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Abstract

The paper explores the discourses surrounding the ‘riots’ of 2001 as a reflection of contemporary understandings of raced/ethnic, gendered and generational identities, and changing discourses about race and ethnicity in Britain. The paper examines these themes in relation to current academic theorizations of culture, identity and difference. Finally, the paper explores the implementation of these understandings in current government policy papers and practices around ‘community cohesion’ and ‘citizenship’. It argues that each of these arenas employs very static and bounded notions of ‘community’, ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ which deny the complex formations of lived identities and obscures ongoing relations of power and disadvantage. This has clear implications for the future of multicultural policy, citizenship education and social justice.

Key words: Britain, citizenship, community cohesion, identity, Muslims

Introduction

One weekend towards the end of May 2001, the streets of Glodwick, Oldham erupted into violence. In what were hailed as the first ‘race riots’ in Britain since the 1980s, the Asian young men of Oldham confronted police and National Front demonstrators in two nights of angry protest that was to presage similar clashes across England – in Aylesbury in the following week, in Leeds and Burnley in June, in Bradford in July. Although the Oldham disturbances had been foreshadowed by clashes in Lidget Green in Bradford in April, and by several months of heightened tension in Oldham itself – around Greater Manchester Police (GMP) claims that the majority of racial

attacks in the area were Asian on white, and of the creation of ‘no-go’ areas for whites,¹ the ‘racial’ mugging of white old age pensioner Walter Chamberlain on 21 April and the weekly presence of the National Front and British National Party – the location, scale and intensity of the Asian response seems to have caught everyone by surprise. This was despite the national obsession with ‘race’ and ‘multiculturalism’ in the run up to the General Election in 2001 – the media scares around asylum seekers, the patriotic fury around the publication of the Parekh Report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, the xenophobic ‘Anglo-Saxon’ sniping about ‘foreign lands’² and ‘mongrel races’³ and the political carpet-bagging around ‘chicken tikka masala’,⁴ the endless slew of television, radio and newspaper debates on the ‘taboo’ of race and race relations⁵ – the main focus of which seemed to be the [in]compatibility of British Muslims.

The aim of this paper is not to explore the causes and motivations of the riots of 2001, nor to speculate on their consequences for an increasingly fraught national picture. The causes are undoubtedly complex, arising from a dense tapestry of social, economic and cultural conditions and neglects, and the consequences are still being played out – post September 11 – as part of a global, national and local narrative with no clear resolution, but an increasingly explicit tone of cultural hostility. What I want to do here is use the ‘riots’ to explore the construction of common sense understandings of ‘the Asian/Muslim presence’ in Britain. Starting with a thumbnail portrait of the ‘riots’, drawing on selected examples in the press⁶ as *emblematic* of changing popular discourses about race and ethnicity in Britain, the paper seeks to explore continuities with understandings in academic approaches to Asian communities in Britain. In particular, it explores the narratives of dysfunction and crisis that mark out accounts of British Muslim communities, and especially Muslim young men. Finally, the paper draws out some broader implications for policy and politics, exploring the reification of culture, community and difference through this lens.

Constructing the riots: ‘race’, ethnicity and the ‘end of multiculturalism’

Although the events of May–July 2001 exploded seemingly out of nowhere, the media explanations for the events were almost

immediately focused backwards, towards the 1980s. The *Guardian* thus described the events as ‘a weekend of race riots in Oldham which were the worst Britain has seen for 15 years’ (1 June 2001). The labelling of the violence as ‘race riots’ drew explicit links with these events, bypassing the more specific local, cultural/religious matrices of the demonstrations over the Gulf War and the *Satanic Verses* affair, and indeed, the ‘riots’ in Bradford in 1995. While the straightforwardly ‘racial’ nature of the 1980s unrest has been contested (Benyon, 1983; Benyon and Solomos, 1987; Keith, 1993), the violence of Oldham and elsewhere reflected an apparently stark ethnic/racial divide – Asian versus white – reinforced by geographic, social, economic and cultural segregation.

As with the 1980s, the issues of policing, racist political discourse, immigration controls, the facilitation of Far Right movements and violence, local government neglect etc. soon largely fell from the agenda. ‘Explanations’ again fell broadly into two camps – one focusing on issues of economic and social marginalization and the other concerned with issues of cultural dysfunction, crime and law and order issues (Benyon and Solomos, 1987; Keith, 1993).

A *Guardian* Leader article of May 2001 captures the former approach dramatically:

We have seen it so many times before. In the 90s in the deprived pockets of Oxford, Leeds and Cardiff; a decade earlier in Brixton, Southall and Toxteth. Now, as then, it is the same combustible mix: race, poverty and a distrusted local police force . . . For Saturday’s events did not come out of nowhere. They were the result of tensions that have been brewing for years and whose sources are not mysterious. The first is poverty. As in every other recent British riot, the trouble erupted in a place of desperate economic hardship. Youth unemployment in Oldham is 40%. That does not justify the behaviour of those young men on Saturday – but it helps explain their anger, frustration and the sense they had nothing to lose. (28 May 2001, my emphasis)⁷

This structural account centres on social exclusion and disadvantage, and carries with it an implicit notion of racial ecology or teleology that underpins explicit comparisons with the earlier experiences of Britain’s black (African-Caribbean) communities. The ‘riots’ are thus seen as the natural, inevitable response to racial discrimination and disadvantage, and as following a pre-ordained pathway – mainly spiralling downwards.

The 'alternative' to the liberal discourse of social exclusion is the conservative argument centred on cultural dysfunction, crime and law and order. This perspective lays the blame clearly at the feet of the rioters and the community pathologies that have generated them. The image of the 'riots' that appears in this narrative is of generational conflict and identity crisis potentially fused with criminality and hooliganism. This mixture can be clearly seen in the run-up to the Oldham riots in the reports around the level of racial attacks on whites by Asians, and the creation of so-called 'no-go areas' for whites, which were said to have underpinned the attack on pensioner Walter Chamberlain ('Get out of our area', *Guardian*, 28 April 2001). In the wake of the earlier clashes in Lidget Green, Bradford, in April, an *Observer* article commented:

Isolated in downtrodden towns where work is scarce, they [Asian communities] are finding life increasingly difficult. Drugs have entered their communities, violent gangs have followed and racism is never far away. *They are becoming ghettos*. Fears that estates in Bradford and Oldham may become virtual *no-go areas for other races*, especially whites, could yet become a reality . . . In a *tight-knit community* like Lidget Green everyone knows who to contact to score a hit. *It is virtually impossible for an outsider to break in*. (22 April 2001, my emphasis)

The notion of racial/ethnic/cultural segregation runs clearly through these accounts (ghettos, no-go areas, outsider/insiders) and is seamlessly fused with images of dysfunction and social breakdown (drugs, gangs, violence). The same article also refers to the Ouseley Report on Bradford warning of 'the growing threat of self-segregation' of the city's diverse ethnic communities (Ouseley, 2001). Unsurprisingly, the notion of cultural difference became a recurrent theme through these debates, focused particularly on Britain's Muslim (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) communities.⁸

Although the narratives sketched above are versions of the debates around the 1980s riots, the discussions are not identical. Indeed in many ways, it is the differences in these arguments that are most telling about the situation of Asian communities in Britain in the contemporary setting. First, there is a greater emphasis on the discussion of 'culture' and particularly cultural difference. This illustrates the shift from a dualistic racist/anti-racist discourse towards a more nuanced 'new racist' discussion of nation and belonging. Within the broader framework of the national furore around multiculturalism

in the wake of the Parekh Report (2000) and the moral panic over asylum seekers, this places notions of culture and citizenship into question – the riots are constructed as being about recalcitrant foreign cultures and failed integration as much as about social exclusion and discrimination. Multiculturalism is thus placed as part of the problem rather than, as in the 1980s, its proposed solution (Kundnani, 2002). Second, and relatedly, the focus is on *Muslim* communities in Britain and reflects the growth of Islamophobia in the media and popular culture (Runnymede Trust, 1997). Although this is closely tied up with broader racialized fears around Asians in general, centred on the oft-repeated mantra of cultural difference – religion, marriage practices and gender roles – this specificity points to the splintering effect of the 1990s reclamation of ‘cultural identity’ and the fragmentation of ‘black’ as a category either of discrimination or of resistance (Sivanandan, 2000). Third, and most significantly for the current paper, the reporting of the riots in even a traditionally liberal newspaper such as the *Guardian* shows the currency of culturalist arguments, which suffuse and underpin the discussion of socio-economic marginalization, so that the two explanations – what might be termed loosely the ‘class’ (socio-economic) and ‘underclass’ (culturalist) debates – become effectively inseparable.

A *Guardian* article from April 2001, illustrates this fusion clearly. In the wake of the attack on Walter Chamberlain, ‘a 75 year old D-Day Veteran’, the Special Report describes the local situation:

The divides are historic. Oldham’s Asian population came here in the post-war decades to work in the unpopular night shift in the cotton mills . . . They settled in the cheapest parts of town, near people who spoke the same language.

When the cotton business began to suffer, the Asian night workers were the first to go. With no language or social skills because they had worked at nights, times were extremely hard in the tough economic climate of the late 1970s. White families were going through hard times too, and then as now the National Front swaggered through the town blaming the hardships on the immigrants.

A generation grew up watching their cowed parents being subjected to abuse. This history sometimes becomes an excuse for present-day attacks on whites, but it is only one ingredient in the mix. Some of it more about puberty than racism; teenage males staking out their turfs and

picking on boys of a different colour in dim-witted acts of bravado. There is also a criminal element. Drug dealers sometimes employ teenagers as look-outs, briefed to scare off anyone who looks like a stranger . . .

There has been a loss of pride among Asian elders and a breakdown of parental discipline . . .

The parts of Oldham where many Asian families live remain among the poorest places in Britain. The smaller Indian community has been assimilated more successfully, but there is high unemployment within Pakistani and Bangladeshi quarters . . . (28 April 2001)

The seamless mixing of the structural and cultural arguments is explicit in this article. On the one hand there is the issue of poverty, economic restructuring and social exclusion; on the other, there are the arguments around 'the cultural divide' – communities that are self-segregating around language and religion, lacking social and cultural capital to adapt to changing economic conditions, and fissuring intergenerationally. Significantly, racism is almost invisible in this portrait – it appears as individualized 'prejudice' in the 1970s (a product of the National Front (NF) rather than the racialized discourse nationally through this period – a period of explicitly racist immigration legislation (Solomos, 1993)) and as an aspect of testosterone, turf and youth crime in the new millennium. The institutional racialized dimensions of housing, employment and education do not receive a mention – these, it seems, are products of cultural choice. It is interesting also to note the ways in which Muslim communities are distinguished from the more 'successfully assimilated' Indians (the language is significant) and from wider national cultures (the image of Walter Chamberlain, D-Day Veteran and local resident, is opposed clearly to the more recently arrived foreigners).

At the forefront of these portraits of cultural dysfunction and social breakdown stand Muslim young men, encapsulated in the image of 'the gang'. Reports up to, during and after the riots weave a picture of angry young men, alienated from society and their own communities, entangled in a life of crime and violence. A *Guardian* article in April talks of 'A Rash of Attacks by Asian Gangs' (*Guardian*, 20 April 2001) while an article in *The Times* on the same date writes of 'new efforts to curb *racist attacks on white people* yesterday

amid growing fears that some districts could be turned into “no-go” areas by ethnic minority gangs’ (*The Times*, 20 April 2001; my emphasis).

The figure of ‘the gang’ draws upon common sense ideas of Asian masculinities as collectively dysfunctional and as newly dangerous – most notably in its links of Britain’s Muslim communities with religious ‘Fundamentalism’. After the riots in Oldham, an *Observer* article claimed:

Asian youths are preparing to fight back. Stores of petrol bombs have been collected and gangs formed to meet any threat. One such group, known as Combat 786, is believed to have several hundred young supporters in both Bradford and Oldham . . . The numbers 786 are a numerical representation of Allah. (3 June 2001)

The fusion of over-determined religio-culturalist definitions of youth identities with notions of social exclusion and alienation marks out a reformulation of long-standing concerns around ‘black’ youth – what I have described elsewhere as the ‘new Asian folk devil’ (Alexander, 2000a). It is no accident that the idea of ‘gangs’ should be at the centre of constructions of the ‘riots’, standing as a potent symbol of ethnic, gendered and generational dysfunction and crisis that functions also as a testament to the failures of community and the limits of multiculturalism. What is most striking about the discourse around the ‘riots’ is the way in which ideas around ‘the Muslim underclass’ have become the explanatory paradigm not only of the conservative or ‘New Racist’ ideologues but also of the liberal establishment (still fazed by the fallout of the Rushdie affair) – creating what might, tellingly, be termed a ‘broad church’. These images work on the terrain of common sense, fuelling popular [mis]conceptions around the Asian/Muslim presence that have become axiomatic, and with the notion of cultural difference as its chief article of faith.

Significantly, these representations are also reflected in dominant academic constructions of Asian-Muslim identities, which have placed these communities within an explanatory framework defined through notions of crisis and pathology. These have in turn fed into policy responses to the ‘riots’, underpinning and legitimating the dual strategies of criminalization and containment on the one hand, and ‘community cohesion’ and citizenship training on the other. At the

same time, it can be argued that these understandings of ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ provide a major conceptual stumbling block for the successful implementation of policies aimed at bridging ‘parallel lives’. It is to these academic constructions of Asian-Muslim youth identities that I now turn, exploring the notions of community and cultural difference, gender and generation.

Theorizing the riots: community, gender and generation

Community and cultural difference

At the heart of the ‘Muslim underclass’ debate lies a reified notion of culture that is mapped on to physically identifiable collectivities – what we think of as ‘communities’ (Alleyne, 2002). This image of the nation as cultural tapestry lies at the heart of the Parekh Report’s vision of *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (Parekh, 2000) as a ‘community of communities’. The idea of ethnic community, in particular, carries with it the belief in membership of a bounded and internally homogeneous group, sharing place of common origin, language, religion, kinship system, marriage patterns – what might be seen as the broadly anthropological notion of ‘culture’. Although it has become commonplace to recognize the ‘imagined’ nature of community identifications, it is nevertheless true that some communities are more easily imagined, while others retain a seemingly unassailable ‘reality’. This remains particularly true of Britain’s Asian communities in which minority position is reinforced through the ascription of an over-determined cultural heritage. In Britain, as throughout Europe, the concerns about essentialized and unassimilable cultures have been recently fixated on Muslim groups – in Britain, mainly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis – with the privileging of a simplistic religious identification that has increasingly subsumed any alternative identifications; for example around race, ethnicity, nation, class and location (Modood, 1992; Modood et al., 1997). It is revealing that gender is cast as the only salient form of division within this identification, with the notion of Islamic patriarchal oppression reformulating earlier generic culturalist concerns around arranged marriages, domestic violence and the oppression of women, as a

testament to 'Fundamentalism' and its opposition to Western 'freedoms' (Macey, 1999).

The focus on 'community' is premised on the construction and maintenance of boundaries, of processes of inclusion and exclusion, of internal similarity and external difference, which are held to be absolute and irreconcilable. In relation to Asian communities in Britain, as Sue Benson (1996) has argued, this has perpetuated an anthropological approach that has privileged 'Culture' over 'Structure' – ethnicity over race (and racism), or what Tariq Modood has referred to as 'being' over 'becoming' (1992). Asian cultures and identities are generally understood, in both popular and academic discourse, as static, inward looking and primordial. The Parekh Report, for example, describes Asian communities as:

Maintaining cultural and religious traditions [which] is critical to their sense of identity . . . Traditions of origins are strongest in familial, personal and religious contexts, where there is a strong sense of extended kinship. (Parekh, 2000: 30)

It is significant to note the layering of individual/personal, familial, community, religious and cultural identities, where each of these categories is seemingly identical to and interchangeable with the other. Within this framework, change or fragmentation can only be understood as a moment of fracture and loss; a symbol of cultural dissolution and crisis that works through all levels from the individual to the collective cultural consciousness. As regards particularly Muslim communities, the construction of culture as primordial and pre-modern means that Muslim cultural identities are viewed as anachronistic and problematic within a modern national setting, and implicitly incompatible with it. Culture then becomes a problem rather than a resource – an obstacle to integration and to success. Discussions of racism and structural exclusion are replaced with a UK version of the 'cultures of poverty' or 'cultures of deprivation' debates that have marked out discussions of 'the underclass' in the United States (Murray, 1984). This results in a pathologization of Muslim cultures and a simplistic blame-the-victim approach to understanding complex processes of social exclusion: Modood, for example, has contrasted Indian/East African Asian 'achievers' with Pakistani and Bangladeshi 'believers' (1992: 43). This process can be seen in the articles discussed above, but it also marks out much of the discussion, both historically and contemporarily, around Asian youth identities,

and particularly masculinities, underpinning the fears around criminality, violence and 'the gang'.

Asian masculinity-in-crisis

As mentioned earlier, the primary division in this construction of Asian/Muslim community is that of gender. The 'riots' are clashes between Asian men and white men, or Asian men and the police, and the images are similarly gendered – about crime, violence, testosterone, unemployment, alienation from authority (whether parental or state), etc. The gendered nature of the 'riots' reflects a longer trend in the portrayal of Asian communities as implicitly patriarchal, but also points towards the reimagining of community-as-problem in newly gendered terms. Thus, where earlier moral panics were concerned about arranged/forced marriages, domestic violence, runaway girls etc., the focus in recent years has been on the activities of young men, particularly around issues of crime and violence – and 'the Asian gang' (Alexander, 2000a; Keith, 1995). This visibility can be traced back to the furore around the *Satanic Verses* affair, the demonstrations around the Gulf War and the Bradford 'riots' of 1995. Where Asian young men were previously largely invisible – certainly in academic discourse – the assumed heirs of patriarchal privilege and 'community', they are now the hyper-visible embodiments of a racialized dysfunctionality (Macey, 1999). This is signalled most clearly in the shift from 'victim' to 'aggressor' status.

The demonization of Asian masculinities is inseparable from the notion of cultural/community breakdown previously outlined – the fracturing of perceived patriarchal authority in the family and wider community, the culture-of-poverty that leads to underachievement in schools, high levels of unemployment and an inability to fulfil an adequate culturally defined patriarchal role of provider and protector. This is reinforced by the idea of class/underclass position, which feeds into wider concerns about working class young men, but more particularly into long established racialized debates around black masculinities (Alexander, 2000b). This academic common sense places black male identities as perpetually in crisis – a product of socio-economic marginalization and cultural inadequacy – outside and opposed to mainstream gender models. In relation to Asian youths, this dysfunction is also increasingly linked with the apparent growth

of aggressive religious 'Fundamentalism' amongst Muslim young men (Macey, 1999).

The generation gap

A parallel shift in the imagination of the Asian presence in Britain is the renewed concern around generation. The riots were thus very much presented as about youth (specifically young *men*), and about intergenerational breakdown and conflict, particularly with 'community elders' (Home Office, 2001b). The concerns with youth partly result from the changing demographics of the Asian populations in Britain, notably amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin communities (Modood, 1997), but are also connected to the construction of pathologized identities (Alexander, forthcoming). This again can be connected to long established debates around 'Between Two Cultures' identity crisis (Watson, 1977), which sees Asian young people as caught between two monolithic cultural presences – the oppressive parental culture and the 'freedoms' of British life.

It can be argued that youth in general are popularly understood as a symbol of change and usually of crisis – youth is in itself a 'problem category', particularly in its implicitly gendered concerns with young (working class) men. However, where working class white youth cultures have long been reclaimed in cultural studies as the epitome of romanticized resistance, this has been less true of black youth cultures, while Asian youth cultures have been almost completely overlooked (Sharma et al., 1996). Black youth cultures have broadly been understood as the product of social marginalization and alienation – figured through images of the ghetto, of rage, of nihilism and violence – of unromantic and dangerous resistance. Central to this portrait is the recurrent idea of racialized youth identities as failing, with the peer group standing as the compensatory 'family' through which fictions of strength and success can be narrated. This returns us to 'the gang', which is seen as the product of a 'culture of poverty'. Although aspects of black youth culture have, in recent years, been reclaimed and marketed as a global commodity, the same cannot be said of Asian youth identities. Rather Asian youth have recently emerged from a pathologized culture of poverty to stand as a symbol of its failures and an increasing threat to wider society. Modood for example writes:

The prediction that Pakistanis and Bangladeshis will develop a similar class profile to other South Asians grossly understates the current scale of the disadvantage of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, and takes no account either of the cultural differences between South Asians . . . or of a political alienation, sometimes expressed in terms of a political Muslim identity . . . or of anxiety about a possible trend of criminalisation among young Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. (Modood, 1997: 147)

Modood's analysis fuses notions of social exclusion, cultural dysfunction and political marginality in his figure of the Muslim young man as criminal. This reflects a broader concern about 'Asian crime' that can be clearly seen in the accounts of the 'riots' (Farrar, 2002). The Cattle Report, commissioned by the Home Office after the disturbances, thus frames the events in terms of drug crime:

One activity which sadly seems to be present with all the communities we visited was drug dealing. There was even some suggestion that in Burnley, some of the rioting which centred around a particular pub used by white youths, and which was burnt down by a crowd of ethnic minority youths, was in fact the result of a 'turf war' between drug gangs rather than a direct racist attack (Home Office, 2001a: 16)⁹

It is worth emphasizing the conflation of gendered, generational and ethnic categorizations with criminal activity, the reduction of the 'riots' themselves to acts of simple illegality, as well as the positioning of Asian young men as the perpetrators of 'racist' violence against white youths. More generally, Asian young men are seen as both produced by, and as standing outside, their cultural community – a depiction that denies the continuities across genders and generations and reduces validity of disturbances as legitimate political concerns. This image was strengthened in the wake of the Bradford disturbances by the police publication of photos of 'Wanted' rioters and the action of 'community leaders' in naming the young men concerned and turning them over to the police (Allen, 2003).

Implementing the 'riots': 'the Asian gang' in theory and practice

An analysis of the discourses surrounding and underpinning 'the riots' is important because it both marks the ways in which the Asian/Muslim presence is understood in Britain in the present moment and

also reveals its silences. This is significant in mapping the current terrain of theorizations of race and ethnicity within the academy, and its opaque reflection in the media imagination. Perhaps more crucially, it also provides the conceptual parameters in which politics and policy are formulated and enacted. The intersection of race/ethnicity, gender and generation embodied in 'the Asian gang' and performed in the notion of 'the riot' thus translates from media image and academic theory into political rhetoric and policy practice.

The understanding of the 'riots' outlined above encapsulates a notion of 'culture' that defines and imprisons our ideas of 'the Asian community', fixing it in some kind of timeless and unchanging prison. This leads to the reification of community and the coalescence of individual, family and community ties and identities (Parekh, 2000). Asian identities thus become internally homogenized and externally bounded, naturalizing processes of individual and group identification, and fixing 'ethnicity' as its privileged marker. This in turn essentializes ethnic identity as a possession or content rather than as a process of boundary marking (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993) – racializing culture as 'a pseudo-biological property of communal life' (Gilroy, 1993: 24).

This notion of coherent ethnic communities can be seen to lie at the heart of mainstream liberal understandings of racial and ethnic difference, mirrored, for example, in Parekh's vision for Britain as a culturally plural 'community of communities' or in the multiculturalist celebration of 'diversity' in its 'saris, steelbands and samosas' incarnation (Rattansi, 1992). However, as Gilroy (1992) and Rattansi (1992) have persuasively argued, this version of ethnicity feeds easily into New Right discourse around unscrutinized cultural difference and cultural antipathy. The idea of 'natural' group identities and preferences forms the conceptual baseline of the reinvention of Far Right groups in Britain, across Europe and in North America, which place race and ethnicity as an integral aspect of family, community and nation (Back, 2002a), and as a legitimate basis of concern for all 'respectable', right thinking citizens (Back, 2000a,b). Perhaps more worrying is the way in which this version of holistic and antipathetic cultural difference has seeped into mainstream media and political rhetoric in the period after the 'riots'. The 'riots' are thus understood as the inevitable confrontation between a displaced but ineluctable Asian-ness and a coherent White English/Britishness, in which racial-cultural differences are played out.

Both the earlier Ouseley report on Bradford (Ouseley, 2001) and the Cantle Report on Oldham, Burnley and Bradford (Home Office, 2001a), then, seize on the notion of cultural difference and self-segregation as the primary factor in the 'riots', and in perpetuating long-term conditions of social marginalization for both Asian and white communities – what Cantle captions as 'Parallel Lives'. The Denham Report on *Building Cohesive Communities* thus points to 'the fragmentation and polarisation of communities – on economic, geographical, racial and cultural lines – on a scale which amounts to segregation, *albeit to an extent by choice*' as the 'key issue' in the disturbances (Home Office, 2001b: 11; my emphasis). The report also quotes Herman Ouseley's earlier observation that 'different ethnic groups (in Bradford) are increasingly *segregating themselves* from each other and retreating into "comfort zones" *made up of people like themselves*' (Home Office, 2001b: 12; my emphasis).

The Denham Report points particularly to the issue of language proficiency – or lack of it – as an 'important factor' in maintaining the segregation of Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (Home Office, 2001b: 12), and in delineating the boundaries of community 'difference'. It is significant that the connected issues of language and marriage practices have been at the centre of the Home Office rhetoric in the following months – placing 'the Asian family' under the legislative gaze of the state with renewed visibility (Samad and Eade, 2003), and with the inevitable links to immigration control. Bradford MP Anne Cryer, for example, was quoted soon after the riots as saying that the social exclusion of Muslim minorities could be traced to the ongoing practice of bringing wives from the subcontinent, who could not speak English and were responsible for perpetuating foreign cultures within the home – 'importing poverty' (*Guardian*, 12 September 2001). Similarly, Home Secretary David Blunkett, in response to Census details that revealed that 30 per cent of Asian families do not use English as their main language at home, has attacked arranged/forced marriages (seemingly there is no distinction) and language practices as central to sustained social exclusion. In an essay on Britishness, Blunkett wrote:

Speaking English enables parents to converse with their children in English at home and participate in wider *modern culture*, and it helps overcome the *schizophrenia which bedevils generational relationships*. (*Telegraph*, 17 September 2002; my emphasis)

The rubric of citizenship education, delineated in the recent Crick Report, has laid an explicit emphasis on 'integration', with language facility as a core measure of the worthiness for national inclusion. Along with asylum seekers, spouses of settled communities are targeted as key recipients of citizenship training, with language as a crucial element in cultural and cross-generational (re)education. David Blunkett was thus quoted: '*Acquiring English is a prerequisite to social integration, to further education and employment and to the well-being of succeeding generations*' (*Guardian*, 3 September 2003; my emphasis).

Blunkett's demand that ethnic minorities adopt British social values and 'norms of acceptability' (*Telegraph*, 10 December 2001) reiterates the recommendations of the Denham Report, which itself provides the template for the Home Office's new strategy for improving race relations – 'community cohesion'. In his introduction, Lord Denham writes (Home Office, 2001b):

We recognise that in many areas affected by disorder or community tensions, there is little interchange between members of racial, cultural and religious communities and that proactive measures will have to be taken to promote dialogue and understanding. We also take on board the need to generate a widespread and open debate about identity, shared values and common citizenship as part of the process of building cohesive communities.

The notion of community cohesion has wider repercussions for understanding nationhood and citizenship, and the future of multiculturalism. Arun Kundnani has thus argued that 'community cohesion' signals 'The Death of Multiculturalism' (Kundnani, 2002), demanding the reversal of cultural pluralist rhetoric to the conformity of 'shared values and common citizenship'. 'Celebrating difference' has now been replaced with strategies for 'managing diversity', with all the legislative control that this implies. Indeed, the recent pursuit of citizenship training, loyalty oaths and new 'managed migration' measures by the Home Office marks a clear departure from the 'piecemeal', 'haphazard' and 'uncertain' 'drift' towards multiculturalism in Britain (Hall, 2000: 231) in favour of a more regulated and pedagogic pursuit of universalist liberal goals and acculturation. An uneasy trade-off between an inclusion premised on 'shared values' and the right to cultural difference is clearly discernible in both the

Denham Report and the more recent Crick Report. The latter states:

To be British seems to us to mean that we respect the laws, the elected parliamentary and democratic political structures, *traditional values of mutual tolerance, respect for equal rights and mutual concern*; and that we give our allegiance to the state . . . in return for its protection. (*Guardian*, 4 September 2003; my emphasis)¹⁰

However, the report is at pains to stress, this ‘does not mean assimilation into a common culture so that original identities are lost’ (*Guardian*, 4 September 2003). The problem remains, nevertheless, of the potential incompatibility of shared and particularistic cultural values which is deceptively elided in Home Office rhetoric. In 1997, Bhikhu Parekh wrote of a ‘moral covenant’ between ethnic minorities and the seemingly homogeneous ‘British’ majority, ‘Some of their [minority] values and practices might be unacceptable and then they need to be changed, by consensus where possible and *by law if necessary*’ (Parekh, 1997: x; my emphasis). In his later report, however, Parekh seems less certain about how this moral covenant might be pursued,

What values and loyalties must be shared by communities and individuals in One Nation. . . . How is a balance to be struck between the need to treat people equally, the need to treat people differently, and the need to maintain shared values and social cohesion? (Parekh, 2000: xv)

Part of the dilemma lies in the version of discrete and bounded cultural ‘communities’ at the heart of the ethnic tapestry of multicultural Britain. Thus while the Denham and Cattle Reports, and the Crick Report, point to the need for a reinvented, inclusive notion of ‘cohesive community’ with ‘common goals and a shared vision’ (Home Office, 2001a: 70), the version of ‘culture’ mobilized throughout these discussions creates the very notion of bounded and unassailable ethnic community it then seeks to critique (Hall, 2000). It thus privileges notions of cultural difference at the expense of alternative identifications – gender, class, age, location – that cut within and across ‘community’ boundaries (Amin, 2002). Asian/Muslim communities particularly are thus caught in a conceptual Catch 22 – they are expected to renounce their culture to become citizens, but are unable to renounce their ethnicity, their ‘mode of being’. The Powellian resonances are inescapable.¹¹

The role of gender and generation within the imagination and reformulation of community remains similarly vexed and contradictory. As argued above, the 'riots' were popularly cast as young and male, and as newly threatening, particularly when linked to the growth of so-called Fundamentalist sensibilities in the post September 11 era. The Denham Report noted that 'the participants were overwhelmingly young men' (Home Office, 2001b: 8). The subsequent local reports on the 'riots', and the Ouseley and the Cante Reports highlighted the element of criminality, particularly related to drugs, as a defining motivation of the events, although the Denham Report later played down this element.¹² The emphasis on criminality – on what Blunkett dismissed as 'sheer mindless violence – people behaving in a totally anti-social and thuggish fashion' (cited in Allen, 2003: 23) – reflects the ongoing process of the criminalization of Asian youth (Webster, 1997) and their increased visibility in the criminal justice system (Spalek and Wilson, 2002). Indeed, the harshness of the sentences for the Bradford 'rioters' – ranging between four and eight years (Allen, 2003) – can be read as a clear reflection of broader concerns around Asian youth 'crime' (Clancy et al., 2001). More than this, however, these penalties can be seen as part of the increasing containment and demonization of the Muslim community as a whole in a post September 11 context – what Chris Allen refers to as 'community sentencing' (Allen, 2003: 46).

The issue of generation was particularly highlighted as a focus for policy response. The Denham Report thus points to:

Disengagement of young people from the local decision making process, intergenerational tensions, and an increasingly territorial mentality in asserting different racial, cultural and religious identities in response to real or perceived attacks. (Home Office, 2001b: 11)

This analysis, along with the concerns over high unemployment and inadequate youth services, is implicitly gendered, focusing on the threat posed by young men with nothing to do and nowhere to go.¹³ It also signals the ongoing notion of intergenerational conflict within Asian communities, reflected in Blunkett's notion of generational 'schizophrenia'. However, young people are also a key part of the planned response to the 'riots', in terms of encouraging participation in the pursuit of community cohesiveness – they represent at once both problem and solution.

This contradictory stance is compounded for Asian youth by the issue of ethnicity. Asian young people are thus positioned as simultaneously produced by backward cultures that promote segregation, and outside these communities – the embodiment of its myriad failures. The question arises then, whether the problem for Asian young people lies in the possession of a backward culture or the absence of this culture.¹⁴ It is significant, for example, that the only place in which youth culture appears is in a trans-ethnic drug culture and associated deviance, an image which belies the more complex, if ambiguous, spaces of youth marginalization, interaction and acculturation. As Ash Amin has forcefully argued:

There is a complexity to the cultural identity of the Asian youths that cannot be reduced to the stereotype of traditional Muslim, Hindu, Sikh lives, to the bad masculinities of gang life . . . to the all too frequently repeated idea of their entrapment between two cultures. . . . Their frustration and public anger cannot be detached from their identities as a new generation of British Asians claiming in full the right to belong to Oldham or Burnley *and* the nation, but whose Britishness includes Islam, halal meat, family honour and cultural resources located in diaspora networks. (Amin, 2002: 10)

Amin argues that the focus of ‘community’ and citizenship needs to be shifted from the notion of shared social values or civic identity towards issues of equality and discrimination. His view of the ‘riots’ as ‘disputed rights claims’ places the emphasis on importance of racism and racialized disadvantage in the disturbances. Although the Home Office reports acknowledge the role of Far Right groups, the failure of the police in tackling racial crime and violence, and racialized inequalities in housing and employment as underlying causes of the ‘riots’, it is nevertheless the case that issues of race and racism have taken a back seat to questions of culture and identity. This reflects a broader trend in studies of race and ethnicity in Britain, which has privileged ethnicity and difference over the social, historical and material conditions of their production (Alexander, 2002). The focus on Islam, Islamophobia and ‘the Muslim underclass’ thus separates out these phenomena from a wider racialized landscape and history of ‘black’ and ‘Asian’ struggle, and runs the risk of reinscribing reductive culturalist analyses and hierarchies. Stuart Hall has thus argued that a truly ‘radical’ multiculturalism must move away from abstracted and neatly prescribed notions of ‘nation’, ‘community’ and

'citizenship' towards 'the analysis of what "community" actually means and how the different communities which now compose the nation actually interact on the ground' (Hall, 2000: 231–2).

Concluding comments

As argued earlier, the aim of the present paper has not been to provide an account of the 'riots' or of their representation in the media. The aim has been rather to identify broad themes in this representation, around culture, gender and generation, and to explore the connections between media and academic discourses of race and ethnicity in Britain in the present moment. This shows at once the continuities of racialized images from the unrest of the 1980s to the events of 2001, but also reveals telling changes in this landscape, particularly around the role of culture and ethnic identity. The prominence of Islamophobia in the present conjuncture should not, however, blind us to this broader and longer context of racialized fears, and its intersection with alternative formations, such as those around gender, age and class. As equally revealing as this diachronic perspective are the synchronic parallels between media and academic analyses, which raises pertinent, and disquieting, questions about the ways in which selected academic discourses have fed into, and upon, populist soundbite understandings of race and ethnicity. More worrying still is the reproduction of these reductive and inherently conservative discourses in political and policy terms. While there are alternative voices and perspectives, which challenge the reinscription of culturally simplistic and exclusive notions of belonging, citizenship and national identity, these remain largely marginal to the debates and seemingly powerless to stop the drift from multiculturalism to a home-grown cultural re-colonization.

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Notes

1. In April 2001, Chief Superintendent of the GMP, Eric Hewitt claimed that 60 per cent of racial attacks in Oldham were by Asians on whites.
2. In March 2001, William Hague was quoted, 'Let me take you on a journey to a foreign land – to Britain after a second term of Tony Blair' (*Guardian*, 5 March 2001). The same speech promises stricter controls on asylum seekers.
3. John Townend, MP for Yorkshire East, was quoted in March 2001: 'Our homogeneous Anglo-Saxon society has been seriously undermined by the massive immigration . . . that has taken place since the war' (*Guardian*, 28 March 2001).
4. In April 2001, Robin Cook asserted, 'Chicken Tikka Masala is now Britain's true national dish. . . . It is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences' (*Guardian*, 4 April 2001).
5. For example, British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin wore a white gag over his mouth at the election in Oldham (7 June 2001) to signal his enforced silence over the 'truth' of race relations in Britain. The BNP gained 16 per cent of the votes in Oldham West.
6. The extracts are drawn mainly from the *Guardian* newspaper, as illustrative of a mainstream, broadly liberal, understanding of Asian/Muslim communities in Britain.
7. Additional, but secondary, factors, according to the article, were discrimination against Muslims, the role of policing and the activities of the BNP/National Front – the solutions are urban regeneration, an ethnically reflective police force and wider political participation.
8. Phil Woolas, MP for Oldham East, thus proposed a programme of 'forced integration' of Muslim communities into wider society (June 15) to lessen racism.
9. The Burnley Task Force Summary Report also described the events as 'disturbances [which] were caused originally by criminal acts involving both Asian and White criminal gangs, which were followed by deliberate attempts to turn the violent acts into racial confrontation' (2001: 5, cited in Farrar, 2002).
10. It is interesting that one of the key areas for education is 'the changing role of women and patterns of youth culture', which can be read as a nod towards perceived anachronistic patriarchal (Muslim) cultures.
11. Enoch Powell stated in 1968, 'the West Indian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law, he becomes a UK citizen by birth; in fact, he is a West Indian or Asian still'.

12. Although the report opens with the numbers of arrests, injuries and levels of damage incurred and later notes the costs to 'the ordinary, decent and law-abiding majority' (Home Office, 2001b: 10).
13. Women are largely invisible in the reports and proposed policy responses, as the reports themselves acknowledge.
14. Tariq Modood has thus argued that the problem with the rioters was that they were 'too assimilated' to British yob culture – what he termed the equivalent of a 'Millwall football firm' (seminar presentation, University of Salford, 5 September 2001).

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