

Cohesion as ‘common sense’: Everyday narratives of community and cohesion in New Labour’s Britain

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Abstract

This article engages with popular narratives of community and cohesion, explored through a series of focus groups in Bradford and Birmingham. This article argues that the participants interviewed used discourses propagated by government to make sense of these narratives in their neighbourhoods and communities. The use of these discourses constructs what Gramsci calls a ‘common sense’ position, which legitimises a specific and targeted notion of cohesion. However, participants can contaminate these discourses, which can lead to subtle changes or explicit challenges to dominant discourses on community and cohesion in the United Kingdom.

Keywords

cohesion, community, discourse, Gramsci, narratives

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Introduction

The legacy of New Labour’s Community Cohesion policy still has an impact on communities today, particularly as the concept has not been fully phased out by the Coalition government, with a reference even being made to social cohesion in the recent Queen’s Speech (GOV.UK, 2015). Yet under-researched in political science is an analysis of the influence of policy from the position of the citizen rather than institutions related to the state and civil society. In particular, little has been produced in this field concerning the everyday narratives of citizens and how they may be influenced by, or act as an influence on, policy. This is perhaps because ‘much of the international relations and political science literature tends to assume that subjects are passively constructed by the policies that act upon them’ without acknowledging the various roles citizens may play in legitimising or contesting such policy (Clarke, 2005: 460; Pero, 2011: 223). This article builds

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upon a growing body of literature that attempts to rectify this oversight. It contributes to debates on the importance of language in policy and politics, investigating its influence on citizens and their communities.

This article uses New Labour's development of Community Cohesion policy as a case study, exploring how the concepts of community and cohesion are internalised, legitimised and contested by different communities, through a series of focus groups conducted in Bradford and Birmingham in 2012. It draws upon a previous critical discourse analysis (CDA) of New Labour's Community Cohesion and Welfare reform policy (Donoghue, 2013, 2014). Employing a CDA of focus group participants' narratives, which explores how 'social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk' (Van Dijk, 2004: 352), this article argues that these discourses may be reproduced by citizens to form what Gramsci calls a 'common sense' position. This position revolves around specific understandings of the role of community and cohesion in UK society. However, these discourses are open to contamination, giving citizens the potential to challenge the discourses.

This article adds to debates within political science and policy studies through increasing the visibility and agency of citizens in the business of policy making as well as contributing to debates concerned with understanding the role of governance within communities (e.g. Rose, 1996) through everyday narratives. It draws on debates in policy anthropology, bolstering the notion that 'policies are not simply external, generalised or constraining forces, nor are they confined to texts. Rather, they are productive, performative and continually contested' (Shore and Wright, 2011: 1). It also illuminates a number of implications regarding Gramsci's work in policy and politics, but, in particular, the utility of a Gramscian approach in exploring the positioning and agency of citizens in relation to policy making and community governance.

This article is divided into a number of sections. First, it provides some background on New Labour's development of Community Cohesion policy and the associated narratives of community and cohesion. Second, it provides a theoretical framework for discursively analysing citizens' everyday narratives on community and cohesion. In particular, it discusses the elements of discourse and discourse analysis and how these elements can be organised using a Gramscian analytical frame. Third, it sets out the methodological approach of the study, providing information on the background of and access to participants as well as the methods used. Fourth, the article discusses and analyses the focus group data. Finally, the article concludes.

Background: new labour and community cohesion

Although (social) cohesion as a concept is neither new to academia nor policy, community cohesion is a relatively new development. It was devised as a specific response to unrest in northern towns in 2001 (Bagguley and Hussain, 2008; Cheong et al., 2007; Clarke, 2001; Hussain and Bagguley, 2005; Kalra, 2003; McGhee, 2003, 2008, 2010; Phillips et al., 2008; Richie, 2001), which was reported to be some of the worst in the United Kingdom's modern history (BBC, 2001; Harris, 2001). It was popularly conceived as 'the violence of communities fragmented by colour lines, class lines, and police lines. It was the violence of hopelessness' (Kundnani, 2007: 105). Community cohesion's goals were mainstreamed, embedding cohesion within existing policy structures, lessening the need for a sustained stand-alone policy framework. A newly formed sub-group of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), concerned with communities and local

government, was set up in 2001, taking responsibility for the development of community cohesion. In 2006, this became the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), subsuming the responsibilities of the ODPM.

The government was quick to proclaim that the riots were caused by (ethnic) communities not mixing with one another, leading to mutual mistrust. The Denham Report stated that '[w]e cannot claim to be a truly multi-cultural society if the various communities within it live, as Cattle puts it, a series of parallel lives which do not touch at any point' (Home Office, 2001a: 13). The Cattle Report, the first report on the riots, was 'particularly struck by the depth of polarisation in our towns and cities', remarking that it was 'little wonder that the ignorance about each other's communities can easily grow into fear' (Home Office, 2001b: 9). These ideas were developed further by Cattle (2008), not only retaining a focus on developing trust and tolerance through communication but also highlighting the need for improved systems of governance that can cope with a new citizenry that think and act beyond the 'traditional outlooks and confines' associated with the nation state (Cattle, 2012: 2). A central recommendation of the Cattle and Denham reports involved developing localised problem-solving with the communities themselves. Central government was to 'support local community solutions, rather than impose them from the outside' (Home Office, 2001a: iii).

Although social exclusion was the concept of choice to explain social division at the beginning of New Labour's time in government (Levitas, 2005; Lister, 1998, 2003, 2006; Powell, 2000; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998: 1), it was gradually de-emphasised in policy discourse in favour of 'community cohesion' (e.g. Fairclough, 2000: 51; Worley, 2005). Community cohesion afforded more focus on ethnic and cultural difference (e.g. Commission on Integration and Cohesion (CIC), 2007; Home Office, 2001a, 2001b, 2004), steering the focus away from more intractable problems, such as the high levels of deprivation and social marginalisation in locations such as Bradford and Birmingham. It also directed initiatives towards 'virgin political territory that the government could colonise with its own priorities and preoccupations' (Robinson, 2008: 17).

One way these preoccupations were shored up was through the development of a robust discursive mesh, which facilitated the legitimisation and popularisation of particular ideas and positions over others. It is this that is examined later in this article. First, it provides an overview of discourse and common sense, understood here in Gramscian terms.

Discourse in policy: Gramsci, 'common sense' and everyday narratives

This article accesses the discursive elements of community cohesion policy through the heuristics of community and cohesion, which can be organised in such a way as to develop 'common sense'. Although the language of cohesion policy is empowering (Donoghue, 2013, 2014), it creates a highly controlled, top-down discursive frame (Fairclough, 2002: 177) that limits the actions of citizens regarding their integration, particularly regarding acceptable methods of integration. Using 'community as a new plane or surface on which micro-moral relations among persons are conceptualised and administered' (Rose, 1996: 331), discourses within cohesion and welfare construct a specific understanding of the concepts in the public consciousness in which *one method* of integration and cohesion is presented unproblematically as *the only feasible choice*.

Notwithstanding the importance of policy development by experts, the voices and positions of citizens provide insight into this process of organising common sense through

policy development and dissemination. This article prioritises the voices of citizens over policy makers to ascertain the extent to which discourses in policy impact on citizens' lives, particularly as '[p]olicy is a fundamental "organising principle" of society, which, like "family," "nation," "class" or "citizenship," provides a way of conceptualising and symbolising social relations, and around which people live their lives and structure their realities' (Shore and Wright, 2011: 2).

Understanding how citizens' everyday narratives on cohesion and community are mediated by discourse is important because 'people not only act and organise in particular ways, they also represent their ways of acting and organising, and produce imaginary projections of new or alternative ways, in particular discourses' (Fairclough et al., 2002: 2). Furthermore, discourse can legitimise specific interactions between state and citizen, influencing the strength and scope of policy (Jackson, 1999; Jacobs, 2006; Jacobs and Manzi, 1996; Taylor, 1999). The implicit meaning of carefully selected words within policy literature influences individuals' understandings of policy issues. Yet it is not a simple case of policy being designed and implemented from on high. Citizens have a constitutive role to play in the legitimisation, suppression or modification of policy precisely because they are involved as the subjects of policy. It is 'important to examine how policy comes to be transformed, challenged, resisted, neutralised or improved from below, through the creative engagements of disadvantaged recipients' (Pero, 2011: 244).

This relationship between policy(makers) and citizens involves complex power relations and requires a framework that can analyse these relations adequately. The work of Gramsci can provide this framework, considering his focus on the relationships between citizen and state, and social classes, his work on hegemony (particularly coercion and consent), and most importantly for this article his work on language, 'common sense' and normative grammar. For Gramsci, language is inherently political. The way in which it is used can have a significant impact on institutions, which makes controlling language important. A particular tool to achieve this is normative grammar, which Gramsci (1985) described as

[R]eciprocal 'censorship' expressed in such questions as 'What did you mean to say?', 'What do you mean?', 'Make yourself clearer', etc. and in mimicry and teasing. This whole complex of actions and reactions comes together to create a grammatical conformism, in which 'norms' or judgements of correctness and incorrectness [are established]. (p. 180)

Inherent within language rules and conversation are power relations that encourage people to conform to prescribed social norms, such as changing one's accent and pronunciation to fit in with different social groups. These grammars are not 'natural' to language: 'Rather, normative grammars are produced through the organisation, codification and legitimisation of certain spontaneous grammars.¹ Of course, this is a competitive process whereby many (if not most) spontaneous grammars are often delegitimised and suppressed' (Ives, 2004: 96). Examining how everyday narratives are constructed provides insight into the organisation of language to achieve political aims. The language citizens use, along with if and how that language is policed, can give an indication of the influence of certain ideas and principles. Normative grammars can also manifest in actions. Mimicry and teasing can be physical manifestations of censorship that are not purely linguistic. In the analysis of focus groups, one can identify the use of these normative grammars, particularly through one participant's correcting of another or through the way one may disagree with another participant, for example.

Through normalising the privileging of specific ideas, this discursive construction facilitates the development of common sense, which in the Gramscian context is akin to a normal or average understanding of phenomena (rather than the English equation with good sense). However, common sense must be 'organised' because it is an 'amalgam of historically effective ideologies, scientific doctrines and social mythologies' (Rupert, 2003: 185). It reflects the untidy nature of thought and practice formation. Opinions are not formulated unproblematically; one's understandings are at least partially derived from past attitudes, norms and values as well as those of one's peers. Furthermore, organisation of common sense requires resources and expertise, which gives elites an advantage over subaltern classes (Ives, 2004: 74–75). This highlights its utility for focus group research: the narratives constructed by individuals will reflect and reproduce the syncretic structure of meaning-making through conversation. Common sense is *presented* as whole and unproblematic by necessity, as it is easier to hold an ostensibly unproblematic position than one that is obviously problematic.

However, common sense is not the unproblematic transmission of a particular set of ideas – in this case, from policy to the polity and society. The fact that common sense is 'a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions' (Gramsci, 1971: 422), the organisation of which is a competitive process, means that the position can be contaminated (Laclau, 2001). Discourses can be appropriated and have their meaning and implications subtly altered. This can be an act of resistance because a contaminated discourse has its 'chain of equivalences' – the links between a discourse and its conceptual anchors – stretched to the point it can become an 'empty signifier' (Laclau, 2001: 11), making it susceptible to population by alternative preoccupations. This emphasises the use of language as a political act; the organisation of discourse, even by those with more influence and resources, is not always simply accepted by society-at-large. It can be inconsistent enough to be challenged implicitly and explicitly. Yet, for common sense to be organised effectively and take hold, it needs a vehicle to facilitate its uptake. For the purposes of this article, that vehicle is an array of political logics.

Donoghue's (2013, 2014) CDA of New Labour's cohesion and welfare policy examined social and political logics, understood here as the building blocks of discourse (for a fuller discussion, see Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2005). Social logics define the boundaries of discourse, while political logics constitute and contest these boundaries (and therefore provide opportunities for contamination). Cohesion and welfare can be treated as social logics, as they are systems of historically sedimented practice (Howarth, 2005: 323) that contain rules on how one should understand and act upon phenomena. Political logics, however, 'refer to the special kinds of practice that *constitute* and *contest* these social logics' (Howarth, 2005: 323). Donoghue (2013, 2014) focused on three political logics, which are also utilised in the focus group research – conditionality, rights and responsibilities, and integration and assimilation. This article focuses on the latter two, which are closely linked to the concepts of community and cohesion.

There is not enough space in this article to do justice to the role, significance and complexity of discursive logics. Instead, I provide a working outline to enable the identification of logics in the narrative (a fuller discussion can be found in Donoghue, 2013, 2014: 183–226). The notion of *rights and responsibilities* is central to cohesion and welfare as social logics, as it deals with the obligations and freedoms of citizens. *Conditionality*² is more evident in the welfare literature, but can be seen in varying, and generally less formal, ways in the cohesion literature. *Assimilation and integration* operates as a result of the interrelation of conditionality and rights and responsibilities. Alone and collectively

these logics influence the construction, reproduction and contestation of larger rules. The logic of rights and responsibilities is effective because it is discursively and practically strengthened by the logic of conditionality and its material effects (e.g. sanctions when responsibilities are not discharged). The logic of assimilation and integration solidifies the logic of rights and responsibilities by promoting particular, yet universal, values. To do this, it relies to some extent on the logic of conditionality.

Participants draw upon these political logics to make sense of the key concepts of community and cohesion, which influences their understandings of these concepts so that they are more or less in line with the discourses found in policy. The logics also characterise the use of normative grammars. In this sense, they develop a 'common sense' position, organised by policy makers and presented as policy positions (Donoghue, 2013: 83). However, evidence of dissent from these positions at points in the discussions suggests that the positions are not immutable. Indeed, dissent helps highlight the syncretic nature of common sense (Rupert, 2003: 185). The contamination of discourses provides enough intellectual movement to give participants a sense of agency over their own positions on these subjects.

In order to understand the relationship between these concepts and the fieldwork, the following section documents the methodology used in the fieldwork for this study, before moving on to an analysis of the narratives themselves.

Methodology

Five focus groups³ were conducted in Manningham, Bradford and Aston, Birmingham in 2012, in order to investigate citizens' everyday narratives of community and cohesion. Focus groups are an appropriate method for this purpose because of the way in which the construction of conversation in the groups provides much information on how participants understand key issues, particularly in relation to the values and arguments of others (Burnham et al., 2008: 128; Kitzinger, 1994; Morgan, 1992, 1997, 2004).

Participants were recruited through gatekeepers (e.g. Barbour and Schostak, 2005: 44) such as community organisations. This was particularly important for access in Bradford, as in general the population were wary of increased focus from academics and policy makers since 2001. Snowball sampling was also used where appropriate, whereby individuals are recommended by their peers, forming a network of participants, and informing relevant communities about the focus groups (Burnham et al., 2008: 107–108).

Although in the groups there was no significant detrimental conflict, some groups did experience dominant speakers. In general, moderator involvement was limited to defining the topic of debate, and occasional steering of the conversation in order to probe further interesting elements (e.g. Flick, 2009: 199), as well as ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to speak. Participants were generally willing to engage in conversation and debate, particularly in the more homogeneous groups.

In general, the majority of groups contained a roughly equal split of male and female participants (although the Bradford groups did slightly privilege male voices). There was a range of ages, from people in their early 20s to people of retirement age. The majority of participants were in their 30s and 40s however.

There was a more pronounced difference between the groups in terms of ethnic background. In Bradford, the majority of participants in both groups were of south Asian origin but born in Britain. A handful of participants were white British. The Birmingham focus groups were more diverse, with people from south Asian, southern African,

Caribbean, eastern European, British and Irish backgrounds. Again, many were born in Britain with an ethnic identity from another country.

Participants were asked questions regarding their opinions on the sense and depth of community in their area, how different social and ethnic groups interact and whether or not they feel represented and have a voice in local decision-making. They were also asked to discuss issues surrounding welfare reform, although that is not covered in this article. The participants' discussions were then analysed in comparison with the previously mentioned CDA of New Labour policy (Donoghue, 2013, 2014).

The focus groups were analysed using CDA, within a Gramscian analytical framework examining participants' and groups' narratives in more depth. This ascertained whether, and the extent to which, their narratives conformed to or contested the discourses identified in New Labour's policy literature. These issues are elaborated upon in the following section.

Everyday narratives and 'common sense' in Bradford and Birmingham

Participants in Bradford and Birmingham were asked to discuss, among other things, their feelings and thoughts on the concepts of community and cohesion as well as on how their areas had been impacted by policies related to these concepts. The participants in general positioned themselves apart from the government (both New Labour and the Coalition) on many issues. Yet, the way in which they used certain concepts and linguistic structures suggests that the language, imagery and discourses associated with the policies gained traction, implicitly if not explicitly. As such, a 'common sense' understanding of community and cohesion can be identified. It is sustained through the (re)production of key discourses, which are strengthened by the political logics. Participants contaminate discourses, yet the political logics constrain the extent to which contamination is successful. Participants' use of normative grammar softens dissent and brings the discussion back to approved territory. This has pertinent implications for how academics understand the relationship between citizens and policy as well as how political decision-making and governance is understood from the perspective of the citizen rather than the state.

Community

Participants broadly echoed the policy literature's treatment of 'community' as a proxy for ethnic groups (Home Office, 2001a, 2001b). However, the specific treatment of the terms differed in the two sites. Bradford participants, when asked directly, questioned the validity of the notion, although when used implicitly it was linked to ethnicity more regularly. Ibrahim,⁴ from Bradford, insisted that community is 'going to mean different things to different people in this room ... because you have people sat there with all different views'. For Paul, community was simply 'two or more people'. This broad and pluralistic understanding of community sits in stark contrast to its presentation in policy. This suggests that, far from having a strong influence on citizens, the policy's treatment of community did not chime with its popular understanding.

Although participants in Bradford were keen to set apart their understanding and experiences of community with that of the 'official' discourse, further conversation revealed that the concept as defined by policy discourses in fact had a deeper reach than the participants' original discussion of the concept suggested. This highlights the plausibility of a

'common sense' conception of community. When participants made sense of the world around them, they invoked a more homogeneous notion of community. Paul drew upon the political logic of rights and responsibilities, and of integration and assimilation, when discussing the health of his local community:

Things are changing too fast to be able to create something stable, to be able to feel a sense of community ... we don't understand people coming into neighbourhoods, we don't have the same language [...] I would look at areas where they are stable, I bet those people in those stable areas feel a better sense of community, I'm guessing.

The local community is framed as unstable, in which a lack of understanding of one another is the central issue. This conforms exactly to the arguments of the Cattle and Denham Reports (Home Office, 2001a, 2001b). Although Paul previously understood community as a pluralistic domain, it becomes understood through the implicit link of homogeneity and stability. This understanding draws directly on the logic of assimilation and integration, seen in the Home Office's proclamation that there is a 'need to support not just *existing communities*, but also to *bring diverse communities together*' (Home Office, 2004: 19 – emphasis added). There is a clear separation between external and internal understandings of community. This highlights the ability of a political logic to facilitate the survival and reproduction of a particular discourse, while providing room for an apparent ability to dissent. This is emblematic of the Gramscian notion of coercion and consent, 'embodied in *hegemony*, achieved when the state or classes [embody] political and cultural leadership and thus [gain] the consent of the ruled' (Moran, 1998: 161; see also Gramsci, 1971: 161; Femia, 1975: 32; Morton, 2006: 63).

Paul does not explicitly emphasise difference, nor does he blame one group over another. However, he speaks as a member of the host community, which in the policy literature corresponds to white British. He admits that he has not done enough to facilitate the integration of new arrivals: 'I've sort of said hello to them and that's it, you know, I haven't made an effort, a conscious effort to, [get to know] my east European neighbours'. He explicitly responsabilises himself, drawing on the logic of rights and responsibilities. Yet, the logic of assimilation and integration gives more responsibility to those 'diverse' communities that should be 'brought together' rather than the 'existing communities'. This is another example of political logics reinforcing the common sense position, while legitimising the logics themselves. There is no blame of others; Paul implicates himself. Yet he will not suffer direct consequences, as he does not need to integrate. As a member of the host community, he belongs to the group towards which the diverse communities should gravitate. Yet his admission that he has not done enough legitimises the notion that instead of targeting certain groups, community cohesion represents a universal push for closer socio-cultural ties.

This is perhaps most starkly represented through the positioning of Jas, a British-Asian who has lived in Manningham all his life. His residency qualifies him as a member of the host community. However, he places his ethnic group outside in opposition:

As a community or as south Asian or Muslim etcetera, we use the word discrimination, racism as an excuse sometimes. [...] I think we're more racist sometimes than the host community, about wanting to integrate, about wanting to get together – we would rather stay out of it.

Jas uses his belonging to different 'communities' to legitimise a position that could be seen as controversial in other contexts. Separating south Asian and Muslim from 'the host

community' illustrates his feeling of otherness. His position that his community is more racist than the host community acts to further responsabilise non-host communities while absolving the host community itself of wrong-doing. As such, this positioning utilises the logics of rights and responsibilities and assimilation and integration to legitimise those same logics. He uses normative grammar through this separation and self-accusation: he significantly reduces his ability to take a dissenting stand on matters, deligitimising his own position. He disciplines himself through his choice of language.

The notion of separated communities was not confined to Bradford. Participants in Birmingham stood broadly in opposition to established discourses. However, rather than having this explicit position while implicitly supporting the discourses, their position was somewhat the opposite. Linda stated that it

Doesn't help that you've got the particular ethnicities in particular areas, so if you've got a load of black people there, a lot of Asian people there, a load of white people there, then perhaps that black person isn't going to want to go into that, um, that predominantly white area or that Asian person isn't going to want to go into that black area. So you know, I think it stems from housing as well.

Linda, using established discourses on ethnic groups living separate lives, reflects New Labour's approach to cohesion (Home Office, 2001a, 2001b; CIC, 2007). However, her focus emphasises structural factors rather than the foibles of particular groups. Using the same linguistic presentation but altering its message and implications is an act of contamination. It is not a direct challenge because it is implicit. She does not openly challenge the policy or language as such; rather, she redirects its focus, populating certain terms with alternative connotations.

Linda's treatment of discourses surrounding integration and cohesion emphasises a discord between policy language and some people's lived experiences. Ensuring all have a responsibility to integrate is noble. However, this cannot target just one group (Cheong et al., 2007; McGhee, 2003; Ratcliffe, 2012; Worley, 2005). Furthermore, responsibility cannot be increased without also providing the wherewithal to discharge any new duties. If one can only afford to live in a certain area, or if one feels (or is made to feel) uncomfortable moving into a certain area, opportunities for integration and therefore cohesion are limited. Even though discourses become contaminated, the logics are able to stabilise and legitimise a targeted approach to integration while promoting it as universal. This engenders the development of hegemonic discourses because common sense understandings are in operation even within critique; to engage a critique, common reference points must be used. As Femia (1975) elaborates, this '[draws] attention to the frequent incompatibility between a man's conscious thoughts and the unconscious values implicit in his action' (pp. 32–33).

Linda's explicit feeling of separation also went further compared with feelings in Bradford and in the policy literature. Richard outlined what the term 'community' meant to him using a clear critique of current structures of local and national governance, which was met with agreement from the group:

[T]o me a community is a group of people who are sort of battling against the decision makers, because I don't feel as though decision makers give central, local, or you know regional government, actually participate in what communities feel they need. And you know, it's like if you've got a family member that is in charge of the house, and doesn't really listen to anybody and does their own thing. You, everyone else is going to get frustrated and that's what I feel communities are feeling at the moment.

Richard provides a stark contrast between the everyday narratives of his community and that of the policy that originally drove community governance in the beginning of the 21st century. The Denham Report, for example, states that

While central Government clearly has a crucial role to play in empowering and enabling local communities, many of the solutions to the problems identified must be found and implemented at a local level. The action we have already taken ... is intended to support local community solutions, rather than impose them from the outside. (Home Office, 2001a: iii)

The report sets out a clear need for localised empowerment, yet such empowerment was not reflected in the everyday narratives. There is a strong language of empowerment, but with no basis in reality, this leads to frustration from the local community. In both Bradford and Birmingham, therefore, there exist confused and fractured understandings of community, from which it is difficult to build cohesion. As such, a key role of the political logics is to organise a common sense conception of community upon which a successful programme of cohesion can be built. However, although a common sense conception of cohesion can be developed in partnership with a similar conception of community, the concepts remain contingent on particularised understandings, which are syncretic and therefore open to contamination, as the following section further demonstrates.

Cohesion

Lydia shows concern in the way an ostensibly universal drive towards cohesion is, in practice, targeted towards particular groups. She tells the group about the creation of community centres that, although are technically for everyone, act for specific groups:

I think sometimes they make that divide, whereas if it's a youth centre for the youth, it should be open to everybody and it shouldn't just be targeted to that one group of individuals [...] So really by letting them all use the one you've sent out, you're actually helping relationships between the different sort of groups of people, rather than just having it at targeted groups everywhere.

By referencing the issue of separation, but pointing the finger at those with more influence and power in the community, Lydia begins a process of contamination. The logic of assimilation and integration is contaminated through highlighting the problematic nature of the targeting strategies, while still agreeing with the overall purpose of integration. She contaminates the logic of rights and responsibilities by illustrating the frustration of trying to work within a system that requires communities and neighbourhoods to integrate, but prevents such integration at a systemic level. Lydia also questions New Labour's assumption that ethnic communities deliberately led parallel lives by asserting that 'I think sometimes *they* (i.e. the government) make that divide'.

Similar concerns were held in Bradford, albeit within a somewhat different context. Azra and Ibrahim provide a narrative common to a number of participants in the city, in which the two logics can be seen clearly to affect dominant understandings of cohesion:

Ibrahim: When you're walking out, as a Muslim, now ... you feel that you're under constant scrutiny, by wherever you are, you're watching the airport, you know, you feel that ... because you're a Muslim, and if you have a beard

- it's more, or wearing a Hijab, you feel under more scrutiny and you shouldn't have to feel that way. That's unfortunate the way it is.[...]
- Azra: Yeah. But you know, there is that kind of feeling, but, which I don't normally think about, sometimes you're in situations where people will make you think about you.

This conversation highlights the targeting nature of cohesion policy in the United Kingdom, which chimes strongly with a policy literature that focuses on the 'values and mores of minorities' (Cheong et al., 2007: 26). This manifests itself in a 'discourse of blame directed towards new migrants and especially British Muslim communities, who are expected to show "which side they are on," through an allegiance to a "phoney" construction of Britishness' (Worley, 2005: 491).

Ibrahim's and Azra's discussion of suspicion illustrates the logic of assimilation and integration. The fact that Muslims will feel more suspicion regarding their appearance and actions is simultaneously normalised and contested. It is characterised as 'unfortunate' and 'the way it is', indicating perhaps some acceptance, while also being challenged; 'you shouldn't have to feel that way'. They are forced to think about their dress and behaviour, which in turn may change their behaviour so that it fits more neatly into the dominant group's value system. This is exemplary of those elements of normative grammar that centre on teasing and mimicry (e.g. Brandist, 1996: 100; Ives, 2010: 528–530). Formally speaking, the identity of British Muslims has been homogenised and securitised. The PREVENT strategy, for example, conflated cohesion with combatting (violent) extremism (Home Office, 2008: 6), which was reinforced by the Home Office's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. Through this, the government '[attempted] to co-opt into their counter-terrorism strategy the "intolerance of intolerance" discourse' (McGhee, 2010: 34). As Worley highlights, this produces a dichotomous understanding of identity: "'our" identities may already be shared with "theirs"' (Worley, 2005: 489). It also highlights the use of normative grammar, as people's vocal disapproval acts as a form of castigation that may influence behaviour, drawing parallels with the act of teasing (Gramsci, 1985: 180).

Whereas in Bradford there were systemic divisions based on ethnicity, participants in Birmingham developed narratives of systemic divisions based socio-economic issues. Lydia argues that

A lot of the community don't realise what they've got right under their noses ... I'd like more of a voice for them to be able to have it more specifically tailored towards what the community wants as opposed to what people think the community wants. And I'd actually like to see cohesion, instead of hearing it.

For Lydia, cohesion must respond to the needs of the community rather than specifying a set of rules to which the community must adhere. In this sense, her narrative agrees with the ostensibly empowering and citizen-centred policy literature, which argues that

The concept of citizenship is therefore developed into something that can stand as a wider contract of rights and responsibilities for all citizens. And to get to that, we need to openly debate forms of citizenship that prioritise integration and cohesion. (CIC, 2007: 62)

The prioritisation of open debate alongside developing a citizenship that can stand as a wider contract of rights and responsibilities potentially provides citizens with social and

political agency. However, to be able to access these rights, people must discharge their responsibilities. Lydia illustrates a group of people who do not have the wherewithal to be able to discharge their duties or to make use of the empowering machinery provided by government. Only those who already have the required resources and social, cultural and human capital are able to access these services. This is another example of the empty language of empowerment. Through organising common sense around such concepts, and using political logics to strengthen the associated discourses, policy can be seen to influence the behaviour of citizens into accepting an appropriate set of normative and cultural orientations (Bieling, 2003: 66) that encourages 'local people to alter their ways of thinking about, doing and being communities' (McGhee, 2003: 391). It also illuminates a potential crisis of governance, in which empowering language is used so that 'inherent contradictions are not made too apparent' (Farrelly, 2010: 101). This increases the difficulty of developing collective problem-solving, a key element of governance (Sloat, 2003: 128), to issues that affect communities.

Conclusion: common sense and contamination in everyday narratives

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the preceding discussions. First, discourses found in policy literature do seem to influence everyday narratives. Participants draw upon discourses found within the policy literature, which influences the construction and reproduction of their narratives of community and cohesion. However, this does not mean an unproblematic acceptance of the discourses, as shown by the elements of contamination within participants' narratives. Second, these narratives provide a foundation for exploring the potential agency of citizens to accept and/or contest dominant discourses on concepts used to make sense of a range of issues in their communities. This is drawn out through the use of Gramscian concepts such as 'common sense' and normative grammar. When used as an analytical frame for CDA, these highlight the problematic nature of New Labour's Community Cohesion policy. Empowering language is developed within the policy literature and shapes citizens' understandings of key concepts. However, rather than being empowered, citizens are constrained by discursive frames that legitimise specific notions of governance at the local and community levels. This controls citizens' outlets for 'thinking about, doing and being communities' (McGhee, 2003: 391).

Although participants were able to contaminate discourses, this was not enough to destabilise them to the extent that they could be challenged outright. In some cases, participants regulated themselves, and in other cases, one participant would regulate another. Highlighting the syncretic nature of common sense, community and cohesion were interpreted differently in the two sites, yet participants still drew upon the logics in various ways, conforming to norms developed and promoted through the policy literature. This suggests that although citizens want to resist the implementation of certain policies, it is difficult to realise practically. Drawing on Gramsci, the article argues that this is, in part, due to being restrained by these common sense understandings, which are (re)produced by political logics and policed by normative grammars.

How participants treated the concepts of community and cohesion highlights the utility of Gramscian common sense in exploring participants' understanding of the social world and of their relationship with, and power relative to, the state. The fact that community and cohesion were contested and questioned when discussing them explicitly, but

accepted unproblematically when mobilised implicitly, highlights the idea that the political logics are not appropriated consciously; rather, they are absorbed through a mesh of normative grammars and discursive constructions. Although perhaps not personally acquainted, participants still come into contact with organisations that reproduce the language, imagery and discourse used in the policy literature, which feeds into their everyday narratives.

These everyday narratives allow for increased focus on not only the impact of policy on local communities but also the constitutive role citizens play in the further development of policy and governance, particularly at the local level. The inclusion of Gramscian concepts such as common sense also provides a relatively underused method in political science of conceptualising the role and agency of the citizen in relation to key social and political institutions. Citizens do have some ability to contest unpopular policy. However, its recent linguistic presentation, particularly under New Labour, provides a robust discursive and political framework that provides citizens with the illusion of agency, while in fact establishing common sense understandings of key concepts from which policy can be developed further.

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Notes

1. Ives states that '[b]y "spontaneous grammar," Gramsci means those patterns we follow while speaking that are unconscious and *seem* natural ... He rejects the idea that we could speak without grammar' (Ives, 2004: 90–91). For Gramsci, grammar is "immanent" in language itself" (Gramsci, 1985: 180). Such spontaneity is, to an extent, organised in this sense.
2. Although it is not explored in this article, the logic is mentioned here for the sake of continuity.
3. In total, six groups were held. However, one group in Birmingham was omitted due to poor attendance. It was intended to conduct more focus groups in Bradford, but this was met with reticence from the local community.
4. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity.

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