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THE SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY COHESION: KEY THEMES AND DOMINANT CONCEPTS OF THE PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

ABSTRACT

The community cohesion policy agenda in England emerged from the melee of explanation and advice that abounded in the aftermath of the street disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001. Various reports were published examining issues arising from the disturbances and providing recommendations for action. In 2002 the government responded with the launch of guidance on community cohesion for local authorities and established the Community Cohesion Unit, which was set the twin tasks of reviewing government policy and encouraging new learning and good practice in community cohesion at the local level. Housing was recognised as a key theme within this agenda, having been blamed in the various reports into the disturbances in 2001 for contributing toward high levels of residential segregation in many English towns, which were assumed to lead to different populations living, working and socialising separately. This paper explores this causal story, by first considering the particular conceptualisations of community and multiculturalism informing this new policy agenda, before moving on to question the integrity of four fundamental pillars on which the community cohesion agenda has been built: the assumed self-segregation of South Asian households within certain towns and cities; the role that housing policy and provision has played in reinforcing this process of self-segregation; the potential of housing interventions to reverse this process and to promote residential integration; and the curative benefits that will flow from greater inter-ethnic residential mix.

Introduction

The community cohesion agenda emerged as a discrete policy concern in the aftermath of the street confrontations in the Pennine mill towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the summer of 2001. The disturbances, invariably referred to in the news media as ‘race riots’, were initially portrayed by the home secretary as a “*law and order issue*” and condemned by the prime minister as “*simply thuggery*”. Various official reports commissioned to examine issues arising from the disturbances and to provide recommendations for action, however, subsequently drew attention to the fracturing of local communities and the perceived existence of ‘parallel lives’, whereby different communities and populations were seen to live, work and socialise separately. The government response was to launch the community cohesion agenda. Guidance for local authorities was published, offering a “*broad working definition*” of community cohesion and providing advice on mainstreaming community cohesion objectives across a broad range of policy realms, including housing, regeneration, youth and community work, community safety and policing, education and employment. The Community Cohesion Unit was established, located in the Home Office and charged with leading on a review of government policy and encouraging new learning at the local level through the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme. In little more than a year, the community cohesion agenda had been born and matured into a key policy concern.

On the face of it, the emergence of the community cohesion agenda would appear to be evidence-based policy making in action. The various reports into the disturbances provided a diagnosis, advice and recommendations from the independent panels and review bodies directed the policy prescription and the Pathfinder Programme represented the 'what works' approach to practice development writ large. This evidence-based narrative, however, denies the conceptual complexities and contested interpretations of community cohesion. It fails to recognise that community cohesion is an agenda built on ideological assumptions regarding disputed concepts such as 'community' and 'multiculturalism' and drawing on dominant discourses concerning key themes in contemporary public policy, including social capital and the benefits of social mix. This paper seeks to expose and examine these dominant themes and concepts and profile their authority in shaping the focus and emphasis of the community cohesion agenda. The aim in doing so is not to deny that contemporary society is faced with the very real challenge of managing the consequences of antagonism, prejudice and conflict between distinct groups often resident in different neighbourhoods forced to compete for scarce resources (housing, jobs, regeneration funding, educational opportunities and so on). Rather, it is to assert that the community cohesion agenda has overblown differences of ethnicity, is unwarranted in maintaining that the problem is *with* minority ethnic communities and is wrong in many of the conclusions drawn to legitimatise the specifics of the policy response. In particular, attention is

paid to the importance placed on housing as both a cause of the supposed crisis in cohesion and as a curative balm capable of drawing out the infection undermining community cohesion in England's towns and cities.

Discussion begins with a brief, descriptive review of the immediate justification and essential ingredients of the community cohesion agenda, focusing on the efforts of government sponsored reports into the street disturbances in summer 2001 to comprehend and formulate a response to events in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Recognising that community cohesion had no place in the vocabulary of urban theory or public policy prior to the disturbances in 2001, discussion then goes in search of the conceptual moorings of the community cohesion agenda, focusing, in particular, on two key conceptual touchstones; community as a realm of governance through which to counter the apparent crisis in social cohesion in contemporary society and recent shifts in attitudes toward multiculturalism. Having detailed the causal story and profiled the conceptual underpinnings of the community cohesion agenda, the remainder of the paper moves on to question the integrity of four supporting pillars of the agenda: the assumed self-segregation of minority ethnic groups; the role that housing policy and provision has played in reinforcing segregation; the role that housing policy and provision might play in promoting increased ethnic mix and; the benefits of social interaction assumed to flow from residential integration.

An Overview of the Community Cohesion Agenda

The community cohesion agenda represents the principle ingredient of the political response to the violence in the summer of 2001 (Burnett, 2004). In the rush to explain the roots of the disturbances central government commissioned and sanctioned various local and national reports.

Following the confrontations in Bradford the home secretary announced the formation of an inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion. Set the task of reporting on what government could do to minimise the risk of further disorder and to help build stronger, more cohesive communities, the subsequent report (Home Office, 2001) drew heavily on the findings of local reviews commissioned in Oldham (Oldham Independent Panel Review, 2001) and Burnley (Burnley Task Force, 2002), as well as the findings of a report examining 'community fragmentation' in Bradford, commissioned before but published in the immediate aftermath of the disturbances in July 2001 (Ouseley, 2001). The home secretary also established and directed a Community Cohesion Review Team, chaired by Ted Cattle, to report the views and opinions of residents and different community interests in the affected towns, as well as other parts of England. The Home Office co-ordinated the launch of these various reports, which were published simultaneously on 11 December 2001.

Various triggers have been identified as sparking the disturbances, including the frustration of young Pakistani and Bangladeshi men with

deprivation and social marginalisation, their vilification in the local media, the visible activities and local incursions of the BNP and insensitive and inappropriate local policing (Amin, 2002). The official reports, however, maintained the media representation of the disturbances as an 'Asian problem' and chose not to contradict the demonisation of the young men involved as criminals, ungrateful immigrants, disloyal subjects, cultural separatists and, in the context of the rising Islamophobia that followed in the wake of September 11, Islamic militants (Amin, 2002; 964). Instead, the various reports emphasised what Ouseley (2001) refers to in the foreword of the Bradford Race Review as "*the very worrying drift toward self-segregation*" and the importance of "*arresting and reversing this process*". The essence of this position is captured in a much quoted section of the Home Office commissioned and published report of the Independent Review Team:

"Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges." (Independent Review Team, 2001, pp. 9)

Despite little evidence regarding patterns and trends of ethnic segregation in towns and cities in England, and what evidence is available pointing to a

far more complex and variable situation than that assumed in the various reports into the disturbances in 2001 (Phillips et al., 2002), great emphasis was placed on the contribution of residential segregation to social disharmony and unrest. Suggesting that community cohesion is about helping micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole, the Independent Review Team (2001) argued that divided communities will need to develop common goals and a shared vision; to challenge the 'them and us' attitude considered prevalent in situations of increasing division and crumbling cohesion (Home Office, 2001). In addition to positive approaches to celebrating diversity, the report of the Ministerial Group suggested that the most successful approach to managing the inevitable tensions between different groups is to forge unity through a common sense of place and shared sense of belonging (Home Office, 2001). This rationale led the various reports to challenge, what Ouseley (2001; 3) refers to as, the increasing segregation of different ethnic groups, which are seen to be "*retreating into 'comfort zones' made up of people like themselves*".

Alongside criticism of the tendency toward self-segregation within certain minority ethnic groups and, in particular, the South Asian population, housing policy and provision was recognised as a major determinant of the shape of communities in the official reports and singled out for particular criticism for contributing toward high levels of residential segregation in many English towns and cities:

“The impact of housing policies on community cohesion seems to have escaped serious consideration to date..... However, this is clearly a major determinant of the shape of communities and will have profound implications on the relationship between different races and cultures.” (Independent Review Team, 2001; 42).

As the Oldham Independent Review Panel (2001) put it “*the segregated nature of society in Oldham is at the heart of the town’s problems, and that begins with housing.*” (pp.16). Recognising that while some minority ethnic groups choose to live within “*their own communities*”, the Independent Review Team (2001) argued that some choices are not always freely made and may reflect the outcome of housing policy and provision. Choices constrained by negative factors, including poverty and threats or the experience of harassment and violence, were identified as leading to frustration and resentment at the inequalities in access to better housing and better areas. Action was therefore demanded from housing agencies:

“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 of other services such as youth provision and health. It is essential that more ambitious and creative strategies are developed to provide more mixed housing areas, with supportive mechanisms for minorities facing intimidation and harassment”. (Independent Review Team, 2001; 43).

Constrained choices were also recognised in the report of the Ministerial Group as serving to increase isolation from other communities, which concluded that clear evidence exists that “*concentrations of people from*

one ethnic background in certain areas of housing, and their separation from other groups living in adjacent areas has contributed greatly to inter-community tensions and conflict" (Home Office, 2001; 22). Physical isolation, it was suggested, can, in turn, result in isolation in schooling, employment, service use and social life. Such isolation, can prove particularly divisive, it was argued, when exacerbated by factors including the inflammatory activities of extreme political organisations, including the British National Party (BNP), the concentration of extreme deprivation and disadvantage within isolated communities, the divisive consequences of perceived inequities in the allocation of regeneration funding and resources to community groups and the insensitive, inaccurate and provocative reporting of local news media. A final ingredient was identified as weak political leadership, that fails to acknowledge and meet these challenges head on.

Having fashioned the evidence base, central government set about facilitating the generation of a framework of practical measures to mainstream the process of community cohesion. A Community Cohesion Unit (CCU) was established by the Home Office and charged with leading on the review of government policy and co-ordinating the Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme, that was launched in 2003 with the stated aim of developing good-practice examples of areas that are 'getting community cohesion right' (Home Office, 2002). Various community cohesion action plans were developed by government departments,

including a housing action plan devised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Office with the intention of fostering a strategic approach to the promotion of community cohesion through housing policy and provision. Principal responsibility for delivering the community cohesion agenda, however, was placed on local authorities and their strategic partners, with guidance on community cohesion issued to local authorities in 2002 identifying their community leadership role, enshrined in the Local Government Act 2000, as being fundamental to the successful development of cohesive communities (LGA et al., 2002). In 2004 fresh impetus was injected to the agenda with the publication of an updated action guide for local authorities, that emphasised the centrality of housing to a strategic approach to tackling community cohesion (LGA, 2004; 50), and the launch of government consultation to assist with the development of a national Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy, billed as providing the basis of a renewed programme of action across Government to build community cohesion and reduce race inequalities (Home Office, 2004).

Conceptualising Community Cohesion

Community cohesion had no place in the lexicon of urban theory or public policy prior to the street confrontations of summer 2001. Conceptually speaking, it represented an empty vessel into which the preoccupations of contemporary public policy were poured. As revealed above, a 'story-line',

containing elements of different policy narratives, was generated that 'sounded right' and provided the common-sense basis for intervention. Paramount among the discourses called upon to articulate this 'story line' were the growing interest in the communitarianism of Etzioni (1995) in the context of the apparent modern-day crisis in social cohesion, and New Labour's shifting attitudes toward multi-culturalism.

The community cohesion agenda buys into the collective pessimism of urban theorists and angst among policy makers regarding the 'crisis' of social cohesion; what Fukuyama (1999) refers to as the great disruption in social values and order and what Castells (1997) points to as the dissolution in the social glue binding social systems together, in the face of the processes of privatisation, residualisation and globalisation. A world is assumed in which, as Forrest and Kearns (2001) put it:

"The social element of a previous era is crumbling and...we are being collectively cast adrift in a world in which the previous rules of social interaction and social integration no longer apply." (p2126)

Recognising that scant effort has been made to evidence or measure either the previous existence or the recent loss of cohesion, Kearns and Forrest (2000) attempt to disassemble the constituent elements of a socially cohesive society and provide a conceptual basis for empirical investigation. Their approach builds on von Hoffman's (1994) consideration of the essential characteristics of the urban neighbourhood during its supposed

'golden era' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and his emphasis on the combined importance of associational activity, local economic growth, dense organisational life and a responsive political culture. Suggesting that a socially cohesion society 'hangs together' in a way that the component parts fit in and contribute toward society's collective project and well-being, with minimal conflict between different groups, Kearns and Forrest (2000) identify five elements or components of social cohesion, detailed in Figure 1. The community cohesion agenda appropriated this conceptualisation, the report of the Independent Review Team on community cohesion directly quoting the five dimensions detailed by Kearns and Forrest, but presenting them as the principal domains of *community cohesion*. The "*broad working definition*" of community cohesion presented in the official guidance also draws on the five dimensions, although there are some subtle departures from Kearns and Forrest's conceptualisation, as revealed in Figure 1. In particular, their emphasis on the reduction in wealth disparities is substituted with a reference to the provision of equality in life opportunities.

The community cohesion agenda derives further conceptual clarity by drawing on Kearns and Forrest (2000) discussion of contradictory connectiveness between neighbourhoods, as a means of distinguishing between social cohesion and community cohesion. Drawing on the UK experience, Kearns and Forrest evaluate current responses to the social cohesion agenda at three different spatial scales; national/interurban,

city/city-region and neighbourhood. In doing so, they emphasise the interconnectedness of the different domains across these spatial scales, pointing out that this interconnectiveness can be contradictory as well as complementary. In particular, they draw attention to a potential contradiction of fundamental importance to the community cohesion agenda; the fact that tensions can exist between socially cohesive neighbourhoods. In their words, "*there may be within some neighbourhoods the social cohesion of restrictive covenants and of withdrawal from and defence against the outside world*" (p1013). The stronger the ties that bind these local communities, they suggest, the greater may be the social, racial or religious conflict between them. The result might be a city consisting of socially cohesive but increasingly divided neighbourhoods. The Independent Review Team draws directly on this contradiction to distinguish between social cohesion, which it claims can be found in increasingly divided towns and cities where individuals are integrated into their local ethnic or religious based communities, and community cohesion, where participation is taking place across communities, knitting them together into a wider whole. In response, the Independent Review Team (2001) suggests that community cohesion should be about helping micro-communities to gel or mesh into an integrated whole that 'hangs together'. Community cohesion is conceptualised as social cohesion at the neighbourhood level and community is regarded as the domain through which common social

values, enabling all communities to work together toward common goals, can be asserted and a sense of belonging and citizenship nurtured.

This conceptualisation of community cohesion taps into the communitarianism of Etzioni (1995) and his assertion that communities can serve the dominant moral order, by expressing particular moral commitments to which individual members align their personal value system and allegiance (Burnett, 2004). Community is recognised as a vehicle for promoting a particular model of citizenship and asserting civic order. Segregation is problematised within this narrative if it is perceived to result in communities that assert moral commitments considered to be at odds with the dominant moral order. It is at this point that the policy narrative regarding community as a realm of governance intersects with shifting attitudes toward multi-culturalism to provide the essential justification for the community cohesion agenda.

The events of summer 2001 in northern towns and cities, together with the growing Islamophobia and open questioning of the allegiances of British Muslims following the events of September 11, have been recognised as prompting a shift in New Labour policy, away from a valuing of cultural mix and an active embracing of diversity and back to the assimilationist language of the 1960s, exemplified by the introduction of citizenship tests and an oath of allegiance for new immigrants. According to Back et al. (2002), this position involves, on the one hand, a commitment to what then Home

Secretary, Roy Jenkins, described in 1966 as integration as 'equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance', and, on the other hand, a resolution to limit immigration, which is portrayed as catalyst of intolerance and hate. Hence the home secretary's justification for the increasingly draconian stance on asylum as a means of preventing the asylum issue being used as a weapon in the armoury of the National Front and BNP.

This model of multiculturalism is premised on the notion of private and public cultural domains. The private cultural realm is recognised as having positive value in providing social and psychological support for the individual and diversity is tolerated if it does not impinge on the public sphere. The public domain is promoted as an arena of equal individual citizenship, rather than celebrated difference, and is presumed to be neutral. This public/private binarism is important in helping explain why, as Amin (2002) points out, so much has been made of the supposed retreat of South Asian households into inner-urban wards to protect and preserve diaspora traditions and Muslim values, while little is said about the ethnic cultures and race proclivities of White British households.

As Harris (2001; 19) points out, drawing on John Rex's outlining of a 'political sociology' of multi-culturalism, the application of the two-domain thesis in the British context is beset with difficulties. First, institutions such as schools do not fit neatly into either domain, communicating private

morals of family and community and also serving the public function of skilling children for life in modern society. Second, various institutions afforded a privileged position in British society assert culturally specific values and commitments. In particular, Harris points to the privileged position of the Anglican church in the public domain, evidenced by the role of the monarch as head of the church and protection provided by the blasphemy law, that serves to endorse a nationalist culture that excludes other faiths and cultures. Most significant, however, is the extent to which the neutrality of the public domain is compromised by the hegemonic position occupied by a particular notion of 'Britishness', to the exclusion of any representation of minority ethnic cultures. A narrow vision is projected in which "*certain liberal ideals are posited as beyond the challenge of multi-culturalism, and from which notions of equality of outcome and social rights are excluded*" (Harris, 2001; 18). Britishness as an accepted given; a durable set of principles, values and habits (Winder, 2004).

Situated within this model of multi-culturalism, community cohesion agenda has considered the segregation of the White British population as largely unproblematic, the unspoken assumption being that they share the principles and values of 'Britishness' that dominate the public cultural domain. The segregation of the South Asian populations of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, in contrast, has been problematised for allowing (South Asian) identities, values and principles that lie outside the boundaries of the imagined national culture to encroach upon the public

cultural domain, compromising its supposed neutrality and challenging established norms. In a press interview just two days before the publication of the official reports into the disturbances in 2001 comments made by the home secretary asserted this narrative. Arguing that “*if we want social cohesion we need a sense of identity*” he sought to emphasise the importance of immigrants and their children adopting British “*norms of acceptability*” (Brown, 2001). The press coverage of the launch of the various reports into the 2001 disturbances subsequently focused on the one recommendation out of the 67 contained in the Independent Review Panel report that identified the need for all new immigrants to swear and ‘oath of allegiance’ to Britain.¹

The causal story of the community cohesion agenda identifies the disturbances of 2001 as being rooted in the residential choices of minority ethnic households, informed by the constraints of the housing system. These choices are regarded as serving to isolate certain minority ethnic groups in segregated neighbourhoods, limiting interaction and undercutting the promotion of shared (British) values, principles and norms of behaviour, allowing social disharmony and unrest to flourish. In response, government has invoked the community cohesion agenda in an attempt to prevent further harm to the fabric of society by promoting shared identities,

¹ See, for example, Johnston, P. (2002) Loyalty oath urged for immigrants. *Daily Telegraph*, 12 December 2001; Travis, A. (2001) Loyalty pledge to Britain urged for all cultures. *The Guardian*, 12 December 2001; Waugh, P. (2001) Immigrants must show loyalty to nation, says report. *The Independent*, 12 December 2001.

values and principles through social interaction borne out of residential integration.

Firm Foundations? A Survey of Four Fundamental Pillars of the Community Cohesion Agenda

The validity of the causal story of the community cohesion agenda rests on the acceptance of at least four essential assumptions regarding trends in the residential settlement patterns of different ethnic groups in England and the role of housing in shaping these outcomes. First, different minority ethnic groups are assumed to be actively choosing to live in segregated communities. Second, housing policy and practice is believed to have informed and reinforced these patterns of segregation. Third, housing interventions are considered capable of promoting residential integration and, fourth, it is assumed that integration will flow from interaction, resulting in increasing understanding, tolerance and harmony between different groups. The remainder of this paper examines the integrity of each of these four suppositions.

The Self Segregation of Minority Ethnic Groups

In contrast to the situation in the USA, where social scientists have recently rediscovered their interest in residential segregation as a persistent factor in racial inequality (Charles, 2003), little is known about the trends in

settlement patterns of different ethnic groups in the UK, the factors influencing the spatial distribution of different groups and the consequences of segregation. There is clear evidence, however, of a long history of minority ethnic groups clustering in specific residential areas (Phillips, 1998). Migrants have long gravitated toward population clusters of people from similar ethnic backgrounds, for reasons of mutual support and security in the face of hostility from the majority ethnic population, as well as the availability of cheap and accessible accommodation (Johnston et al., 2002).

The community cohesion agenda appears concerned that minority ethnic population clusters in some towns and cities are proving a persistent presence, with certain groups failing to follow the path toward assimilation; increasing ethnic mixing and the gradual decline of ethnic distinctions and the cultural and social differences by which they are expressed (Alba and Lee, 1997). In the context of low levels of spatial redistribution of the minority ethnic population across the country, recent evidence, however, points to significant localised change, including the increasing suburbanisation of minority ethnic groups out from traditional population clusters, although the situation has been reported to vary from place to place and between different minority ethnic groups (Phillips, 1998). Analysis of the 1991 Census leads Johnston et al. (2002), for example, to conclude that the “*assimilation scenario fits – especially for Blacks, but also for many of the Asians*” (pp. 609). Most of England’s minority ethnic

population, in sharp contrast to the white-British population, they suggest, live in parts of cities where members of the majority ethnic (white-British) population form a substantial, if not a majority, component of the local population (Johnston et al., 2002). Analysis of the 1991 Census has also pointed to the active dispersal of minority ethnic populations, Peach (1996; 1998) reporting a modest dispersal of the Caribbean-born population in London through time and Rees and Phillips (1996) highlighting the movement of the Indian population of Greater London from inner to outer city areas.

Analysis of the 1991 Census, however, has suggested that the process of suburbanisation has been selective. Phillips (1998) concludes that, while Indian and British-born Black Caribbean people are well represented amongst the 'spatial pioneers' Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, the principal minority ethnic population groups in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, are virtually absent. Rather than suggesting that such patterns reflect active choice, however, Phillips points to the low socio-economic status and high unemployment levels of these groups and the historically restricted opportunities available to them through council housing.

Simpson (2004) is more explicit in pouring scorn on the assumed self-segregation of minority ethnic groups. Pointing to several problems with measures of segregation used in previous studies, Simpson attempts to measure residential segregation in Bradford through time, comparing the same areas, tracing the impact of population growth and separating

migration patterns from natural change within the South Asian population. Drawing on demographic statistics with a racial dimension compiled by Bradford City Council since the 1970s, together with data from the 1991 Census, he reveals that there are fewer mono-racial areas in Bradford at the beginning of the 21st century than there were a decade before, there are no mono-racially South Asian areas in the district and there has not been a separation of South Asian and Other populations. The net migratory trend throughout the 1990s was, in fact, out of the city, for both White and South Asian households. Segregation did not reduce and more South Asian households are living in 'high-minority' areas, but this is not because of self-segregation, but rather the 'refilling' of the inner city through immigration and natural population growth within the South Asian communities.

As Simpson rightly points out, surveys of local households support his findings, revealing that many South Asian households in Bradford, and particularly younger people, are keen to move to areas beyond current settlements (Ratcliffe et al., 2001; Phillips et al., 2002). The self-segregation and active isolationism of South Asian households, Simpson argues, is therefore exposed as a myth in the very place held up by the purveyors of this legend as the archetypal polarising city.

Housing and Residential Segregation

Further opprobrium is poured on the assumed isolationism of minority ethnic groups by the wealth of evidence revealing how the housing outcomes of minority ethnic households are the product of 'constrained choice'; choices made within a greater system of constraints than that encountered by the majority ethnic (white-British) population (Tomlins, 1999). The constraints shaping the housing outcomes of minority ethnic households have been shown to include the actions of key individuals in the housing system and the policies and practices of key housing agencies, including estate agents, building societies, house builders, housing associations and local authorities (Robinson, 2002). Evidence of the discriminatory actions of key individuals ranges from the racist assessments of housing visitors in 1960s Birmingham (Rex and Moore, 1967), through to 'blacklining' activities of estate agents, revealed in the 1990s to involve the identification of certain neighbourhoods as unsuitable for minority ethnic settlement (Bowes et al., 1998). Evidence of the discriminatory consequences of the policies and practices of housing agencies includes a substantial body of work examining the allocation policies of social landlords stretching back 40 years, revealing the institutional processes through which certain groups remain under-represented in the sector, while minority ethnic households who access the sector are more likely to reside in less desirable properties in less popular neighbourhoods (Robinson, 2002).

These processes have been recognised as fundamental to the residential settlement patterns of minority ethnic groups in many British cities and appear to justify the criticism directed toward housing policy and provision by the community cohesion agenda for reinforcing the segregation of minority ethnic groups into discrete neighbourhoods. The consequences of constraints in the housing system on patterns of residential settlement among different minority ethnic groups, however, are difficult to unpick. In some instances the consequences of discrimination within housing provision are obvious, an investigation of the allocation policies and practices of Oldham MBC, for example, found that the council was systematically segregating South Asian applicants into certain estates (CRE, 1993). The housing outcomes of minority ethnic groups, however, are typically the product of more than merely the action or inaction of key individuals within the housing system or the consequence of policies and administrative processes of housing agencies. They also reflect wider societal situations and experiences and the strategies that different groups and households adopt to manage these challenges.

Experiences vary between different minority ethnic groups, but minority ethnic people are more likely than the rest of the population to live in deprived neighbourhoods, have low incomes, be unemployed, live in inadequate or unsuitable accommodation, experience poor health and be the victims of crime and anti-social behaviour (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

These situations, and the racism that is central to their experience, impact on the locational choices and housing outcomes of minority ethnic households. The precise consequences are difficult to predict, however, minority ethnic people being active agents, rather than passive recipients of consumption opportunities, who can devise strategies of avoidance, accommodation and resistance even within these most constrained of circumstances (Harrison, 2003; Law, 1996).

The precise strategies adopted by individual households will vary within and between different minority ethnic groups, reflecting the particular resources that populations are able to draw on, as well as individual preferences and previous experiences. Avoidance might involve staying away from particular agencies (estate agents, mortgage lenders, social landlords) or locations (estates or neighbourhoods). Research has revealed, for example, how racialised notions of space are an important influence on the neighbourhood preferences of minority ethnic households, with certain neighbourhoods being regarded as 'hostile', 'white' or 'racist' and therefore out-of-bounds by some minority ethnic people (Phillips et al., 2002; Robinson et al., 2004).

Accommodation might involve the development of coping strategies and the negotiation of opportunities within established constraints. The segregated communities that the community cohesion agenda seeks to problematise, for example, can represent a vital resource for helping

people manage the challenges and difficulties they face, offering a sense of identity and ontological security (Wilton, 1998), defence against persecution and oppression and support to deal with exclusion from social and economic opportunities in mainstream society. More practical benefits of minority ethnic population clusters have been reported to include the availability of culturally sensitive services, religious and recreational facilities and shopping opportunities and access to businesses providing job opportunities to local people that are not available in the wider labour market (Robinson et al., 2002). Rich in the key aspects of social organisation – networks, norms and trust - that Putnam (1993) suggests facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit, these communities can also provide the social ties and mediating community organisations that Burns and Taylor (1988) argue are used by excluded communities to provide solutions, springboards and alternatives.

Finally, resistance might involve challenging constraints, individually or collectively. The 'spatial pioneers' referred to by Phillips (1998), for example, can be viewed as rallying against racialised notions of space in order to extend their own housing choices, whilst also serving as a bridgehead through which new locations and associated opportunities are opened up to other households. The BME housing movement, meanwhile, represents a collective response to the ongoing failings of white-run agencies to adequately satisfy the housing needs of minority ethnic groups, which has striven to directly meet the needs of minority ethnic households

and served to increase cultural competence across the social rented sector (Robinson, 2002).

The housing outcomes and residential settlement patterns of different minority ethnic groups are therefore the product of far more than the actions of key individuals or the policies and actions of particular agencies within the housing system. This fact is underlined by the evident difficulties of promoting residential integration through housing interventions.

Housing and Residential Integration

The community cohesion agenda assumes that housing interventions can promote residential integration and increasing ethnic mix, from which inter-ethnic interaction will inevitably flow. This basic premise raises two fundamental questions. First, do the levers exist through which policy can intervene to effect a change in residential settlement patterns and the ethnic composition of neighbourhoods? Secondly, social landlords are identified as key agents of change, but are they allied to the cause?

The assumed potential of housing interventions to promote residential integration parallels the contemporary fascination of public policy, and housing policy in particular, with social mix, which emerged as an explicit policy concern in the 1990s when criticism was levelled at 'closed' communities by proponents of the underclass thesis and the social

exclusion agenda. Two principle levers of housing policy and provision have been used to try and promote greater social mix. First, social landlords have been encouraged to devise housing allocations systems that control the social composition of the tenant base within particular locations. Second, housing tenure has been taken as a proxy for class and the diversification of the local stock base has been pursued, for example, through the development of dwellings for sale, either within or adjacent to social housing estates, as a means of diversifying the socio-economic profile of the local population. Neither of these interventions are relevant to the aim of fostering ethnic diversity in local neighbourhoods. The differential treatment of applicants on the grounds of race or ethnicity is prohibited under race relations legislation, while tenure does not serve as a proxy for ethnicity (Goodchild and Cole, 2001). Promoting ethnic mix therefore demands new interventions capable of extending choice and encouraging households to move into new neighbourhoods.

Social rented housing is the key lever through which housing policy has effected social change and the various reports into the 2001 disturbances and subsequent guidance on housing and community cohesion all emphasise the role that social landlords (local authorities and housing associations) can play in promoting the community cohesion agenda (Blackaby, 2004; Fotheringham and Perry, 2003; Robinson, 2003; Robinson et al., 2004). Effecting a change in the geography of residential settlement, however, requires landlords to do more than merely tinker with

management practices. As a review of social landlord led initiatives designed to extend the housing options and locational choices of minority ethnic households revealed, achieving even modest success at the neighbourhood level is an exacting and resource hungry challenge (Robinson et al., 2004). Not only is the reform and innovative development of practice required across the broad canvas of housing management activities (marketing and advertising, lettings, tenancy management and support, repairs and maintenance, monitoring and evaluation). The receiving population needs preparing for the changes about to take place in their neighbourhood and community development activities with both incoming and receiving populations are required to facilitate engagement, foster dialogue and minimise tensions. Relevant and sensitive policing is also required to manage problems as and when they arise and to minimise the potential for inter-ethnic conflict to escalate. The consequences of failing to address these wider societal concerns are illustrated by the Homehunter initiative in Bradford, reported in Robinson et al. (2004).

Homehunter was a collaborative initiative developed by the local authority in partnership with social landlords across the city, in response to evidence of a need and aspiration among the city's South Asian population to move into social housing but continuing under representation of this group within the social rented sector (Ratcliffe et al., 2001). The aim was to improve access to the social rented sector across the city and, in doing so, to extend the tenure options and locational choices open to minority ethnic

households. In summary, Homehunter involved the development of a web-based property system for letting social housing in the city, which was actively marketed to the minority ethnic population by specially recruited marketing officers skilled in community languages. Emphasis was placed on how to apply, the opportunities available and the support in place to help and assist new and existing tenants. An eight fold increase in applications to the local authority from minority ethnic households was reported, the active marketing of the sector apparently succeeding in making the sector more attractive to the minority ethnic population. Lettings to minority ethnic households, however, increased less dramatically, by 68 per cent. The difference between applications and lettings was reported to be the consequence of demand outstripping supply for larger properties and dwellings in locations adjacent to traditional population clusters (Robinson et al., 2004). The failure to address historical inadequacies in the profile of the local housing stock and tackle the social climate underpinning racialised notions of space that led South Asian people in Bradford to regard certain areas of the city as 'hostile', 'racist' and 'out of bounds' had effectively limited the new housing opportunities provided and the extent to which locational choices were extended.

In addition to the practical difficulties and resource implications of striving to secure even modest gains in residential integration at the neighbourhood level, there is an inherent ambiguity for social landlords in committing to the community cohesion agenda. As Goodchild and Cole (2002) point out,

while the social exclusion and community cohesion agendas promote mobility and reject strong local communities for fear of promoting further isolation, housing and neighbourhood management promotes social cohesion at the neighbourhood level as essential ingredient of sustainability. In effect, the sustainable communities that housing managers are striving to nurture - characterised as internally cohesive and possessing a sense of solidarity and mutual support and cooperation - are the very communities problematised by the community cohesion agenda. Hence the comments of a chief executive of a BME-led housing association reported by Robinson et al. (2004), who reflects that his most sustainable and easy to manage estates are mono-cultural (p15).

Robinson et al. (2004) also report concerns among housing managers about the use of coercion, which is taken to be inferred by the emphasis placed on the active pursuit of residential integration. Extending choice was a more immediate priority for the housing managers surveyed, regardless of the consequences for residential settlement patterns, although it was suggested that that extending choice could help promote community cohesion. First, landlords reported that extending choice is integral to delivering on their general duty to promote equality of opportunity and to avoid (direct and indirect) discrimination. Second, it was suggested that integration could flow from extending the historically restricted choices of certain minority ethnic groups, given latent demand and the broadening aspirations of younger minority ethnic people.

Residential Integration and Inter-ethnic Interaction

Accepting, for a moment, that housing policy and practice can overcome the, not insignificant, challenges raised above and promote residential integration, the community cohesion agenda assumes that the fruits of social interaction will inevitably follow. This logic draws on contact theory (Allport, 1954) and the concepts of bonding and bridging capital (Putnam, 2000).

Contact theory posits that contact between different racial groups will reduce negative inter-group stereotypes and lead to more positive attitudes. Drawing on Putnam (2000), it is also suggested that multi-racial social ties serve to bond people together around a common interest, resulting in sharing of resources and support (bonding capital), and serve to further understanding, ease tensions and foster relations between groups (bridging capital) (Emerson et al., 2002). In so doing, multi-racial social networks are presumed to promote cooperation, generate reciprocity norms, reduce forms of segregation and increase life opportunities (Emerson et al., 2002). Contact theory, however, requires that various conditions exist for positive changes in attitude and behaviour to occur. Contact should be intimate, cooperative and orientated toward the achievement of a shared goal and, importantly, it should occur between equal status participants who are interacting in an environment where

integration is institutionally sanctioned (Dixon and Durrheim, 2003). These conditions rarely apply in everyday life. Nor can it be presumed that integration will provide a fixed and stable situation in which the benefits of interaction might ensue. Evidence from the USA points to how even weak preferences for same-race neighbours can promote neighbourhood change before the benefits of contact have accrued, making stable, ethnically mixed neighbourhoods difficult to achieve (Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi, 2002).

Even if a stable integrated neighbourhoods do transpire, it cannot be presumed that residential integration will lead to interaction and the benefits of bonding and bridging capital. First, lessons gleaned from analysis of patterns of interaction within socially mixed neighbourhoods question whether residential integration necessarily fosters interaction between different groups, available evidence suggesting that even in situations of social mix there is little social interaction between people of different social backgrounds (Atkinson and Kintrea, 1998; Cole and Shayer, 1998; Jupp, 1999). Second, reflecting on experience of ethnically mixed housing estates in the UK context, Amin (2002) points out that habitual contact is in itself no guarantor of cultural exchange and can even entrench animosities. Indeed, he notes that past attempts to engineer ethnically mixed estates have resulted in deep resentment and violence from the older settled White population and suggests that many ethnically mixed estates are “*riddled with racism, interethnic tension and cultural isolation*” (pp. 968). This leads Amin (2002) to conclude that the contact

spaces of housing estates and urban public spaces are incapable of fostering interethnic appreciation, not being structured as spaces of interdependence and habitual understanding. Attention might therefore be better focused, he suggests, on sites and situations where 'prosaic negotiations' are compulsory, such as in the workplace, schools, colleges, youth centres and other spaces of association (pp. 969).

Examples spotlighted by Robinson et al. (2004) of apparent gains made by social landlords in breaking down barriers between different ethnic groups appear to support Amin's conclusion. For example, an initiative in Bradford is described, which has brought together the (predominantly White) residents of a housing association estate with the tenants of a minority ethnic housing association who live in the surrounding neighbourhood with the aim of developing mutual understanding and awareness (pp. 37).

Rather than pursuing interaction through residential integration, the project has focused on generating opportunities for association and engagement, including residential trips for younger people from different ethnic backgrounds, cooking classes exploring foods from different cultures and reciprocated attendance at tenant association committee meetings.

Robinson et al. acknowledge that any gains made are difficult to measure, but comments from local residents suggest subtle developments and improving relations between ethnic groups. Officers, meanwhile, are reported as pointing to the potential for ongoing inter-ethnic engagement to help minimise the tensions that might arise from any future increase in

lettings on the estate to minority ethnic households. Inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding is recognised as integral to opening up new housing opportunities for traditionally disadvantaged and excluded minority ethnic groups, in an interesting subversion of the community cohesion agenda's emphasis on residential integration as a means to fostering social harmony through shared values and principles.

Closing Thoughts

The community cohesion agenda has represented a political response to the street disturbances in 2001. A narrative was generated that 'sounded right' and justified a response that spoke directly to the contemporary priorities of public policy, including the withdrawal into a more restrictive conceptualisation of multiculturalism, a fascination with communitarianism and an evangelical commitment to generate social capital through the promotion of mobility and greater social mix.

This paper has questioned the validity of a number of key assumptions made in the various reports into the disturbances in the summer of 2001, that represent supporting pillars of the community cohesion agenda. The assumed self-segregation of minority ethnic groups has been challenged by demographic evidence pointing to a consistent pattern of dispersal of different minority ethnic groups out from traditional population clusters. Most minority ethnic households in England now live in areas where white-

British households represent a large proportion, if not the majority, of the local population. Evidence of the discriminatory consequences of the policies and practices of housing agencies continues to accumulate, but the residential settlement patterns of minority ethnic groups have been revealed to be the consequence of much more than merely the actions of individual officers and the policies and performance of housing agencies. They reflect wider societal influences that are managed in different ways by different groups and household types. It is therefore questionable whether housing policy can effect change in residential settlement patterns and promote increasing inter-ethnic mix at the neighbourhood level. Finally, even if inter-ethnic residential integration can be actively promoted, it cannot be assumed that inter-ethnic interaction will inevitably follow.

This critique does not deny that very real challenges are presented by the existence of distinct groups of people clustered in different neighbourhoods, who have a their own history of exclusion from opportunities and choices and are often in direct competition for scarce resources and restricted opportunities. Rather, it questions the diagnosis and prescribed response encapsulated in the community cohesion agenda. If we want real community cohesion, it will take more than the promotion of residential integration and neighbourly interaction. Not only will local collaborative structures and communication networks need to be created to improve understanding and appreciation. Restricted choices will need to be extended, equalities of opportunity secured and a national identity and

sense of belonging developed that is founded on ideals of democracy and citizenship, rather than race and ethnicity.

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Figure 1 Defining Social Cohesion and Community Cohesion

The five components of social cohesion (Kearns and Forrest, 2000)	The four components of community cohesion (LGA et al., 2002)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Common values and civic culture</i> – members share common values which enable them to identify and support common aims and objectives, and share a common set of moral principles and codes of behaviour 2. <i>Social order and social control</i> – the absence of general conflict within society and of any serious challenge to the existing order and system, with social cohesion being a by-product of the routines, demands and reciprocities of everyday life 3. <i>Social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities</i> – the harmonious development of society and its constituent groups towards common economic, social and environmental standards, the implications including reductions in poverty, reduced disparities in incomes and employment, a higher quality of life and access to services of general benefit and protection 4. <i>Social networks and social capital</i> – the belief that a cohesive society contains a high degree of social interaction within communities and families, although it is unclear whether strong (family and dense, neighbourhood based interactions) or weak (neighbourhood and friend) ties are most important 5. <i>Place attachment and identity</i> – identities and places are accepted as being intertwined and contributing toward social cohesion through the reproduction of common values, norms and willingness to participate in social networks and build social capital 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities 2. the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued 3. those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities 4. strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different background in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods