin 2006; Pantazis & Pemberton 2009). In the period following the First World War and the Russian Revolution (1917), for example, anti-bolshevism combined with anti-Semitism to label Eastern European Jews “bolshies” – a threat the British state tried to manage by designating it “a criminal offence for aliens to foster disaffection amongst soldiers and civilians or to promote industrial unrest” (Multanen 1999, 49). Blame for housing shortages, overcrowding, obsession with the numbers of black migrants and worries about miscegenation in the 1950s and 1960s were displaced or augmented from the 1970s by “common-sense” links between “black culture” and “crime” and (second generation) young black people were constructed as a new internal threat to the “character” of Britain (Gilroy 1987; Hall et al 1978). Furthermore, “the territorial link between a black presence and urban violence” came to predominate in the 1980s (Smith 1989, 131 [original emphasis]) following the urban uprisings of that decade, which in turn was employed to justify authoritarian policing responses to “contain” the threat (Gilroy 1987; Smith 1989).

The aim of this article is to place more recent debates about securitization and community cohesion in a wider context; it situates assumptions about the “threats” posed by particular communities against the backdrop of recent urban policy and urban social change in the UK. It reveals the way marginalised “communities”, minority ethnic groups and white working-class, were imagined in New Labour’s urban regeneration policies and how they are invoked in more recent Conservative-led Coalition policies and their accompanying rhetoric. It is argued that the ways urban communities have been conceptualised reflect, at best, a neglect of the structural determinants of urban social life and, at worst, deliberate attempts to downplay such concerns underpinned by deeply-rooted preoccupation with the problem of, rather than the problems faced by, marginalised communities. The argument will be developed with a specific focus upon housing and housing policy as these are central to the claims of self-segregation and to issues of securitization in urban environments.

The following section briefly illustrates why the structural causes of “segregation” are so frequently ignored and outlines the broad influences which “place” populations in urban space. The paper then discusses how securitization
and community cohesion became intertwined in New Labour's urban policies before considering how idealised notions of urban citizenship were pitched against “problematic” communities in the quest for renewal. Building on these insights, the discussion turns to the way white working-class (“host”) communities have been constructed. Finally, the impacts of austerity measures and welfare reform in the contemporary setting, which are directly informed by manufactured understandings about marginalised communities, are discussed briefly. The social policies pursued by the Coalition government signify a departure from its predecessor's concern with cohesion, which was deeply problematic in different ways. The Conservative-led coalition's policies are likely, however, to undermine cohesion and community-relations further.

**Ignoring the Structural Causes of Segregation**

Avoiding “race” becoming a political issue was a concern in the minds of legislators as Britain negotiated its withdrawal from Empire and place at the head of the Commonwealth in the early post-war period (Smith 1989). Laissez-faire dispositions towards “race” and “racism” effectively meant no intervention to coordinate housing and migration was attempted at the national level (Smith 1989). Failure to acknowledge that intervention was necessary or how racism structured access to private housing markets or the growing public housing sector set the scene for the spatial patterning of black and ethnic minority ethnic groups which still resonates in the UK. Moreover, the “discovery” of segregated spaces, given the prevailing assumptions about natural absorption and dispersal, was then viewed as a consequence of “choice” on the part of settlers (Smith 1989). Governments ever since have defined the causes of segregation in accordance with their ideological frameworks and preferred solutions (Smith 1989; Kalra & Kapoor 2009).

A detailed examination of the mechanisms through which “residential segregation” was created over the post-war period, the responses (or inaction) of governments, and the temperature of “public opinion” to which governments and institutions appealed, is of course beyond the scope of this paper (see Smith 1989). Suffice to note that racism and disadvantage in the labour and housing markets of areas where post-war black and minority ethnic migrants settled, restructuring local labour markets, their interaction with housing markets together with broad policy shifts in the way welfare (especially housing) was allocated and organised (the movement from slum clearance to renewal in the 1970s, for example) were critically important factors (Smith 1989). Throughout the post-war period, however, explanations focusing on the material processes shaping the urban spatial order have been systematically buried under ones more in keeping with the prevailing

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1 Greater London, West Midlands, North West, Yorkshire and Humberside regions (Smith 1989).
ideologies of successive governments and appeals to white electorates. In this way “residential segregation” is a symbol in the minds of legislators as well as the arena in which black people experience urban life. This construction is informed by a sequence of political ideas about “race” and immigration. At any one time, these images determine (and rationalise) the range of “solutions” that may be put into effect (Smith 1989, 105-6).

Because racism and class relations and disadvantage have not been named, the “causes” of segregation have been misunderstood and the prescribed “solutions” time and again inevitably fail. As Smith (1989) noted,

The 1980s mark the culmination of a long political struggle with a problem termed “racial segregation”. Modern legislators are no nearer than their predecessors to establishing what it is, or why it persists without marginalising or demeaning the black population (143-4).

New Labour’s conceptualisation of “the problem” and prescribed “solutions” to insecurity and “cohesion” from 2001 have operated in much the same way (Kalra & Kapoor 2009).

**Insecurity and Cohesion**

The terms of the debate on “residential segregation” and “security” underwent a seismic shift in 2001. A criminalisation discourse had been developing towards “Asian” (mainly Muslim) men from the late 1980s, especially following the “Rushdie Affair” in 1988 (Bowling & Phillips 2002), but the urban disorders in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the spring and summer of 2001 and, even more, following the attacks in New York and on the Pentagon on 11th September led to step change in the way Muslim communities were constructed as “problematic” and “suspect” (Pantazis & Pemberton 2009; Evans 2011). The securitization agenda intensified again following the bombings in London on 7th July 2005 (Evans 2011; Brown 2010); the escalation of internal controls in response to the perceived new danger posed by “home grown” terrorists included a trebling of stops and searches by the police under section 44 of the Terrorism Act (2000) from 37,197 during 2006-07 to 117,278 in 2007-08 (Travis 2009). This represented an increase of 215% overall but of 322% for black people and 277% for “Asian” people; the majority of stops took place in the Metropolitan police area (Ministry of Justice 2009, 29-30).

Counter-terrorism policing strategies focused disproportionately on Muslim communities, and preoccupations with “security” increasingly penetrated the social

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2 These powers were judged a violation of human rights by the European Court in 2010.
fabric (Brown 2010; Pantazis & Pemberton 2009). The goals of New Labour’s “Contest” and “Contest2” strategies were to prevent “radicalisation”, use “disruption” to neutralise the terrorist threat and reduce the likelihood of future attack as well as to ameliorate the impact should one occur (Brown 2010; Evans 2011). The “Prevent” part of the Contest framework, launched in 2007 and updated in 2009, emphasised that “strong and empowered communities are better equipped to effectively reject the ideology of violent extremism, isolate apologists for terrorism and provide support to vulnerable institutions and individuals” (HM Government 2009, 84). The strategy reinforced the link with New Labour’s “community cohesion” and “community empowerment” agendas which first took shape in urban policy during 2001 in the wake of the urban disorders (HM Government 2009, 84).

The Prevent strategy under New Labour brought together a varied range of government departments, agencies and voluntary sector groups under its rubric although crucially and critically the police played a pivotal role (Brown 2010; Pantazis & Pemberton 2009). However, the fusion of anti-terror and community cohesion agendas was vociferously criticised for not only stigmatizing Muslim groups (see Evans 2011) but for being contradictory in its aims and counterproductive in its practices; it alienated those it ostensibly sought to reach (Communities & Local Government Committee 2010). More broadly, and in summary, successive pieces of anti-terror legislation since 2000, the policies and strategies that underpinned these developments and the media and political discourses accompanying them served to construct British Muslims as “Others” (Brown, 2010; Pantazis & Pemberton 2009), who are less than “fully British” and upon whom the responsibility lies to make themselves so (Evans 2011).

New Labour’s “community cohesion” and “community empowerment” agendas from 2001 were informed by a strand of communitarian philosophy (Robinson 2008) in which class divisions went unrecognised, and the mechanisms through which power-relations are defended in urban space were rendered incomprehensible as a consequence (Haylett 2001; Hancock 2007). The problem of spatial segregation was defined through this communitarian lens (Robinson 2008; Phillips et al 2008). Neither did they appreciate the roles played by far right groups in the 2001 disorders or in the continued maintenance of segregated spaces in British cities (McGhee 2005; Phillips et al 2008; Smith 1989). Instead there was a preoccupation with “cultural difference” and a reformulation of “segregation” as a problem of residents choosing to live “parallel lives” despite the questionable evidence upon which such claims were made (Robinson 2008; Phillips et al 2008).

3 The Prevent strategy was reviewed by Lord Carlile in 2011 and the Prevent strategy re-launched in June 2011.
Muslims were therefore obliged to “de-segregate” and contact and interaction between “communities” was seen as the way to debunk the myths which held groups apart (McGhee 2005). The Cantle Report (2001) acknowledged economic disadvantage among minority ethnic and white communities but the main emphasis of the report’s recommendations implied the problem was a technical one concerning the delivery of urban policy programmes; unhealthy competition for resources had inadvertently been promoted but these problems could be resolved with modifications to resource allocation mechanisms.

**New Labour, Renewal and the Ideal Citizen-Consumer**

More generally, New Labour placed faith in its flagship urban and social programmes to deliver renewal for disadvantaged communities. The National Minimum Wage (introduced in 1999), programmes such as the New Deal for Communities (launched in 1998), the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (2001) and Sure Start (1998), for example, in this view would benefit all communities in the most disadvantaged areas. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000 bolstered the conviction that racialised minorities would not lose out. The attention of policy makers turned to questions of governance: how best to co-ordinate activity across government departments, between local authorities and statutory, private and third sector partners at local level, strengthening accountability to central government through more challenging performance targets, issuing guidance and rolling out programmes.

The Cantle Report (2001) identified housing policies and allocation processes as major factors that thwarted community cohesion and also mechanisms through which more integrated communities could potentially be created. The report recommended:

Housing agencies must urgently assess their allocation systems and development programmes with a view to ensuring more contact between different communities and to reducing tension. They must also consider the impact on other services, such as youth provision and health. It is also essential that more ambitious and creative strategies are developed to provide more mixed housing areas, with supportive mechanisms for minorities facing intimidation and harassment (2001, 43).

Indeed, the Review Team expressed frustration that “the impact of housing policies on community cohesion seems to have escaped serious consideration to date” (2001, 42). Further, they drew attention to the impact of weak housing markets – in Burnley dwelling prices had plummeted to between £1500-2000 per dwelling – and the deleterious impact housing market decline was having on community confidence and as a source of discontent and conflict. Nevertheless,
they concluded that the “problem of low demand housing is largely outside our remit” (2001, 43).

The role of housing and labour markets together with changes in welfare provision and demographic shifts profoundly affect patterns of residential settlement and segregation, as we have seen. Such patterning is not “a given” but takes different forms in cities subject to broadly similar economic forces and the general thrust of state policies (Lee & Murie 2002). Earlier rounds of investment shape later developments, and some cities and “sub-markets” within them are more able to withstand the impact of changes in their economic fortunes than others (Lee & Murie 2002; Cole & Ferrari 2008). Residential settlement patterns are therefore complex and nuanced in different localities but the interplay of market activity and political interventions by national and local governments are critical factors (Lee & Murie 2002).

Local studies have revealed results at odds with the widely held and officially sanctioned presumption that communities are “self-segregating”. Phillips et al (2008), for example, noted how British Asian and white young adults in their focus groups each viewed mixed neighbourhoods and social spaces positively. Their statistical analysis revealed that residential “clustering” diminished between 1991 and 2001 in Oldham and Rochdale (2008, 82[my emphasis]). Living in some proximity to family and ethnic group members was regarded as important for social, cultural and economic support, but the main barriers to residential moves were associated with low incomes and fear of racist harassment and violence, which was particularly worrisome in a context where far right extremism was nurtured by “racialised national discourses on asylum and immigration, minority ethnic citizenship and belonging” (2008, 81).

Phillips et al’s (2008) study in Oldham and Rochdale formed part of a larger research project for the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI) Pathfinder established in 2002. The HMRI was New Labour’s flagship urban programme which aimed to arrest housing market decline of the like outlined by Cantle (see above). The Pathfinders as they are known nationally were centred in nine areas in the North and Midlands of England initially, extending to 12 in 2005. The initiative attracted £1.2 billion from central government between 2002 and 2008 and a further £1 billion was committed for 2008-11 (Long, 2010). The Oldham and Rochdale Pathfinder in Phillips et al’s study was remarkable because it placed community cohesion and involvement firmly in its strategy (Robinson & Pearce 2009). For the majority of Pathfinders, however, “community cohesion” was poorly understood, initiatives lacked guidance or direction and cohesion was not prioritised (Robinson & Pearce 2009).
Some local authorities located their HMRI plans in a broader set of over-arching priorities. In Liverpool the initiative was linked inextricably to the city’s “urban renaissance” ambitions: “During this period we will be consolidating and extending the dynamic renaissance of the city and growing its economy” (City of Liverpool n.d., para 2.5). The strategic mechanism to address the problems of marginalised communities was to attract higher income groups and increase revenue by bolstering the number and proportion of higher-rated council tax\textsuperscript{4} banded properties. Large scale clearance (demolition) of properties was envisaged as the means to address over-supply and to facilitate new developments in partnership with private and third sector property developers. Like other British cities, Liverpool aimed to compete with other cities, regionally and globally, to attract investors and consumers. Broadening the city’s “cultural offer” through consumption-based and “culture-led” projects, such as Liverpool’s European Capital of Culture status during 2008, was regarded as the approach through which middle-class re-population and inward investment would be secured. Middle-class professionals, preferably young, with disposable incomes were therefore pitched as the “ideal” residents in the spaces to be gentrified in the city centre and the neighbourhoods beyond (Jones & Wilks-Heeg 2004; Hancock 2007).

New Labour’s modernisation agenda embraced a particular variant of multiculturalism in its discourse on urban cosmopolitanism, re-vitalisation and “social inclusion” but the historically rooted view that poverty in Britain was a problem of culture and lifestyle underpinned by welfare dependency was strongly reasserted (Haylett 2001). Moreover,

In these circumstances a representative middle class is positioned at the vanguard of “the modern” which becomes a moral category referring to liberal, cosmopolitan, work and consumption based lifestyles and values, and “the unmodern” on which this category depends is the white working-class “other”, emblematically a throwback to other times and places (Haylett 2001, 365).

This backdrop illuminates the kind of “core values” into which Muslims were expected to “integrate” (Burnett 2008) and the way “good Muslims” are represented outside of the dominant demonising securitization discourse (Brown 2010).

The neoliberal ideology advanced by New Labour constructs the “good Muslim”, as it constructs other “good citizens”, primarily through meritocratic materialism. In this sense the “normal Muslim” is the one we can “do business” with, in a quite literal way (Brown 2010, 180).

\textsuperscript{4} The local taxation system operating in the UK. 80% of properties in Liverpool were in the lowest bands, A and B (City of Liverpool n.d., para 3.2).
The belief at the heart of the community cohesion agenda was that promoting social contact brings tangible social benefits. Coupled with the notion that economic benefits "trickle down" from more affluent groups to the poor, the view that economically disadvantaged residents draw economic benefits from higher income groups re-locating into "mixed communities" became common policy sense. There was little systematic evidence to support it however:

There are two principal mechanisms by which low income residents might be expected to benefit from mixed community approaches: area resources and social interactions. There is limited evidence that the new resources that may come with higher income residents (e.g. shops) either materialise or are beneficial to people on low incomes [because of higher prices and less disposable income as a consequence e.g.]. However, there is evidence that area reputations and stigma can be affected in ways not possible with less transformational change. There is some evidence that social tolerance might be increased through increased visibility of people from other social groups. However, a consensus is emerging that groups tend not to actually mix. Mixed communities are more likely to deliver shared spaces, than to create broader social networks, positive role models and job finding opportunities (Tunstall & Lupton 2010, 3).

Tunstall and Lupton (2010) concluded from the evidence available that social relationships between residents occupying different housing tenures and employment statuses tend to be highly circumscribed. The denigration of the working-class poor, especially welfare claimants, in New Labour’s political and policy discourses and refracted in media representations form part of the wider context against which findings such as these must be situated, as I explore below.

**White Working Class “Communities”**

McGhee’s (2005; 2006) work reminds us that the importance of preparing “host” communities – economically and psychologically – for the arrival and acceptance of “new” migrants is acknowledged in the policy documents on “race” equality and, in particular, in relation to the National Asylum Dispersal Scheme. Such preparation however suffered acute neglect and, where it took place, was frequently undermined by the overriding preoccupation with deterring asylum seekers and managing new migrants as part of the wider securitization agenda. The notion of “host community” moreover was conceptualised vaguely, such as by reference to the “general public”, or in terms of “risk”, through descriptions such as “far right susceptible” (McGhee 2006, 112). White working-class people’s anxieties were invoked in justifications for tougher restrictions, exploited by far right extremists and, in turn, the dangers posed by the British National Party (BNP) were then

5 The National Asylum Dispersal Scheme launched in 2000 aimed to “relieve” the pressure of settlement on communities and resources in the South East of England (especially London and Kent) and to act as a “deterrent” to asylum seekers (McGhee 2006, 121).
used to rationalise further deterrent measures, especially in a context where tabloid press hyperbole framed the debates (McGhee 2006). Successive Home Secretaries have therefore displayed only a very partial understanding of the social settings in which far right extremism may be forged, ignored the roles of legislators and policy-makers themselves in these processes, and have hinged their efforts on “preparing the migrant”.

The argument in this section of the paper supports the emphasis McGhee (2006) placed on action to address the social and economic problems facing white working class communities where “new” migrants may settle (see Reeve 2008) or indeed with whom settled Muslim communities are expected to “integrate”. However, the pervasive assaults on the cultural integrity of the urban poor (minority groups and white working class) reflect and reinforce economic and political marginality and provide the justifications for leaving unchallenged the material conditions and deprivations that sustain conflicts and I extend McGhee’s arguments in this direction.

A number of writers have made reference to the demonization of the white working-class poor and the myriad ways in which social control has been extended for these groups in a manner that has some parallels with Muslim communities (see Kalra & Kapoor 2009 for example). As McGhee described, commentators of different political persuasions have represented working class white communities as either “problems” for or “victims” of government policy. The Cohesion Panel (2004: 15, see also McGhee 2006: 120), for example, stated that:

We recognise that inward migration does create tensions and that these do not necessarily revolve around race. It is easier for the more affluent communities to be tolerant towards newcomers, as they do not perceive them to be a threat. Many immigrants will not, initially at least, be able to afford homes in the more affluent areas, will not be sending their children to schools in those areas and will not have the skills to compete for the higher level of jobs. Indeed, they will often be providing services to middle class families, keeping petrol stations open 24 hours a day, working in restaurants, and providing au pairs and cleaners.

No evidence however was provided to support the view that middle-class “communities” are “more tolerant”, especially towards poor migrants, and the limited evidence that exists on mixed income group interaction cited earlier suggests that poor and affluent groups do tend to live “parallel lives” even in close proximity. More broadly, the assertion in the quotation reflects the binary opposition of the “included majority” and the “socially excluded” which hides from view deviance – in this case intolerance - in the “included majority” (Young 1999; 2007). As Haylet

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6 Through requiring proficiency in English language, knowledge of Britain, assessed via the citizenship test, and the “active citizenship” agenda which was directed toward migrants and “host” communities (McGhee 2005; 2006).
(2001, 365) puts it: “middle-class dependency on working-class “backwardness” for its own claim to modern multicultural citizenship is an unspoken interest within the discourse of illegitimacy around the white working-class poor”. These unspoken class interests were also reflected in urban regeneration and social policies where “socially excluded” families and communities are defined as “the problems to be fixed” or corrected (Morrison 2003) and in academic discourses in more sanitised form (Haylett 2001) where uncritical use of pejorative terms such as “underclass” and “sink estate”, for example, are used too frequently to describe “host” communities.

The denigration and demonization of poor working class families and communities is, of course, most forcefully represented in UK tabloid press and popular television programmes’ fascination with any kind of “dysfunctionality” (Mooney & Hancock 2010). From the reality TV shows which feature “experts” (and the audience) sitting in judgment of working class lives and lifestyles and offering direction to aid their self-improvement (Skeggs 2005) to the tabloid obsession with “benefit scroungers”, working class people in disadvantaged areas are represented as a hazard to themselves and a threat to the wealth and security of the supposedly respectable, aspirational and “law-abiding majority” (Mooney & Hancock 2010). Underpinning these discourses is a vociferous anti-welfare message which is mobilised in the justifications for reforms to eradicate “welfare dependency” as the source of this malaise. Coupled with “penal pornography” (Wacquant 2009, xi), which trains its gaze in the same direction, “poverty porn” is a potent force in the criminalisation of the urban poor (Mooney & Hancock 2010). “Poverty porn” manifests in the hugely distorted but nevertheless widespread portrayal of people in poverty in the 24/7 news media, in tabloid newspapers and on popular television programmes in the UK which focus on individual failures, cultural deficiencies and deficits to the neglect of context, history and structure. These pornographies claim to reflect “reality” but in fact serve to shape and reconstruct dominant popular and political attitudes to poverty and welfare more generally (Mooney & Hancock 2010). At least partially informed by these representations, more intensive welfare conditionality regimes and formal policing practices in urban spaces reflect and re-forge relations of power and disadvantage. Reducing “social exclusion” and securing property-led regeneration was, for example, regarded as being reliant upon “domesticating” problematic lifestyles as much as reducing the perception of crime and anti-social behaviour which were deemed obstacles to regenerative efforts between 1998 and 2010. New Labour’s “urban renaissance” justified targeting policing efforts on the most marginal groups in urban neighbourhoods (see Hancock 2007) and intensifying securitization in city centres (Coleman 2009; 7 The conditions that must be met to claim welfare benefits which include requiring applicants to apply for a given number of jobs each week, subjecting to medical assessments for sickness benefits, and the sanctions imposed (including loss of benefits) for claimants deemed to fall short of these requirements.
Furthermore, the problematisation of welfare in political and media discourses around the urban poor are mobilised to justify the restriction and withdrawal of social welfare support, which I return to later.

"Host” Communities, Dispersal and the Far Right

The “sites” chosen for the National Asylum Dispersal Scheme which began in 2000 were designated primarily because housing was available. Other criteria were accorded far less importance but nevertheless included a) that there should be established multi-ethnic populations and b) voluntary organisations to provide support should be available (Audit Commission 2000 in McGhee 2005, 70). Not surprisingly in view of the fragility of the housing markets in the dispersal sites located primarily in the northern towns, the localities offered few employment opportunities. Welfare services were hard-pressed and against a backdrop where competition over scarce urban resources was intense the risk of hostility and violence towards incoming residents ought to have been a priority (McGhee 2005). However, while the government ignored or downplayed the importance of preparing “host” communities, far right extremists did not; the BNP capitalised on and cultivated the widespread perception that local white populations were “losing out” to asylum seekers and racialised and religious minorities (McGhee 2005).

The BNP increased its support in local elections during the first decade of the 21st century (Bowyer 2008; Wilks-Heeg 2009). The party won two seats in the 2009 European parliamentary elections (the North West and Yorks and Humber constituencies) with a 6.2% share of the vote. Analyses preceding that election showed BNP support was concentrated in economically disadvantaged urban areas but less so in the most diverse neighbourhoods (Bowyer 2008; Ford & Goodwin 2010). Bowyer’s (2008) contextual analysis suggested that housing markets were more significant than labour markets, supporting the view that competition for scarce urban resources has been influential.

The impact of deteriorating local social and economic conditions combined with the failure of the main political parties (especially Labour) to effectively reach these voters (see Wilks-Heeg 2009; Goodman 2010) led many commentators to predict growing BNP support as the economy descended into recession and ‘austerity’ dominated government responses in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008. Despite the confidence the BNP derived from media attention following their European election successes, however, it was unable to build on its gains in 2010 (Lowles 2010). What is more, by this time their self-proclaimed role as “defenders

8 Glasgow, Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Birmingham, Stoke on Trent, Bradford and Hull, for example.
of “White spaces” and “white rights” (McGhee 2005), their part in the maintenance of segregated spaces in cities and their demands for the further securitization of national borders were increasingly being shared with the English Defence League (EDL), which grew rapidly from 2009 (Searchlight 2010). The EDL makes no claim to be a political party and does not seek electoral respectability; it regards itself as “a movement” and is considered “the biggest threat to community cohesion in Britain today” (Searchlight 2010). Organised primarily through social networking sites on the internet and via football hooligan networks, the EDL hold street protests in localities with relatively large Muslim populations. Their activities are specifically designed to exploit tensions between communities and are frequently accompanied by violence (Searchlight 2010).

It is important to acknowledge the local activities to foster hospitality towards asylum seekers in “host” communities (Goodman 2010), innovative local community safety initiatives (Hughes 2007) and anti-racist and anti-fascist groups that organise to oppose the BNP and the EDL. However, cuts to urban programmes, welfare entitlements and the longevity of the economic crisis suggest the persistence of “economic pessimism” amongst individuals and groups – a predictor of far right party support (Ford & Goodwin 2010) - as the next section explores.

Insecurity and Austerity

UK cities’ regeneration programmes, from the 1990s, became increasingly entwined with measures to augment the “resilience” of urban centres against terrorist attack or other disaster (Coaffee et al 2008). These priorities invoked local authority officials and their partners to rely less on the conspicuous “fortification” of urban spaces and more and more on sophisticated surveillance systems, especially CCTV, as well as new forms of regulation to promote “safety”, “quality of life” and “sustainability” to promote property and consumer-led regeneration strategies (Coaffee et al 2008; Coleman 2004). The intensification of territorial-based social control through such measures as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs), Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), orders attached to criminal convictions (CRASBOs); Dispersal Orders (Section 30 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003) and the like added to the already well-developed collection of regulatory mechanisms practiced by social landlords (Burney 2005) and the police in urban neighbourhoods, as we have seen. These measures were regarded as essential pre-requisites for renewal, the settlement of new (more affluent) residents and to address “social exclusion” (Hancock 2006a; 2006b; 2007). For the more economically disadvantaged and politically less powerful (working-class young people, for example), whose street-presence is most common-place, however, these powers frequently exacerbated their insecurity in public space (Hancock 2006a).
New Labour’s flagship HMRI urban programme aimed to revive weak housing markets, as noted above, and relied in large part on private and third sector developers to do so. Not surprisingly the programme became vulnerable following the financial crisis in 2008 and the rapidly diminishing market for credit which followed. In Liverpool, for example, renewal “slowed down” and, because little demand was evident, some units intended for the private market were converted to social use. Flats and terraced houses in the HMRI “Pathfinder area” and in the north of Liverpool were badly hit by falling prices. More generally, the recession manifested itself unevenly within the city; the more affluent suburbs saw house prices fall by 3.5% on average between December 2007 and June 2009; in the city centre by 22% in same period, but in the inner core prices plummeted by more than a third. City centre new builds were badly affected, and repossessions increased between Jan and June 2009 by nearly 94% compared with the same period in 2008 (City of Liverpool 2010).

The HMRI was jeopardised further following the election of the Conservative-led coalition government in May 2010 and its announcement to withdraw funding in October the same year. In the Liverpool HMRI pathfinder area over 800 properties awaited demolition in the clearance areas and many residents remained isolated in their “blighted” neighbourhoods unable to move (Cooper 2011; see also Mason 2011). In the north Liverpool area of Anfield alone 657 occupied properties were still to be bought and demolished at the time of the announcement (Bartlett & Waddington 2011).

Over the course of the preceding decade most of the HMRI pathfinders housed increasingly ethnically diverse populations (Robinson & Pearce 2009). In Kensington (Liverpool)9, for example, the 1991 Census is likely to have underestimated black and minority ethnic groups at a little over 5% of the population, but by 2001 the percentage had risen to 13.7%10, and was estimated to be around 20% by 2009 (Russell 2009, 7). Just fewer than 9% were non-EU nationals. Some new migrants were students, others incomers from the wider region and, as part of Liverpool’s role in the National Asylum Dispersal Scheme, asylum seekers and refugees made up an increasing proportion over the lifetime of the NDC and HMRI (Russell 2009). Furthermore, neighbourhood blight, its associated disorder and economic consequences “amplify the importance of cleavages, especially along racial lines” (Letki 2005 in Kalra & Kapoor 2009, 1410; see also Skogan 1990 in Hancock 2001) and neighbourhood instability has been related to residents’ concerns and worries about safety (Taylor 1997, in Hancock 2001, 78). These problems are likely to

9 Kensington was a New Deal for Communities (NDC) site and later part of the HMRI area (Russell 2009).

10 3.5% described their ethnicity as “Mixed race”; 2.8% Asian or British Asian; 2.6% Black or Black British and 4.7% Chinese or “Other” (Russell 2009, 7).
become significantly more pronounced as a consequence of Coalition austerity measures.

The Coalition government claimed its Regional Growth Fund provided a possible source of funding to make up the shortfall in HMRI funding. The fund (£1.4bn for 2011-14 according to the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS) 2010) aims to assist the “re-balancing” of local economies towards the private sector, especially in regions such as these that are regarded as “over-dependent” on the state, in line with the government’s neoliberal ambitions. Three quarters of bids in the first round came from partnerships in the ethnically diverse but economically depressed North West, West Midlands, North East and Yorkshire and Humber areas of England. Total bids across England ran to £2.78bn (BIS 2011). However, hopes of filling the gaps left by cutting HMRI funding through this source were crushed when the UK Parliament’s Communities and Local Government Committee was advised that “The regional growth fund is not in any way a replacement for the housing market renewal funding...There is no way in which we are doing housing renewal.” (Lord Heseltine cited by Luciana Berger MP, Hansard 12 July 2011 Column 28WH). Instead, a £30m transition fund was made available for authorities in the five areas most badly affected. The amount required to complete the initiative in Liverpool alone however was estimated to be £120m (Luciana Berger MP, Hansard 12 July 2011 Columns 28 and 29WH).

The local administrations in the north and midlands, like their counterparts in inner-London which contain the most economically disadvantaged localities in the south of England (Newham, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham), are struggling with disproportionate cuts to their budgets compared to those in the most affluent areas (Curtis 2010). Central government funding for local authorities is bearing a large share of the government’s £81bn deficit reduction programme; councils face a 28% reduction in their budgets in real terms to 2015, the largest cuts occurring in 2011-12. Capital funding has been reduced by an estimated 45% (LGA, 2010). Furthermore, the Prime Minister’s ambition to grow the “Big Society” through voluntary sector delivery of services in the gaps left by cuts to central or local government provision for the most economically marginal areas and groups appears unconvincing.

Many charities and voluntary organisations supporting the most disadvantaged groups rely on non-“ring-fenced” local authority grants (BBC 2011b) and have reduced their programmes and staff quotas as council budgets have shrunk; more than 2000 charities have found themselves in this position at the time of writing (Ramesh 2011). Other revenue streams relied upon by third sector organisations are also facing savage cuts (Legal Aid funding, for example). Charities offering assistance to refugees and asylum seekers have found their activities destabilised by cuts of 62% to UK Border Agency (UKBA) funding (Refugee Council 2011) and
the removal of immigration cases from the scope of Legal Aid. Refugee and Migrant Justice (RMJ) and the Immigration Advisory Service (IAS), both large not-for-profit organisations, have gone into administration (Robins 2011) and the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) ceased operations in September 2011 (Hill 2011).

In view of the importance of housing markets and welfare provision for patterns of residential settlement and because the socio-economic context of localities strongly influence social relations between social groups, reductions in housing subsidies\(^\text{11}\) are particularly germane to the present discussion. A more thorough consideration of the Coalition's urban and social policies lies beyond the scope of this paper but the legislative programme more broadly shows a conspicuous disregard for community cohesion\(^\text{12}\).

**Housing Benefit Reforms as a Revanchist Measure?**

The notion of urban revanchism\(^\text{13}\) has been debated primarily in relation to the gentrification of city spaces and the eviction and displacement of the poor (Smith 2005). It describes a political strategy which “embodies a revengeful and reactionary viciousness against various populations accused of ‘stealing’ the city” (Smith 2005, xv). Research in a variety of jurisdictions has often focused on national legislation, local bye-laws and police action to remove homeless people from urban neighbourhoods to enhance the “quality of life” for affluent newcomers and to improve the investment opportunities for corporate developers (see Smith 2005). The thesis is not without critics or qualification (see Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010, for example), but the notion of “revanchism” usefully captures the sense of vengeance contained in urban social policies towards welfare benefit claimants, especially in what are regarded as the more affluent sectors of UK cities (especially London) in the current period. Inasmuch as the Coalition's proposal to cut housing benefit by 10% for people claiming Job Seekers' Allowance for twelve months or more was withdrawn in February 2011, for example, it nonetheless indicated the government’s direction of travel. These provisions were widely condemned for punishing claimants irrespective of their efforts to find work, labour market disadvantage or experience of discrimination.

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\(^{11}\) Housing Benefit (HB) is paid to qualifying tenants in the social rented sector and Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is paid to qualifying tenants in the private rented sector. Both are means tested.

\(^{12}\) The UK Government’s Open Public Services White Paper (2011) raises profound concerns in this regard for example.

\(^{13}\) Translated as “revenge” (Smith 2005, 43).
From October 2011 the calculation of local housing allowances will be based on the 30\textsuperscript{th} percentile of rents in Broad Rental Market Areas\textsuperscript{14} rather than the median (50\textsuperscript{th} percentile), and reforms scheduled for 2013 to 2015 will see subsidies increase in line with the (usually lower) Consumer Prices Index rather than the Retail Price Index which includes housing costs. These changes will not only diminish the pool of available properties for rent, reconfigure how and where the poor are housed in urban space but will depress further the meagre disposable incomes of claimants. The reforms revise downwards the weekly caps on the allowances payable for a range of property sizes; properties containing more than four bedrooms will no longer be supported. Ceasing to provide for larger properties will disproportionately impact upon larger families and households, especially in the London region, some minority ethnic households and families with dependent children (who are also more likely to experience poverty)\textsuperscript{15}. Young people will also be particularly adversely affected; the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee (2010, 31) reported that:

The Valuation Office Agency has calculated what the June 2010 LHA rates would have been if they were calculated at the 30th percentile rather than the median. These show that a young person renting a room in shared accommodation in Inner North London stands to lose £25 per week in LHA if the changes go ahead. This would represent nearly half of their weekly £51.85 JSA payment.

Furthermore, the Committee heard that the “shared room rate” – a lower level of benefit for those aged up to 25 – had been found to be wholly inadequate for securing suitable accommodation. Considerable subsidies from the earnings (or benefits) of young people were necessary even before the reduction in subsidy to the 30\textsuperscript{th} percentile of rents takes place. Under this package of reforms the lower rates will be extended to single people aged up to 35.

One of the stated aims of these measures was to provide a fairer and more sustainable Housing Benefit scheme by taking steps to ensure that people on benefit are not living in accommodation that would be out of the reach of most people in work, creating a fairer system for low-income working families and for the taxpayer. It will avoid the present situation where Housing Benefit recipients are able to live in very expensive properties in areas that most working people supporting themselves would have no prospect of being able to afford (Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) 2010a).

In contrast to the impression invoked in this quotation (and repeated frequently in the media and political discourses surrounding these reforms), however, housing

\textsuperscript{14} Administrative units for calculating rents and subsidies.

\textsuperscript{15} House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee (2010).
benefit claimants include low paid workers, people claiming sickness benefits, pensioners who have retired as well as the unemployed, as the aforementioned Select Committee noted. Many informed commentators have concluded that as a consequence of these reforms low paid workers in London will be forced to move away from the city, beyond reasonable travel to work distances, and in the capital as well as elsewhere more exclusively affluent areas and “ghettoization” for the most disadvantaged will be encouraged. Crisis (a homeless charity), for example, argued that:

Reducing Housing Benefit rates will move people away from their jobs and future employment opportunities, disrupt children’s education and damage local communities. Poorer people will become concentrated in areas with lower rents risking ghettoisation, an increased burden on public services and real implications for mixed communities (Crisis 2010).

The DWP informed the Select Committee that it will “discuss the impact of people moving address and needing to find new childcare, schools and health services” and added that “some customers will need to move away from extended family support networks; this however reflects the choices that most people in work also have to make” (2010, 44 [my emphasis]). The persistent and erroneous view that HB and HLA are “out of work” benefits is, yet again, clearly reflected here (see also Mooney & Hancock 2010). Moreover, extreme and wholly unrepresentative examples drawn from the tabloid press of households purportedly claiming colossal amounts in housing benefit were employed by the Chancellor, George Osborne, to justify these reforms (Booth 2010; Crisis 2010). “Welfare dependency” is the evil to be addressed (DWP 2010b); the structural causes of poverty, unemployment, uneven development, discrimination and low wages have been effectively erased from current policy discourses.

**Conclusion**

The UK Coalition government’s social policies signify an unambiguous departure from the way community cohesion was regarded as a means to respond to insecurity under New Labour’s urban programmes. Furthermore, while the previous Labour government was committed rhetorically at least to multiculturalism recent Prime Ministerial pronouncements have branded “state multiculturalism” as part of the problem which produced “segregation” and “extremism” (BBC 2011a). “Assimilation” into “British values” has materialized as the government’s explicit policy to an even greater extent. Following a long line of former incumbents, the structural causes of “segregation” have been defeated in favour of the dominant political ideology of the day. David Cameron’s speech on 5th February 2011 contained an attempt to distinguish between Islam and “Islamic extremism” (BBC 2011a) and could
have provided an opportunity to condemn far right extremism directed at Muslims. Instead it signalled continuity with his earlier counterparts in the way Muslim communities were singled out. Indeed, the coincidence of this event with the EDL holding one of their biggest rallies in their history (in Luton) provided succour to these Islamophobic protesters.

The preoccupation with disadvantaged communities as “problematic communities” which precedes New Labour has been made even more explicit in the current justification for public spending cuts and welfare reform, especially in the wake of urban disorders in English cities during August 2011 (Cameron 2011). Furthermore, diminishing welfare support is likely to promote family dislocation, economic insecurity, and neighbourhood instability which nurture urban divisions and conflict. In this unforgiving setting, asylum seekers and refugees who have borne the brunt of securitization measures on the borders will need to contend with the systematic withdrawal of support that was already pitiful (Burnett 2011).

The preceding discussion illustrates the significance of a wider frame of reference for understanding the problem of “security” in urban spaces which so often is conceived in narrow, technological and “risk-focused” terms defined by the state. Broader notions of “security” which recognise and support the cultural integrity of communities (minority ethnic groups and white working-class) are essential for critical analysis; systematic attacks on the “culture” and “lifestyles” of the urban poor both reflect and perpetuate the political and economic marginalization of communities. These discourses help to forge a context in which groups and communities become “morally excluded” from wider society and, in turn, excluded from “resources, rights and fair treatment” (Tyler et al 1997: 216).

References


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