

A STUDY OF THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE:

What draws people of faith to right-wing organisations
and what effects does the EDL have on
community cohesion and interfaith relations?

H.S.Lane

Reviewed by Dr. Matthew Feldman
on behalf of



FAITH MATTERS

Working Globally, Impacting Locally
www.faith-matters.org

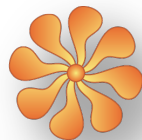


A STUDY OF THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE:

What draws people of faith to right-wing organisations
and what effects does the EDL have on
community cohesion and interfaith relations?

H.S.Lane

Reviewed by Dr. Matthew Feldman



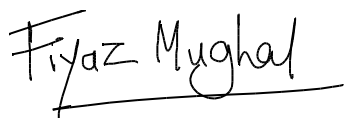
FAITH MATTERS

Working Globally, Impacting Locally
www.faith-matters.org

Foreword

This report, the second in the series of reports on the English Defence League (EDL) looks at the impact of their campaigns on faith communities and those within some faith communities who promote and support the EDL. The assumption is that people of faith will not be drawn to groups like the EDL and their desire to cause division and inflame tensions in local areas in our country. Yet, this is not the case as some within faith communities believe that by allying with the EDL, they can marginalise and stigmatize another faith community, namely Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. The old adage of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend,' rings true to them.

The EDL mainly uses Christian symbolism in its promotion and publicity material. The fact that the vast majority of EDL sympathisers do not regularly attend church is of no significance to them. Nor is the fact that many EDL sympathisers have no real motivation towards faith apart from a hatred of Muslims. The use of Christian symbolism in their eyes is a way of engaging others in their cause, whilst supposedly sending a message to Muslims that they are the 'true' defenders of Christianity. This narrative, whilst twisted and corrupting the true messages of Christianity will no doubt resonate with some and building community resilience against such hate is therefore key. We salute key faith based groups like the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Community Security Trust and the Sikh focussed Turban Campaign who have stood up and forcefully denounced those like the EDL who seek to attract support from believers in these faiths. We also stand by those like the Bishop of St Albans and Bishop Tony Robinson of the Kirklees Faith Forum for their stance against promoters of hate like the EDL. Together, faith communities are a powerful force for good in our country. However, we must never take for granted that this cohesion will always be a given. It must be worked upon day and night as the forces of hate and darkness press us from all sides.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiyaz Mughal". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Fiyaz Mughal OBE – Founder & Director, Faith Matters, September 2012

Executive Summary

Abstract

- This report was commissioned to provide an analysis and evaluation of the English Defence League (EDL) and the threat it poses at a community level.
- The research draws attention to the tactics and propaganda employed by the EDL in their attempt to attract support from Christians, Jews, Sikhs and Hindus.
- Further investigation reveals the responses from different faith communities in reaction to the EDL's targeted recruitment campaigns.
- The report includes an assessment of the EDL's claim that it only opposes Islamic extremism and does not promote an anti-Islamic ideology. It hypothesises that the EDL is actually an inherently Islamophobic organisation that attempts to isolate the Muslim community by creating a global 'counter-jihad' network.
- Recommendations are offered with the aim of strengthening inter-faith relations, with suggestions for how to develop more unified and accommodating communities now and in the future.

Key points

- There is a need to maintain resilience as the EDL's message is tailored to play on historical angsts between faith groups and their campaigning with faith groups is thought out.
- Christian institutions on a national level, bar a few locally, have not been robust in condemning the actions of the EDL which disrupt communities and who attempt to divide Christian and Muslim communities.
- Religious institutions need to recognise the fact that a small number of radicals within their communities might be drawn to right-wing organisations. This issue should not be discounted or ignored as it can only be addressed by accepting that the problem exists, no matter how minor.
- The EDL has European and international links which allows it to fundraise at an international level. British authorities need to look at their international money flows, especially when extremist groups are involved. Links with Pamela Geller's Stop the Islamization of America campaign and the ability to raise funds from the US need to be highlighted, since US residents promoting street based social unrest in the UK by donating to the EDL needs to be curtailed.

- Religious communities should emphasise that the actions of small groups of extremists should not be allowed to represent their whole faith. Each group should publicly denounce their actions robustly at local and national levels.

For the future

- The Jewish Defence League needs to be effectively outlawed in the UK in light of the FBI's 2001 classification of it as a right wing terrorist organisation. The Jewish Defence League UK branch posted a cartoon online on 18th September 2012 abusing the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad in a graphic sexual manner. On the 16th of September 2012, the JDL-UK Facebook page suggested that Hilary Clinton should be hung. The posting by the JDL administrator suggested, "bring a noose." A further posting on that day suggested that, "whore Hilary deserves to be put on a chair," – posted by the JLD administrator, allegedly by UK based Roberta Moore, the ex-head of the EDL's Jewish Division. In September 2012, the site also abused the deceased US Ambassador to Libya, though these postings were subsequently removed after they were highlighted by anti-racist groups.
- Groups like the Turban Campaign and Sikhs Against the EDL should be supported in their work against the EDL, given that they are committed, dedicated campaigners who have campaigned for years against the EDL without any resource. Their impact can be widened.
- Faith organisations should continue to develop ties with other religious organisations to foster good relations and promote cross-faith solidarity to counter the EDL's attempts to 'divide and conquer'. These are on-going processes and such partnerships need a consistency of focus.

Contents

Chapter 1 – INTRODUCTION

1. 1	Overview	p.7
1.2	Background	p.7
1.3	Purpose	p.8
1.4	Methodology	p.9

Chapter 2 – CHRISTIANITY

2.1	Links between the EDL and Christian communities	p.10
2.2	Online Links	p.11
2.3	Propaganda used to attract Christian support	p.13
2. 4	The response from the Christian communities	p.16

Chapter 3 – JUDAISM

3.1	Links between the EDL and Jewish communities	p.17
3.2	Online Links	p.22
3.3	Propaganda used to attract Jewish support	p.24
3.4	The response from the Jewish communities	p.26

Chapter 4 – SIKHISM

4.1	Links between the EDL and Sikh communities	p.28
4. 2	Online Links	p.30
4.3	Propaganda used to attract Sikh support	p.32
4. 4	The response from the Sikh communities	p.37

Chapter 5 – HINDUISM

5. 1	Links between the EDL and Hindu communities	p.40
5.2	Online Links	p.40
5. 3	Propaganda used to attract Hindu support	p.41
5.4	The response from the Hindu communities	p.44

Chapter 6 – ISLAM: The case of Abdul Rafiq	p.46
---	------

Chapter 7 – CONCLUSION	p.47
-------------------------------	------

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This report provides information on the English Defence League (EDL) and addresses the psychological, sociological, historical and religious reasons why people of faith might join an organisation that has been widely accused of violence, intolerance, and racism. It draws on the beliefs and experiences of supporters from different religious persuasions and assesses the popular notion that the EDL's agenda is a hate-fuelled one 'designed to increase tensions, raise hate and divide communities'.¹

Chapter One provides a brief outline of the structure and content of the report and an introduction to the EDL. The main body of text is then divided into four chapters focusing on Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism which discuss why people of these respective faiths might join the EDL and remain as supporters. The propaganda and recruitment tools used by the EDL to target specific faith groups are also addressed and each chapter incorporates testimonies from members of religious communities in support of the proposed theories. Their reactions regarding religious EDL members and their responses to the attempts made by the EDL to forge alliances with their religious communities will also be addressed. The penultimate chapter follows the same structure as the previous four but focuses on the extremely small number of members of the EDL who come from Muslim communities. It is something of a side note as the number of Muslim members is extremely low, but it does provide an insight as to why those that *have* joined defend the EDL and believe more Muslims should take the same stand. The report concludes in Chapter Seven by looking at the effects the organisation has on communities and interfaith relations. Key areas of traction are identified and recommendations are made as to how the threat from the EDL can be countered and how interfaith relations and community cohesion can be strengthened from a grassroots level.

1.2 Background

The EDL is arguably the largest populist street movement to emerge in Britain since the 1970s and it has been controversial since its conception.² It describes itself in its manifesto as a 'non-racist, non-violent, human rights organisation', whose *raison d'être* is a vehement opposition to Islamic extremism, the 'Islamification' of Britain, (particularly the 'creeping' introduction of Sharia law), and the 'subsequent erosion of English culture and Christian values'. However, since its emergence in 2009, the EDL has attracted hostility due to its controversial and aggressive views on Islam, and the effect it has on communities and inter-faith relations.

The EDL claims to oppose only *radical* Islamism but it is frequently branded a racist network of football hooligans who uphold and promulgate an ideology that is extremist in its ethos and

¹ <http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/fm-reports/english-defense-league-report.pdf> p.3

² There is some debate as to whether the EDL should be defined as a populist movement but its ideology is in line with the Cambridge dictionary's definition of the term: 'political ideas and activities that are intended to represent ordinary people's needs and wishes'. In its report, Demos also defines the EDL as a populist movement http://www.demos.co.uk/files/Inside_the_edl_WEB.pdf?1331035419 p.3

virulently anti-Muslim. The most common accusation is that it employs a violent brand of cultural racism directed against all Muslims and attempts to isolate them by severing ties between them and other religious communities. EDL leadership deny such indictments and are quick to highlight the inclusive policies of their 'multi-ethnic, multi-religious movement'. Trevor Kelway, (real name Davy Cooling), a spokesman for Casuals United – a splinter group of the EDL – has said, 'we would march alongside Muslims and Jews who are against militant Islam...they can join the EDL as long as they accept an English way of life. It is the people who threaten with bombs and violence and threaten and bomb our troops – they don't belong here'.

The EDL operates an on-going recruitment drive targeting individuals from different religious communities; partly to increase their support base, but mainly to try and reverse the racist image they have gained. Professor Matthew Goodwin states the EDL 'wants members of the Sikh community, similarly members of the Jewish community, to become involved as a way of opposing what [they] call radical militant Islam', and it has also targeted Christians and Hindus. It appears it is also trying to forge links with groups that have 'historical angst' against Muslims, and view other religious communities as fertile recruiting grounds. These tactics have been compared to those of the British National Party (BNP) after the *Guardian* reported in 2001 that 'racists from the BNP joined forces with extremists from the Sikh and Hindu communities in an anti-Islamic campaign that has been blamed for stirring up racial violence'.³

The EDL strenuously denies any similarities to the BNP, which it defines as a racist, anti-Semitic party, and draws attention to its own faith branches, namely Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, and Pakistani Christian.⁴ The EDL claims these specialist divisions prove it is not a racist group, demonstrates diversity, and actually helps strengthen interfaith relations. On the group's official forum, EDL leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, aka Tommy Robinson, has responded to the question 'what has the EDL actually achieved?' by claiming his organisation has been a positive, national force in building local community groups and has 'brought people of many ethnic, religious and political backgrounds together in a way never achieved before'.⁵ This report questions the validity of this statement in light of the popular opinion that the EDL in fact contributes greatly to the issues of cultural intolerance and community division, and exacerbates intra- and interfaith tensions.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of what the EDL is and what it actually stands for.
- Investigate links the EDL has with different religious communities and organisations.

³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2001/dec/23/race.politics>

⁴ EDL member 1 claimed that the faith divisions were in the process of being dissolved and new recruits were being directed towards their local division instead. He said the need to prove the EDL as being a non-racist organisation had greatly decreased since its inception and he felt it was a better idea for all members to be fully integrated, 'as one'. At the time of writing the faith divisions still existed in an online capacity.

⁵ <http://englishdefenceleague.org/forum/edl-chat/what-has-the-edl-achieved/page-2/>

- Question why people of faith might join the EDL and what originally attracted them to the organisation.
- Raise awareness about the strategies employed by the EDL to attract people of faith to the group. This includes its use of religious symbolism and reference to holy texts and histories.
- Assess how the EDL affects communities and interfaith relations and highlight areas where further work is needed to improve cohesion between faith groups.
- Suggest how to increase understanding between religious communities, and make recommendations concerning the implementation of action projects and strategies to help strengthen community relations and understanding, and increase interfaith dialogue.

1.4 Methodology

This report aims to provide a balanced viewpoint on the EDL, for attempting to discuss the group by employing biased categorisation both confuses the issue and exacerbates the problem. The EDL needs to be understood in the social and political context of today, not through simplistic comparisons with past organisations. It is a mistake simply to dismiss its members as being unhinged and violent, for to successfully confront and defeat something one must first understand the threat one is facing; as Paulo Freire queried: ‘How can I enter into a dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?’

The research for this report draws on newspapers, electronic sources, statistical databases, blogs and academic reports, and a limited number of secondary sources. All electronic sources were accessed in the period April 23rd – August 23rd 2012. Questionnaires were sent to different religious institutions in Britain (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu), as well as to interfaith charities and organisations, and their responses were incorporated into the findings. Official EDL websites, blogs, forums and social networking sites were utilised, and interviews were conducted with leading EDL activists as well as ex-supporters. Statements have been incorporated from lower-ranking supporters as well as leading activists, which demonstrate how the former often present more extreme views than the latter and sometimes get contradicted by higher-ranking officials. However, their comments are still telling, and show how the ‘officials’ sometimes let their mask slip as well. All figures and statistics were correct at the time of going to print

Chapter 2: CHRISTIANITY

2.1 Links between the EDL and Christian Communities

Despite not defining itself a religious organisation, the EDL has attempted to portray strong ties with Christianity, and religious references and symbolism are deeply intertwined in its rhetoric and insignia. In a recent survey by think-tank Demos, 45% of EDL supporters questioned stated they were Christians and the group's mission statement defines itself as 'the final bulwark of Christianity against an uncaring world'. One of the EDL's primary goals is to 'defend' Britain's Christian values against Islam, as it believes 'the propaganda campaign against Christian culture continues both in government policy and popular media', and 'many of the media outlets are owned by Islamics [sic] or by people with no loyalty to or feeling for the British and American people.'⁶ The EDL casts its struggle in religious terms, and seeks to add a sense of cosmic significance by portraying a war being waged between Western civilisation and Islam, and more broadly between Good and Evil.

In 2010 the Pakistani Christian Division of the EDL was established, which encompassed 'Pakistanis, British Pakistanis, and Christian Pakistanis who support the EDL in its goal against the Islamisation of England and the UK'. Largely through this division, the EDL has developed a small number of national and international links to Christian individuals and organisations and has supported causes related to the Christian faith. In December 2010 the British Pakistani Christian Association held a protest demanding freedom for Asia Bibi, the Pakistani Christian woman who received a death sentence for blasphemy, and much like at the Sikh protest in Luton this year, around a dozen EDL members joined the demonstrators in a show of support, including Ruby Aktar, the ex-leader of the Pakistani Christian Division. Several months later in March 2011, *Christian Voice* announced it would be leafleting football supporters attending Wembley Stadium for the England versus Ghana match to warn them that halal meat was allegedly being served in the stadium takeaways.⁷ Alan Lake (aka Alan Ayling), a key financier of the EDL who has links to Christian evangelical groups in Britain and the USA, heavily promoted the event on his 4Freedoms website and urged EDL members to attend. Conservative Party member Stephen Green, another member of *Christian Voice*, later demonstrated his online support of the EDL, posting comments on its official Facebook page designed to incense Christian extremists and encourage them to join their Jewish counterparts in voicing their approval of the EDL. On the 'Yorkshire EDL North Yorkshire' Facebook Page on February 2nd 2011 he posted: 'British Muslims want to kill you and you are giving aid to Muslims, please stop giving aid to Muslim countries'.

Despite having a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) division, the EDL has also fostered links with the extremist Christian Action Network (CAN); a homophobic and Islamophobic organisation founded by Martin Mawyer 'to protect America's religious and moral heritage through educational efforts'. A CAN media team interviewed EDL members during a visit to the UK in 2009

⁶ <http://englishdefenceleague.org/forums/topic/what-has-the-edl-achieved/>

⁷ Christian Voice (CV) is a British pressure group which, in language very similar to the EDL's, claims to 'uphold Christianity as the Faith of the United Kingdom, to be a voice for Biblical values in law and public policy, and to defend and support traditional family life'. However CV has been widely criticised and the Rev. Dr. David Peel, leader of the United Reformed Church, called it 'a disgrace' and described its claim that it represents Christians as 'absurd'.

with Robert Spencer – the founder of anti-Islam website Jihad Watch – and again in March 2012 when they met various counter-jihad activists in London including representatives from the EDL. Tommy Robinson and Paul Weston, the present chairman of the British Freedom Party and close affiliate of the EDL, are also regular guests on Michael Coren’s Arena TV show, while Chris Knowles, a member of the EDL and the International Civil Liberties Alliance (ICLA), also appeared on it recently speaking about his sacking from Leeds City Council allegedly for belonging to the EDL.⁸ Coren is a member of the Catholic Right, and like Mawyer is particularly known for his right-wing views and stringent objections to homosexuality. Weston and Lennon are also friendly with Andy Miller of the Tennessee Freedom Coalition (TFC), who recently hosted ‘The Dangers of Islam’ event and who has links to the British group Christian Concern (CC).⁹ The EDL say of the TFC, ‘[They] have been watching the rise and work of the EDL for a while now and like what they see, they view us as the biggest players in the fight against Islamic extremism in the UK and are delighted to see so many people clued up about the dangers of radical Islam’.¹⁰ Terry Jones, the controversial pastor who threatened to burn copies of the Qur’an, was also invited to speak at an EDL rally in 2011 but a spokesman for the group later confirmed the invitation had been withdrawn due to his critical views on homosexuality and race.

2. 2 Online Links

The EDL is a product of the Facebook generation and there are several Christian social networking groups officially linked to the organisation or who are sympathetic towards it. The primary ones are listed below and whilst ‘likes’ are not an ideal way of showing support, they nonetheless do show some level of support:

- *Christian Defence League* – 3642 ‘likes’.
- *Christian Defence League (Angels Division)* – 597 ‘likes’.
- *EDL Persecuted Christians living under Islam* – 830 members.
- *Christian and Jewish Crusaders United against Radical Islam* – 345 ‘likes’.

⁸ According to Powerbase, the reason for Knowles’ suspension was the fact that UAF exposed him as the director of the US-based Centre for Vigilant Freedom.

⁹ Hope not Hate has listed Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre (CLC) as Christian groups involved in the ‘counter-Jihad’ movement.

¹⁰ <http://englishdefenceleague.org/tennessee-freedom-coalition-more-support-from-across-the-pond/>

- *Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians and Jews who support the EDL* – There are three separate groups with very similar variations of this name. The total combined number of members is 696 but it is not clear which percentages are made up by which faith members.

Other Christian-inspired websites that are linked to the EDL include:

- <http://4freedoms.ning.com/group/christians> – Alan Lake’s anti-Islam website. It has links to the official EDL website and technical support for the 4Freedoms blog is provided by EDL activist and close friend of Lake’s ‘Kinana Nadir’.¹¹ Trevor Kelway, aka Davy Cooling, also has a page on the site, as did Chris Knowles before it was removed.

(This page also lists many links to anti-Muslim stories in relation to the persecution of Hindus such as ‘Jihad against Hindu Kashmirians’[sic], ‘49 Million Hindus Missing Due to Islamic Atrocities’ and ‘Destruction of Hindu Temples by Muslims’. Nothing is mentioned regarding atrocities against Muslims and there are consistent attempts to demonise and dehumanise Muslims & Islam.)

- <http://lionheartuk.blogspot.co.uk/> – Paul Ray, the creator of this site, was a co-founder of the EDL and the St George’s STG Division of the EDL (although his relationships with the leadership have since soured). The blog’s title is a reference to Richard I and the Crusades, and is a nod to battles between Christianity and Islam. LionheartUK also contains many Biblical quotations and states ‘now more than ever does the world need a revival and resurgence of the legendary Army of Christian Warriors, the Knights Templars’. On 31st July 2011, Interpol asked Maltese police to investigate Paul Ray in connection with possible links to Anders Breivik. Ray conceded that he may have been an inspiration for Breivik, but deplored his actions.¹²
- <http://www.christianconcern.com/> – Has links to Lake’s 4Freedoms website and lists Islam and sexual orientation as concerns.
- <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.co.uk/> – This virulently anti-Islam website, which published articles by ‘Fjordman’¹³ and Anders Breivik, states: ‘At the siege of Vienna in 1683 Islam seemed poised to overrun Christian Europe. We are in a new phase of a very old war’. (Note Breivik’s similar reference to today’s world as ‘2083’.) There is much two-way traffic

¹¹ Kinana’s name is believed to be in reference to Kinana ibn al-Rabi, a seventh century Jewish leader, and opponent of Muhammad. He was eventually killed on Muhammad’s orders.

¹² <http://www.independent.com.mt/news.asp?newsitemid=129700>

¹³ ‘Fjordman’ is the alias of Peder Nøstvold Jensen, a Norwegian far right blogger who is very active in the counter-jihad movement and believes Muslims are planning to overthrow Western society. Anders Breivik quoted him extensively in his manifesto and he is considered a hero of the so-called ‘counter-jihad’ movement.

between this blogspot and the official EDL website, while British Freedom Party (BFP) leader Paul Weston also has articles published there including one entitled *The Ethnic Cleansing of the English*. The links are not only online: on July 9th 2012 Tommy Robinson attended a ‘non-inscrit’ meeting at the European parliament in Brussels with notorious European Islamophobes including ‘the mentors of Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik’.¹⁴ These included Edward ‘Ned’ May, co-founder of the Gates of Vienna (GOV) website, and Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, who was recently fined by an Austrian court for ‘denigration of religious beliefs of a legally recognised religion’.¹⁵ *

* These websites are not ranked particularly highly on Google search but the busiest of those listed is the Gates of Vienna blog.

2.3 Propaganda used to attract Christian support

The Image of Britain as a Christian country

The propaganda and language used by the EDL are laced with Christian imagery and reference. The group promotes the image of Britain as a Christian country and equates Christianity with upstanding values and morality. According to the EDL, Christianity represents ‘good’, while Islam is presented as its antithesis – a dark force that threatens the very foundations of British life and English values. (The fact that Muslims only make up 4.6% of England’s demographic is not acknowledged.)¹⁶ In December 2011, David Cameron made a speech on the failure of multiculturalism in which he reaffirmed England’s status as a Christian country and aligned Western values with the faith, which was accused of being ‘propaganda for the EDL’. At the EDL rally held on the same day, Tommy Robinson told the crowd it was part of a ‘tidal wave of patriotism’ that was sweeping Britain, led by Cameron and the EDL. He also aligned patriotism with Christianity (and therefore Islam with anti-British ideology), declaring ‘We are a Christian country and we should not be afraid to say so...what I am saying is that the Bible has helped to give Britain a set of values and morals which make Britain what it is today.’¹⁷

In the lead up to the ‘European counter-jihad’ rally in Aarhus, Denmark in March 2012, Twitter was also flooded with EDL comments claiming that the demonstrators were ‘doing God’s work’ in Denmark and thanking God that they were ‘living in white Christian Britain’. Tommy Robinson was presented as a Christian fighting Islamism, in much the same way as the Crusaders were: when he was allegedly attacked by a group of ‘Asians’ the EDL released a statement saying that Muslim on Christian violence had existed for centuries and that Robinson had been attacked for being a Christian speaking out about Islam. This association of the EDL and Christianity adds to inter-religious

¹⁴ <http://www.neurope.eu/article/breivik-s-mentors-european-parliament>

¹⁵ Richard Howitt MEP highlighted a similarity between the BNP and EDL’S activities – ‘In the same way Nick Griffin and the BNP tried to use the European Parliament as a spring board and failed abysmally, the EDL will find they are badly out-of-their-depth’.

¹⁶ <http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/2010/how-many-muslims/>

¹⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-16224394>

tensions, is a cynical manipulation of Christian theology and symbolism and further divides religious communities as it forces individuals to side with either Christianity or Islam.

The Crusades

The EDL uses historical references in an attempt to show that tension between Muslims and Christians is intrinsic to the Islamic faith and that violence directed against Christians has occurred for centuries. They profess that Christians should make a stand against Islam as their forefathers did, and refer to the Crusades to insinuate they are the next generation of holy warriors. The imagery used is unmistakably Christian in origin and reinforces the concept of their members being involved in a religious struggle. Their emblem is made up of the Christian cross encircled by the words *In Hoc Signo Vinces*, which is a Latin rendering of the Greek phrase meaning ‘in this sign you will conquer’ and was an early Christian motto adopted by Emperor Constantine I when he conquered the Roman Empire with a cross as his standard. It was also used as the emblem of the Knights Templar who were among the most skilled fighting units of the Crusades. Officially endorsed by the Catholic Church, the Order of the Knights Templar comprised a generation of religious knights who wore white mantles with a red cross when they fought the Saracens and who were also involved in the massacres of Muslims and Jews during the Crusades¹⁸. The emblem can also be found on the Knight Templar Cross, which is the name of the chivalric order affiliated with Freemasonry and one of several Masonic Orders in which membership is only open to Freemasons who profess a belief in the Christian religion. A red cross on a white background is also clearly reminiscent of the flag of St George, which can be seen decorating the EDL websites and their merchandise. The official EDL Facebook page shows how supporters see their cause as being symbolic of the historical battles fought between Christians and Muslims, and view it from a religious angle:

‘Lest we forget, thanks Constantine, before his great victory in the battle of Milvian Bridge (312 A.D.), which brought him to power as the first Christian Roman Emperor, saw in the sky a cross with the words “In Hoc Signo Vinces”– “in this sign you shall conquer.” The victory of every Christian is achieved always through the power of the Cross. It was this sign that the Catholic armies defeated the Muslims at Lepanto. The Pope had asked that the Cross be displayed on all the ships’ sails and that the prayers should be offered before battle ...and the Christian fleet was victorious, and Europe saved from becoming Muslim...In the CHRIST BLOOD RED CROSS OF THE EDL!!!’ [sic]

The current situation in the Middle East

Contemporary events in the Middle East – particularly in Egypt and Pakistan where Robinson states ‘Christians, Hindus, [and] all different religions are being persecuted’ – are also used as evidence of Islamic intolerance and violence and as incentives to join the EDL’s cause. The clashes between Muslims and Coptic Christians in Egypt are used to demonstrate Islamic barbarity and the EDL speak

¹⁸ <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/jerusalem-captured-in-first-crusade>

of the need to support their Christian ‘brothers and sisters’.¹⁹ One contributor on the official EDL forum wrote: ‘It’s a pity we weren’t still under the Holy Roman Empire and go and protect these Christians we have betrayed them’ [sic]. Tommy Robinson repeatedly refers to the two-tier system that supposedly operates in the UK, (as do the EDL’s associates, including Jihad Watch and the Swiss Defence League), and all of the groups have posted articles about ‘the system’, which allows Muslims to build mosques on British soil despite the fact that there are no official churches in Saudi Arabia for example,²⁰ and Christians cannot own a Bible in some Middle Eastern Islamic states. This reasoning forms the basis for their argument that mosques should not be allowed to be built so freely in England, and acts as a warning against letting Sharia overtake the British legal system.

What Saudi Arabia has to do with British Muslims is something that Robinson does not choose to comment on, nor that Christians practise their religion (and have Bibles) in Muslim majority countries such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates.

The image of Muslims as ‘the other’

All organisations and individuals with a cause attempt to create a divide between themselves and whatever/whomever they oppose. The same language and tactics are repeatedly demonstrated: in particular, the demonization of one’s opponents by portraying them as the sub-human ‘other’ – and therefore the opposition and enemy force – is a tactic that has been employed for hundreds of years. The depictions employed are Manichean opposites and force the observer to choose an alliance between Christianity or Islam – essentially Good or Evil. This tactic of dividing communities by creating scapegoats is typical of the EDL and has been seen throughout history: for example in Nazi Germany against the Jews, and at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia. The Tsar tried to deflect political opposition by pogroms against the ‘enemy within’ – the Jews – who were presented as an ‘anti-Christian’ people and thus formed a perfect scapegoat for Russian nationalists. More recently in Britain, when a small number of radical Muslims abused soldiers during their homecoming parade in Luton 2009 and burnt an image of a poppy on Armistice Day in 2010, the EDL used these events to demonise the whole Muslim community, their rhetoric mirroring the claims of anti-patriotism wielded against the Jews in Russia.

This tactic of demonization serves the same purpose of making Muslims the enemy within and creates a patriotic duty to stop them ‘undermining the Western way of life’; relying on a mob mentality that is cultured to divert peoples’ anger away from the true oppressive sources and towards an easy scapegoat. In a study by Faith Matters that addresses religious cohesion in Britain, Muslim participants said they felt like ‘the Jews of Europe’,²¹ which is an interesting and potentially instructive parallel from history. EDL propaganda (and certain tabloid newspapers that rely on broad and sensationalist headlines), portray the majority of Muslims as an ‘enemy within’ and claim their

¹⁹ This is interesting language as it employs the same logic as found in Islam: that of a global faith community unrestricted by racial or ethnic barriers (*Ummah*).

²⁰ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/saudis-top-religious-official-calls-for-destruction-of-all-churches-71506/>

<http://listverse.com/2011/11/24/top-10-most-dangerous-countries-for-christians/>

²¹ http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/cohesive_community_report090908.pdf p.9

culture and tenets of their faith are entirely at odds with Christian ways of life, morality, and Western political systems.

2. 4 The response from Christian Communities

It is interesting to note the relatively minor response from Christian communities in relation to the EDL's appropriation of their faith. The main Sikh, Jewish and Hindu organisations in the UK have released official representative statements condemning the EDL, but their Christian counterparts have remained quiet, although several individuals *have* spoken out independently. Shortly before the EDL's demonstration in Yorkshire in June 2012, Bishop Tony Robinson of the Kirklees Faith Forum, released a critical statement, saying: 'We condemn the actions of all those who seek to divide and sow the seeds of distrust between our communities...And the EDL's use of the Christian religion to support their perspective is a blasphemous misinterpretation of the Christian gospel'.²² In his 2011 Christmas sermon, Reverend Dr Alan Smith, the Bishop of St Albans, addressed the issue of racism and used the EDL as an example of a group that promotes 'hatred and unrest'. He also strongly objected the fact that the EDL are 'trying to commandeer Christianity to support their cause', and warned his congregation to oppose groups that 'try to divide communities, races and religions'.²³

Compared to the other faith denominations, the online response from the Christian community has also been relatively small, and the only Facebook group to emerge – *Christians Against the EDL* – only has 121 members as compared with the *Sikhs Against the EDL* Facebook campaign that has 1984 'likes'. The former group opposes the fact that EDL members often talk of being Christian and defending Christianity, and states their members wish 'to show the EDL that their claiming of Christianity is a fallacy, based upon not understanding the Gospel. God is love, not racism'. The group is allied with Hope Not Hate and Unite Against Fascism and has posted links to the Christian Defence League and the Facebook presence of the Christian Muslim Forum. The Forum is a charity built on friendship between Christians and Muslims that attempts to show that faith can be a catalyst for good relationships between each other and in wider society. Their online component seeks to build interfaith networks, generate dialogue and better understanding of both faiths, and counter the propaganda that is produced in relation to both Islam and Christianity. Christians Against the EDL has also posted many links to EDL counter-demonstrations, and calls for their members to attend.

²² <http://www.thepressnews.co.uk/NewsDetails.asp?id=7887>

²³ <http://www.islamophobiatoday.com/2010/12/26/bishop-of-st-albans-urges-christians-to-stand-firm-against-edl/>

Chapter 3: JUDAISM

3.1 Links between the EDL and Jewish Communities

The connection between the EDL and a small section of Jewish communities is one of the most interesting and controversial. The EDL is frequently condemned as a fascist, Nazi organisation, partly because supporters have been pictured making 'Sieg Heil' salutes, yet in 2010 a Jewish wing was formed for 'Jewish supporters of the EDL and supporters of Jewish people everywhere'. It became their flagship faith division and according to a report by the *Jewish Chronicle*, 'hundreds' of Jews rushed to join their Facebook group,²⁴ with one supporter writing, 'we are all Shayeret 13', in support of the Israeli Defence Force naval Special Forces unit involved in the Gaza flotilla incident. The division is small but particularly vocal and was originally led by Roberta Moore, a Kahanist²⁵ sympathiser and non-practising Brazilian Jew, who claimed '[the EDL] are causing ripples everywhere because [they] are achieving things the Jewish community has not. CST and the Board of Deputies speak out but their voices are not heard. People want to see action on their streets'. (The CST is the Anglo-Jewry's Community Security Trust, which monitors anti-Semitic incidents in Britain.)²⁶

The connection between a small number of Jewish activists and the EDL has been apparent since the group's formation when Tommy Robinson wore a Star of David lapel badge in his first public speech and made a point of 'bigging up' Israel who he said 'had [its] back to the wall'. Israeli flags have been paraded since the earliest rallies and the Jewish Star has been amalgamated into the St George flags carried by EDL supporters, while in September 2011 Tommy Robinson disguised himself as an orthodox Jew and was introduced as Rabbi Benjamin Kidderman to his supporters during a rally in Tower Hamlets, East London. He donned a black hat and fake beard in an apparent attempt to evade his bail conditions, and made the now infamous speech starting: 'Every single Muslim watching this on YouTube, on 7/7 you got away with killing and maiming British citizens, you got away with it. You had better understand that we have built a network from one end of this country to the other end, and we will not tolerate it, and the Islamic community will feel the full force of the English Defence League if we see any of our citizens killed, maimed or hurt on British soil ever again'.²⁷ Robinson then clarified the EDL's position concerning Israel and Judaism saying: 'One of the fundamental beliefs that this movement was built on was its support for Israel's right to defend itself...The reason for this is because Israel is a shining star of democracy. If Israel falls, we all fall. This is what our movement has been built on for two years'.²⁸ His message was clear: 'we the EDL share the same goals as Israel'. In December 2010 Geert Wilders, founder of the Dutch far right Freedom Party,²⁹ made one

²⁴ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/32535/edl-step-their-jewish-recruitment>

²⁵ Israel has banned Kahanist movements since the mid 1980's:

http://www.adl.org/terrorism/symbols/kahane_2.asp

²⁶ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/39434/the-english-defence-league-and-surfing-rabbi>

²⁷ <http://www.pickledpolitics.com/archives/13622>

²⁸ <http://wideshut.co.uk/edl-officially-announce-ties-to-zionist-state-of-israel/>

²⁹ Wilders is best known for his notoriously critical views of Islam. In parallel to the EDL, he states 'I don't hate Muslims, I hate Islam' and has campaigned to stop what he perceives to be the 'Islamisation of the Netherlands'. He calls the Qur'an the 'jihadist's Mein Kampf' and has attempted to get it banned in the Netherlands, advocates ending immigration from Muslim countries, and supports banning the construction of new mosques. As a result, he has become a particularly contentious figure and in January 2009, the

of several visits to Israel and used almost identical language when he gave a speech in Tel Aviv. He spoke of Israel as the front line of the far right's counter-jihad ideology, saying: '[Israelis] are fighting our fight . . . If Jerusalem falls, Amsterdam and New York will be next.'³⁰

However unusual or erroneous an association between the far right and radical factions within Jewish communities seems, the case of the EDL is not a unique one, and the linguistic similarity noted above indicates there is an anti-Muslim prejudice being widely disseminated throughout the far right, particularly in Europe and North America. Within the last decade, far right activists have begun to forge alliances of convenience with radical Zionists, a coupling that has split the traditionally anti-Semitic far right movement in Europe. Hard-line Zionists see an alliance as an opportunity to diminish the Muslim presence and influence in the USA and Europe that they perceive as being detrimental to Israel, and Islamophobes mistakenly view the whole Jewish community as a receptive audience to their historical and scriptural anti-Islam propaganda and a ready-made support base (as opposed to an extreme minority of radical Zionists).

Additionally, due to the far right parties' association with anti-Semitism, they have long found it difficult to enter the political mainstream. However it seems that they are mutating; it is now unacceptable to be ostentatiously anti-Semitic and so their focus has moved from Jews to Muslims who are an easier target for scapegoating and abuse.³¹ Even the notoriously fascist BNP released a statement online in February 2012 saying 'we have Jewish members, probably more than the EDL, but we don't make a song and dance of it'.³² Nick Lowles from Hope Not Hate has said right-wing parties' attempts to appeal to different ethnic and cultural groups is tactical as, 'it allows them to portray themselves as being non-racist at the same time as legitimising their vicious and sustained attacks on the UK's Muslim communities'. Vidhya Ramalingam, an associate at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue similarly claims right wing parties are now actively trying to canvass Jewish (and other religious communities') support in order to soften their image: 'We see leading [far right] figures visiting Israel and saying positive things while keeping Islamophobic statements alive'. This acts as a clear indicator that there are more forms of racism than white supremacy and that a hatred of Muslims drives a pro-Israel agenda of groups like the EDL which is superficial since many activists revert back to type, based on a deep rooted hatred of minority communities and faiths.

In fact, several European political parties have tried to 'shed' their traditional anti-Semitic beliefs in an attempt to attract allies, which has happened most notably in France where Marine Le Pen has taken to professing her new found 'Philozionism' (love of Zionism). (Note her father founded the National Front and was last month charged as an apologist for war crimes and disputing the Holocaust as a crime against humanity.)³³ Right wing political figures from Norway, Holland, Austria and Belgium amongst others, have also publicly declared their support for Israel despite the fact that

Amsterdam Court of Appeal ordered Wilders' prosecution for 'incitement to hatred and discrimination' (although he was later acquitted).

³⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/06/israel-rightwing-europeans-migration-toxic>

³¹ It is interesting to note here that during the fascist era there was some cooperation and emulation between Nazis and small pockets of Muslim society, and scholars such as Robert Wistrich and Bernard Lewis have proposed the existence of ideological similarities between Islamic fundamentalism and Nazism, specifically a shared anti-Semitism.

³² <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/opportunity-be-seized-why-we-have-lifted-proscription-english-defence-league>

³³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5175968.stm>

several of their parties emerged from fascist origins. For example, in December 2010, Heinz-Christian Strache of Austria's Freedom Party and Filip Dewinter, a leading member of the far right Vlaams Belang party in Belgium, attended a conference in Jerusalem to support Israel's right to defend itself and toured the West Bank, voicing their support for settlers.³⁴

National and International Connections

The EDL has fostered some national and international links with ultra-Zionist pressure groups. Its closest affiliation is with the Jewish Defence League (JDL) which is run by Roberta Moore – even though it is a proscribed group in the USA and was described by the FBI as a 'right-wing terrorist group' in 2001. Meir Weinstein, National Director of the Canadian JDL, said of the EDL: 'From what we see they're on the streets and they're very vocal supporting Israel, supporting Israel's right to defend itself and standing up to political Islam, so that's about it.' Several EDL rallies have been promoted on the JDL's website, alongside the announcement, 'JDL supports the EDL...The EDL needs international support to help it support the values of freedom that Britain was once famous [for]. Now is the time to step forward and stop political Islam.' (However, what is also clear is that groups like the Jewish Defence League use social media to promote a larger physical presence than may actually be the case and claims made by them should be approached with some caution.)

In January 2011, Tommy Robinson was also invited to give a speech at the Toronto Zionist Centre by the Canadian wing of the JDL, for although the vast and overwhelming majority of British Jewish organisations have denounced the EDL, the JDL of Canada welcomes them. The Canadian branch of the JDL operates openly in North Toronto, which is perhaps a testament to the unprecedented strengthening of ties between Canada and Israel over the past six years, which in turn may explain their support for the EDL.

Rabbi Nachum Shifren is another figure with whom the EDL has developed a relationship, and who has been very vocal in his support for its members. Shifren originates from California and is also known as 'the surfing Rabbi' due to his passion for surfing, the ten years he spent as a Los Angeles County Lifeguard, and his founding of Jewish Surfers International and the Surf & Soul newsletter. After becoming a kibbutz volunteer at the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War and serving in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), Shifren later attended Toras Chayim Yeshiva in Jerusalem and Yeshivat Tomchei Tmimim in Kfar Chabad, Israel, where he received his rabbinical ordination in 1990. Rabbi Shifren, who is running in the November 2012 elections to represent the district of West Los Angeles in the state senate, is a dedicated Islamophobe and has many documented right wing links. In October 2010 he visited London to show solidarity with the EDL and to speak at a pro-Israel counter-demonstration its supporters were attending outside the Israeli Embassy. During his speech he described Muslims as 'dogs' who were trying to 'take over our countries' before saying 'history will be recorded that on this day, read by our children for eternity, one group lit the spark to liberate us

³⁴ Filip Dewinter has strong ties to Nazism; in 1988 he attempted to visit the Lommel cemetery where thousands of German Nazi soldiers are buried, and pay his respects at the graves of 38 Flemish SS collaborators. In 1992 he also listed well-known anti-Semites and Nazi collaborators as friends including Bert Eriksson, Staf De Clercq Cyriel Verschaeve and August Borms. Speaking of Islam he has said: 'She who wears a hijab signs her "return to sender" contract'. Heinz-Christian Strache has been dogged by rumours of anti-Semitism and xenophobia, (which he denies).

from the oppressors of our two governments and the leftist, fifth column, quisling press, and that it was the EDL which started the liberation of England from evil...'³⁵ Both Shifren and the EDL have ties to the American Tea Party movement, which has a growing anti-Islamic wing and is co-run by Pamela Geller, who is also the executive director of the Stop Islamisation of America (SIOA) organisation. Geller pledged her support to the EDL following the campaign against plans to build an Islamic cultural centre near Ground Zero in New York, although she later withdrew it after Roberta Moore claimed the EDL had anti-Semitic members and was not sufficiently pro-Israel.

Moore's accusation that there were pro-Nazi sentiments in the wider movements is an accusation that has been vehemently contested by the EDL leadership. However, Geller said, 'I stand by my concern about the increasing anti-Semitism in the ranks of the admins at the EDL. We have no intention of breaking with the EDL if they purge these anti-Semitic elements. If they do not, they will be finished as a force for good in England. I was immediately reassured that these rogue elements would be routed out.'³⁶ Interestingly, before Moore's departure from the EDL, a Facebook group entitled 'Zionists not welcome in the EDL: Click like if you want Roberta Moore kicked out of the EDL' appeared. The page bears the formal EDL crest and has been 'liked' by Helen Gower, Tommy Robinson's PA and high-ranking EDL administrator.³⁷ There is some debate concerning the legitimacy of Geller's reasoning as she appears to equate anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and assumes that Gower has a deep-seated hatred for Jews based on her approval of the group aimed to remove Roberta Moore from the EDL ranks. (There had also been internal debate about Moore's future in the EDL due to personality clashes and her determination to forge links with the proscribed Jewish Task Force – see below).

Whilst she still held the title as leader of the Jewish division, Roberta Moore attempted to forge a partnership between the EDL and the far right American group the Jewish Task Force (JTF), whose leader Victor Vancier (also known as Chaim Ben Pesach), is a convicted terrorist and was the national chairman of the Jewish Defence League until it was formally proscribed. Moore announced the affiliation on the EDL Facebook page and Vancier responded by posting a podcast confirming the union: 'we were contacted by the English Defence League last few weeks and we have agreed we want to work together on joint projects...They wave Israeli flags, they support the Jewish people. They want Jewish members. We are happy to work with them to save England from the millions of Muslim invaders. We want to work as a united front.' However, affiliation with the JTF was largely considered unwelcome as the EDL leadership realised that the JTF, and indeed Moore herself, were political liabilities and did not want to be associated with convicted terrorists. However not all supporters held this view. Paul Ray posted this statement on the JTF forum:

'There are elements in the EDL who desperately want to be accepted by the left-wing establishment and the media. These elements have no principles or courage. Roberta Moore and the Jewish Division represent courageous and noble elements. If the EDL is not willing to

³⁵ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/40155/rabbi-shifren%E2%80%99s-speech-edl-demonstration>

³⁶ <http://4freedoms.ning.com/forum/topics/update-from-pamela-geller-the?groupUrl=uk&groupId=3766518%3AGroup%3A255&id=3766518%3ATopic%3A59478&page=1#comments>

³⁷ <http://4freedoms.ning.com/forum/topics/update-from-pamela-geller-the?groupUrl=uk&groupId=3766518%3AGroup%3A255&id=3766518%3ATopic%3A59478&page=1#comments>

work with JTF, then they are rejecting all right-wing Jews, evangelical Christians and others who believe in the right of the Jewish people to the entire land of Israel.’³⁸

Interestingly, after Moore left the EDL in July 2011, there were rumours that the Jewish Division was taken over by Robert Bartholomeus who is a right-wing Dutch activist and also a supporter of the Jewish Task Force.

BNP Similarities

The relationship between the EDL and the BNP is a complex one; both parties deny any affiliation or similarity but comparisons between the two frequently surface. The EDL are often described as the BNP’s ‘foot soldiers’, and while the EDL is somewhat unusual among far-right groups as it attempts to attract non-white support, its discourse is seen as, ‘one that reflects that of the BNP and others’.³⁹ There has also been a certain amount of crossover: in the EDL’s infancy in 2009 the Sunday Herald revealed links between the Scottish Defence League (SDL) and the BNP with one supporter being quoted as saying, ‘I am a member of the BNP and a supporter of the Scottish Defence League. A lot of the supporters are the same’.⁴⁰ BNP activists have often been spotted at EDL rallies, which led Nick Griffin to ban his party members from EDL affiliation, while in 2009 the BNP claimed it would expel members found to be active in the SDL and the EDL. National Organiser of the Scottish BNP, Gary Raikes, also said in December of that year that every party member in Scotland had been informed that anyone found to have links with the SDL or to have attended any of their demonstrations would be expelled from the party.

Similarly, membership to the BNP is proscribed by the EDL, despite the fact many of the group’s supporters are themselves ex-members, including several of the EDL lynchpins. Founder Tommy Robinson is an ex-supporter, while Kevin Carroll was very keen to stand as a BNP candidate (but was prevented by his partner’s intervention), and signed the nomination papers for BNP candidate Robert Sherratt in the 2007 Luton council elections. Other key figures within the EDL also have BNP links, (although it should be noted that several were members before the inception of the EDL and renounced their formal membership when they joined the EDL. Despite this they have since been seen at BNP rallies). Davy Cooling, EDL activist and administrator of the Luton EDL Facebook page, is an ex-BNP member and registered his interest in attending the BNP’s Red, White and Blue festival in 2010, while Alan Spence, described by Unite Against Fascism as a leading figure in the EDL, is also a ‘key link between the EDL and the British National Party’.⁴¹ Spence essentially organises the EDL Newcastle division, but in May 2010 stood as the BNP parliamentary candidate in Newcastle East where he received 3.5% of the vote.⁴²

Although we are not the BNP and we are not Nazis’ is a mantra frequently repeated by the EDL, a number of commentators have noted the tactical similarity employed by the EDL and BNP. In its

³⁸ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/45704/edl-dismisses-jewish-arm-too-extreme-0>

³⁹ Allen, Chris (2010), *Fear and Loathing: the Political Discourse in Relation to Muslims and Islam in the British Contemporary Setting*, Politics and Religion 4: 228

⁴⁰ <http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/politics/revealed-the-secret-links-between-the-scottish-defence-league-and-the-bnp-1.991834>

⁴¹ <http://uaf.org.uk/2011/12/edl-north-east-boss-spence-jailed-after-attack-on-socialist-meeting/>

⁴² <http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/features/article/32/the-extremist-defence-league>

2008 campaign the BNP targeted Jewish (and Sikh – see page 24) areas across London and attempted to exploit what it saw as historical enmity between Jews and Muslims. Although a biased assessment, Martin Wingfield, the editor of the BNP newspaper, wrote on his blog: 'There has been a growing dialogue between senior members of the Jewish community and the BNP and today there are an increasing number of Jews campaigning for the BNP and feeling very comfortable with their political choice'. The BNP's only Jewish councillor⁴³ Pat Richardson spoke in agreement: 'I'm in the BNP because no one else speaks out against the Islamification of our country...Being Jewish only adds to my concern about this aggressive creed that also threatens our secular values and Christian tradition'. Ruth Smeeth, a campaigner at the Board of Deputies of British Jews⁴⁴ has also noted the recent Zionist influences:

'The BNP website... now [purports to be] one of the most Zionist on the web – it goes further than any of the mainstream parties in its support of Israel and at the same time demonises Islam and the Muslim world. They are actively campaigning in Jewish communities, particularly in London, making a lot of their one Jewish councillor, their support of Israel and attacking Muslims. It is a poisonous campaign but it shows a growing electoral sophistication.'⁴⁵

However the BNP's attempts to woo Jewish voters has recently fallen foul with the publication⁴⁶ of a report outlining allegations by Nick Griffin in which he suggests that the EDL is a Zionist front organisation intended to split the BNP. What may well be happening is an exercise in differentiation between the BNP and the EDL which may well develop into an increasingly vocal and bitter war of words and ideologies in the future.

3.2 Online Links

There are many social media links between the EDL and radical groups headed by individuals from Jewish communities. The most active Facebook groups are listed below:

- *English Defence League Jewish Division* – 1629 'likes'. (It should be noted that, as with the other faith divisions, not all of the likes are necessarily from Jews, although it is safe to assume that some are.)
- *Jewish Defence League UK* – 2600 'likes'. This site is run by the ex-leader of the EDL's Jewish division, Roberta Moore.
- *Jewish Defence League* – 3687 'likes'.

⁴³ Currently not a serving councillor.

⁴⁴ She has worked on campaigns to generate votes to combat far right parties.

⁴⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2008/apr/10/thefarright.race>

⁴⁶ <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/edl-exposed>

- *Jewish Defence League of Canada* – 355 members.
- *Jewish Defence League Great Britain* – 258 members.
- *Israel Defence League* – 1217 ‘likes’.
- *Stop Islamization of America* (SIOA) – 8,381 ‘likes’. This organisation was co-founded by Pamela Geller who presents herself as an ardent supporter of Israel. The link between these groups is not only online; on September 11th 2010, eight EDL activists, including Kevin Carroll, attended the SIOA rally in New York to protest against the proposed build of an Islamic community centre near ‘Ground Zero’. Geller, Tommy Robinson and Robert Spencer from Jihad Watch united again on August 4th 2012 in Stockholm at the ‘First Worldwide Counter-Jihad Action’ rally that sought to raise awareness of the threat of Islamism and to create a global ‘counter-jihad’ movement.

Other online websites and individuals with links or who have attended EDL events include:

- <http://www.jtf.org/> – Jewish Taskforce (JTF), 10,229 members.

Despite the EDL denying any links with the JTF, there are pictures of the Jewish Task Force leader at the EDL Demonstration in Amsterdam on 31st October 2010 on the blog cited below. There is also a photograph of the JTF leader posing at the same demonstration with the BFP leader, Paul Weston and senior EDL leader Chris Knowles, who is a central component to the EDL’s links with European and US far-right groups. One caption reads, ‘the photo above proves that the real EDL leadership still supports the Jewish Task Force and Roberta Moore’.

- <http://zionistedl.blogspot.co.uk> – Zionists for the EDL.
- <http://www.libertiesalliance.org/> – The International Civil Liberties Alliance (ICLA). This is a project of the Centre for Vigilant Freedom, ‘a US-based organisation which has received, at a minimum, tens of thousands of dollars in funding to establish a transnational anti-Muslim propaganda network, and which has openly courted the European far-right’.⁴⁷ Chris Knowles of the EDL, using the alias ‘Aeneas Livinium’, is the UK coordinator of the Centre for Vigilant Freedom and the site has posted over a dozen articles about the EDL including an open letter to Pamela Geller entitled

⁴⁷ <http://oraclesyndicate.twoday.net/stories/the-islamophobe-international-vigilant-freedom-and-the-english-defence/comment>

‘Recent criticism of the English Defence League is unwarranted and unacceptable’. The letter calls for a public apology and is undersigned by a selection of high-profile counter-jihad activists and bloggers including Paul Weston (BFP), Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff, Fjordman and Baron Bodissey from the Gates of Vienna.⁴⁸

- <http://gatesofvienna.blogspot.co.uk/> – This website necessitates an additional mention in this chapter as it has links to right-wing Zionist websites including the *Torah Parsha* blog and the ardently anti-Palestinian and anti-Islam blog *Sultan Knish*, run by Daniel Greenfield, a fellow at the David Horowitz Freedom Centre – the same organisation that sponsors Jihad Watch (<http://sultanknish.blogspot.co.uk/>).

3.3 Propaganda used to try and attract Jewish support

The EDL draws on historical flashpoints and long-running issues between Jews and Muslims, which are particularly potent tools of persuasion as they are extremely sensitive to Jews and Muslims and can be easily exploited. Vidhya Ramalingam, an associate at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue said, ‘far right groups pick on polemical, divisive issues between Jews and Muslims. If they tap into something that resonates with someone’s personal identity, it can have a powerful impact, acting on latent Islamophobia’.⁴⁹

Qur’anic reference

The EDL claims Islam is an intrinsically anti-Semitic religion that calls for the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people and believes Jews to be ‘the enemies of God, and the descendants of apes and pigs’. According to the author of the EDL Extra Blog, there are passages in the Qur’an and hadiths that are almost identical to Nazi broadcasts made during World War Two: ‘... The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him...’ (*Sahih Muslim*, 41:6985).⁵⁰ The author continues, minimising the problem of Islamophobia and inverting the issue to imply that the victims are actually the perpetrators:

‘It has been consistently shown that the rise of Judeophobia, or anti-Semitism, is far more of a problem than Islamophobia, which is largely a myth devised in order to aggrandise Muslims and Islamist groups. Not only that. Many of the people responsible for Judeophobia

⁴⁸ <http://www.libertiesalliance.org/2011/06/30/recent-criticism-of-the-english-defence-league-is-unwarranted-and-unacceptable/>

⁴⁹ <http://www.newstatesman.com/2012/05/we-need-muslim-jewish-unity-against-far-right>

⁵⁰ There is some debate about the authenticity of this verse as its principles appear to go against the Qur’an. The 14th century Islamic scholar and historian Ibn Khaldun expands upon this:

‘I do not believe any hadith or report of a companion of the Prophet to be true which differs from the common sense meaning of the Qur’an, no matter how trustworthy the narrators may have been. It is not impossible that a narrator appears to be trustworthy though he may be moved by ulterior motive’.

are exactly the same people who are crying about Islamophobia. That is, many of the hard-core Judeophobes are Islamists.’⁵¹

Israel/Palestine situation

One key reason British Jews might consider joining the EDL is due to the political situation in the Middle East. Deep affiliation to opposing sides of the Israel/Palestine conflict has caused rifts between sections of the British Jewish and Muslim communities and is a useful anti-Muslim propaganda tool. One interfaith worker claimed that the conflict is the biggest block to Jewish/Muslim unity in Britain as it is so emotional and identity-defining that ‘people aren’t prepared to park it’. The EDL capitalises on this situation and attempts to inflame conflict between Jews and Muslims in the UK for their own gain. In supporting Israel as the homeland of the Jews, the EDL see pro-Palestine supporters as their natural enemy and there have been several clashes between the two sides. In September 2009 the EDL were involved in a standoff in central London where pro-Palestinian protesters held up banners with slogans including ‘Justice for the murdered children of Gaza’, ‘Boycott Israel’ and ‘Judaism rejects the Zionist state’, while the EDL responded with chants of ‘We hate Muslims’ and ‘Muslim bombers off our streets’. These mantras show that while the EDL’s presence at the demonstration was supposedly to show support for Israel, the underlying reason for the confrontation boiled down to its hostility towards Muslims in general. In June 2010 several EDL members, waving Israeli flags, disrupted a Palestine Peace Protest in Birmingham, while a month later members of the EDL Halifax division flew an Israeli flag in the centre of the square where the ‘Discover Palestine Festival’ in Halifax was being held.

Use of Language – Association with Nazism

Tommy Robinson has frequently stated that Islamism and Nazism are ‘two sides of the same coin’, and employs the term Islamo-fascists when describing radical Muslims. At EDL demonstrations placards have read, ‘There is no place for fascist Islamic Jew haters in England’, while Robinson often states, ‘we reject all anti-Semitism’. At the rally outside the Israeli embassy he added, ‘our forefathers fought a Nazi regime and won to protect our God-given human rights, we cannot allow such fascist ideologies try to rule our streets once again using the same racist tactics’. The issue of Palestine is also often linked to Nazism and an article posted on the EDL Extra blog entitled ‘Husseini, the Grand Mufti, and Palestinian Nazism’, implicates Palestine in the Holocaust and calls Husseini ‘a personal friend of Hitler, Himmler and other high-ranking Nazis; a supporter of terrorism; [and] a creator of Arab/Islamic Nazi parties which even used the Nazi salute and the swastika’.⁵² Equating Islamism with Nazism is an inflammatory tactic as the Holocaust is an incredibly emotive and painful subject for Jews particularly, and adds to the divide between Jewish and Muslim communities. Naturally the vast majority of Jews would not want to be associated with any anti-Semitic groups or sentiment, and the EDL is ready to provide an opposing group that supports Israel and is loudly vocal in its condemnation for Palestine, anti-Semitism, and Islamism.

⁵¹ <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/jew-haters-mpacuk-want-muslims-to.html>

⁵² <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/husseini-grand-mufti-and-palestinian.html>

3. 4 The response from Jewish Communities

The majority of commentators believe the EDL's show of support for Israel and Judaism is actually part of a larger anti-Islam campaign and simply a façade to entice Jews to join their campaign. The Board of Deputies said it condemned the EDL 'unreservedly' and all the main Jewish organisations in the UK denounced the opening of the Jewish Division as they believe Philo Zionism to be a political manoeuvre rather than a genuine reversal of traditional anti-Semitic beliefs. EDL support for Israel was called 'empty and duplicitous' and Adar Primor, the foreign editor of *Haaretz* newspaper said, '[the European nationalist parties] have not genuinely cast off their spiritual DNA... and aren't looking for anything except for Jewish absolution that will bring them closer to political power.' Similarly, Dave Rich, spokesman of the CST, was quoted as saying that the new breed of far right Philo Zionists 'must think we're pretty stupid if they think we'll get taken in by that. The moment their perceived political gain disappears they revert to type. We completely reject their idea that they hate Muslims so they like Jews. What targets one community at one time can very easily move on to target another community if the climate changes'.⁵³

The EDL's adoption of the Israeli flag and Rabbi Shifren's claim that he represents the beliefs and attitudes of the wider Jewish community have also been roundly criticised by Jewish organisations. In early 2011 the leaders of the United Synagogue, Reform, Liberal and Masorti communities, the Board of Deputies and the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' congregation, vocalised their opposition to the EDL's tactics and called on it to refrain from using Jewish and Israeli symbols in its campaigns. The Board of Deputies later released a statement in September 2011 saying:

'It is clear for all to see that the EDL are solely intent on causing divisions and mistrust between different groups in British society. When they wave Israeli flags at a rally or demonstration, they do so only to goad the Muslim community and to stir communal tensions. This, and everything that the EDL stands for, is utterly abhorrent. All right-thinking people should be repulsed by extremism from any quarter.'⁵⁴

Both left and right wing groups share the same perspective of the EDL's use of the Israeli flag at their rallies. Nick Griffin wrote on the official BNP website that, 'Israeli flags have no more place on street demonstrations in Britain than Palestinian ones. That kind of thing only helps to further radicalise young Muslims and to add to their hostility to all things British',⁵⁵ while a contributor to the white supremacist website Stormfront was in agreement stating, 'Like the Loyalists the EDL fly the Israel flag as a way to wind up the Islamists - the same way the Loyalists flew the Israeli flag in Northern Ireland in order to wind up the PLO supporting Sinn Fein / IRA. It's all about winding the opposition up.'⁵⁶ Chief Executive of the Board of Deputies Jon Benjamin similarly added, 'Rabbi Shifren displays breath-taking naivety and ignorance in associating himself with the EDL and in the way he characterises the British Jewish community', while the CST concluded by saying any Jews who believed they could shape the EDL or find shelter in the organisation were 'utterly deluded'. (This is

⁵³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/mar/27/far-right-philozionism-racism>

⁵⁴ http://www.bod.org.uk/live/content.php?Item_ID=201

⁵⁵ <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/opportunity-be-seized-why-we-have-lifted-proscription-english-defence-league>

⁵⁶ <http://leejohnbarnes.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/stormfront-britain-wankers.html>

the same term used by the Sikh community to describe members of their community who join the EDL.)

In 2010 the first joint initiative to combat Jewish support for the EDL within the Jewish community was launched and more than 500 people pledged their support. *Not in Our Name - Jews against the EDL* is the campaign of the Union of Jewish Students and is backed by more than a dozen organisations, including the Board of Deputies, CST, the Israeli Embassy, and Jews for Justice for Palestinians. The initiative, which includes a Facebook group with 901 'likes', is a response to the creation of a Jewish division and the EDL's appearance at the pro-Israel protest outside the Israeli Embassy in October 2010. The *Not in Our Name* group's founding pledge states: 'Now our community faces a new threat. The EDL claims to be our allies in the fight against extremism. In reality, they are violent racists with BNP members and Nazi sympathisers among their ranks...It is time for the Jewish community to come together as one to expose the EDL as the racist thugs they are'. Edie Friedman, director of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality, which is backing the initiative also said, 'it's terribly important for different sections of the community, as well as individuals, to stand up and say categorically, "not in our name". It's unbelievable that such an organisation can appropriate Jewish support.' Karen Pollock, chief executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust, added: 'At the HET we educate about the dangers of racism and discrimination and it is vital that we stand up against groups such as the EDL who preach hatred and division in our communities.' The Board of Deputies of British Jews and Faith Matters produced a joint statement in July 2012 that represents the general perception held by a wide network of Jewish organisations throughout the UK, which opposes the abuse of faith-based symbols to promote prejudice. (This sentiment mirrors that held by different religious groups who do not want their faith associated with the EDL.)

'As Jews and Muslims we deplore the abuse of our faiths by those who purportedly write in their name to spread messages of hate, threat and contempt. We hereby raise our voices against those who promote hate whether street based or on-line and who attempt to use symbolism, whether Jewish or Muslim, to promote fear of the other. We, Jews and Muslims, come from a shared family, and a shared tradition. Therefore, we state clearly, when groups that stir up prejudice, such as the English Defence League and all their sympathisers, use spurious Jewish themes or the Israeli flag to seek to garner Jewish support for their causes, they are acting in vain. When Islamic symbols are used by fringe groups to spread Anti-Semitic messages they are acting in vain. Our common roots run too deep, our common concerns are too intertwined, our common respect too sincere, to be divided by ugly allegations of prejudice, and cowardly acts of violence. We therefore stand together against all forms of hate and prejudice and believe that both Jewish and Muslim communities will work together for voices of moderation to prevail and that those who seek to divide by promoting hate will not succeed.'⁵⁷

⁵⁷ <http://faith-matters.org/component/content/article/44-news/281-joint-statement-by-the-board-of-deputies-of-british-jews-a-faith-matters>

Chapter 4: SIKHISM

4.1 Links between the EDL and Sikh Communities

The media has recently reported ‘growing links’ between the far right and a small section of Sikh communities, but the connection is not a new one. It first became apparent in Britain several years ago when the Khalistani flag was paraded at EDL marches and various Sikh emblems and insignia were used in EDL propaganda.⁵⁸ In early 2010 Rajinder Singh became the first of a handful of non-white members to join the BNP, and urged Hindus and Sikhs to join him to ‘praise the BNP and thank God that something has appeared that may guarantee that [Britain] is not overwhelmed [by Islam]’.⁵⁹ Unlike the BNP’s anomalous Sikh member, the EDL have always sought to create an anti-Muslim alliance with members of the Sikh community and claim the number of Sikh members in their organisation is higher than that of any other minority faith. Kevin Carroll, speaking on behalf of the EDL, verbalised the group’s allegiance to the Sikh community by stating:

‘We stand 100% with our Sikh Brothers and Sisters, they are some of the most decent upstanding people I have ever met; they are vibrant and fantastically brave. I could go on all day about the great and interesting things about these extremely proud and fine people, so if any backward primitive <banned word filtered> is being abusive about them, then they are not with me or the EDL, we don’t want nothing [sic] to do with these types of idiots.’⁶⁰

The most recent example of an EDL/Sikh link was the protest held earlier this year concerning the assault on a Sikh girl by a Muslim man in Luton. On May 29th 2012, approximately three hundred Sikhs gathered near Buxton Road police station to peacefully protest the ‘lack of action’ demonstrated by the police in the handling of the case.⁶¹ Around a dozen members of the EDL, including leaders Tommy Robinson and Kevin Carroll, both wearing *rumāls*,⁶² arrived at the demonstration in a ‘show of solidarity with [their] Sikh brothers and sisters’. The majority of Sikhs were unhappy with the EDL ‘hijacking’ their protest for anti-Muslim propaganda reasons, but reports indicate they had been invited, and some of the younger (and more extreme) community members welcomed their presence. Responding to the claims that the EDL had hijacked the Luton protest, the administrator of the Sikhs Against Sharia Facebook page – the Sikh Defence League’s (SDL) sister organisation – said:

‘I tell you what...This man and his associates [Tommy Robinson and the EDL], are invited by my mother, my brother, and myself to do the job they are doing – be it defending Sikhs and

⁵⁸ The Khalistan movement refers to a global political secessionist movement, which seeks to create a separate Sikh state called Khālīstān in the Punjab region of South Asia.

⁵⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/feb/11/bnp-nonwhites-members-sikh-join>

⁶⁰ <http://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/55338-edl-contact-lhm/>

⁶¹ Bedford Police force came under huge criticism following their handling of the case. According to the website <http://www.sikh24.com>, the girl involved in the attack had been a victim of grooming and the police had previously been contacted at least four times by the family but had failed to act. Rumours also circulated that the man arrested for this crime was due to be released the same night. Locals reported that the community felt ‘the police could do more with regards to the investigation and current situation’.

⁶² A *rumāl* is a piece of cloth that people use to cover their heads when entering a gurdwara, as a mark of respect in a holy place.

Hindus or be it anti-Islamification in our N.R.I [non-residential Indian] community...wishing Kevin Carroll and Tommy Robinson all the very best of luck with their project work. Love, your Sikh sister.’⁶³

The *Mail on Sunday* newspaper reported that several days after this protest ‘Sikhs and EDL members held a secret meeting in Luton to discuss a joint response to the problem. Both sides are said to have favoured acts of vigilantism’. The common consensus is that the Sikhs who met with the EDL belonged to the Sikh Awareness Society – an organisation that seeks to address the ‘growing concerns of the “grooming” of [their] youth’ – although the Society was quick to distance itself from the EDL. A spokesperson for the organisation spoke to Hope Not Hate saying: ‘We would have nothing to do with any racist or fascist group, certainly one that uses religion to divide people...I know nothing about this and no, we are not in any kind of talks and discussion with them’.⁶⁴

However, the most recognised link between the EDL and the Sikh community is the now ex-member Guramit Singh,⁶⁵ who was very active in his role as ‘Sikh spokesman’, and supposedly showed the EDL to be ‘a place for all races’. During his time in the EDL, Singh made many vitriolic anti-Islam speeches, which resulted in his arrest in 2010 on suspicion of causing religiously aggravated harassment, alarm or distress. Despite stating he was not a practising Sikh, nor that he represented Sikhism during his time in the EDL, Singh said, ‘I consider the Guru Granth Sahib to be my Guru’, and often made reference to Sikh theology and religious history in order to justify his activism and to bolster his claim that being a person of faith and an EDL supporter are not mutually exclusive. He claimed his background justified his hatred of Islam – ‘Sikhs have been trying to protect the world from Islam for 300-400 years’ – and attempted to align Sikh teachings and far right philosophy by claiming the EDL are the modern-day ideological counterparts of Guru Gobind Singh’s historical *Khālsā*.⁶⁶

During the EDL rally in Nuneaton on 27th November 2010, Singh made a speech where he exploited the sacred verses of Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikhism), by misquoting them out of context and warping them to make them appear to provide support for EDL ideology. He also referenced the *Zafarnamah*, (Notification of Victory), when attempting to justify his conduct, which was a letter of defiance written by Guru Gobind Singh to the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, condemning him for his religious bigotry, false piety and abuse of power, and accusing him of treachery by claiming a moral victory.⁶⁷ The official EDL blog also refers to Sikh history and theology to explain their reasons for seeking support from the Sikh community. In an article headed ‘Sikhism compared to Islam’, the author also quotes from the Guru Granth Sahib and refers to the teachings of Bhikan Shah in an attempt to exalt Sikhism above Islam and create division between the two faiths.

⁶³ <http://www.facebook.com/groups/sikhraj/>

⁶⁴ Hope Not Hate magazine, July-August 2012, p.27

⁶⁵ Several Luton sources claim that Guramit Singh has not actually left the EDL but is now in a behind-the-scenes role, acting as Robinson’s publicity advisor, and providing him with legal advice and financial assistance. These rumours remained unconfirmed when this report went to print.

⁶⁶ *Khālsā* is the eleventh and final temporal-Guru/leader of the Sikhs. It is the collective body of Singhs and Kaurs represented by the five beloved-ones.

⁶⁷ <http://www.turbancampaign.com/updates/edl%E2%80%99s-guramit-singh-responds-to-excommunication-ultimatum-with-doublespeak-religious-hypocrisy/>

Why the EDL are courting the Sikh community?

Due to the fact some EDL members confuse Sikhs and Muslims and in order to make Sikh members more palatable to their followers, the EDL leadership often refers to the long history of cordiality between Sikhs and the British and the Sikh involvement in the British Indian Army. It highlights the fact that by the advent of World War I the number of Sikhs in the British Indian Army totalled over 100,000 and made up twenty per cent of its manpower, and equally uses these statistics to attract Sikh sympathisers to their cause. Supporting the British Armed Forces comprises an important element of EDL ideology, so reinforcing the link between Sikhs and the military is an attempt to generate goodwill from EDL supporters. The military image of Sikhs has also proved to be an attractive incentive for the EDL to forge a connection:

‘From the time Sikhism was introduced to the West in the nineteenth century, the martial aspect of Sikh identity has been a dominant feature in the public perception of the religion. Especially in the eyes of the British, the Sikhs were fierce fighters who put up stiff resistance during the Anglo-Sikh wars and then offered loyal support during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. They were deemed a ‘martial race’ and continued to fight with distinction for their colonial ruler during the first and second world wars.’⁶⁸

4. 2 Online Links

A simple online search reveals widespread EDL support for Sikhs, and to a lesser extent, Sikh support for the EDL. The most active Facebook groups are listed below:

- *The Sikh Defence League (SDL)* – 1660 ‘likes’.
- *Sikhs Against Sharia* (sister organisation to the SDL) – 1,457 members. (The link between SAS and the EDL is not just on-line; on April 3rd 2010, a representative of Sikhs Against Sharia made a speech at the EDL rally in Dudley.)
- *Against The False Sikh & Muslim Friendship Groups - Reality Check* – 445 ‘likes’. (Not an official affiliate of the EDL but this site has posted favourable links to EDL articles and videos.)
- *Sikhs Against Sikh-Muslim Dialogue* – 420 members. (The sister organisation of the above group.)

⁶⁸ http://www.walterdorn.org/pdf/Sikhism&Force_JME-Vol10-No1_Mas_2011.pdf

- It is interesting to note the on-line anti-Islam traffic that exists between different religious and political fringe groups. For example, there is communication between the *Jewish Defence League* and *Sikhs Against Sharia* – SAS have shared links from the JDL's UK Facebook page – as well as similar communication between SAS and Combined Ex-Forces (CxF), who are linked to the EDL's Facebook page.

There are also several websites and forums where Sikh youths discuss their views on Islam and the EDL (amongst other topics). Examples of pro-EDL and anti-Islam stances are shown below:

- <http://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/58052-sikh-community-jointly-condemns-english-defence-league/> – Voice of the Sikh Youth

Southall Youth wrote: 'While I may not support the racist elements which have been attracted to EDL I fully support Tommy Robinson and his leadership core group openly as a British Sikh, I oppose Militant Islam and Militant Hinduism in all its forms – I'm a proud British Khalistani Sikh.'

SarabhaPanjab wrote: 'Those marginalised, frustrated Sikh youth, fed up with the system, fed up with the gurdwaras, will find refuge with EDL. People like Gurmit Singh, and many others. The Turban Campaign will only push more of these people towards the EDL. It is stupid and dangerous'.

West London Singh wrote: 'Yes there are racist supporters within the EDL. But then again there are also racist supporters of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the local gym. That doesn't mean we can't join or support those organisations just because there are some racists among them. Personally, I don't support the EDL but I wholeheartedly respect the right and understand the reason why some Sikhs do'.

Hammertime007 wrote: 'I have had brief experience meeting with EDL, they are good people. You talk about "divide and conquer"; you can only divide something which is united in the first place and we are not united with Muslims, they are the oldest enemy – FACT'.

- <http://www.topix.com/forumsearch/religion/sikh?q=english+defence&qb=Go> – Sikh Forum

Joey wrote: [Speaking about Guramit Singh's speech in Peterborough, December 2010]. 'I cried when I watched the video, this brother speaks the truth, well most of it is true ;) Muslims got their arses handed to them as usual'.

EDL supporter Baljit wrote: 'Me and my friends all support EDL. In fact I have never bumped into any Hindu/Sikh who loves Muslims, they all hate them scum'.

Jez wrote: 'While there is the EDL this country has a chance to turn around and become the Islamism-free nation it used to be. Support the EDL and God bless them.'

Nazir Ahmed Dhillon wrote: 'Anyone who wants Sharia should be deported.'

- <http://www.sikhawareness.com/> – Sikh Awareness, the Eye Opening Forum

Dalsingh101 wrote: ‘Guys if *apne*⁶⁹ like Shere Punjab can tie up with the English Defence League...it would be of great help to the society in general, just my 2 cents! Correct me if I am wrong. It would portray the true Khalsa, which has always stood by the oppressed, create a good will with them’ [sic].

Hindutva_fauji wrote: ‘You Muslims are a sick caste and the time is near when the public will turn and you Islamics will get what is due to you’ [sic].

Kaljug wrote: ‘Watch how few of these so-called anti-fascist organisations, who caused violence and chaos on the streets of Britain when the EDL were demonstrating, turn up to counter these demos. "We hate fascists, but not the Islamic kind" is their lunatic message.’

Kaljug wrote: ‘If Muslims can set up organisations in Britain like Hizb ut-Tahrir who want Britain turned into a country of genitally-mutilated males and women dressed like ninjas, why can't whitey protest this? It seems to me that the media says nothing when Muslims do it, but as soon as someone speaks out against Islam and Muslim immigration, the press automatically makes them out to be racists... By the by, I find UAF as racist as the people they are fighting against because they do not seem to believe that us poor ignorant mud people are capable of racism ourselves’.

4.3 Propaganda used to attract Sikh support

Sikhs Against the EDL released a statement in 2010 declaring there to be only two valid reasons why a Sikh would support a group such as the EDL: firstly, they don't understand what being a Sikh is, and secondly, they don't understand what the EDL is. While the sentiment is understandable, perhaps the reasoning is more complex and deep-rooted. According to Sikh supporters, the primary reasons for joining the EDL are deep-rooted and relate to their history and the early tensions between Sikh and Muslim communities. More contemporary reasons include the perceived Islamification of Britain (with specific reference to the influx of halal foodstuffs – even though they cater for the needs of Muslim communities), reports of alleged grooming of Sikhs, and cases of mistaken identity where Sikhs have been wrongly identified as Muslims and attacked as a result. (This last element is puzzling because the victims direct their anger towards Muslims rather than the actual perpetrators.)

History

A minority of British Sikhs still believe in an existential threat from different communities including Muslims and Hindus, and much like the techniques used when engaging with the Jewish community, the EDL exploits their anxiety and uses historic examples of Sikh/Muslim tension to heighten the religious divide and act as an incentive for Sikhs to migrate towards the right. The origins of tension between Sikhs and Muslims go back centuries to the era of the Mughal rule of India (1556–1707), when the emerging Sikh religion had strained relations with the ruling Mughals. Sikhism grew in

⁶⁹ *Apne* means ‘ours/our own’ in Punjabi. It is normally used in a sentence to mean Sikh rather than Hindu or Muslim for example.

popularity throughout India, particularly in the Punjab, since its founding by Guru Nanak in the 1500s, but tensions flared in the years following the death of the fifth Guru Arjan Dev at the hands of Aurangzeb's grandfather Jahangir. Prominent Sikh Gurus were martyred as the ruling Mughal dynasty saw the new faith as a political threat to the ruling elite; in 1675 Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed by Emperor Aurangzeb. His execution infuriated the Sikhs and in response, his son and successor Guru Gobind Singh established the *Khalsa*, a Sikh order of religious-soldiers prepared to sacrifice their lives for their faith and land. In response to the Sikh militarisation, the Mughals attacked the *Khalsa* and Aurangzeb killed all four of Gobind Singh's sons and devastated much of the Sikh army.

Conflict continued during the partition of the Punjab in 1947, when tens of thousands of Muslim, Sikh and Hindu women were raped and killed as a way for men to exact revenge,⁷⁰ (see page 31). A small minority of Sikhs still feel there is animosity between themselves and Muslims and rebuff the frequently made claim that the EDL divides communities and heightens interfaith tensions. A young Sikh supporter of the EDL explained:

'The EDL doesn't need to promote disharmony between the Sikh and Muslim communities because it already exists. Islam, being a proselytising religion, will always be at odds with Sikhism, just as it is at odds with every other religion. This disharmony, in fact, goes back hundreds of years. Today, to cite just one case of contemporary disharmony, there is the big problem of Muslims pimping or 'grooming' Sikh and Hindu girls, whom they see as Islamic 'booty'. (It's all there in the Qur'an!)'⁷¹

EDL member Raj Singh attempted to use examples from more recent history to unite Sikhs and the EDL by comparing the latter to Sher-e-Punjab (Lions of Punjab) – a Sikh group that clashed with Pakistanis during the mid-1980s. The Sher-e-Punjab operated as part street gang, part political grouping and offered physical support to their community when they felt it was threatened by local Muslims. Some Sikhs claim that Sher-e-Punjab 'protected the Sikh community from the Islamic extremists', and today Raj Singh claims the EDL is fighting for the same cause. On the official EDL forum Singh posted an interview clip with Sher-e-Punjab from 1988 and also an article from the *Independent* in 1989 concerning Sher-e-Punjab members in court after confronting Pakistani sex gangs.⁷² This has been particularly effective in the EDL's propaganda campaign considering the recent grooming scandals in Britain, and since 2009 a small number of Sikhs have been swayed by such arguments and formed relations with the BNP and EDL. For a minority on the fringe of the Khalistani movement, hatred of Muslims can be so strong that the far right becomes a potential ally. (This is ironic as in India the Khalistani movement has traditionally seen Muslim separatists as friends while the enemy has been a central government perceived as Hindu.)

A 2008 study by Faith Matters also highlighted serious incidences of youth violence between Sikh and Muslim communities starting in 1996 within the Slough and Southall areas of London, as well as in Luton and Derby in 2001. Following 9/11, relations between Sikhs and Muslims deteriorated as rumours spread that Al-Muhajiroun members were active in Derby distributing anti-Sikh leaflets. A

⁷⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2012/jul/03/edl-sikh-men-women>

⁷¹ <http://theenglishdefenceleagueextra.blogspot.co.uk/2010/11/british-sikhs-warned-of-edl-and-bnp.html>

⁷² <http://englishdefenceleague.org/forum/edl-chat/the-independent-newspaper-24th-june1989-sikhs-showed-the-way-to-combat-sex-grooming-gangs-in-the-uk/>

hoax letter, which had been circulating on the internet for some years, in an attempt to foment Sikh-Muslim conflict, inflamed the Sikh community when it was allegedly distributed in the heart of Derby's Asian community. The letter accused the government of only being interested in funding 'Gurdwaras and Gays and Homos' and goes on to suggest that Muslim boys need 'to bring Sikh girls into the arms of Islam' by taking them out: 'it is easy to take the Sikh girls out on a date as they generally like a good drink'. There was talk of a boycott of Muslim shops and angry meetings were held at the gurdwara. The EDL (and BNP) have tactically attempted to capitalise on this past animosity, both historical and more recent, by seeking to keep the conflicts fresh in the minds of British Sikhs to aid their 'divide and rule' tactics.

Mistaken identity

Both Muslim and non-Muslim members of the South Asian diaspora in the UK and the US became victims of a racist backlash in the aftermaths of 9/11 and 7/7, which created a climate of vulnerability, fear, anger, and frustration and resulted in a series of physical attacks and abuse. Tensions flared as the issue of mistaken identity – when Sikhs (and Hindus) are mistaken for Muslims – have become more frequent. There have been numerous reports of Sikhs being called 'terrorist' and 'Bin Laden' and Vijay Prashad notes that a disproportionately large number of the resultant 645 'revenge' attacks took place against Sikhs.⁷³ Joseph Crowley, a New York Democrat, cited reports documenting, 'how those practicing the Sikh religion are often targeted for hate violence because of their religiously mandated turbans i.e. because of their Sikh identity, regardless of whether the attacker understands the victim to be Sikh or not.' CNN also reported there had been a noted increase in hate crimes against Sikh men in Britain and the United States following 9/11, which culminated in the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi who was fatally shot by Frank Rouse who mistakenly thought he had ties to al-Qaeda.

Drawing on the issue of mistaken identity, the EDL and its associated groups champion the creation of a wider division between Sikhism and Islam. However, part of the problem is as a result of some of their own members who, despite claiming only to oppose Islam also admit on the EDL forum that, 'it's difficult for some of [them] to differentiate between Sikhs and Muslims.' As a result, abuse meant for Muslims is often directed at Sikhs and Hindus by the very people claiming to defend them, thus creating a vicious cycle of racism and cultural ignorance. The most recent example of this was the shooting at a gurdwara in Wisconsin on the 5th August 2012, in which six Sikhs were killed by a white-supremacist gunman. It is believed that the shooting was a case of mistaken identity as the perpetrator had a '9/11' tattoo and reportedly targeted turbaned males whom he believed to be Muslims. In a letter to Attorney General Eric Holder and FBI Director Robert Mueller dated April 19th 2012, U.S. lawmakers cited a 'growing concern' about how Sikh men wearing beards and turbans are sometimes confused with Muslims, while several months before the Wisconsin shooting more than ninety members of Congress asked the FBI to monitor hate crimes directed at Sikh adherents. There have also been reports of gurdwaras being mistakenly attacked instead of mosques, as in 2012 when a gurdwara in Michigan was vandalised with aggressive anti-Muslim graffiti.

⁷³ <http://www.rediff.com/news/column/sikh-killings-in-us-and-the-sense-of-white-supremacy-column/20120807.htm>

The media has been accused by some Sikhs and Hindus of creating negative images of their faiths when they refer to Muslim perpetrators (in grooming crimes) as 'Asian'. There are forty-eight countries in Asia (the official number is debated due to the status of certain countries), and a number of Sikhs and Hindus, as well as the EDL, claim the men involved in such cases should be identified by their nationality and religious persuasion, namely Pakistani Muslims (even though Islam strictly forbids sexual engagements outside of marriage and especially when people may be vulnerable to abuse), as the vagueness of the term 'Asian' 'besmirches entire swathes of Britons with roots in the Indian subcontinent'.⁷⁴ Hardeep Singh, Press Secretary for the Network of Sikh Organisations, voiced his agreement in his article for the *Telegraph* when he wrote, 'it's time to stop lumping Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus together as "Asians"...Obviously Sikhs and Hindus and other "Asian" non-Muslims, including Jains, Zoroastrians, Christians and Buddhists, don't want to be associated with sexual grooming of vulnerable white girls'. He also goes on to state that, 'commentators are unwilling to label the perpetrators "Muslims," opting instead to hide behind the fudge of "Asian."'

Grooming

Another result of the 9/11 attack is that allegations of sexual grooming and 'forced conversions' of non-Muslim, and particularly Sikh girls by Muslim men have become more prevalent in Britain partly due to the rising tide of Islamophobia.⁷⁵ This issue is explored in some detail by Dr Katy Sian of Leeds University who states, "The 'forced' conversions narrative has a phantasmagoric structure which works to reproduce the historical battle between 'good' and 'evil', it is a tale to rescue the British Asian Sikh community from abandoning their traditions, and although it may or may not be true, it re-engages, stabilises and regulates the community through the articulation of such a fear."⁷⁶

At a Hindu Forum conference in 2007, ex Metropolitan Police commissioner Sir Ian Blair revealed how the police were working to clamp down on 'aggressive conversions' of vulnerable girls, while Sikhs have long claimed there has been a problem of Muslim men grooming Sikh girls. The cases in Rochdale in 2012 reignited the unrest between some sections of the Sikh and Muslim communities and provided the EDL with another angle with which to attract Sikh membership and dissolve Sikh/Muslim relations. The EDL have profiled the grooming gangs as Pakistani Muslims (note the similarity of narratives to those listed earlier) and claim their faith advocates and encourages their actions. They also refer to Judge Gerald Clifton, who sentenced the men in Rochdale, and asserted that one of the motivations behind their actions was that the girls 'were not part of [their] community or religion'. However, what they fail to acknowledge is that Judge Clifton did not suggest that anything

⁷⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9314448/Its-time-to-stop-using-the-word-Asians.html>

⁷⁵ Although there have been allegations that Muslims are forcing conversion to Islam on non-Muslims, the Qur'an clearly condemns this practice, and nobody who calls themselves a true Muslim could forcibly convert another without going against several verses in the Qur'an. It is written in verse 2:256, 'There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong', while verse 10:99 states: 'And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?'

⁷⁶ <http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/research/cers/final%20cers%20working%20paper%20katy.pdf>

within the faith of those convicted made them pre-disposed to their behaviour, but that does not play well into the corrosive set of narratives that the EDL are determined to promote.

Islamisation of Britain – Halal products

One element of the EDL's theory that Britain is being Islamified concerns the mislabelling and sale of *halal* food on the basis that the slaughtering process contravenes UK animal welfare laws and signifies 'creeping Sharia'. The EDL have used the halal debate as a means of turning Sikhs against Islam by highlighting the fact Sikhs cannot eat where halal meat and fish is served as it is forbidden for them to consume anything that has been ritually slaughtered (*kutha* meat). On a popular Sikh forum an individual supported this notion saying: 'Look at all these places serving up halal...Sikhs can't eat halal. Every time a KFC or a Subway goes halal, that's one more place that we can't eat.'⁷⁷

Once again, what the EDL fails to mention is that by opposing the Halal ritual slaughter of animals by suggesting that it contravenes UK animal welfare laws (which it does not), it also de-facto opposes Kashrut (or Jewish dietary laws).

Implementation of Sharia

The cornerstone of the EDL's campaign against the spread of Islam is the issue of the implementation of Sharia law in Britain, which it believes to be a real and impending threat. It frequently cite statistics – for example, that there are eighty-five Sharia courts operating in Britain today – to demonstrate the 'rising tide of Islam' that must be halted before it assumes control. The EDL presents a dichotomous world-view comprised of only Muslims and non-Muslims and it urges the people of Britain to 'pick sides'. The EDL operates on the principle that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend', and cites elements of Sharia law to canvas support from sections of society it claims Sharia will negatively affect, including women, Jews, Sikhs and the LGBT community. Several Sikh supporters claim this is the reasoning behind their support for the EDL:

'The EDL is the only nationalist movement Sikh youths can relate to. We've had it up to our necks with these Muslims attacking Sikhs across the country...the time to choose sides has come we ain't gonna stand in the middle ground; either we choose Britain or Sharia law – I know which I choose...No Nazi scum who may be hanging around in the EDL crowds can subdue the Sikhs, whereas the whole Islamic faith is egging on for sharia and conversions, halal meat and abuse of the kafir [sic]'⁷⁸

⁷⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/15/what-makes-sikh-join-far-right>

⁷⁸ http://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/58052-sikh-community-jointly-condemns-english-defence-league/page_st_60

4. 4 The response from Sikh Communities

Although the majority of Sikhs have shown solidarity with the Muslim community, a small faction has actively tried to distance itself from Muslims for reasons which include fear of attack due to mistaken identity, fear that their faith may become 'tarred' through association with Islam, and simple Islamophobia. The Sikh Defence League posted a video on its Facebook page entitled 'Sikhs get mistaken for Muslims' next to a picture with the caption, 'Don't freak we are Sikh – different race...But we share a hatred for Muslims and Islam.' Similarly, during a procession in America after 9/11, a small group of Sikhs marched separately with banners saying 'we are not Muslims'. A Facebook page was also formed in November 2011 entitled *Sick of people who think all Asians are Muslim. NO I'm Sikh/Hindu etc* that has already received 1,044 'likes'.

The use of the term 'Asian' by the media has also been problematic for sections of non-Muslims as they feel it is too broad and paves the way for cases of mistaken identity and cultural confusion. Writing on the issue of mistaken identity, a Sikh individual with the alias Lionsingh responded to the article 'What does it mean to be Asian?' on the official EDL website saying:

'I was born here and am English with a British passport. I come from an Indian Sikh heritage which I am proud of...But I hate the term "Asian" as it is too inclusive to be meaningless... basically it means not the white folk nor the blacks...I don't mind being called from Indian heritage...the most insulting thing is to be referred to as a "p@ki". If you look at the contribution Indian heritage peoples have made to this country, the success they have achieved in business and academia to those of Islamic origin...you will see a wide gap. The crime figures speak for themselves!!!! If Islamacists and Muslims define themselves by their so-called religion...the media should as well!!!! It is as my mother says, "they give us all a bad name!!!!!!!"'

This response which grossly exaggerates and denigrates, does not help interfaith or wider community relations as it does not explicitly condone violence, but instead implies that it has simply been directed at the wrong community. The gesture has its roots in Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice, for it seems to suggest that Muslims deserve to be the recipients of religious intolerance – a notion that can be traced back to the events of 9/11.

Another issue that has arisen concerns groups who are trying to promote a unified front against the EDL. Some younger Sikhs have called for the Turban Campaign to change its name as they believe it fails to represent the whole Sikh community, and complain that it is 'trying to create a polarization within [its] community and forcing them to take sides'.⁷⁹ Whilst members of the Turban Campaign have been effective at campaigning and have a strongly anti-racist and inclusive agenda, they undoubtedly have come in for criticism from those Sikhs who hate Muslims. Individuals who complain are concerned that in only offering two choices the Turban Campaign and associates may in fact drive their youth into the arms of the EDL. On the Voice of the Sikh Youth forum, one female contributor wrote of the Campaign: 'You are not representative of the majority of British Sikh community's view...Do not side with the Islamists and give us a bad name as you will turn many of the youth into the hands of the EDL as I know our community would rather side with the English

⁷⁹ http://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/58052-sikh-community-jointly-condemns-english-defence-league/page_st_80

nationalists as patriots of this land than Islamo-fascists who hate non-Muslims and have infiltrated Unite Against Fascism (UAF) by the banner of MDL (Muslim Defence League)’.

However, aside from this very small section of British Sikhs, the majority have been forthright in their condemnation of the EDL, categorically stating they do not desire an alliance with them, and vowing to support their Muslim brothers and sisters. Much like the Jewish community, Sikhs feel that their faith is brought into disrepute when linked to the EDL, and object that their theology and history are misrepresented and exploited for propaganda reasons. The EDL strive to isolate the Muslim community by forming anti-Islamic alliances and the Sikh community believes that a link between themselves and the EDL (and/or the BNP) has the potential to ‘seriously derail good community and interfaith relations between two of Britain’s settled communities as well as add to the increasing problems of racism and Islamophobia’.⁸⁰ These Sikhs have called for their community to stand alongside their Muslim counterparts and show them support whilst publically rejecting the EDL and everything it stands for.

Several groups have appeared both on and offline to try and develop interfaith relations, show solidarity, and oppose a Sikh/EDL alliance. They include:

- *Sikhs Against the EDL* Facebook page – 1984 ‘likes’.
- *The Turban Campaign*.
- Four Facebook groups appeared online after the London riots in 2011, each named with a variation of the title, *Muslims and Sikhs Unite to sort out these thugs while the EDL hide*. The combined total of ‘likes’ for these groups is 4926.

These groups produce statements, information and guidance concerning the EDL and representatives from the Sikhs Against the EDL and the Turban Campaign are often seen at counter-demonstrations representing their faith community. Each group refers to Sikh history and theology as a way to reclaim their faith from the EDL, combat its propaganda, and counter the EDL’s claims that Sikhs should show solidarity with them. They claim the EDL are exploiting historical flashpoints and political tensions and creating great division within societies and the Turban Campaign drew up a five-point plan as to why Sikhs should oppose the EDL. In December 2010 leaders of some of the largest Sikh and Hindu organisations in England released a joint statement condemning the EDL. It reads:

‘We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned by the rise in fascism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and racism. The English Defence League (EDL) has organised events across the country, stirring up hatred, Islamophobia and racism – running riot in some cases and provoking violent attacks on Muslim, black and Asian communities and on Mosques and Mandirs (Hindu temples)...They are using the old tactics of ‘divide and rule’ and are trying to

⁸⁰ http://faith-matters.org/images/stories/publications/The_Adab_Respect_Research_Programme.pdf pg.7

divide the Asians by isolating the Muslim community. Furthermore, some misguided Sikh youth are letting themselves to be used by the EDL while a Sikh man has disgracefully joined the BNP. These people are helping to spread mistrust within our communities and we whole-heartedly condemn their actions. At a time of economic crisis with mass unemployment and impending deep public spending cuts – if the racists are allowed to make any further gains then we all would suffer from grave consequences. Thus we urge all Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews and people of other faiths to come together to strongly condemn the actions of these racist organisations and unite to turn back this tide of hatred.’⁸¹

All of the Sikh anti-EDL groups have unanimously condemned the actions of Guramit Singh and say he brought (and continues to bring, even after his departure), the Sikh faith into disrepute. Prior to his departure from the EDL, the Turban Campaign called for Singh to leave the group or face being excommunicated from the faith community. The general view was summarised by a Sikh forum user: ‘It is only a few deluded young of so-called Sikhs who support them and they are the biggest hypocrites amongst the EDL. And just to make it clear to anyone who may get the impression that Sikhs are supporting the EDL, the very, very tiny minority of Sikhs who support the EDL have been ostracised by the wider community.’⁸²

⁸¹ <http://www.turbancampaign.com/updates/joint-statement-release/>

⁸² <http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/Band-denies-supports-EDL/story-16226896-detail/story.html>

Chapter 5: HINDUISM

5. 1 Links between the EDL and Hindu Communities

There is less information on the relationship between Hindus and the EDL but some links do exist. One commentator spoke of an inclusive anti-Islam alliance in glowing terms saying,

‘I am very heartened by the possibility that Sikhs in the UK and the EDL (and perhaps other groups like 'March For England) may form an alliance to resist the Islamoforming [sic] of the Island of the Mighty...Watch the Mohammedan bullyboys run for cover when faced by the heirs of long-ago Crusaders (and the sons and grandsons of those who flew in Bomber Command or at the Battle of Britain, or who sailed the Little Ships) side by side and arm in arm and (if necessary) back to back with the heirs of the great Sikh and Hindu warriors who fought ceaselessly to try to defend their homeland from the raping, pillaging, kidnapping, slaving, mass-murdering Muslim hordes.’⁸³

The EDL has the indirect support of the Canadian Hindu Advocacy (CHA) via its association with the JDL. The CHA is a small Hindu Nationalist organisation led by Ron Banerjee and Naresh Patel that supports the extremist, nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)/ Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Party in India, and particularly the BJP led government of Gujarat, which is notable for its complicity in anti-Muslim pogroms and glorifies Hitler as having been a great nationalist leader. The CHA pledged its support for the EDL/JDL meeting held at the Toronto Zionist Centre in Canada and not only attended the event but sent ‘a special security team to join the JDL and deter any ARA (Anti-Racist Action) and Islamic disruptors’. The CHA website also declares its support for Israel and Banerjee proposes that, ‘a joint Hindu-Jewish museum and exhibit would be ideal, since these two communities have suffered more than any other’. During a JDL demonstration, one reporter asked Banerjee how he could claim to be pro-Jewish and pro-Israel when he supports a party that praises Hitler. His response adhered to the dangerous logic of ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’ often demonstrated by EDL supporters from minority religious groups and members of Casuals United, who join forces with rival football firms for a common cause – ‘As long as they kill Muslims I don't care’.⁸⁴

5.2 Online Links

It is easier to source online Hindu/EDL connections, although there is still much less support to be seen than from radical elements of the Sikh and Jewish communities.

- *Hindus who support the English Defence League* Facebook group – 1,429 ‘likes’.

Mission statement: ‘We are a group of Hindus, who strongly believe that Islam is nothing but an evil violent ideology; a cult following and whose sole purpose is to brainwash its followers, use violence, intimidation, abuse of rights, oppose freedom and democracy and

⁸³ http://www.newenglishreview.org/blog_display.cfm/blog_id/42755

⁸⁴ <http://bigcitylib.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/edljdj-love-fest-attracts.html>

rule the world under Sharia law by either converting all non-Muslims to Islam or slaughtering them in the name of Allah. Throughout the history of world, wherever there is Islam, there is a problem. We also believe, that EDL is not a racist or far-right organization, as portrayed by British media, but rather a nationalist group fighting to save the British culture and way of life, and when time comes, will perhaps be the last line of defence against Islamic extremism’.

- *Hindu Defence-League* Facebook page – political views defined as, ‘Against Islamic extremists and terrorists. Not a racist group but we need to stick together with the EDL and SDL to stop radical Islamists’.
- <http://hindundefenceleague.blogspot.co.uk/>
- <http://hindurevolution.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/english-defence-league-leader-tommy.html>
- <http://www.facebook.com/IndianDefenceLeague>

5.3 Propaganda used to attract Hindu support

With reference to minority religious communities, the level of EDL support from Hindu communities is comparatively smaller than that from Jews and Sikhs although the same tactics are used by the EDL, such as drawing on historical events and manipulating religious texts and imagery.

History

The official EDL website has a section entitled ‘Islam and the Hindus’, where it quotes historians including William Durrant⁸⁵ in an attempt to exploit historical flashpoints between the two faith communities to weaken interfaith relations and stir up past unrest. Reigniting historical tensions is a common tactic, and one that is relied upon by all anti-Islam organisations as examples of why Hindus should be wary of Muslims, if not aggressive towards them.

⁸⁵ The figure of 80 million was first put forward by the Indian Historian K.S. Lal, who has been accused of belonging to the RSS - a militant, right wing Indian party set up in opposition to British colonialism and Muslim separatism - and was also widely believed to have supported Hindutva, a Hindu nationalist movement at the time of partition. No other sources quote the figure 80 million, and given the lack of evidence in early sources and pre-census data, Durrant’s work appears to have no historical truth. The late SOAS professor Simon Digby and Indian Marxist historian Irfan Habib both voiced their opposition to Lal’s estimate of 80 million and argued that Durrant’s work should be treated with extreme caution.

‘The Mohammedan conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history. The Islamic historians and scholars have recorded with great glee and pride the slaughters of Hindus, forced conversions, abduction of Hindu women and children to slave markets and the destruction of temples carried out by the warriors of Islam.’⁸⁶

The CHA website also paraphrases Durrant, writing: ‘the largest genocide in history occurred during the Islamic occupation of India. An estimated 80 million Hindus were slaughtered and thousands of temples were smashed in a deliberate and systematic attempt to wipe Hindu civilization off the planet’. Such gross exaggerations and misinformation is often used by right wing parties to heap blame on Muslims through a warped version of their history, and demonise them because of it. The Sikh Awareness website, like the EDL’s, uses the same inflated statistics and again makes a link between Islam and Nazism, using the term ‘Holocaust’ to describe the events that happened during 800 AD to 1700 AD:

‘Unfortunately the world seems to ignore the many millions of lives lost during the 800-year long holocaust of Hindus in India...Today the modern world faces a global threat from organisations and groups of terrorists such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda – organisations whose ideologies are chillingly similar to that of the perpetrators of the world’s biggest holocaust.’⁸⁷

Partition of India

The partition of India in 1947 is another event used by the EDL to gain Hindu support, and it is described in similar terms to the so-called Mohammedan conquests. The partition, which was on the basis of religious demographics, saw the dissolution of the British Indian Empire and the creation of the sovereign states of Pakistan and India. It resulted in a struggle between the new states of India and Pakistan and displaced up to 12.5 million people with an estimated loss of life ranging from several hundred thousand to a million. Today Pakistan is primarily Muslim, whilst the majority of India remains Hindu, so enabling the EDL to capitalise on any residual post-partition anti-Muslim sentiment. The comment below has been posted on the Hindus who Support the EDL Facebook page:

‘ON THIS DAY... 15TH Aug 1947, India gained freedom from British rule... and in [the] process Pakistan (and Now Bangladesh) was cut out of our land for Muslims... yet 65 years after independence... flag of Islam and Pakistan is being hoisted in our nation.... it's really a time to put everything in retrospect...that are we really independent...or are heading towards another imperialism... this time far deadlier and bloodier under Islam.. It's time we proudly say...that we Hindus are proud of our country...and hope in next 65 years...Islam will not wipe us...’[sic]

⁸⁶ http://englishdefenceleague.org/islam_and_the_hindus/

⁸⁷ http://www.sikhawareness.com/index.php/topic/11919-now-muslims-demand-full-sharia-law/page_hl_luton_fromsearch_1

Religious imagery

A YouTube video posted by a Hindu EDL sympathiser entitled 'Hindus who support EDL' (22,419 views) utilises Hindi imagery, history, sacred texts and uses Punjabi language to appeal to Hindu sympathies and create a divide between them and the Muslim community in Britain.⁸⁸ It also employs the metaphor used by all extremist groups: that of a cosmic and religious war fought between 'us' and 'them', the representatives of Good and Evil (see also page 4). By referring to the Hindu gods, the video's creator has added more significance to the context than if he had placed all the emphasis on historic (or contemporary) rivalry:

'Janani janmabhoomische swardadwapi gariyasi means motherland is more beautiful than heaven to British Hindus. England is your motherland. What will you do when your mother England is attacked by jihadis? You fight back to bring dignity back to your mother England. Wake up and support the EDL...Bhagavad Gita says fight evil. Hindus are lions; we will never surrender to the jihadis. Have you forgotten eighty million Sikhs and Hindus were killed by the radical Muslims? Let our gods be with us in our war against Islamisation of England.'⁸⁹

A video posted on the International Civil Liberties Alliance (ICLA) website called 'British Hindus for the EDL' also refers to Hindi history and imagery and draw parallels that suggest supporting the EDL is in keeping with the tenets of the Hindu faith and even a religious obligation. 'Let the mother goddess bless the EDL. Just as Lord Ram killed Ravana the evil, we should support the EDL to wipe out the demons (terrorists) of today.'

Side note – ideological link between Hindu Nationalists and Zionists

The *Hindus United for Israel* Facebook page (2116 'likes') has no explicit connections to the EDL but it has re-posted a BFP link on the Stockholm conference that was attended by the EDL leadership. Its adherents also employ similar language to the EDL in their attempt to create an anti-Islam alliance between themselves and members of other religious communities, as shown in the speech below taken from the website. It is interesting to note that it is simply an edited version of a statement posted on the BNP's official website.⁹⁰

'We are fighting the same war. Whether you call them Palestinians, Afghans or Pakistanis, the root of the problem for Hindus and Jews is Islam. The 800 year genocide suffered by the Hindus of India at the hands of Arab, Turkish, Mughal and Afghan occupying forces is as yet formally unrecognized. And yet the only comparable acts of genocide in modern history are those of the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis, the Africans during the slave trade, and the also almost total extermination of native populations such as the Aboriginal people of Australia and the native Indians, Aztecs, Incas, etc. in North and South America. The holocaust of the Hindus in India was of even greater proportions. The only difference was that it continued for 800 years; until the brutal regimes were effectively overpowered in a life and death struggle by the Sikhs in the Punjab and the Hindu Maratha armies in other

⁸⁸ The same video has been posted from the British Freedom TV's YouTube page.

⁸⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1xj17AzHEE>

⁹⁰ <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/biggest-holocaust-world-historywhitewashed-history>

parts of India in the late 1700's. We must unite, and fight together. Long live the forces of HINDUTVA and Zionism!

Mistaken Identity

As with Sikh communities, a small section of Hindus resent being categorised as 'Asian' and the subsequent association with the Muslim community. The 'Hindus who support the EDL' Facebook group has posted links to Hardeep Singh's article, 'It's time to stop using the word Asian', while the National Hindu Students Forum – the largest Hindu student body in Europe – released an article stating:

'It is clear that this "Asian" formula leaves Hindus short changed. A few examples should make this amply clear. Let's take the race riots in North England in the summer of last year. The media proclaimed these as Asian riots. But to anybody who knew even vaguely what was going on, it was clear that these were specifically Pakistani and Bangladeshi riots - in which not even a single Hindu participated. Truly, the umbrella term "Asian" let down Hindus, causing Hindus of Bradford to suffer without voice, as well as lumping Hindus together with the actual perpetrators of the violence.'⁹¹

Hindus have also been mistaken for Muslims and attacked, and there are reports that after an EDL rally in Dudley (17/07/2010), a Hindu temple was attacked by EDL supporters who (presumably) mistook it for a mosque. Gian Narad, the temple's treasurer, told Socialist Worker: 'Fifty or sixty of them broke down the fencing outside to get into the temple grounds...They threw bricks and stones at the building, smashing three windows'.⁹²

5.4 The response from Hindu Communities

Hindu communities have responded in much the same way as the Jews and Sikhs; the majority affirm the need to support their Muslim counterparts and show unity and solidarity between all faiths, but a minority agrees with the EDL rhetoric and tries to distance themselves from Islam. However, the issue of mistaken identity has clearly existed for decades, as before the EDL had even formed, Sunrise Radio – Britain's 'leading Asian radio station' – banned in January 2002 the use of the word 'Asian'.⁹³ The campaign to create distance between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Britain began even earlier than this, with groups such as the UK branch of the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council) campaigning to dissociate themselves from Muslims in public consciousness by dropping the term 'Asian'. By doing so such groups hoped that racists could be persuaded to exclude Hindus and Sikhs from their hatred and focus instead solely on Muslims.

It is interesting to note that there are no social media groups in opposition to the EDL, (although several that demonstrate support for it). Despite this, the vast majority of Hindus reject the EDL and

⁹¹ http://www.nhsf.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=346:qasiansq-and-hindus&catid=239:misconceptions&Itemid=233

⁹² <http://uaf.org.uk/2010/07/edl-attack-on-dudley-hindu-temple-confirmed/>

⁹³ <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/an-unholy-alliance-racism-religion-and-communalism/>

leaders of some of the largest Hindu organisations in the UK have signed a joint statement alongside representatives of the Sikh community condemning the EDL and calling for faith communities to stand side by side rather than succumbing to the EDL's 'divide and rule tactics' (see page 26). Interestingly, in January 2011, Sunrise Radio aired a joint Hindu/Sikh statement which condemned the EDL and urged faith communities to unite. A month later they broadcast an interview with Varinder Singh, the spokesperson of the Turban Campaign, who spoke about their EDL counter-demonstrations.

Chapter 6: ISLAM – The curious case of Abdul Rafiq

As one might imagine, the number of Muslims who support the EDL is minute, and if BBC statistics are correct, there is only one who belongs – Abdul Rafiq (also known as Abdul Hussain and Salaam).⁹⁴ Despite the EDL's assertion that it only opposes Islamic extremism, the scope of the its invective encompasses many central tenets of the Islamic faith. Moreover the language and logic it uses to discuss Islam is found grossly offensive by the vast majority of Muslims, not simply radicals. For example, during one EDL demonstration, Tommy Robinson held up a lighter and a copy of the Qur'an to the crowd and suggested the latter deserved to be burnt because of some verses which allegedly contravened women's rights, and opposed homosexuality. The crowd's response was to urge him to do it, and Abdul offered to light the flame. (Thankfully though they were empty words and nothing was burned.)

EDL demonstrations often include the chants, 'Allah, Allah, who the f**k is Allah?' and 'Allah is a paedo' and a search of the EDL forum quickly reveals offensive and inflammatory comments regarding the Prophet Muhammad:

'Muhammad was a bloodthirsty murderer who viciously killed his opponents, caravan robbing thief, slave trader who raped his slaves, paedophile who had sex with 9 years old kids, liar and deluded clown who claimed that even Satan himself wrote parts of Quran. Mohammed's lust for power and domination made him a sick man that committed crimes first and then revealed verses that justified his atrocities [sic].'⁹⁵

Not surprisingly, the response from the Muslim community towards the EDL has been one of overwhelming angry opposition. There are many Facebook pages dedicated to challenging its views, including:

- Muslim Defence League (MDL) – 34,949 'likes'.
- Muslims Against Extremists (MAE) – 789 'likes'.
- We hate the EDL bastards [sic] – 124 'likes'.
- MDL= MUSLIM DEFENCE LEAGUE, FUCK DA EDL – 107 members.
- MDL (MUSLIMS DEFENCE LEAGUE) WILL TAKE OVER EDL – 11 members.

⁹⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-15777852>

⁹⁵ <http://englishdefenceleague.org/forum/the-antichamber/just-for-you/>

Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

Although support for the EDL from people of faith is relatively limited, the organisation does appeal to various sections of different religious communities – and this report has attempted to explain why this is the case.

The final chapter offers suggestions as to how to counter the threats of community fragmentation, and the isolation of the Muslim community as a result of right wing organisations, and also how to strengthen interfaith relations. Issues of Islamophobia and the tenuous relations between small groups within religious communities are not recent constructs, and there have previously been several campaigns and schemes set up to address them. Nonetheless, more work is needed especially as the problems of institutionalised Islamophobia and cultural racism have recently been ‘becoming increasingly acceptable across society, especially under the guise of the “war on terrorism”, and anti-Muslim elements in all communities have found renewed confidence in the wake of Bush’s “you are either with us or against us” rhetoric’.⁹⁶

The lines between right wing populists and right wing radicals are becoming blurred and each paves the way for the other. The EDL claims to be ‘anti-racist’ and argues that it is only against ‘Islamic extremism’, and as such is appealing to individuals who believe that their way of life, safety and jobs are at threat from society’s ‘other’. Right wing populists often like to fan fears, and the resulting hostility to Islam can be used by neo-Nazis and other extremists as a gateway to mainstream society. If left unchecked, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim prejudice may seep into the fabric of British life to devastating effect. Recently a poll undertaken by the *Evening Standard* found that a sizeable section of London residents harbour negative opinions about Muslims, while a *Financial Times* opinion poll showed that Britain is the most suspicious nation about Muslims in Europe.⁹⁷ These findings suggest that a key challenge is to change the perception of Islam and strengthen ties between the Muslim community and the rest of society, particularly other faith communities, so they are not isolated and left open to attack.

Despite what EDL rhetoric and the actions of a few religious extremists infer, it must be reinforced that no single person or select group of people can represent a religion, culture or race. Perceptions of religious communities must not be determined by the actions of a handful of individuals. The central tenet of all religions is peace, but every religious community has a violent, radical, subgroup with which most in their group refuse to be associated. It is unfortunate that these minorities are often the most vocal, especially in the Muslim community of late, but the majority should not suffer for the actions of a tiny minority because of a lazy set of prejudices, wilfully promoted and which categorise Muslims as fifth columnists trying to destabilise British life and the State.

Other minority communities should remember that although right wing groups are now targeting Muslims to capitalise on the anti-Muslim sentiment that has become more prevalent since 9/11 and 7/7, this has not always been the case. Jews have historically been the primary target of persecution, and the target may well change again. Religious communities need to come together and show

⁹⁶ <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/an-unholy-alliance-racism-religion-and-communalism/>

⁹⁷ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/114ea332-4e8a-11dc-85e7-0000779fd2ac.html#axzz26BGVlta9>

solidarity rather than fall victim to the divide and rule and fear tactics employed by right wing groups and sensationalist media sources. As Khadim Hussein, the president for Bradford Council for Mosques, said: 'some people might think that the EDL is only targeting Muslims and they therefore should not get involved. EDL is against everyone who does not fit into its misguided and false definition of what constitutes Britishness. Therefore, let us work together – Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, and Humanists – to say to EDL: we are not interested in your type of politics.'⁹⁸

The BNP and EDL's attempts to 'fish' in the 'troubled waters' of religious relations and form anti-Muslim alliances with Sikhs, Jews and Hindus have meant that they have tried to re-align themselves as non-racists, whilst trying to foment deeper divisions through the development of false friendships. However, the key to strengthen ties between faith groups is to highlight their similarities. The need to let go of historical angst between communities and focus on the elements that can bring them together is vital at a time when the far right is gaining more acceptance. Julie Siddiqi of the Islamic Society of Britain states, 'Jews and Muslims have to be coming together. As uncomfortable as it may be, we need to see above, see beyond. We have to do it',⁹⁹ while the Turban Campaign released a statement calling for Sikhs and Muslims to forget their past issues and 'rediscover' their shared traditions, including a common Punjabi heritage, history and culture, and to concentrate on common values preached in both religions:

Essentially there's a lot in common amongst the culture and tradition of British Sikhs and British Muslims. And that we need to rediscover common shared spaces and common shared history's [sic] in order to combat the wider issue of the emergence of society based racism. In a sense we can't go back to the class formation of the '60s but we can highlight the kind of points that the other speakers mentioned – namely that our traditions should not be used, whether its Islam, Sikhism or Christianity for very distorted political objectives.¹⁰⁰

Funding for Muslim and Sikh organisations in areas with a significant presence of both [the two groups] should be conditional on promoting cross-community relations between the two, particularly among youth and women. Fiyaz Mughal, director of Faith Matters, has said, 'by realising both groups have a shared common heritage, culture and political experience – these tensions [caused by the BNP and EDL] may be overcome'. Professor Gurharpal Singh of Birmingham University added: 'The only way to resolve the crisis is to re-discover the sense of shared cultural and historic identity – it is better for them to work together'.

It should be acknowledged that media sources have provided EDL members with much of their 'knowledge' of Islam and Muslims, and their sensationalist and inflated headlines only do more damage to community cohesion and interfaith relations. Many of these press sources are cited by EDL sympathisers on-line. History shows that the media can have a hugely detrimental effect on interfaith relations; the press was a significant contributor towards anti-Semitism in early-20th century Russia when it provided anti-Semitic agitation in exchange for state funding, and worse tragically followed in Nazi Germany. Correspondingly, publications such as the *Daily Mail*, the *Sun*, and the *Daily Mirror* produce headlines such as 'Premier League fizz ban for Muslims', 'Christmas is

⁹⁸ http://www.sunriseradio.fm/news1.php?news_id=3918

⁹⁹ <http://www.newstatesman.com/2012/05/muslim-jewish-unity>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.turbancampaign.com/updates/category/activism/edlbnp/page/2/>

banned: it offends Muslims', and 'Muslim schools ban our culture' – all of which may generate feelings of isolation, fear, and anger amongst both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and are detrimental to social cohesion. Media sources should be made better aware of the damage that can be caused by sloppy, sensationalist reporting. Documentaries and television programmes also have a duty to represent all faiths in a balanced way, to help educate people and bring marginalised communities into the mainstream, thus reducing suspicion and allowing future generations to develop more balanced and inclusive views of different faiths, as well as shared identities.

Recommendations

'I believe that if different religious communities came together in a genuine show of solidarity, the impetus of the EDL, fuelled by populist anti-Semitic and Islamophobic theories would naturally disintegrate', Jonathan Wittenberg, senior rabbi of the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues says of the situation. 'It is not bleak, empty and hopeless by any means... There is awareness that racism is the enemy of both and there is alertness to Muslim-Jewish relations, to the huge importance of this work'.¹⁰¹ Britain's next generation needs to be raised with the notion of being part of an inclusive, joint community, and there are many initiatives that can help develop stronger interfaith and community relations. The reasons why some young people consider other cultures and faiths as inferior should be addressed by interactive, fun learning, and should start from a young age. Some suggestions are listed below:

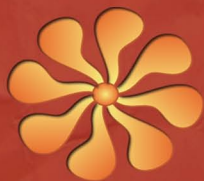
- Local and national 'faith festivals' where each religion is represented. They would be secure environments which allow people to interact, understand and appreciate each other's diverse backgrounds and traditions, and where difficult questions could be broached that might otherwise not get answered. Such festivals would also be good learning spaces as the issue of mistaken identity would be addressed in the context of what different faiths *are*, instead of what they are not.
- Local Faith Councils should publically hold interfaith vigils in protest of EDL demonstrations in their cities or towns. For example, the Vigil for Leicester, held in February 2012, was attended by Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, atheists and members of the Bahá'í faith. The congregation, bearing some 400 lit candles, was described by Canon Barry Naylor as 'a sign of light and hope overcoming all that is dark and evil'.
- Institutionalise teaching and interactive training (faith master classes) on peace building by involving faith fora, community elders, local religious leaders and heads of mosques and gurdwaras. This would help build trust, open lines of communication and provide a neutral space where concerns could be voiced.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/Faith-groups-unite-eve-protests-vigil/story-15130567-detail/story.html>

- Build an on-going feedback and reporting mechanism, which would inform faith groups on latest events and social gatherings, whether it be for interfaith, women's leadership opportunities or conflict resolution work.
- Run workshops where theological practices, cultures, scripture and religious similarities are addressed. A faith-based 'review and reflect' would prove to be interesting and informative and help remove the fear of the unknown.
- Secure resources through joint working between faith communities to support the work of women against all forms of extremism. Whilst central government is implementing huge cuts in social service provision, the impacts of non-investment in community cohesion and integration projects could lead to serious local flashpoints in the future.
- Reinforce the benefits of collective cooperation for finding common solutions to local problems.
- Hold charity events involving people from all faiths for common causes such as relief from natural calamities and fundraising events for the needy.
- Cultural stereotypes, religious dogmas and racist attitudes should be challenged more thoroughly in schools. Awareness should be raised by holding facilitated dialogue sessions where students can share experiences which represent healthy practices of social cohesion. In secondary schools and universities dialogues should be held that focus on existing prejudices and stigmas, and participants from all religious groups should be encouraged to get involved.
- Interfaith groups require greater support and the dissemination of good practice on how to work through issues, for example, when the EDL threatens to march through areas too vague. There are also medium and long-term impacts on communities which need to be addressed and worked upon when the EDL leave an area. Many community groups are not aware of how to handle these consequences, which may include changed perceptions between young people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage and white young people living in the same area.

- Eleanor Davidson of the Leicester Council of Faiths forum said of EDL members in February 2012, 'We all have to try to work out ways of engaging with these people to help them tackle their prejudice without recourse to anger and violence'. With this in mind, there should be 'pop up' centres in town centres with particularly diverse communities, staffed by representatives of all religions for EDL members and general members of the public to have their questions and concerns addressed in a neutral setting.'¹⁰²

¹⁰² <http://www.thisisexeter.co.uk/invitation-learn-differences/story-11702571-detail/story.html>



FAITH MATTERS

Working Globally, Impacting Locally

www.faith-matters.org

COPYRIGHT © 2012