Contesting the 'authentic' community: Far-right spatial strategy and everyday responses in an era of crisis[*]

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abstract

The idea that voting alone will eliminate far-right and fascist politics is fundamentally flawed. Politics takes place in the hearts and minds of people; in their streets, communities and homes. It inhabits the everyday constitution of authenticity and is partly articulated through the spatialities it produces. I illustrate this through a discussion of the recent history of British fascism's decline and re-emergence, and its development of new spatial strategies. The British National Party's re-branding mobilises around a particular idea of the authentic (white, British) community and subsumes into itself a dubious analysis of class divisions and interests. This re-branding can be seen as a particular form of territorialisation in the face of an increasingly fragmentary, mobile and globalised world, and is exaggerated in the wake of the global economic crisis which has had a disproportionate effect on working class communities. The struggle against the far right is in part a struggle over the spatial articulation of and claims to authenticity in differing understandings of working class values. Authenticity, I argue, is primarily a politico-discursive tool to which competing politics lay claim, perching on the ill-defined border between reality and artifice.

> For the last fifty years, more and more of the people of Britain have watched with concern and growing dismay and sometimes anger, as an out-of-touch political elite has transformed our country before our very eyes. It's not just a matter of mass immigration – although that's the most obvious symptom of it – it's handing us over to rule by unelected bureaucrats in Brussels; it's turning the commonwealth of our country, our public services, into private profit centres for giant corporations; it's banning St George's Day festivals while encouraging everyone else to celebrate their festivals, usually with taxpayers' money… The anger of the British people has been held behind dams, walls of lies, growing ever-taller and ever-thicker for the last fifty years. But tonight in the north-west of England and in Yorkshire, the British National Party, and hundreds of thousands of voters… have given their verdict of the dam of lies of the old party, and tonight the British National Party has breached those dams of lies. The words of truth and justice and freedom are once again flowing over this country. (Speech by Nick Griffin, BNP leader, Thursday 4th June 2009)

British far right and neo-fascist politics is not what it once was. The election of two British National Party (BNP) members to the European Parliament in June 2009,

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following dozens of BNP members elected to local government in recent years, represents a profound shift in the landscape of UK politics. Their intoxicating mix of far-right ethno-nationalism and populist social democratic rhetoric has garnered the BNP hundreds of thousands of votes, largely in working class former Labour Party heartlands, despite many months of left-wing and anti-fascist activity around the UK leading up to the elections.

This paper discusses the spatial strategies of this new wave of neo-fascism and the failures of left responses. I argue, in concert with an emerging and increasingly successful spatial strategy, that the BNP has been engaging in careful discursive warfare over the meaning of key working class political concepts, especially *community*. Using publicly available materials, largely online and in archived newspapers, I explore the spatio-discursive strategies that the BNP seeks to mobilise in relation to community and tease out an understanding of authenticity that is a powerful discursive tool in the politics of community. Through a discussion of the radical everyday theories of Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord, I ask what this increasingly sophisticated spatial and discursive strategy can tell us about possible efforts to combat the rise of far-right politics among the white working class and the role of authenticity in the construction of grassroots community politics. Work in geopolitics concerning deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation also helps to shed light on the ways in which community politics are linked to broader processes of economic, social and cultural change in a globalised world.

'Community' is itself a hotly contested term. It can indicate communities rooted in specific geographical locations, as well as communities of common interest and transnational communities based on common ethnicities or places of origin such as diasporas. This geographical differentiation is important and is a tension that is felt throughout this paper. Emerging BNP strategy, I argue, links geographical and ethnic understandings of community, intersecting localist and particularist sentiments concerning place and territory with appeals to a sense of broader 'authentic' British ethno-national identity.

In contemporary policy discourse, the concept of community has become an increasingly important element in social welfare and planning delivery, understood as a means of organising service delivery and encompassing a range of (often antagonistic) actors such as voluntary organisations, businesses and working class populations in a certain area (MacLeavy, 2008; Holgersen and Haarstad, 2009). Diversity and multiculturalism have, in many respects and also among academics, become the watchwords of mainstream liberal understandings of community, in which communities are defined (and to an extent 'rated') by the range of different subjectivities cohabiting within them (e.g. Young, 1990; Amin, 2002).

The emphasis given to such politically-charged and contestable definitions of community in the discourses of both policy makers and civil society actors such as trade unions (e.g. Early and Cohen, 1997) has led some scholars to explore the politics and utility of the term. Following Nancy (1991), Panelli and Welch emphasise an individualistic need for community, arguing that

> [i]ndividuals' negotiation of... everyday actions and spaces in order to reduce the (individual) experience of singularity can explain why the very real differences experienced within community lead to continuous reformulation of community rather than its destruction. (Panelli and Welch, 2005: 1609)

Here, it is argued that community is significant not simply *because of* diversity, but also as a way of *coping* with the potentially alienating effects of diversity. Such an argument also seems to challenge ideas in academia and policy that emphasise sites of 'encounter' – also known as 'micro-publics' (Amin, 2002) or simply 'contact' (Allport, 1954) – between different subjectivities as important means of developing a united yet diverse community. 'Acknowledgement of otherness', in particular, is claimed to be an important means of fostering diverse communities (e.g. Barnett, 2005), although some have critiqued the utility of simple encounters as means of achieving this (Valentine, 2008).

As this paper develops, it becomes clear that responses to the difficulties of living in diverse communities can also be powerfully constituted through a struggle over the articulation and practice of what is (or is not) an 'authentic' understanding of community. The focal point of this paper is the BNP's re-branding of neo-fascist politics in the UK. The paper explores the ways in which fascist and anti-fascist politics contest community as a site of struggle over claims to authentic readings of its nature, politics and history.

Between a death and a rebirth

The global economic crisis of 2008-2009 has taken its toll on the British working class with 7.95 million people of working age unemployed or otherwise 'not economically active' (Office for National Statistics, 2009) and many more pushed into precarious and poverty-level employment (MacInness et al., 2009). In 2008 and 2009, the number of welfare claims increased significantly, as did the average length of time that people remained claiming benefits, putting greater pressure on state and Third Sector service providers (Clancy, 2009). Despite early 2010 seeing the UK economy officially rise out of six quarters of recession (Seager, 2010), the effects of recession linger for all but a privileged minority.

This economic crisis has not only caused widespread economic problems, but has also affected the UK socially and culturally. Coupled with the cultural and territorial insecurity that has developed out of globalised capitalism, discussed below, the recession has arguably become a crisis of both economy and identity. With hindsight, positive election results for the BNP were a side-effect of the intersections of broader insecurities of national identity and economy.

The success of the BNP in the EU elections heralded some level of soul-searching among the left and anti-fascist milieux. While some fatalistically lamented the rise of an unstoppable new fascism, others tried to downplay the significance of the election results, and yet others staged tired and fruitless protests. The left was divided and bruised. In this respect, then, the electoral success of the BNP was more than just an expression of their growing bravado in times of turbulence and crisis – it represented

the floundering of a troubled anti-fascist movement seemingly bereft of any effective counter-strategy.

This is a far cry from the late 1990s and early 2000s, when fascist politics seemed far less of a threat than it had been previously. After decades of often bloody street-based struggle, the numerically and tactically superior left – epitomised by the physical, confrontational tactics of Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) and the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs), alongside the larger broad-based liberal socialist Anti-Nazi League (ANL) – finally appeared to have won. In the case of the militant anti-fascists (who, although smaller than the ANL, were popular and well-organised), physical combat was the watchword of these battles for territorial control of key public spaces (e.g. Lux, 2006; Ramamurthy, 2006). This saw the proliferation of localised fascist and anti-fascist groups vying for the control of communities, streets, neighbourhoods and – those bastions of British working class social and political life – pubs (Bullstreet, 2001). As one AFA activist argued, 'only when they [the fascists] are too terrified to work in the estates and walk the streets can anti-fascists be satisfied' (see Martell, 1996: 14).

The largest fascist grouping of the era, the National Front (NF), had for many years an explicit spatial strategy of 'march and grow' (Lux, 2006). A large and visible street presence, argued the NF, was a necessary precursor to growth and greater control in key strategic territories. However, as the NF branched increasingly into electoral politics in the 1980s, the two-pronged spatial configuration of street and electoral politics became increasingly untenable. The visible presence of aggressive, badly-organised and anti-social young men (as they usually were) did not correlate with the perceived 'respectability' of electoral politics. This, combined with sophisticated tactics of surveillance, infiltration and confrontation enacted by anti-fascists, led to bitter in-fighting, fragmentation and massive shrinking of the NF and similar groups such as the British Movement. The failure of street-based fascism was largely rooted in this problematic strategy that sought to combine street control with electoralism, combined with the effective counter-strategies of the left. With the far-right in collapse, the left, it seemed, had won a major victory.

For some time during the late 1990s and early 2000s, self-congratulatory noises emanated from the left. The growing electoral successes of the BNP were variously dismissed as anomalous, bogus or a failure of the electoral system (e.g. Lowles, 2000; 2001; Taylor, 2001; Deacon et al., 2004). These self-congratulatory noises and the apparent disappearance of the most visible signs of fascism put paid to any serious, grassroots anti-fascist organisation in most areas of the UK. Most anti-fascism was increasingly enacted through cultural spectacles such as Love Music Hate Racism festivals and leafleting campaigns in specific areas during local elections.

However, fast-forward to 2009 and we can see a very different story. The collapse of the NF and the failures of the 'march and grow' strategy led to a period of careful introspection among certain leading sections of the far right (Hayes and Aylward, 2000; Copsey, 2007). The growth of the BNP as a 'legitimate' political party has left the formerly victorious left floundering without appropriate organisation, strategy or understanding of the realities of contemporary far-right organisation. Part of this is due to the simple re-branding of the BNP's political image (Copsey, 2004), but more

interesting is the reorientation and reorganisation of what we might term their 'spatio-discursive strategy'.

The deterritorialised circus of electoral anti-fascism

In response to the increasingly successful reorientation of British far right politics towards electoral activity and slick PR, many on the left have devoted time and resources towards countering the BNP in its assumed new home. Parties, political groups and trade unions have all thrown their weight behind campaigns that attempt to cut off the rise of the BNP by cutting out the most visible signs of their growth: their increased electoral success. This tactic of trying to prevent the BNP from gaining parish and county councillors, MEPs and even boards of school governors by encouraging voters to 'vote for anyone except the BNP' has gained ground in recent years, and in many cases obfuscates any other possibilities for anti-fascist activity beyond the ballot box. A Unite Against Fascism strategy paper is indicative of this approach: 'The role of the anti-fascist movement is to alert the broad majority to the BNP threat [in order to make] the case for the largest possible anti-fascist vote' (Unite Against Fascism, 2010a: 3).

Meanwhile, the BNP has steadily increased its presence in the halls of power to a total of 56 local councillors, three county councillors, two MEPs and one member of the Greater London Assembly. This strategy of voting against the BNP – even if modestly successful in particular contexts – has regularly morphed into a strategy of voting for the Labour Party; the very party from whose disillusioned former supporters the BNP seeks to draw much of their membership. Moreover, it has repeatedly failed to address the *causes* of the BNP's rise. It is a strategy that has, in a sense, deterritorialised and fragmented most anti-fascist activity from specific spaces and places to the abstracted, individualised world of electoral politics. I argue in the coming pages that this is a strategy that has increasingly wrenched political organisation from the material realities and spaces of everyday life.

The concept of 'deterritorialisation' has a strong presence in geopolitical literatures on the effects and dynamics of globalised capitalism as 'the problematic of territory losing its significance and power in everyday life' (Ó Tuathail, 1999: 139). It is argued that globalisation's shrinking of distances through advanced communication technologies and growing connectedness of formerly separated economic markets leads to fragmentary and destabilising effects on identity, community and culture. This operates in particular through the growth of networks and institutions that destabilise the state (e.g. Debrix, 1998; Antonsich, 2009), but it has also a profound impact at the local level. This global deterritorialisation of social, political and cultural subjectivity is perceived to produce anxieties, uncertainties and confused identities; producing subjects of a global system over which people have little or no control, to which they cannot relate (in any traditional sense, at least), and which dominates much of their daily lives nonetheless. Papastergiadis, in the context of migration, explains that 'deterritorialisation has decoupled previous links between space, stability and reproduction; it has situated the notion of community in multiple locations; it has split

loyalties and fractured the practices that secure understanding and knowledge within the family and social unit' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 17).

Deterritorialisation, in a sense, is a process that transforms people's relationships with the places they inhabit and pass through. Individual places become increasingly co-constituted with other places elsewhere, through processes such as migration patterns or the impact of global capital flows. In turn, the way we relate to our local environment is changed through this proliferation of connections with elsewhere. It has implications not only relevant to the everyday experiences of *place*, but also for broader spatial imaginations of belonging, with state borders also becoming increasingly disrupted (e.g. Debrix, 1998).

With such decoupling of everyday spaces of identity formation from socio-political reality, it is not surprising, then, that the BNP and much of the far right elsewhere, oppose globalisation on precisely this basis. Their response can be understood as a *re*territorialisation; an effort to root politics in the immediate, local and concrete. Some (e.g. Harvey, 1993; Gibson-Graham, 2003) have emphasised the latent potentialities of a reterritorialising political strategy as a means of developing positive place-based political subjectivities in the face of reactionary and exclusionary localisms of the political right. However, as the rise of the BNP illustrate, reterritorialisation is not a form of political organisation that is necessarily progressive in all cases.

Indeed, a number of writers have expressed concerns regarding the deterritorialisation-reterritorialisation binary. Elden (2005), for example, has critiqued many scholars of this idea arguing that although scholars seek to disrupt the stability of territory, such a binary often continues to reproduce established, quantifiable and calculative forms of territory that they are seeking to problematise. Ó Tuathail also criticises the binary between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, arguing that '[i]t is not simply that there is no de-territorialisation without re-territorialisation, but that both are parts of ongoing generalised processes of territorialisation' (1999: 143).

What appears to be a binary relationship is really constituted by a range of processes that operate and manifest themselves unevenly and differently across space and time. This range of territorialisations is often manifested through de/reterritorialisation in specific places at specific times, but may not operate uniformly and may not be solely understood as operating in one 'direction' or another over all.

Bearing these concerns in mind, there appear to be two forms of territorialisation taking place in the context of (anti-)fascist spatial strategy. First is a localised process of deterritorialisation of economic, social and cultural signification in numerous localities in the UK that gives strength to far-right and neo-fascist perspectives on ethnocentric nationalism. This process, often with its outward expression being mass migration to an area, is experienced aesthetically and through social and cultural changes for the most part. Secondly, anti-fascism has increasingly rejected its former territorial spatial strategy of community control. By this I mean that electoral campaigns are oriented towards atomised, individual voting choices, rather than emphasising collective, territorial forms of politics that tended to mark out the anti-fascist activities – especially

the militant anti-fascist tradition of AFA and the AYMs – of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s[1].

As a result of what the anti-fascists perceived to be a deterritorialisation of far-right spatial strategy, the organisation of anti-fascism changed, usually no longer rooted in a connection to place or community as it once was. Recognising the BNP's continued growth and improvement in electoral performance and public profile, there is clearly something missing from the anti-fascist response to the shift from street strategy to electoral strategy. But what?

Re-territorialising fascism, or, how the right is threatening to do the left's job, only better

In order to understand the continued and increasing popularity of the BNP, it is necessary to investigate their spatial organisation and mobilisation, and their articulation of re-worked principles of working class (comm)unity. Through a shift to electoral politics, alongside growing working class dissatisfaction with the established parties, the BNP have sought to reconfigure traditional 'working class values' and working class history in their own image. In doing so, I argue, they are increasingly enacting forms of politics that have been largely promoted by the left in previous decades. While, of course, it would be problematic to say the least if one asserted that community politics originated with left-wing politics, it is fair to say that the history of working class urban community organisation since the late 19th century has often been dominated by the left. In this section, I explore the ways in which the BNP has developed a strategy that rests on communitarian principles often identified with left-wing politics, while imbuing within this strategy an idealised imagination of authentic British community.

The politics and discourse of authentic British community is central to understanding the BNP's increasing appeal. This image of community is rooted heavily in the forms of working class community self-help and social solidarity that were enacted most visibly during the Second World War, mobilising a 'spirit of the Blitz' sense of communities as territorial units in struggle against an impending (or already existing) foreign invasion. The party reinforces this discourse of Blitz community spirit in their use of images of Winston Churchill and Victory Day street parties in their propaganda. Indeed, following the recent EU election, the BNP declared 'VE Day', making a direct reference to this idealised – and, of course, largely imagined – wartime spirit of homogeneous community and cross-class (or classless) indigenous unity in adversity. The BNP London Branch leaflet (London BNP, 2008), below, is typical of this imagined sense of homogeneous community:

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1   Although it was against official ANL policy, certain sections of the ANL also enacted a militant strategy. This was often referred to as 'squadism' by those who wished to denounce these tactics.

The Changing Face of London

From this...

CONSIDER THIS, this is the way London used to be. At ease with itself, friendly, happy and secure. A capital city with a sense of community values and social inclusiveness. If you would like London to be like this again, then support the British National Party, the party that puts local people first.

...to this

Is This What You Really Want?

(Image source: BNP leaflet, see also Hirsch and Taylor, 2009)

As this leaflet shows, the articulation of images and discourses of the 'authentic' indigenous British community is a major factor in BNP propaganda. The mobilisation of such a stark contrast represents a mobilisation of a particular image of authentic community; an image that is 'friendly, happy and secure' and, of course, exclusively white. Alongside visual representations of the BNP's ideal community, the BNP promotes policies of community-level politics that were once the mainstay of the left[2]. As their election manifesto (BNP, 2007: 8, 24) notes, the system of local government promoted by the BNP

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2   This irony has not been lost on Nick Griffin, who once claimed that the BNP was the only truly socialist party in Britain (ANL, 2002).

> would revolutionise the way local government is conducted. It would bring democracy and the decision making process back into the reach of the electorate and our communities… with the historic and organic and natural community boundaries that are embedded within our culture. Furthermore the process as a whole is true to our heritage as a modernised version of the venerable practices of popular representation found in our ancestral anglo-saxon-celtic society.
>
> […]
>
> Promoting the culture, the history, of a district is a vital ingredient in helping to establish a local community feeling. These local cultures developed over centuries of human interaction. The liberal regime has deliberately tried to destroy local particularism in a bid for conformity and dull uniformity.

The authentic community, for the BNP, is based upon a fusion of democratic decentralisation and a return to the perceived socio-cultural values and practices of British ethno-national history. This is rooted in a distinctly territorial reworking of what 'authentic community' is, how it works, and what it is designed for. It functions as a means for identifying decentralised forms of decision-making as inherently British, and transforming the current form of government into an 'unnatural' construct of 'foreign' influence. Much of this speaks to the democratic tradition of many elements of the left, calling for a decentralisation of government to the grassroots and the centrality of community as a social, solidaristic unit.

Similarly, the BNP mobilise anti-corporate and anti-globalisation sentiments, appealing to left-wing commitments to good local employment, independence and creativity:

> Culture of course is not just a historic entity. Our unique culture needs to be kept alive in the face of globalisation and standardisation. We will… ensure the survival of the traditional trades and crafts that have been passed down through the centuries. (*ibid*.: 25)

Here authentic community, culture and tradition intersect in places in the selective marketing of particular commodities – and ways of making them – as distinctively British. Anthropological arguments such as this not only affirm certain local historical lineages as 'authentic', but also seek to reify small-scale capitalist processes of production as also inherent in British national heritage. While, historically, craft production was arguably linked to economies that did not conform to the capitalist exchange economy that dominates the majority of the contemporary world, proposing to transplant such crafts into a contemporary economy inevitably foregrounds crafts as, essentially, small business ventures. The BNP's appeals to traditional arts and crafts therefore link petit bourgeois forms of production to an impression of communitarianism and cultural autonomy. Thus, in a sense, the re-territorialisation of community-based economies that the BNP propose in this quotation is at once a rejection of globalised neoliberalism and an assertion of the 'authentically natural' quality of small-scale capitalist enterprise.

Community has therefore become a discursive battleground, with the BNP appropriating and transposing left-wing working class norms and values into their particular brand of populist, cross-class national socialism. However, these appeals to community reside not simply in the discursive realm. Recent scholarship (e.g. Bowyer, 2008; Bailey, 2009; cf. Cobain, 2006) has shown how BNP activists are increasingly undertaking community-based activities in an effort to develop the forms of community

and the electoral support in key wards that they wish to see. The texts of BNP organiser guidelines and handbooks also demonstrate how the BNP is attempting to engage in such grassroots community-based strategies. For example: 'Use a local place name to emphasise that you are locals. Mention a couple of other local issues, such as high council tax, hospital/school closures, etc. It is important you mention local issues and issues other than immigration' (Eriksen, ND), 'Local issue leaflets are far more effective at recruiting than the national party leaflets' (BNP, ND: 18) and 'You have a responsibility to treat each other with respect and civility. We are involved in community politics and this starts with our own Nationalist community' (ibid.: 22).

The emphasis on a territorial understanding of community – on local areas and place-based issues – is clearly a key element of the BNP's spatial strategy and reflects a growing understanding of effective political campaigning that many other parties and organisations already use. It recognises and emphasises the role of place in the constitution of political subjectivity, refusing the stereotype of the monolithic, centralised political party against which many of the white working class have rebelled. Indeed, one leading BNP activist predicted as early as 1994 that this new community-based strategy would be a success:

> [T]he BNP will almost certainly make its next breakthrough in a run-down working-class area. The people who have been abandoned by Labour and who have never been represented by the Tories will, in their desperation, turn to us… [W]e speak for the put-upon working-class. (Lecomber, 1994)

While 'march and grow' territorial politics are, for the most part[3], long gone, the BNP policy of deliberate deployment of organisers in certain neighbourhoods to build micro-level personal relationships with community members is a clear form of territorialisation that allows the BNP access to their core target audience – the urban white working class. Their disproportionate success at local scales of government in white working class areas is a direct symptom of this reconfigured and reterritorialised vision of community, and it provokes a conundrum for those wishing to engage in anti-fascist organising, as Bailey notes: '[BNP] activists practising "community politics"… are carrying out day-to-day activism through community groups and councillors' work. Therefore, in some neighbourhoods, there is little possibility of marginalising these individuals through describing them as "extremist" or "fascist"' (2009: 3).

In areas where BNP activists have been able to embed their particular brand of community discourse and practice into the locality, their adaptation of authentic community is in danger of becoming accepted as legitimate at best – and accurate at worst. This reconfiguration of community and territory demands of us a careful re-examination of anti-fascist strategy. In order to do so, it is necessary to discuss how we

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3   Arguably there has been a small rejuvenation of street-based right-wing activity in the last year, following the creation of the English Defence League. Launched primarily to combat extreme Islam, their politics is rather more ambiguous than the BNP and there is a multitude of voices present within the organisation ranging from relatively mainstream jingoistic nationalism to outright fascism. As such, although a threat, it cannot be said definitively that the EDL represents a return to the street-based forms of fascism exhibited by the NF.

might go about understanding the complex and unpredictable terrains on which these struggles over the authentic community are taking place.

Everyday political strategy and the authentic community

Through their community-oriented spatial strategy, the BNP are articulating and practising a new form of territorial politics; a form of politics to which anti-fascist groups have largely failed to respond. Moreover it is a class politics, rooted in (the BNP's particular version of) traditional working class values. Their careful representation and reworking of working class history and values asks us to rethink the role of authenticity in the spaces where class politics take place.

Crucially, rather than a reworking of values that reproduces authenticity as a quest for some sort of idealised 'unique' or 'autonomous' individual, the BNP strategy reproduces (a skewed version of) left discourses of collectivity, resilience and community. Indeed, much like the radical left in particular, the BNP rejects the managerial discourses of individuality and liberal notions of diversity. The radical left critique lies in liberalism's reification of difference and fragmentation of class unity. However, the far-right criticism is – through a related logic – rooted in a rejection of the 'collective individuality' of liberalism, most clearly represented in the pluralist discourses and policies of multiculturalism and equal opportunities.

Authenticity, as Lorimer notes, 'is neither eternal nor guaranteed' (1999: 519). The assumption of the left that their image of authentic community was indeed eternal and guaranteed, enshrined in the canon of Marxism and the classical anarchists, is a fallacy that has cost them dearly in the contemporary struggle against the BNP. Strangely, as the centrality of territorial community – of place and the local – has become more pronounced in this turbulent era of crisis and de/re-territorialisations, these precise sites of political mobilisation have waned in the spatial strategy of the mainstream left, focusing instead on cultural spectacles such as Love Music Hate Racism festivals and individualised, reactive electoral 'cut-off' activism.

What differentiates BNP strategy from the new electoral strategies of the left is not simply its geography – although it is arguably the most obvious outward manifestation of this difference – but also its connection to *everyday practice*. Politics, as a terrain of practice that resides in the everyday and usually localised interactions of people, is propagated, reproduced and developed over time precisely through these practices.

While they deserve far more exploration than a short article can convey, the entwined thought of Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord is especially relevant to a discussion of authenticity, everyday life and political praxis. These libertarian-leaning French Marxists explored in detail the significance of everyday life to political praxis and our experience of social life. Lefebvre (2000: 16), referring to institutional politics and other representational establishments such as 'high' culture, laid out his perspective clearly:

> [W]e refuse to see them as the substance and hidden being of human reality. We devalue them and revalue the mere residuum upon which they are built – everyday life; *either* we elect to serve 'causes' *or* we support the humble cause of everyday life.

For Lefebvre, politics is located in the residuum of human (inter)action, where established politics – such as governments, capital or trade union bureaucracies – are alienated products of localised social processes, aggregated, institutionalised and reproduced through everyday grassroots interactions:

> Everyday life is made of recurrences: gestures of labour and leisure, mechanical movements both human and properly mechanic… linear and cyclical repetitions, natural and rational time, etc.; the study of creative activity (of *production,* in its widest sense) leads to the study of re-production or the conditions in which actions producing objects and labour are re-produced… or, on the contrary, undergo gradual or sudden modifications. (Lefebvre, 2000: 18)

Thus, everyday life is fundamentally a process of *becoming*; of organisation and re-organisation of the social through practice. Where the left had become complacent in its apparent victory over the NF in the late 1990s, it assumed an immobile everyday and, in turn, a fixed definition of authentic community. On the contrary, as Lefebvre reminds us, '[t]he everyday is neither the inauthentic *per se*, nor the authentically and positively "real"' (2002: 65). Elsewhere, he bemoans the way in which everyday life encompasses a sense of 'reality without truth' (Lefebvre, 1984, quoted in Highmore, 2002: 116), further problematising the linkage of everyday life to authenticity by counterpoising it against a philosophical quest for absolute 'truth without reality'. A Lefebvrean understanding of authenticity is therefore rooted in everyday practices that blur assertions of authenticity and inauthenticity.

Further deepening this assertion is Lefebvre's powerful theorisation of the *social production of space*. Space is, he argued, a complex social product of human interactions, values, desires and significations that tends to characterise a particular location or series of connected locations at a particular moment. Space is important because its social production structures perceptions and experiences, usually on an everyday level. Importantly, much like everyday life, since space is socially *produced* it is also always becoming; being contested, reproduced and shaped over time: 'If space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production. The "object" of interest must be expected to shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*' (Lefebvre, 1991: 36-37).

This has a number of implications for the way we understand the authentic community. First, it means that authenticity – if it really does exist – is not atemporal or aspatial. If space is always in process, then the parameters surrounding what is an authentic treatment of said space are necessarily changing also. Second, it means that community – itself a spatialised phenomenon – is also socially produced. Third, if community is socially produced, it will be constituted in different ways across space. These assertions can pose a strong critique to any assertion of authentic community, whether from the left or the right, since authenticity becomes defined through spatio-temporal differences, according to the constellations of relations that make up community also differing over time and space. In this process, the confident and absolute connotations of authenticity fade away in the shadow of infinite possibilities for difference, change and contrast between spaces and times.

This discussion of Lefebvre raises the question of exactly how this spatialised blurring of authenticity and inauthenticity actually functions in practice. The spectacle, theorised

by Guy Debord of the Situationist International, is a powerful example of how the everyday production and contestation of in/authenticity might operate. Debord argued that the spectacle, an image-saturated totality which bombards people with subtle capitalist and consumerist propaganda, is a 'social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (Debord, 1995: 7) and therefore partly co-constituted with social processes. For Debord, it masks inauthentic fabrications of capital as desirable and authentic, reifying images as objects, and objects as images in an intoxicating cocktail of socio-cultural and economic pressures to consume (and to do so in a particular way). Its production is at once a process of extraction – from the everyday idioms, ideas and cultures of people – and artificial assemblage of multiple trajectories, tendencies and vectors in capitalist re/production of everyday practice and signification. The spectacle is therefore a fact of everyday life that embodies elements of authenticity and inauthenticity:

> The spectacle cannot be set in abstract opposition to concrete social activity… [T]he spectacle, though it turns reality on its head, is itself a product of real activity. Likewise, lived reality suffers the material assaults of the spectacle's mechanisms… lending that order its positive support. Each side therefore has its share of objective reality. (Debord, 1995: 14)

It would be a mistake to read such an analysis at face value and propose that there is some sort of 'false consciousness' within capitalist society that dictates mindless drones in particular ways, but the value of the spectacle is how it exposes the ways in which authenticity can be shaped according to certain definitions. Debord describes a world where capital and state feed back to us that which was already ours. In turn, he and Lefebvre call for a response that emphasises the lived materialities that structure our understanding of the world, and a concomitant anchoring in the everyday spaces – such as community spaces – in which we circulate (cf. Merrifield, 2002). As a response to the complex in/authentic production of everyday space, the Situationist International proposed practices of *détournement* – the subversive diverting or hijacking of space – and *dérives* – literally, 'drifts' through the urban landscape – in order to expose and explore alternative visions of authentic life (see Pinder, 2005).

Although the Situationist International response to the problems of authenticity may not necessarily be relevant to understanding and combating the BNP's community-based spatial strategies, the thoughts of Lefebvre and Debord shed light on the form of authenticity that is enacted by the BNP. A common thread that runs through the materials and propaganda discussed above is an attempt to interpret history through a particular lens and apply it to certain spatial contexts. The ambiguity that surrounds the term 'community' – subsuming a multitude of differences into a singular, monolithic term (e.g. Holgersen and Haarstad, 2009) – is precisely what gives authenticity its power. By identifying a vague, contested term and ascribing to it an 'authentic' lineage, the BNP seeks to naturalise a particular understanding of community as *the authentic one*. If we follow Lefebvre in understanding spaces to be socially produced, through connections and relations that are in themselves contestable and always becoming, the community perceived as a territorial 'unit' becomes a clear target for a politics that understands history as a struggle to preserve a certain lineage linked to a territorial area. Indeed, facing a multiplicity of territorialisations and the proliferation of connections through globalised capitalism, struggles to preserve territorial lineages may arguably

become all the more important in efforts to make sense of the world and one's place in it.

Importantly, the authentic community, for the BNP, rests on an understanding of authenticity that, much like Debord's Spectacle, is in some way a fusion of artifice and reality. Attaching certain imagined cultural values of 'Britishness' to particular practices such as traditional crafts draws inspiration from historical fact (i.e. that Britain once had an economy based partly on craft production). However, this argument also constructs around itself a selective reading of history and an association of certain modes of production to a particular genealogy. In doing so, the BNP's approach uses authenticity as a means to blur the boundaries between everyday experiences and knowledges on the one hand, and political ideology on the other. Thus, for the BNP, the 'authentic community' is a discursive means through which they are able to embed their political principles into lived experiences precisely because community is a socially produced phenomenon that encompasses a range of in/authenticities at any one time. The multiple territorialisations taking place through communities, linking previously disparate places and populations in a variety of ways, makes this use of authenticity all the more powerful in the context of far-right politics.

However, this treatment of authentic community is arguably also true for traditional left-wing (or any wing) politics. Although, due to the internationalist politics that many on the anarchist and socialist left hold, the reterritorialising tendencies of left politics may not be articulated in the same ways as those on the right, it is clear that community is also a discursive terrain that is identified as powerful through its contestable, socially produced nature. Sentiments such as 'Celebrate our diversity – Unity in the Community' (Unite Against Fascism, 2010b) reflect a clear deployment of an anti-fascist authentic community discourse that is diverse and united *per se*. Another typical example is the following, from an anarchist anti-fascist mobilisation in East London:

> Working class areas like Whitechapel where many ordinary Muslims and non-Muslims live and work in complete harmony will not tolerate divisive groups like the EDL [English Defence League], we live in an area steeped in a history of poverty and hard graft but also a history of standing up for ourselves. You can try and blame this on 'angry asian/muslim boys' or 'hotheads' but what these young lads represent, alongside all the locals who also joined them, is the East End spirit. (Whitechapel Anarchist Group, 2010: no pagination)

The anti-fascist left is therefore engaging in much the same contestation of authenticity as the fascist right, appealing not only to a certain definition of authentic community but also to an authentic tradition. Although their articulations of what constitutes the authentic community differ, the processes of producing a form of authenticity that, following Lefebvre, draw from everyday experiences of reality, are similar. Like Debord's Spectacle, both fascist and anti-fascist appeals to authenticity are products of the interactions between these lived experiences of reality and ideological constructs. If we understand space to be socially produced – by the complex, everyday interactions of people – we can begin to understand the authentic community as also socially produced; a terrain of discursive struggle around community as a term and practice that can be defined and practiced in a multitude of ways. Thus, even if authenticity is simply a politico-discursive tool rather than a concrete reflection of reality, it still has powerful effects on the politics of the spaces to which it is applied, especially when delineated by

vague terms such as 'community'. In light of these assertions, the next section discusses the way in which anti-fascist politics might develop as part of a broader political programme.

Give up anti-fascism?

With the help of Lefebvre and Debord, we have now sought to understand the form of authenticity being mobilised by the BNP in the way it organises and practices its spatial strategy of community politics. I have also argued that such an approach to authenticity is by no means the sole preserve of the far right. Fundamentally, the analyses of Lefebvre and Debord affirm the centrality of everyday life to understanding how communities are constituted and discursively contested through spatial practice. Community, like everyday life, is practiced and shaped through complex webs of ongoing social interaction. While it is often imagined as territorially coherent and discrete in policy and media discourses (e.g. Nagle, 2009) – and this perspective is sometimes still reflected in reality – the heightened mobility and transnationalisation of community means that we can now no longer mask the sociality through which community is constituted and reproduced. In these social connections lie opportunities for forms of transformation of authenticity similar to those undertaken by the BNP to take place in new, emancipatory directions. The struggle for the hearts and minds of working class community (or any community, for that matter) is therefore partly a struggle for power over the discourse of authenticity in the spaces and places in which such community is enacted and (re)produced.

However, if we accept that this approach to struggle is correct, then we must consider the ways in which socialities can be shaped and reworked. Since community is constituted through sociality, it is ultimately bound up in connections – friendships, kinships, encounters, and so on – that are developed through everyday practice. The response therefore lies in the development of certain *relations* that are enacted through social connections and encounters within communities. As a result, this requires a careful crafting of social relations and connections that can re-cast discourses and practices of authentic community in particular ways. In other words, it requires a spatial strategy that in many ways mirrors that of the BNP: a community-based strategy that organises through existing social connections in particular places.

Without a doubt, this relation-based approach is neither new nor especially exciting. After all, anarchists (e.g. Bookchin, 1986; Bakunin, 2003; Gordon, 2007) and those at the libertarian end of the Marxist spectrum (Marx, 1975; Perlman, 1992; Vaneigem, 2003) have argued for such strategies to approach broader issues of political struggle for more than a century. The left's largely poor response to the rise of the BNP is in part a failure to respond to the changing nature of working class community in a world that cares little for fixity or solidarity that cannot be recuperated into capital.

At stake in this re-orientation of anti-fascist politics is nothing less than the entire anti-fascist project itself. In a controversial leaflet (Anon., 1999) distributed at the 1999 'Carnival against Capital' in London, attendees were encouraged to 'give up activism'. Activism, the pamphlet argued, is premised upon divisions and exclusions between the

(good, selfless) activist and the (bad, lazy) non-activist and rarely related to the interests and desires of these 'non-activists', thus reproducing the bipolar dynamic *ad infinitum*. Likewise, contemporary forms of UK anti-fascism are largely manifested through an equally self-aggrandising and ineffective strategy, rooted in a reactive and deterritorialised form of (non-)politics with little or no connection to the material spaces of everyday life for the BNP's target group.

Bearing in mind the imposition of binary distinctions, Paul Chatterton argues that we must 'step beyond both the "bad, devious subject" and the "good, conformist subject" towards the "non-subject"' (2005: 558). This rejection of categorisation, for Chatterton, can be utilised in order that one can 'not merely critique capitalist social relations but go far beyond them' (ibid.). This passage calls for a self-organised politics of what Chatterton, elsewhere, labels 'uncommon ground' (2006). If our everyday practices and encounters shape the social basis on which we might build alternative visions of the authentic community, or do away with it altogether, then the range of different subjectivities in a particular locality need to find or make space for engaging social encounters with one another. By articulating a politics of the non-subject on uncommon ground, it is important to bear in mind critiques discussed above concerning the insufficiency of simple 'encounters' (e.g. Valentine, 2008). The principle, for Chatterton, that circumvents this concern is self-organisation that encourages diverse groups of people to work together towards common goals defined autonomously by themselves. This is not an appeal to liberal or managerial discourses of 'diversity'; rather, it is rooted in a desire for non-subjects to refuse the forms of categorisation that both liberal discourses *and BNP discourses* impose on communities and localities. The conflation of difference (as a fact of life) with diversity (as a subject of policy) is a tendency that unites liberal and far-right approaches, admittedly with very different ends. The non-subject that Chatterton seeks to produce is at once a refusal to be categorised and an assertion that difference need neither be divisive nor fetishised. Such a tension between difference and collectivity can be a productive one, but also one that is difficult to enact in practice.

Bearing in mind Chatterton's approach to building uncommon ground and emphasis on self-organisation, there have been some examples of community-based organising in the UK that can be used as glimpses of possible future approaches to anti-fascist politics. Importantly, rather than focusing on combating fascism exclusively, these groups articulate and practice a politics of community in their own right and seek to avoid reactive forms of campaigning. As *Black Flag* magazine argues,

> The traditional negative methods of disruption of far-right activities, of physical no-platform, of making it unsafe or counterproductive for the far right to operate openly must be allied to positive methods of political activity, of methods of directly intervening in working class struggles in ways that cut the ground out from the BNP and occupy the political space that they've already made inroads on. (*Black Flag*, 2008: 8)

The Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) is a non-denominational socialist grouping that was created out of the ashes of AFA. It was created as an explicit effort to build left-leaning alternatives to the place-based, working class community politics that the BNP currently strive to enact. Like the BNP, the IWCA strategy is a dual electoral and community strategy that has had some modest success in electing a handful of local

councillors and enacting a number of localised neighbourhood campaigns against phenomena such as drug dealing and gentrification.

The IWCA has also undertaken innovative steps towards what they call 'Community Restorative Justice' outside and independent of the police and judicial system. This seeks to tackle the causes of crime while also combating 'the resulting breakdown in the relationships which connect people with a community' (IWCA, ND) through mediation, collective discussion and a clear rejection of punitive or retributive forms of justice. Importantly, their politics rejects many elements of left as well as right-wing politics, preferring the principle of working class self-rule to the principle of anti-capitalism *per se*. Although it has waned in size and activity in recent years, the IWCA's approach to community politics is one that is based on self-management of working class communities and illustrates one model of how an autonomous grouping might create a progressive discourse and praxis within a community setting.

Another model of possible future community strategies is the approach taken by social centres – radical spaces rooted in certain communities to facilitate political, social and cultural collectivity and action. While many UK social centres cater exclusively to specific political networks and face a range of problems such as subculture, exclusivity and disconnection from their neighbourhoods, some are at the centre of dynamic grassroots campaigns over political issues facing the working class neighbourhoods in which they are based (see, e.g., Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006; Ince, 2010). Like AFA, AYN, the IWCA and, indeed, the BNP, theirs is also a strategy of territorialisation, located in the tangle of everyday social connections in a particular locality.

Social centres in the UK are far less established than they are in countries such as Italy, but recent developments in social centre activism have seen the growth of related projects such as community gardens and alternative festivals that have sought to break out of the subcultural 'ghetto' in which many have found themselves. The benefit of social centres is that they provide a free physical space for communities to utilise for a variety of purposes, but they are also vulnerable spaces that rarely survive a sufficient amount of time to build meaningful, lasting relationships.

These short introductions to two approaches to self-managed community politics may not provide significant detail, but they do hint at ways in which anti-fascist politics can be a part of much broader political programmes. If community and everyday life are always becoming and in process, then these two examples are only the beginning of possible community politics yet to come. Given the shifting terrains of everyday social and political life, it is equally plausible that in other spatio-temporal contexts, the struggle against the far right may take on a variety of new modulations. However, to ignore the power of community, and the everyday social relations on which it rests, is to ignore a fundamental element in the constitution of the political itself.

Concluding remarks: Everyday sites of struggle

The impermanent and contestable nature of authenticity in practice is reflected in its spatial articulation. If politics originates in everyday, collective practice and struggle, then it is crucial to interrogate the way we enact certain visions of authenticity in everyday spaces. The community – however we care to define it – is clearly a central node in the everyday lives of all people and, for the white working class, it is often exhibited in place-based urban territories. Careful analysis of the geographies of political praxis can help us to unpack seemingly mystifying conundrums such as that posed by the growing appeal of the BNP to sections of the British white working class.

This assertion that there is something politically and organisationally important about everyday life and its vicissitudes has been elaborated at length elsewhere, but this paper has sought to show how it has relevance to both analysis and praxis. It shows that there are no easy options in the development and enactment of meaningful political action and that authenticity is more of a rhetorical device for mobilisation than a tangible empirical 'fact'. The ambiguity of community, I have argued, makes it a prime concept and spatial locus into which competing political approaches can 'market' their own idea of the authentic community. As such, authenticity is relevant primarily as a politico-discursive tool, to which differing interpretations of the authentic community seek to lay claim. This means that static understandings of authenticity and failure to rework and adapt practices and relations over time can leave dangerous vacuums into which reactionary or conservative forms, in this case of community, can insert themselves.

Discussion of strategies and counter-strategies pertaining to community organising has led to thorny questions about the nature of authenticity and community in political practice. We cannot assume a fixed understanding of what community or authenticity 'is' – either spatially or temporally – since they are both defined by those who constitute it every day. Authenticity thus becomes a locus for struggle rather than an *a priori* quality to be objectively imposed on a certain space, concept or phenomenon. The struggle against the far right is in part a struggle over the spatial articulation and claims to authenticity of differing understandings of community.

Community, as I discussed at the beginning of the paper, is a term that is deployed in a range of ways. Policy discourses surrounding multicultural communities not only mask profound social and economic inequalities within communities (Valentine, 2008) but also expose themselves to far-right critiques. Linked to increasing social, economic and cultural insecurity surrounding the multiplicity of territorialisations taking place as part of globalised capitalism, the deployment of claims to authenticity can be a powerful political device for neo-fascist politics. At the same time, mainstream policy approaches also remain exposed to the development of subaltern politics that embrace different cultures and address inequalities and exclusions, while proposing an alternative politics to the false binary of liberal multiculturalism and reactionary nationalism.

In this paper, I also suggest that certain forms of praxis are necessary, while others are largely lacking in utility. Waving placards and denouncing the BNP as 'evil Nazis' is, of course, an easy option. However, it neither engages with the everyday experiences and relations of people, nor does it involve any consideration of the spatial and

discursive strategy and practices of the BNP itself. The authentic response – if there is such a thing – to the situation in which anti-fascists find themselves is also distinctly lacking in 'sexy' qualities of conventional protest activism; on the contrary, it requires careful, long-term organisation at the local level to build self-managed and sustainable grassroots relationships and projects. It requires an acceptance that authenticity is little more than a discursive tool for the articulation and mobilisation of political principles. It requires, I have argued, giving up anti-fascism as it is currently understood.

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