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Paper Session 8: **Comparing regional and local integration policies – understanding patterns of policy convergence and divergence**, IMISCOE Conference 2014.

## **Local Passion, National Indifference: Implementing Community Cohesion policies in Northern England**

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### **Abstract**

*The emergence of Community Cohesion (Cantle, 2001) as national policy from 2001 was portrayed as the ‘death of multiculturalism’ in Britain (Kundnani, 2002). However, empirical evidence on how Community Cohesion policies were actually understood and enacted at the local level by front-line professionals (Thomas, 2011) suggested that Cohesion was actually a ‘rebalancing’ (Meer and Modood, 2009) of British multiculturalism, not its death.*

*Such evidence aids understanding of a situation now where national government is officially disinterested in Community Cohesion or ‘Integration’ of both settled and new minority communities (DCLG, 2012), and where some local authorities are consequently passive (Jones, 2013), whilst others remain passionate and proactive on Community Cohesion (a term the passionate refuse to give up). This localised passion is arguably driven by the highly racialised experience of local space (Amin, 2003) and significant physical segregation (Finney and Simpson, 2009) in certain localities. This paper draws on recent empirical evidence from research around cohesion implementation in West Yorkshire to analyse both the nature of this continuing local passion and*

*the challenges it faces in relation to 'cohesion'. Crucial here are the concepts of local 'policy enactment' (Braun et al, 2011) and the commitment of the 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010) in shaping this passionate commitment to cohesion whilst the agenda withers on the vine in other local authority regions. The paper argues that such local variations have always been an inherent part of British multiculturalism, with local agency central to understandings of local/sub-national variations from national policy.*

## **Introduction**

This paper is a work-in-progress based on current field research. A programme of action research is being carried out by our University in support of the implementation of 'community cohesion' (Cantle, 2001; Thomas, 2011) policies in one local government ('local authority' in UK terminology) area of West Yorkshire in the north of England. The paper draws on understandings held by research participants, mainly ground-based community development and youth workers, of the meaning and purpose of community cohesion policies, as well as on key informant interviews with the current and past lead cohesion policy officers for the area. It uses this to discuss and explain what the paper characterises as the 'local passion' for cohesion work, a passion that has actually grown and become more distinct as the national state has moved towards an official policy position (DCLG, 2012) of 'indifference' in relation to the reality of, and policy implementation around, local cohesion. Alongside this, the paper identifies distinct, individual positions on the meaning and practice of community cohesion held by local practitioners and discusses how they can be seen as being representative of tensions and dilemmas within British community cohesion policy work.

To enable these discussions, the paper first critically discusses the post-2001 policy shift towards community cohesion. In considering the charge that this policy direction has represented the 'death of multiculturalism' (Kundnani, 2002) it argues that it is vital to examine the situated local understandings and practices of multiculturalist policy measures to truly understand the trajectory of British multiculturalist policy. This is because, historically, such multiculturalist policy measures were as much developed from below as implemented from above (Solomos, 2003). Additionally, nationally (and locally) agreed policies have been mediated and 'enacted' (Braun et al, 2011) by ground-level policy officers and practitioners, the 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010) who actually shape the implementation of multiculturalist measures. This evidence, the paper argues, both sheds a different light on post-2001 community cohesion and makes this current situated research evidence helpful in understandings tensions and directions within current policy implementation.

The paper goes on to outline the field research area and the on-going research process. It then discusses the origins, motivations and nature of this 'local passion' for cohesion, developing it further by consideration of the understandings of cohesion held by individual practitioners and the distinct policy positions on cohesion that these individual perspectives seem to represent.

### **The Emergence of national Community Cohesion policies (from passion to indifference)**

It is beyond dispute that 2001 represents a watershed within British Multiculturalist policy. Riots in three towns and cities in the north of England during the summer of 2001 prompted a national government inquiry led by

Ted Cante. Cante's subsequent report (2001), and the supporting national government response (Denham, 2001), proposed a new policy term, 'community cohesion', that apparently provided both an analysis of current problems and a goal that policy should promote from now on. Here, the new policy approach utilised the 'feel-good' factor of 'community' (Bauman, 2001), consistent in terms of both language and 'third-way' approach with wider Labour government approaches to social policy. The key concern of community cohesion was 'parallel lives', a concept echoed by the concurrent local reports on the riot towns (Ritchie, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Ouseley, 2001). Here, 'parallel lives' suggested that different ethnic communities not only lived in distinct residential areas (prompting a fierce and on-going academic debate around the extent and trajectory of physical ethnic segregation; Finney and Simpson, 2009) but also had little to do with each other socially and culturally, leading to a reality of very weak commonality or mutual respect in many areas.

Community cohesion contained a number of distinct themes. 'Parallel lives' drew significantly on social capital ideas around over-developed bonding social capital in the absence of meaningful bridging social capital between distinct ethnic communities. Here, greater cross-community contact and dialogue was seen as vital going forward. Secondly, the agency of individuals and communities was seen as vital to the maintenance and deepening of ethnic physical and cultural barriers, if not to its original causation, as illustrated by growing ethnic segregation in schooling. Thirdly, cohesion offered a critique of the previous, 'political multiculturalism' (Solomos, 2003) phase of state policies developed after the 1981 urban disturbances. Those post-1981 activist policies had sought to address Britain's real ethnic inequalities and blatant racism through monitoring inequalities, setting action plans and significant support for the civil society within distinct minority ethnic communities locally and

nationally to help them take advantage of enhanced educational and employment opportunities. Whilst having made undoubted progress, this 'strategic essentialism' (Law, 1996) was now seen as increasingly problematic. Here, such essentialised policy approaches that reified ethnic identity increasingly failed to reflect the economically-based complexity within and between distinct minority communities (Modood et al, 1997). Secondly, 'multiculturalism' was increasingly understood by sections of the White majority population to mean favouritism towards minorities at a time of growing economic inequalities, prompting a 'white backlash' (Hewitt, 2005; Thomas and Sanderson, 2011) and a sense of 'unfairness' that was significantly causal to the 2001 riots (Cantle, 2001; Ritchie, 2001).

This community cohesion analysis was accepted by government as a new policy priority and subsequently amalgamated in to their wider Race Equality policy framework (Home Office, 2005). From the start, detailed policy orders and direction were given to local authorities (LGA, 2002; Home Office, 2003; Thomas, 2011) and other public bodies to promote community cohesion. This was to be done through focussing on commonality, on events, funding and structures that united disparate ethnic communities. There was even a subsequent policy suggestion (DCLG, 2007) that local and national government should no longer provide funding to organisations serving single, distinct ethnic/religious communities, although it was later rejected. Within the national government -supported initial cohesion activity and advice (Home Office, 2003) the focus was not just on contact between distinct ethnic communities but also on intergenerational contact within specific communities and on work between settled communities and new migrants or traveller/gypsies. This represented a more intersectional conception of identity within community cohesion, a belief that in an increasingly diverse society

‘hot’ and distinct ethnic identities cannot and should not be reified by policy; instead ‘cooler’ and more intersectional identifications should be acknowledged and supported (McGhee, 2006).

Under the Labour government (1997-2010), national funding to support local community cohesion activity work was made available, with the initial ‘Pathfinder’ work in 14 selected areas followed by £51 million funding from 2007 onwards (Thomas, forthcoming). More importantly, all local authorities were contracted by national government through the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) process to carry out cohesion work and progress was subsequently monitored through the ‘National Indicator’ reporting mechanism. Within this, was an activist national approach to sharing and disseminating local good practice, with an overall sense of both carrot and stick being used by national government to promote local cohesion activity. This national ‘passion’ for cohesion did not last, though. As the Prevent Counter-terrorism policy was implemented, it progressively contradicted (through its focus solely on essentialised Muslim communities) and side-lined concern with community cohesion at both the national and local level (Thomas, 2012; Forthcoming). The election of the Coalition government in 2010 led to almost two years’ of policy silence (and cessation of national funding) before their long-awaited policy document appeared (DCLG, 2012).

This document, utilising the term ‘integration’ in a deliberate attempt to step away from Labour’s language of ‘community cohesion’, was a flimsy and woefully brief document. Rejecting any notion of national targets or monitoring, it portrayed ‘Integration’ as entirely a local matter that national government would offer no comment on:

*'We are committed to re-balancing activity from centrally-led to locally-led action and from the public to the voluntary and private sectors'* (DCLG, 2012:2).

Within this official national 'indifference', it confirmed the ending of all national policy direction (including the disappearance of the DCLG's dedicated Race Equality team), and funding on cohesion/integration whilst failing to use the terms 'racism' or 'equalities' (Runnymede Trust, 2012) at all. This can be seen as a part of a wider disinterest in the Equalities agenda that has included scrapping Equality Impact Assessments and the regime of Comprehensive Area Assessments/ Local Area Agreements which drove progress on equalities, whilst even questioning the future of the National Census that provides the data essential to identifying structural ethnic inequalities (Ratcliffe, 2012). The claim that this dismantling of cohesion/integration work was simply driven by the wider, and very deep, cuts in overall public spending (which have fallen disproportionately on local authorities serving multicultural urban areas) was undermined by the fact that the only national funding identified for Integration work was modest support for the Church of England's Near Neighbours programme and the Scout Association (DCLG, 2012), both largely white and 'establishment' organisations. The ideological direction this represents was consistent with the stress on 'values' in both Cameron's Munich speech (2011) and the current Prevent strategy (Thomas, 2012; Forthcoming), arguably a genuine shift towards assimilationism.

Here, though, it must be acknowledged that Britain's (or, more accurately, the UK's) national state is increasingly complex and conflicted as devolution has developed. This has led to a situation where the Labour-dominated Welsh Assembly Government still uses the term 'Community Cohesion', rather than 'Integration' and has maintained an activist policy of funding community



cohesion activity within local authority areas (Cantle and Thomas, 2014). Therefore, the 'national indifference' discussed here has to be understood as concerning England

From its inception in 2001, community cohesion policies were seen as highly contentious (Amin, 2003; Alexander, 2004; Finney and Simpson, 2009). Their emergence from the riots whilst not seeming to discuss the actual triggers of those riots (Thomas, 2011), as well as some very partial political and media comments (Travis, 2001) that seemed to exclusively blame Muslim communities for segregation and rioting led to some commentators seeing community cohesion as an Islamophobic, blaming the victim approach (Kundnani, 2002). Here, 'community' was arguably an implicit short-hand for Muslims (Worley, 2005). This and the undoubted cohesion focus on commonality and 'we', rather than on distinct ethnic identities and experiences fuelled a sense of a return to assimilationism (Alexander, 2004). The fact that 'multiculturalism' was overtly blamed for apparently causing segregation, tension and extremism by people across the political spectrum (Phillips, 2005; Cameron, 2011) deepened this feeling for many. However, to what extent can the meaning of community cohesion be deduced from national level political pronouncements?

### **The Importance of the local in British Multiculturalism**

A reality that needs to be acknowledged here is that British multiculturalism has only ever been partly designed and implemented from the national state level (Solomos, 2003; Thomas, 2011). Whilst some measures, such as equality legislation and Section 11 funding for schools were undoubtedly national, many measures, such as ethnic monitoring, fair recruitment and selection and multicultural/anti-racist education, were designed and implemented at the

local authority level with national government subsequently adopting these measures. Even with national policy measures, local mediation and enactment (Braun et al, 2011) means that the reality of policy understanding and implementation needs to be studied and understood locally. This certainly applies to community cohesion, with very little of the British academic discussion of its meaning utilising any situated empirical evidence. One example of an attempt to do this is my own study of how youth and community workers in Oldham (scene of the one of the 2001 riots) understood and practised community cohesion in the years following 2001 (Thomas, 2007;2011). This study found that these youth workers, 'street-level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010), did indeed focus on bringing young people of different backgrounds together, utilising 'contact theory' (Hewstone et al, 2007), the social psychology-based approach to conflict reduction. However, these youth workers were not denying the strength and relevance of specific ethnic/religious identities, or the reality of structural inequalities. Rather, they were using a 'two-stage' model where preparation for contact was done within local, often ethnic-specific, settings and cross-community contact then engaged with.

Such practice was seen as being about augmenting existing ethnic and social identifications (Thomas and Sanderson, 2011; 2013) with stronger forms of commonality. Rather than 'solving' local problems, such cohesion-based contact was seen as being about de-racialising youth understandings of experience. In this way, rather than being a denial of multiculturalism, community cohesion practice was a 're-balancing' (Meer and Modood, 2009) of multiculturalism. These findings have been echoed by other situated studies of cohesion policy enactment (for example, Lewis and Craig, 2014; Jones, 2013) that have found positive perceptions by local policy-makers and practitioners

of what cohesion practice can and sometimes does represent. These positive local reactions to community cohesion analysis and practice have been in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly hostile local response to the Prevent counter-terrorism initiative (Thomas, 2012; Forthcoming), which can be understood as ‘securitised multiculturalism’ (Ragazzi, 2012). This makes research on local state attitudes to cohesion policy and practice at a time of official national ‘indifference’ particularly interesting.

### **Field Research**

This research focuses on one particular local authority area (anonymised, as are the individual respondents) within the West Yorkshire region of the north of England. West Yorkshire contains many urban areas with significant ethnic differentiation in housing areas and schools and has suffered historical racial tensions. Tensions have included outbreaks of rioting understood as racially-motivated over several decades, persistent (and sometimes successful) attempts by far-right groups to provoke such disorder, links to both Islamist and far-right terrorism, and racialized disputes, such as over schooling. The specific case study local authority area discussed here has experienced a number of these forces and events over past decades with an associated reputational detriment. The local authority area includes a larger town that has significant ethnic diversity, a reasonably successful economy and an external reputation for harmonious community relations. In contrast, two smaller towns have an apparently duo-cultural, white/South Asian Muslim, divide seen as typical of the ‘M62 corridor’ towns and cities experiencing rioting (Cantle, 2001; Denham, 2001), significant physical ethnic segregation (Finney and Simpson, 2009) and racial tensions earlier this century. This ethnic divide has been made somewhat more complex by post-2004 A8 European migration, a development understood locally as increasing ethnic tensions rather than

softening them. These smaller towns measured poorly in the previous regular 'My Place' nationwide cohesion survey (supported by and insisted on by the Labour national government) , with scores in response to the question 'Different ethnic groups get on well in this area?' being 20/30% below scores for the same question in other part of the local authority area and nationally. As a result, the local authority's revised community cohesion local strategy, discussed below, is very much focussed on these two small towns and their suburbs.

The action research reported here is just one element on the wider cohesion policy approach by the local authority in question. That local authority continues to call it 'community cohesion', despite the national discursive shift (DCLG, 2012). That wider approach includes continuing to allocate significant financial and staffing resources from their own local budget to cohesion activity and to also commission external support and research. The University's role here has been an ongoing programme of action research (2013-to date) aimed at generating insights from community members on the state of 'cohesion' and how it can be further developed alongside an emphasis on capacity-building for the practitioners involved. Approximately 20 staff (mainly either White British or Muslim British, using the ethnic self-identifications favoured in the north of England; Thomas and Sanderson, 2011) who play the professional roles of community development workers, youth workers or housing support workers, have been involved in the action research. The research has utilised co-designed research tools such as questionnaires, short interviews and word association/sentence completion exercises developed collaboratively with University researchers during research planning sessions. A key element has been written personal reflections and observations from the practitioners and shared with University researchers as they have engaged

both in the research process and in wider cohesion activity. Some initial comments from these staff reflections are drawn on here, alongside in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews with three local lead policy officers (one former: LA Officer LAO1, two current: LA Officers LAO2 and LAO3, all of whom are 'White British') who have driven the development and implementation generally of local community cohesion policies, as well as this specific piece of action research/staff capacity building that is seen as an important component of the revised local cohesion strategy. This data highlights the strength and the nature of the 'local passion' for cohesion work in the face of growing 'national indifference'. It also highlights distinct individual practitioner conceptions of 'cohesion' and of what policy should and should not attempt to do in its name.

### **The (growing) Local Passion for Community Cohesion and its motivations**

It is clear that the local passion for community cohesion can be traced back to the watershed moment of the 2001 riots and the change in national policy direction (Cantle, 2001; Thomas, 2011). Here, there were contradictory feelings of relief and realism, as the former lead officer identifies:

*'There was almost a bit of back-patting going on because the riots were in Oldham, in Bradford... we were doing quite well against that. In hindsight, that was quite naïve' (LA O 1).*

He also acknowledges that that the then-Chief Executive, who subsequently proved to be a driving force on cohesion locally and regionally (Thomas, 2012):

*'Probably recognised that we'd been lucky... it wasn't down to things here really being so different' (LA O 1).*

The new national policy prescription of community cohesion was here received positively, as a previous, West-Yorkshire wide, study of multiculturalist policies has identified (Husband and Alam, 2011):

*'What Cantle was saying... yes, that's what we already believed in...that degree of separateness worried people'* (LA O 1).

That grounded sense of community cohesion speaking to a reality of racialised perceptions, 'parallel lives' and significant ethnic divides is shared by officers now charged with developing the area's community cohesion work:

*'It's so important to a number of key outcomes that the LA is trying to achieve... XXXX is a diverse place and tensions haven't gone away'* (LA O 2).

The preventative aspect of community cohesion work is highlighted here, with the belief that if work is not maintained:

*'It will lead to bigger problems in communities and end up costing more money'* (LA O 3).

This sense that community cohesion speaks to local realities and that it is as much a preventative agenda that seeks to de-racialise (Thomas, 2011) local perceptions of experience as a reactive one, means that this 'local passion' has survived the growing 'national indifference', and the party-political shift it represents, outlined above:

*'Officers and politicians actually care and just because the national agenda has changed that doesn't alter the local commitment....That's the difference between local and national politics... local political leaders are just that, they're motivated by local agendas and issues'* (LA O 2).

## **An Increasingly Local Cohesion Agenda**

The result of this mis-match between local passion and growing national indifference is an increasingly **local** cohesion agenda, not just in leadership/responsibility but in terms of conception and content. This local agenda has moved from ground-level mediation and enactment (Braun et al, 2010) of a clear national agenda under the previous Labour government towards a point where community cohesion is something imagined and implemented purely at the situated local level. Here, the need for local self-direction has accelerated an already-existing critique of national government's position on what community cohesion is, alongside a local ambivalence about this loss of national direction.

Initially, local authorities followed the apparent national policy line that cohesion was about bringing distinct and essentialised white and BME, especially Muslim communities, together. Here, the original national conception of cohesion did initially seem to include broader and more intersectional understandings of experience and 'community' (Home Office, 2003; Thomas, 2011), as discussed above, but local experience suggests that this policy agenda was overwhelmingly understood in practice at the local level as being about tensions between essentialised Muslim and White ethnic communities:

*'This is about Muslims, this is about Asians... Interestingly in XXXX the African-Caribbean community felt very neglected, very marginalised'* (LA O 1).

*'Initially it was very much bringing South Asian communities together with white communities'* (LA O 3).

However, local experience alongside a gradual loss of national direction and control has created 'space' for a distinctly local approach to community cohesion, and who these policies are concerned with, to gradually emerge:

*'For the first couple of years we followed national policy but...as the emphasis from national has been taken away, we've translated our local interpretation in to direct delivery' (LA O 3).*

That local interpretation has involved stepping back from the emphasis on building contact and communication between 'named' ethnic and religious communities on the basis that this is both too simplistic and too short-term an approach. Instead, emphasis has shifted a much more subtle, community development-based approach that aims to build on and support existing assets within communities in the expectation that 'cohesion' – cross-community dialogue and partnerships – will flow naturally from this investment in local civic capacity. This actually seems to relate closely to the original focus on commonality and on more intersectional understandings of identifications envisaged for community cohesion (Cantle, 2001; Thomas, 2011) but not consistently encouraged nationally or understood local as policy was implemented.

This local policy shift discussed here has been based both on the analysis of previous community cohesion work locally and the on the very significant challenge posed by post-economic crash public spending cuts. The growing 'national disinterest' on community cohesion (Thomas, Forthcoming) has enabled this shift:



*'The shift we undertook a couple of years ago – it's not just about race, it's about the make-up of communities, how we enable them to have a voice' (LA O 3).*

Here, the initial post-2001 approach locally is now seen as:

*'Very simplistic... not really a strategic approach to dealing with what are complex communities' (LA O 3).*

This local shift has involved the 'mainstreaming' of cohesion work, making it an overt responsibility of a much wider group of staff (for example, the neighbourhood-based staff taking part in this research) rather than small number of named 'Cohesion' officers and one named 'Cohesion' budget.

The loss of national direction and monitoring has partially enabled this distinct local shift but key staff do feel ambivalent about it:

*'It's great to have that flexibility to do things locally... but you lose that national steer and that external challenge... there clearly isn't a national push for us to do anything' (LA O 2).*

Here, the impact of the loss of national focus is not just about money, as under the previous government's activist measurement and evaluation regime:

*'The fact that we get measured on it makes it easier to make a business case' (LA O 2).*

Here, LA officers concerned with cohesion now have to continually seek support from their local elected councillors and other senior officers for cohesion work, rather than simply being required to do it by national government. Locally, this has aided the sharpening of focus and a distinct local direction but other local authorities regionally and nationally:

*'Have moved away from it quite considerably, which is a mistake in my view'*  
(LA O 2).

This highlights the suggestion that the reality of significant 'space' for local mediation and enactment has always enabled passivity' by some local authorities in relation to cohesion and other multiculturalist policy agendas (Jones, 2013), something now accentuated by official national indifference. Despite the very considerable budgetary cuts facing this case study area, which includes wholesale cuts to some local authority functions:

*'I'm not sure that at any point was cohesion up for grabs on not doing it in the future'* (LA O 3).

### **Individual Professional conceptions of 'cohesion'**

The paper's initial discussion above of why a local context matter in terms of British multiculturalist policy operation is illustrated by this case study evidence. Here, a distinct and strongly-argued approach to cohesion is being developed and articulated by key past and present local authority officers, one that focusses on the importance of generic community development and the strengthening of civic capacity, with cohesion and cross-community contact between distinct and 'named' ethnic, religious and social communities expected to flow naturally from this. This relates to broader tensions and debates over the ultimate purpose and content of community cohesion policies in Britain. For instance, to what extent can or should specific 'communities' be persuaded to engage in the cross-community 'contact' that the initial, post-2001 iteration of community cohesion policies seemed to be focussed on? There is evidence that significant parts of mainly White, particularly marginalised, communities do not see the benefit of contact with

ethnic minorities (Thomas and Sanderson, 2013), with concerns that clumsy or overt efforts to overcome these racialised fears and pessimism can be counter-productive (Hewitt, 2005; Thomas and Sanderson, 2013). Similarly, the Asian/White dichotomy that much cohesion policy seemed to initially focus on, especially in the north of England (Cantle, 2001; Thomas, 2011) has been complicated by increasing ethnic diversity. Above all, what does 'cohesion' mean in society which sees a policy approach of the state insisting that children go to ethnically-mixed schools or people should live in ethnically-mixed housing areas as being politically-impossible? Above this, how justified is a focus on ethnic divisions in society at a time when economic-class spatial and cultural divisions are increasing?

These tensions, and associated perspectives on what community cohesion policies can or should try to achieve (Thomas, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2012), can be identified in the views of ground-level practitioners when asked to identify what 'cohesion' means to them and their professional practice. For some, the 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001) analysis that drove community cohesion's introduction remains cogent:

*'I believe prejudice is deep-rooted in these communities. Cultural perceptions lead to parallel lives. Not enough opportunities to mix'* (Muslim female community worker).

*'Accepting difference...Common ground (finding)'* (White male community worker).

However, the perception that this is an agenda of social engineering (and negative, external judgements that prompt those attempts at social engineering), focussed on certain communities in particular (Worley, 2005), is

reflected in some responses that fail to accept cohesion's starting assumption of 'parallel lives':

*'Enjoyment of family life where you live'* (Muslim male community worker).

*'An observation or judgement from the outside of community by statutory bodies'* (White female community worker).

The belief that previous approaches to community cohesion had tried to 'force' distinct, essentialised communities together was held strongly by some respondents:

*'Something which is organic and people come together naturally for a common purpose, rather than being forced. It's also about tapping in to individual perceptions and changing those'* (White female community worker).

*'The ability for communities to come together for a common cause and peacefully. This statement is a must – community cohesion means nothing to me in my work – it comes naturally and we've been doing it for years but don't want it labelled'* (Muslim female community worker).

This research process suggests that the distinct, localised cohesion approach that now focusses on community capacity building, rather than contact, (and on a retreat from naming or foregrounding 'community cohesion' itself) has strong support from the ground-level practitioners:

*'Communities feeling safe in their environment so they have confidence to move in to new situations. Too many people are led to believe its bringing communities together'* (White female community worker).

*'It now means connecting communities on their commonalities – communities of interest, communities of geographical difference and everything in-between'*

*to create a place of tolerance, understanding and celebration of togetherness'*  
(White female community worker).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the significance of the post-2001 policy shift towards community cohesion and how this might be understood within the broader trajectory of British multiculturalism. It has also suggested that the meaning and impact of national multiculturalist policy measures needs to be examined through a lens of local mediation and enactment (Braun et al, 2010), a perspective that often provides a more nuanced understanding of supposedly negative policy measures (Thomas, 2011). This is particularly relevant to community cohesion, given its national policy trajectory from urgent passion in the aftermath of the 2001 riots to indifference under the current Coalition government. Utilising initial data from current action research in one case study local authority area of West Yorkshire, the paper has charted 'local passion' for community cohesion, passion that has grown and become more distinctly local in the face of the progressive national indifference. This local passion reflects the local perceptions that 'parallel lives' and racialized understandings of experience are real and problematic features of local life, something that continues to drive investment in and commitment to the community cohesion agenda, despite the loss of national funding, advice, monitoring and encouragement. (Ratcliffe, 2012; Thomas, Forthcoming).

Experience of implementing community cohesion and the 'space' afforded by this growing national indifference has, however, enabled local re-conceptualisation of the scope and ambition of community cohesion. Here, the prime focus has shifted to community capacity building, based on support for

existing assets, rather than engineering cross-community contact. This community development approach is understood as being a more robust way of enabling genuine cross-community dialogue in the future, rather than 'forcing' it in the short-term, and is seen as being more sustainable as the state's budget shrinks. Above all, this new direction reflects many of the concerns and beliefs around the assumptions and realistic goals of 'cohesion' held by the individual practitioners, the 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 2010) charged with making community cohesion happen at ground level.

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