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Community Cohesion

A changed policy context

Introduction: The changed policy context of community cohesion

Chapter 1 outlined the significant threat of Islamist violent extremism which Britain has faced over the past decade and which it is likely to continue to face for some time in the future. The key concern of this book is how effective to date the resulting policy and practice responses to ‘preventing violent extremism’ have been and what lessons can be drawn for the direction and emphasis of future policy. To make sense of those specific policy responses, it is important to examine the wider context of Britain’s increasingly diverse multicultural society and the significant changes to the language and emphasis of ‘race relations’ policies,¹ governmental approaches to managing relationships between different ethnic groups and their places in the wider British society, that have taken place since the watershed moment of the 2001 riots in three towns and cities across northern England.

One of the most controversial aspect of this undoubted shift of emphasis within race relations policy approaches has been the governmental belief that past policy approaches have hardened and enabled, to an unhelpful extent, the development of separate ethnic or faith identities at the expense of commonality and community cohesion. The meaning and practice of this new policy priority of community cohesion, and its implications for the British state’s approach to distinct ethnic or faith communities, is the focus of the first part of this chapter. For many critics, this community cohesion policy agenda has really been about Britain’s perceived ‘Muslim problem’,² with the 2001 riots largely involving young Muslims and the community cohesion concern apparently focusing on the physical and cultural separation of British Muslim communities. That Muslim separation, and the increasingly strong communal self-identification as ‘Muslims’, allegedly at the expense of wider identification with and loyalty to ‘Britishness’³ is explored in the second part of the chapter. Here, primary research data and wider academic evidence around the strength, meaning/s and possible implications of ‘Muslim identification’ in Britain are considered. These discussions not only shed light on the review in Chapter 1 of what faith identification means for British Muslims and how they are understanding and

living it, but also address the issue of Muslim acceptance of 'Britishness'. This provides a starting point for the consideration in later chapters of how *Prevent* policies to date have impacted on British Muslims and how they might be more effective in the future.

The 2001 riots and their aftermath

The violent disturbances in several towns and cities across the north of England during the summer of 2001 can be seen as a watershed for British policy in that the official government analysis of the events prompted a distinct new direction for race relations policy approaches.⁴ Each of the 2001 outbreaks of violent disorder was largely dominated by young Muslim men of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin in conflict with the police and on some occasions with white young men. Violent disorder in Oldham, Greater Manchester between 24th and 28th May was followed by similar scenes in the Harehills area of Leeds on 5th June and in Burnley, Lancashire between 21st and 23rd June. The most serious rioting occurred in Bradford, West Yorkshire on 7/8th July, when the heightened atmosphere created by the threat of a far-right BNP incursion into the British city with the largest proportion of Muslim residents led to extremely intense rioting by young Muslim men that resulted in 326 police officers being injured, an estimated £6 million pounds of damage, and very severe prison sentences for many of those convicted for their roles. Many other towns and cities in the ex-industrial north and Midlands were viewed as being at risk of riots over the same period, with the common thread for the areas so assessed being significant Muslim populations living in concentrated local areas.⁵

To some commentators, this outbreak of violence among ethnic communities seen as law-abiding in previous times was no surprise, and it was explicitly connected to the Islamist violent extremism which emerged in Britain in the following years. The '30-year rule' was identified by some in relation to immigrant communities in Britain: 'it takes about 30 years for a sizeable second generation to establish itself and then become frustrated with its status, both within its own community and the wider society.'⁶ This was true of the African-Caribbean community that had started to arrive in Britain after the Second World War, which experienced significant youth unrest from the mid-1970s onwards, culminating in their pivotal role in the 1981 and 1985 inner-city riots. A further parallel is the socio-economic status of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities representing the bulk of Britain's Muslims. Educational underachievement and especially unemployment rates are much higher for Britons of those backgrounds than the national average, especially compared to the white population. Relevant here is the 'human capital' of the first generation of Muslim settlers, their concentration in industrial areas of the north that have witnessed profound de-industrialisation

and growing social exclusion, and the effects of racism that have increasingly concentrated on Pakistani- and Bangladeshi-origin populations as the most culturally distinct from the white norm.⁷ Certainly, the answer to the question of why riots happened in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, rather than in areas of the Midlands or southern England, must focus on the profound economic marginalisation experienced by both Muslim and white working-class communities in those and neighbouring northern ex-industrial towns that have seen little development of a viable post-industrial economy. However, some commentators saw this 2001 rioting as less about economic experiences than as a result of mistaken, multiculturalist social policy approaches that had allowed distinct and oppositional communities and identities to grow, Muslim ‘ghettos’ that had little connection with or loyalty to wider British society: ‘multiculturalism had a dual appeal; it allowed these states to seem tolerant by showering minorities with rights while segregating them from, rather than absorbing them into, the rest of society.’⁸

It is certainly true that the resulting national and local government inquiries into the 2001 disturbances were much more interested in the longer term situation around ethnic segregation than in the facts and detail of what had actually happened. The government established a Community Cohesion Review Team under the leadership of Ted Cante, and its resulting report focused heavily on long-term issues and national implications, with an urgent need to promote ‘community cohesion’. Local inquiries were carried out in Oldham and Burnley,⁹ whilst a review of ethnic relations in Bradford prepared before the July 2001 riots was published shortly afterwards.¹⁰ These local reports had a more substantial but still limited focus on the actual events, meaning that taken together the post-riots inquiries had the impact of downplaying specific local causal factors, such as persistent political agitation by far-right groups in Oldham and Bradford, clumsy and ineffective policing in both the lead up to and during rioting, and irresponsible local media coverage. Therefore, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the 2001 riots provided national government with the moment to move forward on an agenda they were already considering¹¹ because of longer term concern about ethnic separateness within British society.

The emergence of community cohesion

The Cante Report proposed that government prioritise the development of greater community cohesion as a response to the ethnic segregation and racial tensions, the ‘parallel lives’, identified by the riots and the resulting inquiries. Here, the suggestion was that Britain’s multiculturalism was less successful in creating a positive and pluralist society than had previously been assumed, and that new approaches were urgently needed to prevent the current divides and tensions from worsening. This analysis was immediately accepted by national

government, with community cohesion rapidly becoming both a priority in its own right and a central plank in the government's wider racial equality strategy.¹² Advice was given to local authorities and other public bodies to promote and measure community cohesion, with evidence that this focus on community cohesion was gradually becoming embedded within the core priorities of government at all levels.¹³ To date, this priority has outlasted the previous Labour government, with the coalition government elected in May 2010 continuing to highlight its importance, although seeming to increasingly favour the term 'integration' rather than community cohesion.

'Community cohesion' was a new policy term that appeared to have been rapidly adapted from literature on social/economic cohesion. Through analysis, both of the literature around it and the policy implementation of it, a number of key themes can be identified:

- ethnic segregation and 'parallel lives'
- problematic bonding social capital
- the role of 'agency' both in causing and overcoming segregation
- the impact of past policy approaches
- the need for 'cooler' identities and more emphasis on commonality

The most controversial aspect of community cohesion has been its interrelated focus on the 'fact' of substantial ethnic segregation in Britain and on the considerable role of 'agency' within it. All the areas experiencing riots and/or racial tension in 2001 had significant levels of ethnic segregation, as measured by Indexes of Isolation and Dissimilarity. The picture painted here was one of very considerable physical and cultural segregation, white and ethnic minority, mainly Muslim, communities living 'parallel lives' with only the most cursory and superficial of cross-community interactions. This was supported by data about multiracial towns and cities in general, and about increasing levels of ethnic segregation in British schools.¹⁴ Research among young people in such northern towns and cities has highlighted how young people see their lives and areas as rigidly segregated, with 'race' and generic territorialism combining to create powerful sense of local 'borders' and the need to violently defend them.¹⁵ Much of the academic heat over this issue has come from the implicit suggestion of the cohesion reports that ethnic segregation is getting worse, and that it is voluntary to a very significant extent. Carefully researched responses¹⁶ have suggested that generally the reverse is true, and that this reality is obscured by significant demographic differences between ethnic communities. Some of that evidence is disputed, with the trend on segregation in Bradford hotly contested,¹⁷ but this diverts from the perceived reality that the community cohesion reports were focusing on, namely that ethnic segregation was already very profound in many areas. Here, community cohesion can be

seen as a mark of the frustration that such ethnic segregation is not obviously breaking down but instead may be 'normalising'. Underpinning this, of course, is a reality often not acknowledged by politicians that the most profound form of social segregation in modern Britain is that based on social class.¹⁸

Central to this concern with segregation is the concept of problematic 'bonding social capital'. The work of Putnam (2000) and others has popularised the concept of social capital, with it becoming central to the social policy strategies of Britain and other Western countries. However, in advocating the importance to individual and community well-being of strong and inclusive community networks, Putnam distinguishes two types of social capital. 'Bonding' social capital is the traditional form of community – the communities we all feel part of because of where we live and the social class, ethnic and faith backgrounds we have – 'people like us'. This has many strengths but can on its own be dangerously insular and prejudiced against any sort of external difference. It needs to be balanced by forms of 'bridging' capital – networks and links that allow us to positively interact with people and areas that are different to us, so learning from and understanding 'others' more, and enabling access to jobs and contacts outside of our own communities. The analysis of community cohesion is clearly that in many towns and cities of largely monocultural communities and 'parallel lives', too few Britons have 'bridging' capital links, so fuelling mutual distrust, fear and lack of respect. The solution for community cohesion is to find ways of building contact, dialogue and links across ethnic lines between individuals and groups in all sorts of ways, with this positively building mutual understanding and respect, and shared understandings and identities through a greater focus on commonality. The concurrent attempts by leading politicians of all parties to promote and positively discuss notions of a modern, inclusive 'Britishness' and to ensure that all new British citizens understand basic English language and cultural norms can be understood as consistent with this policy focus.

In outlining this apparent reality of significant ethnic segregation and the consequent lack of 'bridging' social capital in many apparently 'multicultural' areas of Britain, community cohesion puts considerable stress on the 'agency' or responsibility of individuals and communities. The reports do not overtly suggest that community preferences are responsible for ethnic segregation, as individual and institutional white racism was clearly central to the development of segregated housing areas in towns such as Oldham. However, the introduction to the Ouseley report into ethnic relations in Bradford talked bluntly of 'a worrying drift towards self-segregation', and even the Commission for Racial Equality, the then government agency charged with ensuring racial equality, focused on 'congregation', or voluntary clustering, among the Muslim communities of Oldham, Bradford and Burnley.¹⁹ Whilst the community cohesion reports were clearly even-handed in blaming attitudes and behaviour in communities of *all* ethnic backgrounds, some critics have

detected a one-sided focus on the 'cultures' of ethnic minorities, especially Muslims, as problematic. It is indeed true that community cohesion has called for greater use of the English language by all citizens and challenged Asian communities to look carefully at the continuance of sub-continental marriage links and prolonged family visits in relation to the continued educational underachievement of many young Muslims.²⁰ Rather than a lurch back to the assimilationism of the early 1960s, this arguably represents an honest and politically consistent discussion around rights and responsibilities with communities made up of citizens, not 'immigrants'. The suggestion of community cohesion is that too often individuals and organisations of all ethnic backgrounds have accepted *de facto* ethnic segregation and hardened it through their personal choices over housing, schooling and leisure. Consistent with the wider New Labour social policy,²¹ community cohesion takes a communitarianist approach in believing that the state alone cannot make people of different backgrounds get on together, and that communities have to play an active and responsible role in the process of coming together and creating shared dialogue and interests. That ideological position explains the reluctance of governments to promote greater cohesion by insisting that schools or housing areas become more ethnically mixed, although that may have been an implicit goal of the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme that sought to create new high schools in areas of educational underachievement.

Underpinning this community cohesion understanding of the state of British ethnic relations, and the remedies needed, is a critique of previous state policy approaches to 'race relations'. This criticism has been wrongly and unhelpfully extended by others to a blaming of 'multiculturalism' *per se*,²² but the cohesion analysis actually focuses on the enhanced 'political multiculturalism' phase of policy that was developed in response to the 1981 riots and the profound ethnic marginalisation that they highlighted. In keeping with policy generally in this area, political multiculturalism approaches developed organically from below in response to community demands as much as they did through national government guidelines. They involved much greater efforts to tackle the significant ethnic minority educational underachievement, racial discrimination and marginalisation in service delivery, as well as to promote ethnic minority employment in the state sector. Central to this was the approach of 'ethnic monitoring', the measuring of the position of each ethnic group and progress for them, which culminated in the inclusion of an ethnicity question for the first time in the 1991 National Census. Such data enabled target setting by public organisations for greater ethnic equality and training and action plans to make progress on achieving those targets in relation to ethnic minority employment, participation or service delivery. This necessarily encompassed a policy concern with greater 'equality' for each separate ethnic group, a concern with different 'needs' and requirements, at the expense of a focus on commonality. This justified, and much-needed at the time, approach

of ethnicity-based measurement and action has brought significant progress towards greater ethnic equality in Britain over the past three decades, but it involved a 'strategic essentialism',²³ a policy acceptance of distinct ethnic or, increasingly, faith groups. This was cemented from the early 1980s onwards by enhanced funding by national and local bodies for ethnic-specific organisations and their facilities. Such an approach was partially in recognition of past ethnic minority marginalisation from public service provision, but also a policy attempt in the wake of inner-city riots to ensure compliant minority communities through the control of a layer of 'community leaders' that could speak for and informally police 'their' communities.²⁴ Community cohesion understands this approach to ensuring ethnic equality as having a distinct downside, the promotion of separate ethnic identities, facilities and concerns, and consequent damage to notions and experiences of commonality. Whilst having been a necessary policy approach previously, it arguably now needs to be re-calibrated and re-balanced. This nuanced position of Cattle, and the consequent government decision to both accept his analysis and to move away from further use of the term 'multiculturalism', now deemed unhelpful, proved to be a green light for long-term opponents of multiculturalism per se to blame it for any difficulties regarding ethnic minority citizens in Britain.

Implicit in this community cohesion concern with common values and needs, and a shared identity, is the belief that policy needs to encourage and enable more de-centred and intersectional forms of 'identity'. Here, in a genuinely diverse and multicultural society, 'hot' forms of strong, essentialised identities must, of necessity, become somewhat 'cooler' and more flexible if society is to work peacefully and positively.²⁵ Arguably, the last Labour government developed and used the human rights framework of individual rights and responsibilities to balance the continued focus on group rights and identities enshrined in equality legislation. This approach suggests that the rights and equality of any ethnic or religious group must be balanced by their responsibility to accept the equal rights of people with different values and lifestyles, and that no one form of identity can be seen to 'trump' others or be used to police or speak on behalf of them. It also suggests that policy will, of necessity, be in conflict with any community identities claimed as more important than common forms of national citizenship, perhaps providing the context for why recent British policy concerns with 'race relations' have appeared to focus on Muslims over and above the need to 'prevent violent extremism'.

Community cohesion in practice

The themes of community cohesion outlined above have been highly contested, but the considerable academic criticism has drawn almost exclusively on the

analysis of content and discourse of community cohesion reports, policy documents and accompanying ministerial pronouncements.²⁶ Very little empirical evidence of how community cohesion has actually been understood and implemented has been produced, and the empirical data that have been produced have too often been studiously ignored. As with previous phases of multiculturalism, the approaches to community cohesion have been developed as much through practice on the ground as through national government guidance or directive. Research by the author as to how youth workers in Oldham understood and worked with community cohesion in the wake of the 2001 riots found strong support for, and acceptance of, the key themes outlined above.²⁷ The aims and content of their professional practice with young people had altered significantly as a result, with community cohesion becoming a major priority. The focus for their cohesion work was the promotion of 'meaningful direct contact' between young people of different ethnic backgrounds, with such contact built into all their work. This was done through the 'twinning' of youth projects serving diverse backgrounds, regular residential trips away to utilise neutral spaces, and events that brought young people from across the area together. Some of this focused on wider efforts to promote young peoples' empowerment and democratic participation through initiatives such as the Youth Parliament scheme. Key to this community cohesion practice was young people's voluntary participation in this 'direct contact' and that the contact was built around experiential, fun activities, and shared experiences and interests, rather than differences. However, the charge that community cohesion is a new form of assimilationism that demands the disappearance of distinct identities was refuted by this research. Instead of denying difference, youth workers were working with and positively accepting the distinct ethnic, social and faith identities held by young people and their communities, *augmenting* these identities with overarching common identities, rather than seeking to replace them. Within this, preparation was done in local, often ethnic-specific, groups and facilities, with such security used as a springboard for involvement in cohesion programmes of direct contact.

It must be acknowledged that the stress on direct cross-ethnic contact, both in this case study work in Oldham and in the national community cohesion strategies, is controversial, with any relationship between increased cross-ethnic contact and prejudice reduction highly contested. Some critics actually see increasing ethnic diversity itself as problematic and likely to lead to growing social rifts and tensions. In an influential essay,²⁸ David Goodhart drew on the work of 'social capital' theorist Robert Putnam²⁹ to suggest that Britain's increasing ethnic diversity was stoking tensions and undermining support for collective institutions such as the welfare state. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that 'there is much evidence that intergroup contact does not necessarily reduce intergroup tension or prejudice and that it may even increase tension'.³⁰ Such material suggests that interethnic contact in situations of societal tension or

inequalities can intensify, rather than change, an individual's initial attitude or disposition. Therefore, an individual already holding prejudiced attitudes towards the 'other' can have that deepened by interethnic contact. This can be particularly true if there is a clear difference in the perceived status of the two groups meeting or if individuals participating have aggressive or unbalanced personality traits that will always dispose them towards prejudice.

In the Oldham case study outlined above, community cohesion practice was utilising key elements of 'contact theory', a social psychology-based approach to prejudice reduction in situations of significant social divides and tensions.³¹ Contact theory evidence from situations of profound segregation such as Northern Ireland suggests that to make meaningful reductions in communal divisions, contact has to take place over time, be in groups to avoid tokenism, the need for participants to feel that they have choice and control within the process, to often take place in 'safe', neutral settings, and to involve no threat or disrespect to the identities or histories of those taking part. Here, contact theory would suggest that government is right to not 'force' people to live or mix together, as the perception of coercion could be counterproductive. Certainly, evidence from attempts to engineer 'socially mixed' housing developments of privately owned and publicly rented housing in the United Kingdom is that this has often not been successful, and that community-building efforts focused on relationships between distinct housing areas have been more successful.³² What the academic evidence around interethnic contact also suggests is that 'in many contact situations it is not sufficient to bring the antagonistic groups into contact and that these groups should have or should be given superordinate goals to make them cooperate across group lines. Only such superordinate goals can make the contact effective, thereby reducing prejudice and group tension'.³³ This can be seen in the successful Muslim/white cooperation in political campaigns such as the anti-Iraq war campaign,³⁴ or in the Oldham youth work case study discussed above, where residential trips focused on teamwork and common youth issues. In both cases, superordinate goals and processes were central to successful interethnic contact.

The community cohesion youth work practice outlined above, and discussed in detail elsewhere,³⁵ fulfils those conditions, so making possible a 'rooting and shifting' of individual identities and attitudes.³⁶ Such practice does not deny racism and other forms of structural inequality, but it also does not essentialise or reify particular forms of identity. The professionals guiding this work clearly acknowledged the reality of ethnic divides and of racism within the Oldham area, but they also were ambivalent as to whether 'race' alone can explain the present or be the key to a more productive future. These processes of community cohesion were therefore also engaging with 'difference' around geographical space, gender, social class, ability/disability and sexuality, so operationalising the more complex and intersectional understandings of identity being signposted by national government policy.

This complexity can be seen in the initial experimental ‘Pathfinder’ community cohesion activity funded by central government and in the advice given to local government as to the operationalisation of community cohesion.³⁷ Recent research into the operationalisation of community cohesion by Bradford and Kirklees local authorities in West Yorkshire identified cohesion to be a significant policy priority and there to be significant community support for continued progress on it. However, it also highlighted the challenge that community cohesion, with its complex and intersectional understandings of identity, poses to the existing equality and diversity policy agendas, of necessity based around essentialised and rather fixed notions of group identity and experience.³⁸

Refusing Britishness?

Whilst community cohesion in practice is accepting and working with distinct ethnic, faith-based and social identities, it is clear from the analysis above that this post-2001 policy direction sees ‘hot’, separate communal identities that are potentially antagonistic to overarching national identity as problematic. The pivotal role of Muslim youth in the various 2001 violent disturbances, the 9/11 attacks that took place as the Community Cohesion Review Team gathered evidence, and the rapidly growing understanding that some young British Muslims were also being attracted to violent extremism, all contributed to a political focus on Muslims and their identity within the emergence of community cohesion.³⁹ Whilst the community cohesion reports themselves were balanced in their equal focus on white racism and the need to strengthen measures against it, a broader ‘moral panic’ about Muslim identity and its threat to Britain grew alongside it and arguably overtook it. This suggested that ‘multiculturalism’ had enabled and encouraged separate and oppositional identities among ethnic minorities in general and Muslims in particular. Such separate identities were seen as threatening the social cohesion essential to Britain’s welfare state⁴⁰ and as having made the growth of a domestic terror threat more likely.⁴¹ The fact that community cohesion policy approaches no longer used the term ‘multiculturalism’, and that even equality campaigners were prepared to attack the concept, fuelled such viewpoints. Trevor Phillips, then head of the Commission for Racial Equality (now subsumed within the Equality and Human Rights Commission), condemned ‘multiculturalism’ for creating ethnic divisions and leaving Britain ‘sleepwalking towards segregation’, in a disastrously misjudged speech made just weeks after the 7/7 attacks.⁴² Such a linkage was repeated by Prime Minister David Cameron in February 2011, when he used the Munich Conference on Security to launch a broad attack on multiculturalism and supposed Muslim separateness in general, rather than focus on the specific terror threat.⁴³

This broad attack on distinct Muslim identity in Britain, and on policy approaches that have supposedly encouraged it, has been further developed by right-of-centre commentators⁴⁴ and by various Conservative-leaning think tanks. Prominent among them was a report from 'Policy Exchange'⁴⁵ that painted a picture of radicalised young Muslims living increasingly separate lives. Surveying young British Muslims, the authors reported that '86% of respondents also believed that their religion was the most important thing in their life. When asked the same question, only 11% of the wider British population felt the same',⁴⁶ and '7% said they admired organisations like Al-Qaeda'.⁴⁷ The blame for this apparent growth in a distinct religious identity among young Muslims was squarely laid at the door of 'multiculturalism': 'it is the multicultural approach that pigeonholes people and pressures them to keep separate from the mainstream.'⁴⁸

It is undoubtedly true that claims on behalf of Muslims as a distinct community and identity in Britain have grown markedly since the late 1980s. Prior to that, political claims were made by minority communities under the collective terms 'black' or 'ethnic minority', both intended to signify a common non-white experience of marginalisation and racism. Such terms were seen increasingly as irrelevant to the experiences of different South Asian communities,⁴⁹ and the post-1981 phase of political multiculturalism responded by recognising and funding specific ethnic communities, such as African-Caribbeans, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. Whilst that policy approach did not initially recognise faith as a form of identity, it helped to open the door to such claims being made through its focus on distinct, essentialised 'communities'. The watershed moment for the emergence of 'Muslim' as a distinct identity in Britain came in 1989, with the *Satanic Verses* controversy over the controversial book of that name by Salman Rushdie.⁵⁰ The specific identity claims made by Muslims from there on fitted with the wider approach of political multiculturalism in its focus on specific 'needs' and demands of monolithic 'communities', made on their behalf by layers of 'community leaders', so allowing British Muslims to 'surf the wave of multiculturalism'.⁵¹

The problem for Britain, according to another right-of-centre think tank, the Social Affairs Unit,⁵² was that the 'Muslim community leaders' who stepped forward to utilise the twin opportunities of *Satanic Verses* and ethnic-specific multiculturalist policy approaches were unrepresentative Islamists with very specific political agendas. Often these groups and individuals were both funded from abroad, by states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and had links with international Islamist groups. This can be seen in the fact that the first British demonstration against Rushdie's book was organised in December 1988 in Bolton, Lancashire by a Deobandi group with little local support, whilst the national anti-Rushdie campaign was coordinated by the Islamic Foundation that has close ties to the conservative Islamist group Jama'at-e-Islami. Utilising controversies like *Satanic Verses*, and filling the vacuum of the lack

of effective national coordination or representation among Britain's locally focused Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, Islamist individuals and groups quickly became self-appointed national spokesmen for British Muslims. An example here is the Muslim Association of Britain, highly prominent in the post-2003 'Stop the War' coalition, which was largely founded by activists of Arab origin who drew inspiration for their overtly political Islamist positions from the Egyptian-origin Muslim Brotherhood. The strategic networking by Islamist-dominated Muslim groups with non-Muslim local authority officials and other ethnic minority groups enabled them to benefit from the broader political context of 'political multiculturalism', whilst their use of English and their overtly political approach made such Islamist groups and causes attractive to younger Muslims disillusioned with left-wing groups. These 'causes', such as the first Gulf War, and the plight of Bosnian Muslims during the break-up of Yugoslavia, were energetically exploited, along with domestic demands for greater accommodation of Muslim lifestyles connected to the emerging identity issues of younger British Muslims, as is discussed below.

To a significant degree, previous policy approaches of 'political multiculturalism' have influenced this growth of a distinct British Muslim identity and its organised political forms. In 1981, Bradford Council energetically encouraged the formation of a city-wide umbrella body, Bradford Council of Mosques, but was then shocked that by 1989 Islamist-influenced leaders were organising a public burning of Rushdie's book that was broadcast worldwide and which did considerable damage to Bradford's public image.⁵³ Similarly, the national governments of both Conservative John Major and Labour's Tony Blair actively encouraged the formation and funding of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), built on a national network of mosques, as the representative voice of British Muslims, despite the fact that leading figures in this movement had close links to Jama'at-e-Islami and were far from representative of most British Muslims whose traditions were a localised and spiritual form of Islam. The fact that in 2006 the then Labour government broke off funding and official contact with the MCB after pro-jihadi comments by a leading MCB official can be understood as a change in government policy, rather than a shift in the MCB's outlook.

The picture of British Muslims having a strong attachment to their faith as their primary form of identity, in contrast to the approach of other Britons, painted in the Policy Exchange report, is seemingly borne out by other academic evidence, but how should we understand this – is this *prima facie* evidence of a problematic, separate identity that provides the pool from which a minority of faith-motivated terrorists can be drawn? Research by the author and colleague Pete Sanderson into the identifications favoured by young people of all ethnic backgrounds in the Oldham and Rochdale areas of Greater Manchester used a variety of qualitative research approaches, including interviews, questionnaires, word associations and an 'identity ranking' exercise to

investigate these issues.⁵⁴ In the latter exercise, participants were asked to rank their identifications with labels such as ‘Muslim’, ‘British’, ‘English’ and local/town identity, enabling the researchers to capture the reciprocal character of the processes of identification and categorization in relation to ethnicity, religion, locality and ‘nationality’. It highlighted the stress Muslim young people put on their faith identification, in clear contrast to the approach of other young people, and in keeping with the findings of other research processes⁵⁵:

Self-ascribed ethnicity	Rank Religion 1 or 2 (%)	Rank English 1 or 2 (%)	Rank British 1 or 2 (%)
White British, English, white, white English, white Christian, British (N = 57)	7	75	56
Asian Pakistani, British Muslim, Pakistani Kashmiri, Pakistani, British Asian, Bangladeshi/Bengali, British Bengali, British Asian (N = 54)	93	3	20
Black African, Black British, mixed race, other (N = 16)	44	56	44

However, contrary to the claims of right-of-centre think tanks, the majority of Muslim young people surveyed were positive about ‘British’ identity. In total, 63 per cent of those self-identifying as Muslim definitely agreed with the statement ‘I am proud to say that I am British’, and only 10 per cent definitely disagreed. Whilst this was less than the 80 per cent of the non-Muslim young people who agreed with the same statement, the difference is arguably surprisingly limited, given the significant criticisms of and misgivings about British foreign policy of recent years, such as the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, frequently expressed by Muslim young people during the research process. In contrast to the ‘indifference’ about national identity found among young adults elsewhere,⁵⁶ studies of young Muslims consistently find them clear and positive about British national identity. A survey of Pakistani-origin young people in Bradford found that ‘young people in this sample make clear that they consider themselves as “British” as opposed to “Pakistani” – 87% said they describe themselves as “British”, 11% said they describe their identity as being “Pakistani” and 2% as being “English”’.⁵⁷

The data from Oldham and Rochdale on Muslims and national identity presented above supports this, and evidence from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey found that ‘Muslims, as a group, are only slightly less likely

to feel that they belong to Britain than Whites and are, in fact, more likely to feel that they belong to Britain than those in the African-Caribbean group'.⁵⁸ The large majority of Muslim young people surveyed by the author and colleague described themselves as British Muslim or British Asian, mirroring data gathered from a Bradford survey of Pakistani-origin young adults that detected a 'bi-cultural' affiliation.⁵⁹ This type of national identity can be seen even more clearly in Scotland, where the necessity linked to devolution of discussing what 'Scottishness' means, and the associated process of building an authentic national identity, has had positive impacts on non-white ethnic minority willingness to associate positively with Scottishness, in clear contrast to feelings about 'Englishness' in England. Research among Scottish young people of Pakistani origin as devolution became real⁶⁰ found that almost 60 per cent used a 'bi-cultural' term to identify themselves, with 'Scottish Pakistani' the most popular. For that sample, there was no conflict between 'Scottish' and 'Pakistani', leading to the observation that 'hyphenation is still a much underused resource in the re-configuration of plural identities in Britain'.⁶¹

Problematic Muslim identity?

Although the allegation that young Muslims lack identity with, or loyalty to, Britain seems to be clearly misplaced, the strength of commitment to Islamic faith as their preferred form of identification, a stress on religion clearly at odds with other young Britons, does need to be understood further. One explanation is that this is a defensive identification in the face of very significant Islamophobic political and media discourse in the United Kingdom following 9/11 and 7/7. However, is this undoubtedly strong faith identification among young British Muslims also a development prompted by Islamist propaganda and political agitation? Does commitment to the *ummah*, the global Muslim community of believers, trump any professed loyalty to Britain or to its values and democratic systems? In short, how worried should we be about such a strong communalist identity?

Olivier Roy (2004) identifies that because of post-war immigration and the increasing effects of globalisation, one-third of the world's Muslims now live as a minority, many of them in Western countries, and in that context, 're-Islamisation is part of this process of acculturation, rather than being a reaction against it'.⁶² Here, the strong identification with Islamic identity for many young Western Muslims is a product of the need to explicitly consider what being a Muslim means when it is no longer sustained by social authority and popular convention in the way it is in Muslim-majority countries. This leads Roy to suggest that 'acculturation does not automatically entail integration. It also leads to the creation of dynamic and fluctuating sub-cultures, one of the most visible being a so-called "Muslim youth culture"'.⁶³ This suggests that the

strong identification with Muslim faith identity by young Britons is actually part of the increasing individualisation in Western, and indeed, global society, with such forms of solidarity and identity being a modern (re-)creation rather than being a community import or reclamation from the past. Others agree that for the parental generation of British Muslims 'religion was a kind of social glue. For their children, however, religion takes on more individually oriented, spiritual and political dimensions ... it is the backbone of a strong personal identity'.⁶⁴ Part of the emerging Muslim youth identity is their identification with the *ummah*, but emotional attachment to this concept 'does not transcend residential segregation or marriage within ethnically bounded groups'.⁶⁵ That continuing, ethnically focused reality represents the significant maintenance of ethnic community ties and obligations, with youth re-workings of Islam arguably representing a way of moving on from that, as is discussed below. Much of the discussion of new technologies, such as satellite TV and the Internet, has focused on their potential for maintaining transnational identities concerned with the country of origin of migrant communities at the expense of the host country. However, such technologies may well also be playing the role of creating the 'imagined community' of the *ummah*, including its radical and potentially violent extremist form, for a small minority.⁶⁶

There is clear evidence that much of the 're-Islamification' of young British Muslims is more about negotiating their place as a younger British-born generation and as a minority community in an increasingly secular society, rather than being a melancholic step backwards.⁶⁷ This suggests that there is considerable progressive potential in this strong Muslim identification as well as the danger that it can become a form of dangerous radicalisation for a few. A large-scale qualitative survey of young Muslims in Bradford⁶⁸ found that they regarded community and clan network norms and traditions as a very significant restriction on their modernist aspirations and lives. Such norms around gender roles, marriage partners and individual choice were seen as historic community traditions that had been imported and which were no longer helpful or relevant. In this context, young people were arguing for changed possibilities with families and communities by 'appealing to Islam, with its insistence on a basic equality between all believers, to trump such parochial and restrictive loyalties'.⁶⁹ What young people are doing here is 'de-coupling' religion and culture⁷⁰ in order to negotiate changed individual roles and relationships whilst maintaining relationships with, and places within, family and community. This supports Roy's assertion that the strong faith identification of young Western Muslims, including its minority radical Islamist form, is actually a modernist and individualistic development, with this faith adherence being lived out individually, rather than through community norms, as de-coupling religion and culture leads to a greater focus on the religion itself. Relevant here is the discussion in Chapter 1 of Sidique Khan's own ostracism after a love match across community boundaries, his role in performing such

marriages for others, and the fact that Islamist extremists have been much more likely to discuss Islam in private study groups and political organisations than in community-based mosques: ‘most radical militants are engaged in action as individuals, cutting links with their “natural” community.’⁷¹

This suggests that the strong faith identity of young Muslims in Britain and other Western countries is part of significant generational tension: ‘it is a conflict between tradition and individuality, culture and religion, tribalism and universalism, passivity and action.’⁷² There may well be a substantial gender factor in the way that young British Muslims reinterpret a ‘true’ Islam that is de-coupled from ethnic culture. Here, the increased religiosity among young Muslim women, symbolised by the significant growth in numbers wearing the ‘hijab’ headscarf, can be understood as a deployment of ‘true Islam’ to justify greater individual freedom, such as involvement in higher education and employment, and greater say in marriage partners.⁷³ This is all of a piece with the increasingly strong and progressive role played by young Muslim women in community organisation and provision. In contrast, the Muslim identity of young men is sometimes used more negatively, both to symbolise and defend ‘territory’⁷⁴ against young men of other areas and communities, and to police the behaviour of Muslim young women and non-Muslim ‘others’ within their own communities. Certainly, the author’s field research among young Muslims in Oldham and Rochdale, Greater Manchester found a significant minority of respondents, especially young men, making highly negative, faith-based judgements about non-Muslims through terms such as ‘drunkenness’ and ‘godless’ being utilised, as this excerpt from two different youth group shows:

White people: Shameless, not believing in God, no respect for other people.

I don’t understand their tradition – they haven’t really got one; they haven’t got a background.

A minority of Islamist extremists

The discussions above suggested that the strong Muslim faith identification of many young British Muslims can be understood as a product of two interrelated forces. First, the post-1981 phase of ‘political multiculturalism’ governmental policies that have privileged specific ethnic and faith identities generally, so enabling the claiming of the reality and importance of a distinct Muslim identity in society by Islamist-influenced leaders, and a consequent policy response to that expressed ‘need’. Second, the considerable generational tensions and changes experienced by migrant communities in the context of globalisation, which has seen Islamic identity reworked and re-interpreted in ways de-coupled from ethnic culture to enable individuals to negotiate their progress within community and society. It is suggested here that, rather than

being a reactionary and melancholic step backwards, this increased religiosity among young British Muslims is actually a modernist development as part of the increased individualisation of globalised society. For many young Muslims, this Islamic faith identity is a positive and progressive force but, as Chapter 1 outlined, for a small minority it is part of a world view that takes them towards violent extremism. Chapter 1 outlined the interrelated factors that take some individuals in that direction, but those who have studied the young British Muslims involved in violent extremism are clear that generational community tensions are central: 'It is the internal frictions within a traditional Pakistani community in Britain that best explain the radicalisation.'⁷⁵

It certainly seems to be the case that those involved in Islamist violent extremism in Britain and internationally have not been those with a significant background and deep knowledge of Islamic teachings. Rather, they have more often been unobservant people with superficial, at best, knowledge, who have often only recently 'rediscovered' Islam as 'born-again' in response to problems in their life or converted. In both cases, a 'de-cultured' Islam studied away from any community context is something easier to misunderstand or to be presented in an unchallenged but highly questionable way. For instance, the 9/11 attackers had fairly 'normal' and only vaguely observant lives in their countries of origin, but they became 'born-again' Muslims in Europe, as did a number of the Madrid attackers: 'An individual re-Islamisation in a small cell of uprooted fellows.'⁷⁶ Here, Islamist violent extremists create their own 'community' and are unbound by any traditional norms, so explaining the girlfriend that Shezad Tanweer slept with just days before the 7/7 attacks and the 9/11 attackers who drank alcohol in the run-up to the attacks: 'most of these militants undeniably behave in a more western than traditional way.'⁷⁷ This suggests that superficial 'integration' is no defence against the attraction of violent extremism. That non-traditional lifestyle and the use of streetwise English, in contrast to the community languages of mosques, can appeal to unobservant young Muslims or 'seekers' of other backgrounds, with the purity and certainty of a 'de-cultured' Islam, underpinned by the 'single narrative' that supplies a ready-made victimhood and cause to fight for.

That appeal of Islamist extremism for a marginalised minority can be seen within the context of the wider appeal of Islamist activism more generally, both for young Muslims negotiating their place in a society with many internal and external barriers, and to other people who want to see community advancement. For instance, external bodies were positive about the seemingly progressive community voluntary activity that Sidique Khan and other members of the 'Mullah Boys' were carrying out with young Muslims in the Beeston area of south Leeds, in contrast to the conservatism of the older generation. Leeds council area Youth Service manager at the time, Maz Azghar, commented that 'these guys were doing good work on drugs, racial issues and education aspiration issues'.⁷⁸ Such activist figures, and Islamist political groups or study

circles they are part of, can offer much to individual young Muslims focused on their individual identity and place, and also angry about Muslim community experiences of marginalisation at home and abroad, but they can also be, in some eyes, the ‘gateway’ to violent extremism, as Chapter 1 outlined.

Here, the wider context of significant ethnic, physical and cultural segregation in British towns and cities generally, and affecting British Muslims in particular because of historic, economic, social and cultural factors, is relevant. As outlined in the first part of the chapter, the resulting policy response of community cohesion highlighted the danger of separate and inevitably oppositional identities growing in communities of *all* ethnic backgrounds if greater efforts were not made to enable ‘meaningful direct contact’ and the building of shared values, identities and understandings through it. In such monocultural communities, norms and taken-for-granted assumptions can contribute to the creation of space for a minority to develop more extreme attitudes and actions, as Chapter 1 highlighted on the 7/7 attackers.

Conclusion: The importance of community cohesion

This chapter has outlined the post-2001 shift in Britain’s policy approach to ‘race relations’ and its relevance to the attraction of some young Muslims towards violent extremism. It has argued, using empirical evidence, that community cohesion can be understood as a re-balancing of multiculturalist policy approaches, rather than rejection of them. Whilst not causing ethnic segregation or racial tensions, previous approaches of political multiculturalism, whilst effectively tackling ethnic disadvantage, have become increasingly problematic in their focus on essentialised ethnic difference. Inadvertently, they have exacerbated the hardening of separate ethnic and religious identifications that have been engendered by the profound economic and social changes wrought by modern globalisation, changes having particularly negative effects on the ‘losers’ of both white and Muslim communities in ex-industrial areas.

The chapter has argued that those previous policy approaches have played a significant role in the strengthening of Muslim identification in Britain, but also that this faith identity is a product of and response to globalisation. Whilst this strong Muslim faith identification is a positive and progressive identity basis for the large majority of law-abiding young Muslims in British society, it can be seen as the starting point for the journey towards violent extremism for a small minority of Islamist radicals, for the reasons previously outlined in Chapter 1. Here, ‘contemporary Islamic radicalism, far from being an expression of ancient theological beliefs, is really a reaction to new political and social changes: the loss of a sense of belonging in a fragmented society, the blurring of traditional moral lines, the increasing disenchantment with politics

and politicians.⁷⁹ The evidence offered here is that, contrary to the claims of right-of-centre think tanks, most young British Muslims are 'proud to be British' and that their faith identity is a progressive de-coupling of religion and culture for many, but that it can allow a minority to develop an antagonism to 'others', just as a minority of white working-class young people express racialised hostility and blame that groups like the EDL are currently exploiting.

The cohesion analysis argues that too much focus on essentialised difference can strengthen ethnic segregation and allow space for those more extreme forms of separate identifications to flourish, as well as encouraging the racialisation of deeper social and economic problems. Its response is to propose policy approaches that focus much more on common needs and experiences, and shared identities, underpinned with contact and dialogue. The chapter has offered empirical research evidence suggesting that there is significant support for this approach from practitioners engaged in communities experiencing significant ethnic segregation and tension as well as attractions to extremist identifications among some young people. It is in this context of the need to further develop cohesion and integration, and underpinning interethnic contact and respect, that the book will now examine the aims, development and content of Britain's *Prevent* strategy.