Disciplining the Multicultural Community: Ethnic Diversity and the Governance of Anti-Social Behaviour

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This article examines the relationship between the characterisation of and response to anti-social behaviour issues in areas of high ethnic diversity and emerging 'post-multicultural' policies of integration, cohesion and citizenship. It draws on a small study of the views and perceptions of members of local community safety and anti-social behaviour teams in three areas of England with very ethnically diverse populations. The analysis distinguishes between responses to ASB issues within 'settled' minority communities, among young people from those communities and within the 'new' immigrant communities. While these responses vary, the article argues that each can be seen as supporting national policy goals of community cohesion and responsible citizenship based on the assertion of 'shared values'.

Introduction

The term 'multicultural' can be used in at least two distinct ways: to denote a political or ideological discourse that advocates a particular approach to governing ethnically diverse societies, as in 'multiculturalism'; and as a way of describing such societies, drawing attention to the range of different cultural values, beliefs and practices which they embrace. While in this article I use the term in this second, descriptive sense, I want also to draw out links between the ways in which problems of anti-social behaviour (ASB) are constructed and ASB powers are used in contexts of substantial ethnic diversity, and shifts in the discourses and attendant policies of multiculturalism in contemporary British governance. In particular I want to examine how the local delivery of strategies and technologies for tackling ASB may be contributing to the delivery of new and emerging national policy goals around cohesion, integration and citizenship that are concerned with the place of ethnic minorities in Britain.

Briefly, and drawing on McGhee (2008), multiculturalism refers to the recognition and assertion of the right of distinct cultural identities, values and loyalties to co-exist within a national society. Such multicultural discourse became a characteristic of the British response to the substantial immigration of ethnic minorities, particularly from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent, in the second half of the twentieth century. Recently, however, multiculturalism has come under challenge as a result of three distinct developments: the 2001 disturbances in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley and subsequent similar events elsewhere; the perceived threat of Muslim terrorism to national security post 9/11 and especially since the London bombings of 2005; and the growth of 'new' immigration from EC accession states and other regions including Africa. In response to these issues, an alternative discourse has developed, reflected in new policies and laws

to govern immigrant communities and their relationship to 'mainstream' British society. At its core, this new discourse posits the existence of multiple identities and loyalties as inherently problematic and divisive, and demands of all British citizens a primary acceptance of 'British values' (Flint and Robinson, 2008; McGhee, 2008). Responsible citizens are those who behave in accordance with these 'shared values' and thereby demonstrate their successful integration with British society (CICC, 2007).

Anti-social behaviour has been identified as a factor which can impede cohesion and integration (CICC, 2007: 28). However, while ASB policy and practice is the subject of a growing body of academic analysis (for example, Burney, 2005; Flint, 2006; Matthews *et al.*, 2007; Squires, 2008; Millie, 2009), there has, to date, been comparatively little academic investigation of the way the ASB powers are impacting on ethnic minority individuals and communities, and no official data exist to enable such analysis (Isal, 2006). This is a significant gap, given the well-documented over-representation of ethnic minority individuals in the criminal justice system, the frequent accusations of racial discrimination in policing practices and the prominence of essentialising discourses that construct certain ethnic groups as 'problematic' (see, inter alia, Goodey, 2001; Fitzgerald and Hale, 2006; Garland *et al.*, 2006; Webster, 2007; Prior and Spalek, 2008). It is not the aim of this article to fill that gap, but rather to use findings from a recent study to illustrate how local practitioners understand and characterise the work of 'tackling ASB' in areas of high ethnic diversity, and to identify the implications for the wider question of the relationship of ASB practice to national policies affecting minorities.

The research data are taken from a small-scale study of the views of staff involved in community safety and anti-social behaviour work in three local authority areas (see also Prior, 2008). Each of these urban areas has a very high level of ethnic diversity with a non-White population around 30% of the total for the local authority, and in some parts of these areas the ethnic 'minorities' are in fact in the majority. I will refer to these three areas as City A, City B and City C. City A is a large London borough and Cities B and C are large urban authorities in other parts of England. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 staff, employed as local authority and police service members of community safety and anti-social behaviour teams in the three areas; five of the respondents were themselves members of 'visible' ethnic minorities.

In the following sections, I discuss very brief extracts from the interviews in order to illustrate how local practitioners think about their work with ethnically diverse communities. After some brief contextual considerations, this discussion is organised under three key themes: work with the 'settled' minority communities, work with young people from ethnic minorities and work with 'new' migrant communities. The conclusion then considers the implications of this analysis for understanding the relationship between ASB practice and the emerging national policies of cohesion, integration and citizenship.

The wider context: ASB and community cohesion

Given the aims of this paper, it is helpful to begin with a brief consideration of respondents' perceptions of the overall social cohesiveness of their area, as a key contextual factor in shaping local approaches to tackling ASB.

The interviews suggested that local ASB policy and practice was to some extent influenced by an understanding of the broader impact of ethnic diversity on social and community relations. The link between ASB work and community cohesion was made very explicit by one respondent:

> We undertake strategic assessment of relevant safer communities issues across the city. ASB is one of the key themes, but we see it in a wider context of community cohesion and community engagement. (Community Safety Officer, City B)

In each area the view was that the state of local community cohesion was broadly positive; in other words, that relationships between the different ethnic communities that made up the local population were generally good, or at least were not the source of large-scale persistent or serious disorder. A key indicator for this positive perception appeared to be that none of the areas had experienced the kind of inter-ethnic conflicts that had occurred in other parts of the UK in recent times, in particular the 'riots' in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford of 2001 which brought the issue of 'community cohesion' to the fore as a policy concern for government.

> We're deemed to have very good community cohesion here. We should do more of what we're doing because it seems to be working. (Community Safety Officer 1, City A)

> [City B] is seen as a city that is leading the way on cohesion. We haven't had riots, so the assumption is we must be doing something right. (Community Safety Officer, City B)

> In [City C] a key indicator of cohesion is the lack of riots or disturbances that were experienced in the northern towns a few years ago. (Community Safety Officer 1, City C)

In addition to the negative indicator of a lack of riots, another suggestion, supported to an extent in all three areas, was that an indicator of 'good cohesion' was the absence of both an anti-Muslim backlash after the July 2005 bombing incidents in London, and of a hostile Muslim reaction to the follow-up anti-terror policing operations (which had ramifications in each area).

> We haven't had impacts from anti-terrorism. The community mostly sees itself as British and Muslim. I've seen members of the Muslim community tearing down extremist posters and chasing away radicals trying to speak outside the mosques. (ASB Team Leader, City B)

> We've had one or two cases of religiously aggravated assaults, but it's very rare so far. A couple of complaints from people who think their neighbours are Muslim fundamentalists. But it's difficult to know whether assaults are religiously based rather than racial. (ASB Officer 1, City C)

Thus the overall context in which issues of ASB and its relationship to ethnic diversity were considered in the three areas was one in which the existence of a multicultural community was not seen, in itself, as a significant source of social tensions. Despite national evidence of recent increases in faith-related hate crimes and religiously motivated victimisation (Prior and Spalek, 2008: 120), these practitioners suggested that the local response to ASB could be developed in an atmosphere of generally peaceful community relations.

ASB work with the settled minority communities

All three areas involved in this study have long-established ethnic minority communities, mainly resulting from immigration from Commonwealth countries into the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. These are 'settled' communities in the sense that they have been resident for three or four generations and, generally, regard themselves as both permanent and 'British'. For the practitioners in the study, engaging with these settled minority communities was a familiar and natural part of their work; and indeed, in each of the areas, a number of the practitioners were themselves members of settled minority communities.

Beyond the general sense that the state of 'community cohesion' in the three areas was broadly positive, there was considerable discussion by respondents of specific issues or factors that impacted on the nature of social relationships both between and within different ethnic communities, and on different attitudes to aspects of crime and anti-social behaviour. With regard to the latter, a commonly expressed view was that a broad consensus existed among people of all ethnic backgrounds about what constituted 'criminal' or 'anti-social' behaviour. More specifically, respondents tended to view the settled minority communities as sharing the same understandings of and concerns about various forms of ASB as White communities and as not generating distinctive problems of ASB. In other words, 'ethnicity' was not seen as an issue requiring specific consideration from the authorities in developing strategies to deal with ASB.

This tendency to downplay the significance of ethnic factors in identifying and responding to ASB in highly ethnically diverse areas was, however, substantially qualified in one important respect. There was a recognition by most respondents of significant differences between communities in levels of tolerance of specific behaviours and in willingness or capacity to take action in response to problematic behaviours. Levels of tolerance could vary between different kinds of neighbourhood and between different social groups:

> You get different levels of ASB and different levels of toleration. Loud music in [inner-city ward] might well be tolerated but absolutely not in [suburban ward]. (ASB Officer 1, City C)

> [We get] issues arising from BME families having been allocated housing in a White area and feeling intimidated by minor ASB by young people which may be normal for White residents. (ASB Team Leader, City B)

This highlights the intensely subjective nature of how notions of the 'anti-social' are understood within different communities, and the challenge for local agencies in attempting to respond to such varied concerns. This challenge was exacerbated by different expectations of the action that should be taken in response to such concerns. As one respondent put it:

> Different ethnic or cultural groups do have the same sense of what sorts of behaviours are anti-social, but they differ in what should be done about it. (Legal Officer, City C)

This difference in attitudes towards the question of appropriate responses to ASB could be quite stark, posing a considerable dilemma for practitioners. Bearing in mind that ASB teams tend to offer a reactive, complaints-driven service, it was sometimes difficult for

the agencies to respond at all, because they simply received very few complaints from particular areas:

> We do minimal work in the high BME areas. We don't get the complaints from there and problems are dealt with within those communities. The elders of the area will sort matters out. There are different attitudes and values ... We get nothing from those areas. (ASB Officer, City B)

This contrasted with the poor White areas of the city, where most of the referrals to the ASB unit tended to originate.

Respondents in City B speculated whether this absence of demand from minority communities reflected a lack of knowledge of how to make complaints or a lack of trust in the formal authorities. However, two more 'structural' explanations were also offered. Firstly, as the previous quote suggests, it was believed that problems were 'sorted out' by ethnic minority communities themselves (although, as the following section demonstrates, this did not hold for problems involving some young people). Secondly, that there simply was less crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour going on than in comparison with poorer White areas, and that the nature of social life in Asian communities in particular was itself a key contributor to social control and order maintenance:

> People are out and about in [X ward] 24 hours a day, going to the mosque five times a day, going to the madrassa – there's a constant busy-ness of the community. This is a protective factor and it relates to a large sector of the BME community. (ASB Team Leader, City B)

This view of certain communities as 'self-disciplining' was echoed by a respondent in City C:

> There's still a perception of Asian communities regulating their young people more closely, that there is more pressure brought to bear on youths by family and community. And there also cultural differences in what activities people actually engage in. You get Asian kids playing cricket or what I call 'hanging around with a degree of purpose' ... you get the supplementary schools and mosques which occupies the time of large numbers of young people. What would they be doing otherwise? (Police Officer, City C)

There is a sense here in which the settled minority communities are simultaneously constructed as both 'responsible' and 'irresponsible'. They are responsible because their patterns of community life help prevent undesirable behaviours from occurring and, when problems do occur, they take it upon themselves to resolve them, using their own community resources and capacities. At the same time they are seen to be lacking in responsibility because they do not engage with the authorities in helping to address such problems as exist, relying instead on 'traditional' methods of resolution which may fall short of dominant norms of justice and fairness. One respondent, himself an Asian Muslim, highlighted the point with a specific example from the Muslim community:

> Take Ramadan, everyone attends the mosque; parking causes chaos. It's a major problem for local residents, whether Muslim or not, but the mosque leaders won't deal with it by seeking help from the police. Similarly with young people who are forced to attend the mosque and then run around afterwards causing mayhem in the neighbourhood. The mosques don't know how to address it, but won't ask the police for help. (Legal Officer, City C)

Respondents were very aware of the risks to community relations of simply responding to such situations with heavy handed enforcement of the ASB powers. Instead, the emerging approach was one based on principles of community engagement, consultation and partnership: developing the kinds of participative structures and processes that would promote dialogue and build trust, and providing the basis for communities to become the kind of 'responsible' partner with whom the authorities could work in addressing mutually recognised problems of ASB.

ASB work with young people

The attitudes and behaviours of young people from ethnic minority communities were identified by respondents as a specific source of concern, distinct from issues relating to the communities overall. Young people were viewed as different, and as needing to be responded to differently, because the 'youth factor' appeared to introduce a potential source of personal and group identity for individual young people, which could cut across those cultural identities, with their associated norms and customs that were derived from ethnicity or region of origin.

This was highlighted by the phenomenon of 'postcode identity', where for many young people local territory was seen as more significant than racial, ethnic or cultural identities:

> There is a sense that whatever cultural identity stems from an individual's ethnic origins is mediated by local territorial loyalties and identities. You know, 'What's your [postcode] number?' (Police Officer 1, City A)

The process of young people developing their own sources of social identity was seen as creating inter-generational tensions within communities. This had a fairly long history within the African-Caribbean community, but it was suggested that similar 'generation gaps' were opening up in other communities, and especially the South Asian, as young people broke away from traditional cultural norms and controls. This could be interpreted positively, as in the suggestion that younger people were more prepared to break down barriers of ethnic or cultural difference:

> With the older generation it's about sticking together for comfort, it's familiarity with what they're used to. But with the younger people there's less of a problem culturally, it's about interacting. (Community Safety Officer 2, City A)

But it was more generally thought that a key consequence of the process of young people turning away from the traditional community was a greater likelihood of their involvement in crime and anti-social behaviour.

There was a widely expressed view in all three areas that the current generation of Asian young people were markedly different in their attitudes, expectations and behaviours from their elders. Respondents highlighted a gradual process whereby Asian young people identified more with the values and aspirations of 'Western' UK society and were less influenced by the cultural institutions of their original communities:

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> Traditional ties of kinship and community organisations have become less effective as a means of social control as the minority population has become more like the majority. (Community Safety Officer 1, City C)

One outcome of this was a rise in crime rates among Asian young people from an historically low level to a rate closer to the average, along with increasing incidents of ASB.

How this was dealt with by the authorities seemed to vary according to local decisions over what constituted the most effective form of intervention given the nature of the anti-social activity. In City A this could mean ethnic minority young people being targeted through criminal prosecution, and less often being the subject of ASB enforcement:

> ASBOs taken against young people are more likely to involve White perpetrators, but this could point to a faster acceleration of Black young people into the criminal justice system as gangs are more likely to be Black or Turkish and are the focus for more serious criminal activity, and this draws the attention of police interventions. (ASB Team Leader, City A)

Whereas in City C, there was more willingness to use ASBOs as a means of tackling similar kinds of activities:

> ASBOs are mainly targeted at White youths on big council estates, though other ASB interventions might be different. The gang phenomenon is an exception where more BME are targeted. (Police Officer, City C)

> We deal with issues on a case-by-case basis, consider them on their merits, the proportionality of legal action, is it just? But a lot of BME perpetrators get to [the ASB unit] when issues are already serious, so that the questions about appropriateness of legal action can usually be answered 'yes'. The priority of gang issues means that more ASBOs are used on Black and Asian youths. (ASB Officer 1, City C)

There are important issues here about how and why choices are made between either ASB or criminal justice interventions as preferred responses to serious criminal misbehaviours. But the key point is that in contrast to their approach to ethnic minority communities in general, the authorities show much less reticence in using legal interventions, whether civil or criminal, to deal with the anti-social activities of young people who are, in effect, seen as having already separated themselves from their traditional communities. Just as the advent of the ASB powers has been widely viewed as providing an additional means of disciplining disadvantaged and disengaged White youth (Squires and Stephen, 2005), so those powers have been co-opted as a means of disciplining the disadvantaged and disengaged youth of ethnic minority communities. And, importantly, the purpose of this is not just to punish perpetrators or to protect the wider public, it is to alter attitudes and behaviours in order to steer young people on to a path toward a more constructive life: 'how to change behaviour via ASBOs'. (Police Officer, City C)

ASB work with new immigrant communities

As we have seen, for the respondents in this study 'difference' with regard to ethnic communities was significant in relation to different levels of tolerance of forms of 'anti-social' behaviour and different kinds of response to it. It was less significant in relation to

understandings of what actually constituted anti-social behaviour. There was, however, one strong example, referenced across all three study areas, of problems concerning different understandings of what should count as acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, and these problems related to the arrival of 'new' communities.

These new communities included people from Somalia, other African and various East European countries who had come to Britain in recent years either as refugees or economic migrants. Respondents found themselves dealing with frequent complaints about the behaviour of members of new communities, and these complaints came as much from settled ethnic minority residents as well as White residents.

> There are tensions between the new and the settled communities, particularly in areas where the new migrants are first located. It gives the area a transitory nature which has disrupting effects. You get both a mixing and a clashing of cultural values, or perhaps just conflicts over turf. (Police Officer 1, City A)

> There are lots of reports about Polish young men in Asian communities. They work and play hard, so we get a lot of calls from the Asian majority about Polish workers partying and so on. But this is something that may be tolerated in a different part of the city because of different attitudes to drinking. (ASB Officer 2, City C)

The Somalian community, which has a significant presence in each of the study areas, provided a further example of specific cultural practices giving rise to behaviours that were viewed by longer-established residents as anti-social. Two respondents in City A described an episode in which Somali people regularly gathered in and around a coffee shop to chew or smoke khat (a substance derived from a naturally occurring plant in Africa). As was explained:

> Khat is not illegal but the people using it were gathering in large numbers, talking late loudly at night. It was classed as ASB and dealt with through a Dispersal Order. The actual problem, noise, was compounded by what residents thought was going on, they thought the coffee shop was a crack house. (Community Safety Officer 3, City A)

A similar issue had involved members of the Congolese community, many of whom were not resident locally but had begun to use a shop in the borough as a regular meeting place. Again, the problem revolved around large numbers of people gathering together on the street drinking and generating noise and disturbance. The difficulty in knowing how to categorise this kind of behaviour, and therefore how to respond to it, was highlighted by one respondent:

> This was in a predominantly Black area so the complaints were coming from Black residents. But I wouldn't necessarily call this ASB, it's an example of cultural differences, of what people do as part of their normal life that's not really pushing the boundaries. (Police Officer 2, City A)

But if these kinds of tensions could be seen as the perhaps inevitable result of people with different cultural attitudes and traditions having to work out ways of living alongside each other for the first time, there were also more serious issues to be addressed:

> Somalis have become more of a problem over the last 18 months as they move on from refugee status and get on to housing lists and move out of their original area. We have a high use of ASBOs on Somali youths; it's really beyond prevention, it's serious stuff ... There's a major impact of their behaviour on settled communities of all ethnicities, completely out of tune with established standards, constant aggression and harassment. (ASB Officer 1, City C)

While there was acknowledgement by respondents that the behaviours of such recent refugee groups could in part be understood in terms of their extremely difficult experiences prior to arrival in Britain, there was also little hesitation in turning to strong enforcement measures as the necessary way to confront and control such behaviours.

There thus emerged quite strongly from the interviews a sense of a double challenge for policy makers and practitioners. First, key demands on the 'safer communities' agenda arose from the arrival of new ethnic groups whose distinctive norms and patterns of behaviour could come into conflict with the common understandings and expectations around social conduct that characterised the highly diverse but settled populations in the study areas. Second, however, there was considerable ambiguity about how to formally classify some of these behaviours and how to determine an appropriate official response. These challenges came together in one comment, which got to the heart of contemporary policy debates about the extent to which new immigrants should be required to 'integrate' with established values and how the authorities should promote this integration:

> The issue is the definition of civility and what we think is civil, for example a lot of noise within a large family new to the country may be normal for them but unacceptable to their neighbours. How do you get them to understand? When do you step in take action? (Legal Officer, City C)

Here, the question was not *whether* it was appropriate for the authorities to intervene and insist on the adoption of a different set of values but *how* and *when* they should do it.

Conclusion: ASB and 'post-multicultural' policy

Recent commentaries have, in different ways, highlighted the need for analysis of the connections between the discourses and practices of community safety and anti-social behaviour and those of migration and citizenship (Hughes, 2007; Flint, 2009).

In making a modest contribution to this field, based on analysis of how local practitioners talk about their work, I want to offer the tentative conclusion that it is possible to see how tackling the specific issue of ASB may have the additional effect of supporting 'post-multicultural' (McGhee, 2008) policies of cohesion, integration and citizenship. This support is discernible in the ways that ASB policy and practice:

- encourages the 'responsibilization' of settled ethnic minority communities,
- seeks to change the attitudes and behaviour of young people from ethnic minorities,
- disciplines the members of 'new' immigrant communities.

In relation to the settled minority communities, the core issue as perceived by practitioners was not the existence of markedly different values, attitudes and behaviours

as such, but rather an unwillingness to report ASB. Practitioners were uncertain whether this reluctance to call on the authorities to help address aspects of ASB stemmed from a lack of trust, a lack of knowledge about how to make referrals or a belief that the community could, and should, deal with its own problems. While a number of practitioners regarded certain ethnic minority communities as inherently 'cohesive', and thereby effective in preventing much ASB, this in itself could be seen as part of the problem of multiculturalism: acknowledging the 'difference' and 'separateness' of particular communities in their capacities for self-regulation could be an obstacle to the creation of responsible productive relations with the official agencies charged with addressing ASB. The response to this, reported in all three study areas, was a strategy of community engagement and partnership, involving specific community-based initiatives such as Key Individual Networks and Safer Neighbourhood Teams as the building-blocks of communication between the communities and the agencies. Through such means, the aim was to enable local minority communities to become full participants in the responsible governance of the area (CICC, 2007).

Young people posed a different kind of problem, although again one that involved a degree of ambiguity. On the one hand they were seen as breaking away from traditional models of community cohesion, involving ties of family, kinship and cultural values, and adopting attitudes and lifestyles more in tune with contemporary Britain. On the other hand, for many young people in deprived situations this meant an enhanced risk of involvement in crime and ASB and in particular violent gang-based activity and drug dealing. Practitioners therefore saw a justification for explicit enforcement action targeted at Black and Asian young people; pursuing criminal prosecutions and sanctions to prevent offending and protect the wider public, but also using the ASB powers in ways that could assist a lasting and positive change in attitudes and behaviours. The point here is that certain ethnic minority young people were perceived as posing a specific kind of threat, thereby warranting distinctive disciplinary interventions.

Finally, we have seen that the respondents in this study identified the arrival of new migrant communities as an important and troublesome source of problematic behaviours, disrupting what were otherwise presented as relatively harmonious and cohesive multicultural areas (Reeve, 2008). Again, ambiguity was apparent in the doubts expressed as to whether certain 'anti-social' activities by recent migrants should really be seen as harmful, even though they were experienced by longer-term residents as disturbing. However, it was clear that the new communities tended to be viewed as frequently holding values and attitudes, and engaging in forms of behaviour, that were simply unacceptable in terms of the norms of social conduct to which the vast majority of the settled population, of whatever ethnicity, subscribed. Responding to this in ways that were fair and just was felt to be a major challenge, not least because practitioners were highly conscious of the deeply traumatic experiences that many members of the new migrant communities had undergone before, and immediately after, arriving in the UK. Nonetheless, in the absence of alternative social and educational measures, the use of strong legal sanctions was regarded as wholly appropriate as a means of demonstrating what would and would not be tolerated from those seeking to live in British society, and to make clear the ground rules for successful integration. To this extent, ASB policy and practice can be seen as providing a significant contribution to the implementation of post-multicultural strategies of integration and citizenship.

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