

*A complex set of factors contributes to the residential and life separation of different ethnic communities.*

## **Housing and regeneration in multi-ethnic areas**

**Following the recent publication of the reports on the racial disturbances in 2001, RODNEY WALDECK and GURBUX SINGH look at the housing and regeneration implications.**

Chris Griffin's editorial, 'Racial self-segregation hinders neighbourhood regeneration', in the August/September issue of *axis* raised several pertinent points relating to community fragmentation in multi-racial Britain. Self-segregation is but one of a range of factors that contribute to the residential and life separation of different communities.

There is a complex set of factors at work in these processes, if we hope to examine clearly issues of fragmentation and segregation in our society. The reasons why people of different ethnic and/or racial groups live in more or less segregated areas are many. In no particular order, they include, but are not restricted to: family structure; economic status; employment opportunities; attitudes to racial/cultural diversity within different communities; action or inaction by 'official' bodies such as local authorities, RSLs, Government Departments; action and attitudes of financial institutions, estate agents, etc; personal 'safety' issues; immigration and asylum rules; aspirational goals within and between people of different ethnic, cultural, religious backgrounds; differing housing needs; and access to educational, transport and medical provision.

Listing some of the factors that influence people about where they live also highlights the point that explaining segregation primarily through the prism of race or culture, or the (in)ability to use the majority language, will inevitably omit other factors that might be at play. It is by examining the interaction of different factors that we are more likely to arrive at an holistic view of where we are, what kind of housing we need and what kind of society we should like to see in the future.

Segregation, whether self chosen or not, on its own need not fuel the kind of disturbances seen in the north of England and in Glasgow's Sighthill. In the UK and USA there are places where 'clustering'

by distinct groups evinces little physical antagonism. These include many suburban areas in the USA that reflect concentrations of middle-class African-Americans.

In the UK, we have an example in the Stamford Hill area of north London where a relatively high proportion of Orthodox Jews live in a small area and lead a visibly 'different' life. There is a similar number of Muslims. The area was the first in the UK to establish a Muslim-Jewish Forum. There have been some isolated incidents of inter-communal violence coinciding with heightened tensions in the Middle East, but Forum members believe that more unites than divides them. In the 2001 local elections, Jews and Muslims canvassed together. Ismail Amaan runs the Muslim Community Centre and reportedly stated that when house-hunting 'Muslims choose a Jewish road' because they 'don't want their woman in veils taunted'. This does not say much for the attitudes of other residents in the area, but illustrates how different communities can find common ground.

### **Housing influences**

Considering policy options for the future might be assisted by an examination of what brought us to the present situation. An article of this length cannot hope to do justice to the developments in housing that have occurred even in the recent past. In the 18 years to 1997, however, we can posit four main objectives of Government housing policy:

- minimise local authority housing provision
- revitalise the private rented sector
- encourage owner-occupation
- target resources on acute problems.

Despite the significant decline in overall expenditure on social housing (from £4.5 billion in 1981 to £1.4 billion in 1991) *council housing* has remained significant for some minority ethnic groups. An important issue, however, is not simply whether there has been equality of access, but whether there have been 'fair shares' in housing investment. The latter is particularly important in the light of the different patterns of housing within minority communities.

The *private rented sector* has been in decline since the First World War and, despite deregulation attempts in the 1980s, little effect was made on this decline. For people in some minority groups – those of Chinese or African origin – this sector is more important than for people in other groups. The ethnic segmentation of this sector and the role of landlords (whatever their ethnic origin), estate agents and financial institutions, both public and private, all require examination if choice is to have any meaning here.

*Owner occupation* rose significantly between the early 1980s and 90s. The proportion of each major ethnic group also rose in this sector, except for people of Pakistani origin, where there appeared to be a rise in private renting. Bangladeshi households, on the other hand, saw a rise in owner occupation from 30% to 45% in the 80s. People of Indian and African-Indian origin show 85% across all socio-economic groups in this sector.

What does seem clear is that for people of Indian and Pakistani origin, programmes of housing investment in social housing in the 80s/90s were likely to have a smaller impact on the housing conditions of these groups due to their tenure position. Furthermore, the concentration of minorities in older, poorer quality housing stock, and all the attendant problems this brings, combined with generally lower incomes, were likely to lead to increasing patterns of inequity in comparison with white households.

Government efforts to target resources on acute problems would not be of much use, therefore, unless attention was paid to the differing rates of owner occupation, issues of repair and maintenance for families often facing higher rates of unemployment than white counterparts, and how improvement grants impact on different groups.

What this gallop through housing policy indicates is that, in Tariq Modood's words (in an IPPR, 1994 publication), the aggregation of data into simple ethnic categories 'is worse than meaningless'. Analysis is required of ethnic differentiation in housing need, household formation, settlement, tenure preference and

# *If residential segregation on ethnic grounds is perpetuated in other spheres of life, adverse effects are more likely.*

perceptions of housing agencies. Only by taking these factors and their interaction into account, together with those listed earlier, can we hope to make a start on altering and/or formulating policies that are appropriate to a multi-racial/cultural UK.

The events in the north of England and in Glasgow hold a warning for the rest of the UK. An examination of the background to the disturbances and some of the key issues might be useful. It is not possible to paint a detailed picture of the three main towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in this article. Some factors, however, recur in all three and merit attention.

## **Residential segregation/clustering**

In all three cities, there are wards where significant proportions of the population are of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin. In Oldham, for example, the overall minority ethnic population rose from just under 6% in 1986 to a modest 8.7% in 1991. The proportion of people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origins, however, in two Council wards, Coldhurst and Werneth, recorded significantly higher rises, from 22.7 to 36.7% and 26.8 to 38%, between 1986 and 1991, and probably higher now.

In 1990 and 1993, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) published reports of two formal investigations that found unlawful discrimination in housing practices in Oldham. The first involved action by estate agents, that led to Asian property buyers being advised to purchase in those areas where there was already an Asian community and white buyers being advised to buy in 'white' areas.

The second report showed that the local authority had been acting contrary to its own policy for nearly 10 years. The consequence was that Asian housing applicants were being segregated from white applicants and were being allocated properties of a lower quality. Despite disputing the findings, the Council nevertheless entered into an agreement with the CRE to discontinue the practices that had led to the findings.

A recent report on social housing in Bradford, *Breaking down the barriers: Improving Asian access to social rented housing*, again found depressing

evidence of what is termed 'blockbusting' by estate agents. This practice apparently has estate agents contacting neighbours when an adjacent house is sold to a minority family and suggesting that, as the neighbours' own property value might decline, it might be in their interest to move.

## **Deprivation and employment rates**

In Oldham, the wards with the highest proportion of minority ethnic households were in the top 1% of the most deprived wards nationally. In Burnley, the ward with the highest proportion of minority population is also within this 1% figure. The same picture emerges in Bradford, with the three wards with the highest proportion of South Asian families also featuring in the top 1% national deprivation scale.

High unemployment rates are also a feature, particularly in Oldham and Burnley. In the former, the highest unemployment rates were in the four wards with significant proportions of Asian families. In Burnley, too, South Asian groups recorded high rates, with a rate of 30% according to the 1991 census. While the picture in Bradford does not appear as bleak, people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin show the highest rates for employment in unskilled occupations, and people of Pakistani origin showing the highest rates in manual skilled occupations. In an era of rapid technological change and when there is an economic downturn, these are the occupations that are probably the most vulnerable

## **Schooling – 'segregation' and attainment levels**

In all three cities, children are to a large degree educated separately from children of other ethnic groups to themselves. This is particularly the case in primary education. (Further analysis is given in the full article, available from the Editor.)

## **Racial harassment and violence**

Oldham has regularly handled more complaints of racial harassment than any other Greater Manchester Police division since 1974 and the

highest number involving violence against the person, and the phenomenon is an unhappily regular part of life in too many locations in Britain.

## **Lessons for the future**

We share the premise that residential segregation can lead to a 'fragile' sense of community. The question is 'Under what circumstances is it more likely to have adverse effects for all concerned?'

A tentative conclusion might be that if residential segregation on ethnic/racial grounds is perpetuated in other spheres of life, adverse effects might be more likely. Issues such as schooling, youth work provision, political representation, perceptions of the allocation of regeneration resources, and employment prospects are likely to have a major impact.

Examining the statistics on the three northern cities, we find that the interaction between people of different communities at school is not high. The key role that school district boundaries and catchment areas play in the process of segregation should not be overlooked. In the USA school segregation appears to be strongly linked to residential segregation.

The lack of mutual understanding that is likely as a result of school segregation is an issue that is unlikely to disappear unless active steps are taken to overcome the problem. Lord Ouseley's report on Bradford repeats some of the earlier criticisms of the failings of the education system, namely that it 'is not doing enough to counter negativity, ignorance and racial hatred through effective teaching and learning'

There is a host of other issues to be examined when considering schooling and the link with the adverse effects of segregation. Space precludes more than a listing. School boundaries and catchment areas have already been mentioned. Others include admission policies, entrance tests, and how faith schools do or do not play a part in breaking down barriers.

Looking at youth work provision in these areas there is also some evidence that the facilities that do exist are primarily used by one racial group or another. Efforts seem hampered by declining

# *How regeneration funding allocation is made and who is involved in decision-making requires more attention.*

resources and inadequate transport facilities, again illustrating the interaction of different factors in contributing to or hindering the process of segregation.

## **Planning integrated communities**

Youth Service provision highlights a wider issue, namely that of planning. The planning process needs examination in order to see whether the framework provides incentives for encouraging integrated communities, or at least communities that share a common interest in improving facilities.

Perceptions about the allocation of regeneration resources may have played a part in assisting the BNP in Burnley to register the second highest BNP vote in the country: the 'Independents' who comprise the main opposition on the Council have argued that 'Asian' areas receive a disproportionate amount of government regeneration funding. Whether or not this analysis is correct, the issues of how regeneration funding allocation is made, how the results are communicated, and who is involved in the decision making, are all subjects that require attention, if regeneration is to help the process of binding communities more closely together.

## **Segregation and regeneration**

The consequences of economic deprivation and poorer employment opportunities in certain areas should not be underestimated when analysing processes of segregation and regeneration. Evidence from Northern Ireland and the USA suggests a strong connection between levels of economic deprivation and inter-communal conflict. It would be foolish to suggest that middle-class children and their parents are prejudice-free when it comes to attitudes about 'others', but economic decay and a lack of employment opportunities, even if relative, do not appear to be conducive to good inter-communal relations. Mutual support from family and friends is even more important in the face of deprivation and this in turn helps continue the cycle of segregation.

The trouble about the litany of woes that have been highlighted earlier is that it can all too easily

paint a picture of 'victimhood' or lead to an enervating sense that nothing much can be done about the situation as it exists. Neither would be accurate. The article has touched on issues where different policies might make a difference. There are examples in the UK and the USA of action that can and has made a difference, leading to a shared sense of community or at least an avoidance or reduction of the kind of violence that we have seen this year. A few examples include:

- An OFSTED report of a school that involved pupils and teachers in training on how to deal with persistent racial conflict. Another that has encouraged pupils to walk back home in mixed groups to provide protection for all.
- Instituting more pro-active targeted education and youth work campaigns that include white young people, like the Bede House project in South London where racist attacks and harassment fell by over 40% during the period the scheme was running.
- Projects in the USA that have successfully maintained genuine integrated communities, many for longer than 30 years, and in the face of a growing pattern of residential re-segregation. Some of these were established with the specific aim of putting into practice the ideals of the Civil Rights movement. Reports suggest that some 10 million North Americans are living in such relatively stable diverse communities.
- Numerous projects in Northern Ireland funded through the District Council Community Relations Programme. These include projects bringing together pre-school children and their mothers/childminders from both religious communities, a private sector-funded programme that brings Protestant and Catholic teenagers together to work on environmental projects and a project that develops curriculum materials for teachers on the subject of 'teaching controversial issues'.

Individual programmes might be effective in themselves. The challenge must be to learn from

them in a way that informs a co-ordinated approach by all those institutions that have a role in helping to make our society a place of greater freedom and real choice about where individuals wish to live and work.

Government, central and local, clearly have a large role to play in this process. A wholly top-down approach, however, is unlikely to be effective, as elements of the Local Strategic Partnership programme already recognise. Communities have to be involved in the solutions, and where necessary, capacity building will be an essential element in implementing successful regeneration schemes.

Government bodies, however, are not the only ones that face a challenge in deciding what to do about segregation: religious organisations, the Press, political parties and the private sector all need to examine their role and attitudes if we are to steer away from the malign effects of mutual mistrust, incomprehension and fear that can accompany residential and life segregation.

## **Shared vision**

Perhaps one of the most important elements in tackling the adverse effects of segregation is to be found in that somewhat overworked phrase, 'the vision thing'. Without a shared vision of the kind of tolerant, mutually supportive society we would like to see throughout the UK, we might be condemned to see a repetition of the events of 2001. If the vision leads us to adopt novel solutions or to challenge accepted wisdom, for example that we might not be able to leave housing or employment solutions primarily to market forces, then that might be a small price to pay for a healthier and stronger society. •

**Rodney Waldeck is a consultant with IRIS Consulting and Gurbux Singh is Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality.**

*Copies of a longer version of the article are available – fax 020 7251 2363.*