

# Christian Fundamentalists in the UK: Moral Swords of Justice or Moral Crusaders?

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## Abstract

*This article considers two streams of Christian Right mobilisation in the UK – the Christian Peoples Alliance and the Conservative Christian Fellowship – in the context of neoliberalism and resurgent communitarianism. The article notes their roles as moral swords of justice in challenging a lack of local democracy, the weight of multi-national corporations, racism and hostility towards migrants. Conversely this article also shows how that same morality underlines an assault on women’s reproductive rights and enables the perpetuation of Christian supremacy and anti-Muslim sentiment within the context of a national turn to communitarianism and a discourse about British values and cohesion. The article concludes by highlighting the conditions within which these Christian Right organisations garner political space and legitimacy, the registers they utilise to make their claims and the specific aspects of their interventions and ideology that make them fundamentalist formations.*

*Keywords: Abortion, Christian Peoples Alliance, Communitarianism, Conservative Christian Fellowship, Newham, Olympic Mega Mosque, Queen’s Market*

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## Introduction

This article<sup>1</sup> draws the reader’s attention to two main streams of Christian fundamentalist mobilisation in the UK – the Christian Peoples Alliance (CPA) and the Conservative Christian Fellowship (CCF) – both of which rely on the exponential growth of evangelical Christian organisations in Britain. In this article, I make several points about the character and strategies of

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Christian fundamentalist mobilisations, within a national context of neoliberal governance and resurgent communitarianism. Firstly, I note that the CPA managed to gain popular support and local political traction because of their vociferous challenge to an undemocratic local council and the incursion of large corporations in the east London borough of Newham. They did so by attaching themselves to a class-based critique of regeneration. This is a prime example of the way that religious organisations position themselves, as do their academic allies, as ‘moral swords of justice’. However, by highlighting the CPA and CCF’s assault on reproductive rights, I argue that this ‘moral sword of justice’ is double-edged; moral conviction quickly turns to a patriarchal defence of the family and aggressive anti-abortion campaigning. The CPA’s local campaign against the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) is contextualised with a discussion of the CCF’s attempts to discredit BPAS at a national level. I argue that a number of new tactics are being deployed by Christian fundamentalists which include the instrumentalisation of women’s rights and particularly ethnic minority women’s concerns. In the final section, I draw attention to the paradoxical place of ‘race’ for Christian Right organisations in the UK - their pronouncements against racism and in defence of immigration are tempered and trumped by an underlying Christian supremacy that most frequently surfaces in criticisms of Europe, secularism and human rights. Moreover, I argue that Islam poses a specific problem for these organisations as their proclaimed support for religious diversity descends into anxiety whenever they see the Christian character of the nation being undermined, in this case by the growing visibility and assertiveness of Muslim organisations. The final section also notes another set of tactics – the Christian Right’s mobilisation of liberal concerns about extremism, cohesion and women’s rights. This article concludes by acknowledging the conditions of possibility or the contextual issues that enable Christian fundamentalists to thrive but also the modalities of identification, the distinct problems with their ideology and their interventions.

### **Neoliberalism and Religious Communitarianism**

The events discussed within this article need to be understood in the context of several decades of neoliberalism, of a resurgent communitarianism in the UK, and the legitimacy afforded to religious groups (irrespective of their political orientation) as bodies that are pivotal to the renewal of social relations. This is important for understanding the gaps that Christian Right organisations step into and the registers they utilise to justify their interventions and demands.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Dhaliwal, 2012) the revival of communitarianism in UK public policy began with the reconstruction of the Labour Party as New Labour under Tony Blair. Communitarianism was New Labour's tool for reinvigorating the voluntary sector and social provision without extending welfare provision as they looked to govern people through "communities of allegiance" and "etho-politics", a new moral vocabulary for public policy emphasising peoples' behaviour and values as the cause of problems and the basis for change (Rose, 1999). The individual became a moral being rather than social as within social democracy or rational as within neoliberal economic philosophy (Rose, 1999). Moreover, as Cowden and Singh (2017) point out, despite the seeming conflict between neoliberalism and communitarianism – between the individual and the communal – these 'doctrines share crucially significant ground'. They are both 'ideologically anti-statist in the sense that they regard state intervention and state welfare as having "failed"' and secondly, they both expect individuals to assume responsibility for the social problems that impact their lives (Cowden and Singh, 2017).

The term communitarianism needs to be distinguished from the sense of 'community' deployed by civil society organisations to assert a strong collective response to injustices and inequalities, a solidarity politics associated with collective civil action calling the state to account, such as anti-racist organisations referring to the 'Black community'.

Communitarianism is steeped in a conservative discourse about one or more of the following - moral degeneration, social disorder, the rise of individualism and the decline of traditional associations namely church attendance or trade union membership (see for instance Etzioni, 1995; Putnam, 2001). As a synthesis of neoliberal economic and social policy, communitarianism reflects a 'concern with 'community', 'values' and questions about the nature of social bonds' (Cowden and Singh, 2017). As with all other forms of communitarian discourse, there is a harking back to a supposedly better age, usually before the establishment of the welfare state, a time where people supposedly did things for themselves and local populations were more cohesive. Often this romanticisation of 'community' is tied in with nationalist sentiment ('Great' Britain). As Cowden and Singh (2017) point out, communitarianism thus presents itself as an alternative to both a state dominated Fabian social democracy on one hand and classical liberal-individualist conceptions of society on the other.

There has been a surprising level of continuity between New Labour, the subsequent Coalition and Conservative governments and the reinvention of the Labour Party under Ed Miliband. The views of key thinkers – Anthony Giddens (1998), Philip Blond (2010) and Maurice Glasman (2010) respectively – that welfarism has had 'perverse consequences' by creating cultures of dependency and political apathy has influenced all three. Blond and Glasman went further by projecting the state as bureaucratic; their work is emblematic of the attack on rights-bearing individuals accused of perpetuating cultures of neoliberalism and arguments calling for the strengthening of longstanding institutions – namely marriage, the family, and religious organisations – on the presumption that these offer stability and social bonds required to counter the impact of neoliberalism. This new wave of communitarianism carries a subtext – women have become too powerful and this is one of the reasons that social relationships have disintegrated. Feminism is projected as individualistic and middle class and therefore an easy fit with

neoliberalism. Calls for strengthening marriage and the family (the 'Broken Britain' scenario) through financial incentives have also been made by members of the CCF who have attempted to influence Conservative Party policy through the Centre for Social Justice.

Religion and religious groups have occupied a central place in this new-found interest in communitarianism. Both Tony Blair and David Cameron referred to religion as an important moral framework<sup>2</sup> and academics have positioned religious groups as sources of social glue that can renew the social bonds damaged by neoliberalism. Moreover, a range of academics have hailed the role of religious organisations in 'a new politics of morality' intended to counteract market philosophy (see Sandel, 2009) and as 'moral swords of justice' against state bureaucracy and large corporations (Glasman, 2010). Indeed, religious groups have been actively positioning themselves as radical voices instigating a 'revival' of civil society, in defining new social relations and as effective counter-movements against the brute reality of capitalism (see Deneulin et al, undated). As the discussion below demonstrates, there may be some truth to this with religious groups stepping into spaces vacated by the Left and the dismantling of civil society but their 'moral swords of justice' are double-edged and patriarchal as the same morality underlies an attack on women's reproductive rights. While some religious organisations avoid questions of gender, sexuality and reproductive rights (see my discussion of Citizens UK in Dhaliwal, 2012), the fundamentalist organisations discussed in this article are neo-patriarchal formations for whom the control of women's bodies and sexuality are central concerns (see Cowden and Sahgal in this Issue).

Conversely, since 9/11, this turn to values, morality and communitarianism has become intertwined with arguments about the 'binding moral force of British values', a discourse that has replaced rights-based social justice responses to racism and inequality (Cowden and Singh, 2017). Muslims have been subject to 'conditional or earned citizenship' and while religious conviction has been bolstered, religiosity among

Muslims has become evidence of how these communities are 'insufficiently British' (Cowden and Singh, 2017). Where ethnic minorities are concerned, these developments have always been cross-cut by an additional imperative - that of 'the civilising mission' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The place of gender as a standard of governance within this 'civilising mission' is not new (see Spivak, 1985) but several feminists have pointed to its revival post 9/11 as part of a new wave of 'civilisational discourse' (Brown, 2008). Within academia, there is widespread consensus that, at a discursive level at least, gender is an important feature of the moral discourses of community, cohesion and Britishness (for instance see Fekete, 2006).

The following sections reflect the national resurgence of communitarianism as a register for Christian fundamentalist critiques of the state, the market, but also the context within which they feel justified and emboldened by a discourse on 'British values' and government re-iterations that the UK is a Christian country. However, a large part of this article also narrates the story of the east London borough of Newham which reproduced but also contravened Blair's New Labour project. Newham's Labour Party wholeheartedly embraced Blair's neo liberal governance and his preference for a strong centralised command structure, but they did not embrace New Labour (or subsequent government's) faith agendas or communitarianism. The Newham Labour Group are avowedly secular and as part of their implementation of a strong local state, they have been vehemently opposed to a diverse and thriving civil society, including to the resurgence of faith based initiatives (some of which were funded by New Labour). In this context, religious communitarianism is even more likely to present as counter-hegemonic.

### **Resurrecting the Role of Christ in Politics**

The CPA was established in 1999 and was born out of the Movement for Christian Democracy which itself had been established by three cross-party Christian MPs including David Alton who is best known for his opposition to abortion and euthanasia. Their founding document, the

Mayflower Declaration, sets out the organisation's worldview. It is clear from this that ideologically the CPA combines centrist views on the economy, a concern with poverty and disadvantage, support for state welfare provision, communitarian autonomy for some institutions (namely the church and the family), and fundamentalist views on the family, reproduction and sexuality.

The Mayflower Declaration (CPA, 2013) describes the CPA's view of justice as 'ultimately founded in the character of God and its content given by divine law'; they 'regard all life as subject to the rule of Christ' and expressly oppose the 'destruction of the unborn'. Moreover, there are repeated attacks on secularism. Alan Craig, the previous Leader of the CPA and the first CPA councillor to be elected in the UK, noted their continuity with Christian Democratic parties across Europe as based on a shared reaction against anti-clericalism and what he described as 'the corrosive and aggressive secularisation of society and especially of public life'.<sup>3</sup> The CPA assert the 'righteous' role of Christianity in the public sphere:

The Christian basis of our nation is under attack as never before both from secularists and from false religion. We endeavour above all to be authentically Christian in our approach rather than merely different from other political programmes. We will never be ashamed of being Christians and wearing crosses and praying in public.

[CPA, 2013: 13]

Assertions about the role of the state in protecting and providing for the poor, the elderly and the frail and the need to rein in market forces, materialism and objectification are matched by equally strong assertions about the limits of state regulation and a defence of communitarianism, particularly the 'god given' authority of the church and the family (see CPA, 2013: 4). Moreover, the CPA pride themselves on working through Christian values to bring morality back into politics and position themselves against an era of relativism. They frequently assert their commitment to a moral politics of truth and their 2014 Manifesto is

entitled 'Standing for the Truth' and page 2 explains what this means:

The Christian Peoples Alliances' vision for our nation arises from the conviction that the Creator knows best how His creation is ordered. Truth exists and so does a set of objective, moral norms that can guide all human society in the pursuit of true peace, justice, charity and the opportunity for each individual to fulfil their human potential. It is for this reason that a party which seeks to ground itself on Gospel values and the example of Jesus Christ is necessary for our nation.

At the very top of their list of 'moral concerns' is 'the sanctity of life' (from conception to death) and their opposition to abortion.

However, aspects of the CPA's politics can lead progressive emancipatory groups to believe that the CPA are potential allies in struggles against inequality and injustice at times when their vicious assault on reproductive rights and their claim to Christian supremacy is obscured from view.

#### **David versus Goliath: Christian advocates for local people?**

In 2002, the CPA managed to gain an electoral foothold in the London borough of Newham. The significance of this victory cannot be underplayed in a borough where opposition to the Labour Party has been muted and Labour councillors have enjoyed an easy dominance occupying upwards of 54 of the council's 60 seats since 1982.

Arguably, this could suggest a strong mandate in Newham for the local Labour group. However, those interviewed for my doctoral research painted an undemocratic picture of Newham Labour, especially noting low voter turnout, redundant branches, a lack of accountability and transparency, a lack of grassroots activism, voter apathy and high levels of frustration over the absence of an effective Opposition (see Dhaliwal, 2012). Newham Labour Group's electoral monopoly has only been interrupted by two parties - the CPA and the Respect Party - both of which relied on religious identities as vote banks, bringing religion to the fore as a feature of electoral opposition and democratic critique. The CPA's

electoral gains are connected to the growing number of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the south of the borough.

However, in 2010, all three CPA councillors lost their seats; the CPA claimed that this was more about the entrenchment of Labour Party support against a Conservative threat than the unpopularity of their policies among Newham's residents. But it's also possible that the local Labour Party's revival of its Christian Socialist Movement outmanoeuvred the CPA and managed to capture the same vote banks. When he resigned as the leader of the CPA in 2012, Craig joined the UK Independence Party. This is more than simple political opportunism; the discussion below about Christian supremacy and the 'Olympic Mega Mosque' should make clear the basis for such an alignment of interests.

Greg Smith (2002) argues that Alan Craig's electoral success in Newham emerged from his involvement in a local tenants' and residents' association and a critique of estate renewal schemes. However, it was two specific campaigns – opposition to the regeneration of Queen's Market and opposition to the construction of a 'super casino' – that seem to have delivered respect for the CPA in the eyes of local civil society activists and positioned them at the forefront of a critical voice against Newham Council's collusion with large corporations.

Queen's Market is a one-hundred-year-old sheltered grocery and clothes market in east London. In 2003, Newham Council proposed to engage St Modwen's developers to regenerate the area. Over seven years, a community-led campaign by the Friends of Queen's Market successfully highlighted a huge number of shortcomings of the redevelopment proposals. The Council were accused of secrecy, lack of consultation and lack of democracy – even in the face of 2600 planning objections and an inquiry led by The East London Community Organisation (TELCO). Newham's Mayor appeared defiant and continued to push his plans while other Labour councillors remained silent. The Friends of Queen's Market foregrounded the intersection of 'race' and class – the market was depicted as an important site of multicultural conviviality and working-

class heritage and the campaign noted the potential race equality impacts of redevelopment plans.<sup>4</sup> Linked to this were economic and food issues – Asda would offer a narrow range of produce and be more expensive than the cheaper and more diverse being sold at Queen’s Market. In a poor and ethnically mixed area this was particularly significant for mobilising local people. Additional arguments were made about the environment and the Council were also criticised for plans to replace a social housing project for elderly Asians with luxury flats.<sup>5</sup>

The campaign to save Queen’s Market became a significant episode for galvanising local civil society and consolidating a sense of community. The CPA appear to have gained legitimacy from their association with it. When I interviewed Alan Craig, he emphasised the Party's commitment to social justice and protecting the poor without reference to Christianity. Indeed, the CPA’s statement on Queen’s Market argued that it stands against ‘the values-free managerialism’ of the local Labour party and with:

...the marginalised and speaks up for community and family-oriented values. Unlike the Mayor, we would never bulldoze an invaluable and diverse community asset like Queen’s Market in favour of a ruthless grasping Walmart Asda.<sup>6</sup>

This statement reflects Craig’s counter-positioning of ‘values free’ secular politics, bureaucracy and the market against ‘strong values’ faith-based politics.

Two years later, Tony Blair heralded plans to support the development of ‘Super Casinos’ in England. Newham was selected as one of the key sites. Newham’s Labour Party were quick to support the proposals and they eventually awarded a contract to Aspers to develop a large casino in Stratford. This became the country’s first super casino to open in 2011. The Council are convinced that they won the economic argument - Aspers now employs 600 people, 329 of who are Newham residents<sup>7</sup>, Aspers paid Newham Council an initial £5million for the contract and has since been paying them £1 million a year,<sup>8</sup> which the

Council claims has been used to fund community organisations and to create jobs.<sup>9</sup>

Opposition to the plans were muted. When it came to the council vote on the plans for the Casino, all Labour councillors voted in favour except for the Christian Socialists within the Newham Labour Group who abstained on grounds of conscience. Alan Craig emphasised the CPA's commitment to open, transparent government and opposed gambling on the grounds that it could be seen as a 'ticket out of poverty' (Newham is one of the most deprived areas in England).<sup>10</sup> In fact the Casino Advisory Panel's report (undated) had explored some of these concerns but concluded that alleged links between poverty and gambling were contentious and opening a casino presented no additional risk of addiction to the 110 betting shops already in the area as well as bingo halls and access to online gambling.<sup>11</sup> However, Craig was also making moral arguments against gambling which are reiterated in the CPA Manifestos.

Alan Craig's energy for Saving Queen's Market and his David versus Goliath like stand against Newham's Super Casino could be deemed anti-capitalist activism. The CPA may have been an important moral antidote to the lack of state accountability and New Labour's pandering to large corporations. They may well have used the symbolic weight of religion to wield a moral sword of justice to defend the interests of local people against the interests of big business. However, their sense of morality carries proscriptions on behaviour (sex, drinking, smoking, gambling, dress codes) and a desire to police women's reproductive rights. In equal measure, Alan Craig railed against sex outside of marriage and abortion and he alleged that teenagers are getting pregnant to secure housing. The next section shines a spotlight on the way that the same moral sword of justice compromises and attacks women's rights.

### **The Christian Right Assault on Reproductive Rights**

In 2011, Alan Craig's cutting edge critique of the impact of regeneration on local people descended into an assault on women's reproductive rights as he joined a multifaith picket outside the Newham offices of the British

Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) in Stratford. Importantly, Craig deployed the same arguments against BPAS that he had voiced against Newham Council, St Modwen's developers and Aspers Casino. In his view, BPAS was:

Becoming a large money spinning business. This centre is commercial opportunism to take advantage of Westfield Stratford City and the Olympics. BPAS have an interest in doing as many abortions as possible.<sup>12</sup>

Craig joined forces with the Society for the Protection of the Unborn (SPUC) to gather signatures from Newham residents for a petition directed at One Housing, the owners of the BPAS premises. The petition claimed a lack of transparency and proper consultation during the Council's planning process and attempted to scaremonger residents by claiming that BPAS was disposing of human remains in local bins.

In common with other Christian fundamentalists, they claim that life begins at conception and there are repeated references to the right of the 'unborn child'. Their founding document declares that '(w)ithout the right to life, all other rights and laws are rendered meaningless' (CPA, 2013, pg. ii). Abortion is startlingly referred to as one example of international 'cultures of death' and this is coupled with the claim that '(o)ver 7 million unborn children have lost their lives to abortion since the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act' (see CPA Manifesto for 2015, pages 8-9). These 'cultures of death' include assisted reproductive technologies, embryology research and euthanasia or assisted dying.

Moreover, as is now common among a range of fundamentalist groups, the CPA's anti-abortion rhetoric is pinned to an anxiety about declining demography and the possibility that their group will be replaced by outsiders. In one of their many shocking statements on abortion, the CPA claim a connection between abortion and immigration:

CPA members will wake up this country to the reality of the demographic consequences of an anti-life culture. With birth-rates falling dangerously below replacement levels, we now face major

economic and social problems associated with an ageing population. The issue of live birth-rate in turn has implications for the question of migration. States which kill their unborn and do not support marriage and family life, are having to replace this missing workforce through liberalising the numbers of people they admit, with inevitable issues relating to integration.

[CPA, 2016: 12]

The CPA's pro-life position is located within a wider patriarchal discourse about the family as a 'Biblical and fundamental institution'. They oppose same sex relationships and reserve marriage for heterosexual couples. The current leader of the CPA, Sid Cordle, played a leading role in the campaign against the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013. They are opposed to sex outside of marriage and they propose financial incentives for couples to enter and remain married as well as a financial incentive to encourage mothers to remain at home until the child is aged 5. There is absolutely no recognition of the costs of family life and marriage to women, nor of the incidence of domestic violence and the problems that women experience when trying to exit abusive relationships. As Cowden and Sahgal (in this Issue) have explained, 'the construction of a neo-patriarchal order' is a defining feature of fundamentalist organisations. Yet the CPA's opposition to abortion is framed as a defence of the rights of women. In their 2016 Manifesto, they state the following:

Abortion leads to increased exploitation of women, not their 'liberation'. Abortion violates the dignity and integrity of women. It leaves a trail of anger, guilt, resentment, depression and loss of self-respect.

[CPA, 2016: 11].

The CPA reiterate their commitment to a repeal of the 1967 Abortion Act, withdrawal of state funding to abortion providers and the institution of pro-life pregnancy advisory services. They advocate state funding for housing and welfare services for pregnant women on the assumption that women undergoing abortion only do so when faced with difficult material

circumstances.

Fortunately, when it came to the multifaith picket in Newham, BPAS could mobilise considerable support from residents. However, my doctoral research noted that among Newham's councillors and civil society activists, it was the Labour Party's Christian Socialist Movement that spoke out most clearly against the CPA's homophobia and anti-abortion position. Among civil society activists, there appeared to be more discomfort with the CPA's position on the construction of a Tablighi Jamaat mosque than their opposition to abortion and same sex relationships.

According to BPAS, three pickets of their Stratford premises took place during 2011. Two of these were led by SPUC who claimed to have the support of local Evangelical, Catholic and Muslim organisations. A third demonstration was led by Abort 67, which is linked to the Wokingham Evangelical church. It is important to understand the significance of these local interventions in the context of a resurgence in anti-abortion activism in the UK. This has been particularly aggressive and intimidating and included the following tactics: challenges to women as they attempt to enter the clinics; covert filming that undermines women's medical anonymity; the use of placards displaying photographs of bloodied and dismembered fetuses; and distribution of lies about the impact of abortion on women's health including allegations about the incidence of cancer (see Biddlecombe, 2016; Ellis, 2016). Because of the intensity and frequency of these demonstrations, abortion providers appealed to the police for a 'buffer zone' between the clinics and the protestors.

Moreover, a new wave of anti-abortion activism is now embedded within the Conservative Party courtesy of the influence of the CCF. The CCF was founded in 1990 by a group of students at Exeter University including Tim Montgomerie. The CCF is now a major reason for the incorporation of committed Christians into the Conservative Party and several gained the support of evangelical church networks to oust secularist, pro-choice, pro-euthanasia MPs.<sup>13</sup>

This Christian lobby within the Conservative Party found new voice

between 1997 and 2003, when electoral support was waning (Cook, 2010). Along with Phillipa Stroud and the MP Ian Duncan Smith, Montgomerie founded the Centre for Social Justice, a right wing think tank that has influenced many Conservative Party policies. Montgomerie claims that his listening campaign revealed church concerns revolve around poverty, debt and drugs rather than sexuality and reproduction. Yet, in the last ten years, reproductive rights have been at the top of the agenda of at least two CCF members – Nadine Dorries MP for mid-Bedfordshire and Fiona Bruce MP for Congleton.

Since her election in 2005, Nadine Dorries has relentlessly campaigned for a change to abortion time limits, she has vociferously criticised BPAS and Marie Stopes International and promoted faith-based interventions. In 2006, Dorries introduced a Termination of Pregnancy Ten Minute Rule Bill which sought to reduce the abortion time limit from 24 to 21 weeks and to introduce a ten-day cooling off period between the time that a woman requests an abortion and the procedure is performed.<sup>14</sup> The Bill was rejected.

In 2008, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill brought the Christian lobby in the UK to the forefront of national politics as the Vatican and the Catholic Church called on parishioners to lobby their MPs to vote against the Bill (Murphy, 2008). The Christian and pro-life lobby attempted to use this Bill to push for reductions in the abortion time limit from 24 weeks to as little as 13 weeks. Nadine Dorries, tabled an amendment to restrict abortion time limits from 24 weeks to 20 weeks. The current Prime Minister Theresa May voted in favour of Dorries' amendment but fortunately there was overwhelming opposition to any change in abortion time limits.

In 2011, Dorries tried again to impact reproductive rights, this time by proposing an amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill. Her amendment argued for a reduction in abortion time limits and demanded that abortion providers be prevented from delivering pre-abortion counselling because of an alleged vested interest in encouraging women

to choose abortion. Fortunately, none of these interventions have been successful. However, Dorries succeeded in getting the Health Minister to open a discussion about pregnancy counselling services and recently the government awarded the anti-abortion group Life £250,000 to provide counselling services.

BPAS claim that Nadine Dorries' interventions are linked to the import of a new wave of US Evangelical activism into Britain. There is considerable evidence to support this claim. Dorries has been funded by the Christian Legal Centre, which has represented several Christian claims of religious discrimination and is allied to the right-wing American group, the Alliance Defense Fund (Hundal, 2010). Moreover, Andrea Williams, a member of the Lawyers Christian Fellowship, drafted the amendment that Dorries championed in 2008 (Modell, 2008; Hundal 2010). Williams has also been funded by the Alliance Defense Fund (Hundal, 2010) and Dorries has referred to receiving support from 'an army of interns' (Hundal, 2010), which Modell (2008) argues is part of a new Christian Right strategy to push their agenda through sympathetic Christian MPs and simultaneously 'build a new generation of committed Christian politicians'.

There are multiple similarities between the framing of Nadine Dorries' arguments and Alan Craig's interventions. They both claim that abortion providers such as BPAS and Marie Stopes International are led by a financial interest in performing abortions. These groups are compared to corrupt profit-driven companies even though both are not-for-profit charities. Unlike Craig, however, Dorries claims to be pro-choice rather than anti-abortion though others have argued that this is more of a pragmatic strategy to gain support in parliament. Both Craig and Dorries recite the false claims peddled by anti-abortion groups about the links between abortion, cancer and mental health problems. Both claim that women are being exploited, abused and traumatised by the 'abortion industry' and they claim to be on the side of women's rights. Importantly, this claim to women's rights chimes with Ellis' (2016) finding on the tactics of American anti-abortionists. According to Ellis (2016), Mark Crutcher

produced a document in 1992 entitled *Firestorm: A Guerrilla Strategy for Pro-life America* in which he argued that in contexts where a repeal of abortion legislation is unlikely other strategies need to be considered. He specifically advocated reframing anti-abortion arguments as concerns about women. This gave rise to the co-terminus claim by anti-abortionists that they are both pro-women and pro-life.

In November 2014, another member of the Conservative Christian Fellowship, Fiona Bruce MP, also the Chair of the All Party Pro-Life/Anti-Abortion Group, introduced a Ten-Minute Bill proposing “(t) hat leave be given to bring in a Bill to clarify the law relating to abortion on the basis of sex-selection; and for connected purposes” (as quoted by Lee, 2017). There was overwhelming support for further discussion (181 in favour and only 1 opposed) and Bruce could have proceeded. Instead, in February 2015, she decided to re-articulate this as an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill and proposed to criminalise abortion on the grounds of sex selection. As Purewal and Eklund (2017) point out, the amendment on sex selective abortion ‘exemplified how a public health issue could become quickly incorporated into a crime discourse as a means of furthering the neoliberal state’s shrinking role in terms of service provision (e.g. through pregnancy and post-natal support services), meanwhile heightening its penal role’.

Bruce’s amendment was supported by a broad alliance of Asian women’s organisations and ethnic minority fundamentalist organisations who argued that women are under pressure to abort female foetuses because of a cultural preference for sons. They depicted this as a form of violence against women and girls. One activist referred to this as ‘womb terrorism’ (as quoted by Purewal and Eklund, 2017). In defence of her amendment, Bruce declared that sex selective abortion is ‘the first and most fundamental form of violence against women and girls’ (as quoted in Lee, 2017) particularly mobilising the terms ‘gendercide’ and ‘honour killings’. Fortunately, the amendment was successfully opposed by other Asian women’s organisations, academics, abortion providers, and medical

staff who argued that women would end up being harmed and potentially pushed into backstreet abortions. Moreover, the pro-choice lobby raised alarm bells about the push to make the term “unborn child” a part of UK law as this would give the foetus rights, potentially undermining and criminalising all abortion. They also highlighted the lack of clear evidence regarding the incidence of sex selective abortion in the UK and the potential for racial profiling in the provision of abortion services (Purewal and Eklund, 2017). They pushed against criminalisation and in favour of state investment in VAWG services to tackle the issue. Bruce’s amendment was defeated (201 for and 292 against) but the House did agree to commit the UK Government to assess the evidence on this issue.

Importantly for this essay, Bruce’s campaign employed tactics that chime with the other interventions discussed in this section. Doctors and abortion providers were depicted as unethical, greedy and driven by money (Lee, 2017). Moreover, it demonstrated the Christian Right’s ability to instrumentalise Asian women’s struggles for their own anti-abortion agenda and to position themselves as the moral vanguard of equality and non-discrimination, specifically carrying the mantel for oppressed women within minority communities. No doubt this claim bears echoes of centuries of white saviour discourse.

### **Christian Supremacy and its Racial Registers**

Despite the claims of Christian Right activists that they carry the mantel for ethnic minority women’s rights, ‘race’ occupies a paradoxical place within Christian fundamentalist mobilisations. The CPA and CCF are based on support from ethnically diverse evangelical church networks (Brown, 2010). The first leader of the Christian People’s Alliance was Ram Gidoomal, an Asian business man. Gidoomal ran as the CPA candidate in the first race for the London Mayor in 2000 and again in 2004. He managed to gain almost 100,000 votes, beating the Green candidate on first preference votes (White, 2004). Reasons given for Gidoomal’s popularity include ethnic minority church goers disappointed with the lack of other ethnic minority candidates and anger over the Iraq War (White, 2004). In

fact, when Alan Craig was elected in Canning Town in 2002, many believed that this was also about his vocal opposition to the Iraq War, which the CPA had declared to be 'illegal, unwise and immoral' (The Church Times, 2009) in a context where opposition to the Iraq War was suppressed by the Newham Labour Party (Dhaliwal, 2012). Moreover, an immigrant himself, Gidoomal set the tone for the CPA's support of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Indeed, there are plenty of signs that the CPA is keen on diversity and often their Manifestos read like liberal left positions against racism and a defence of immigration based on Christian values of hospitality and a common humanity (see Bretherton, 2010 for more on this line of argument).

However, there are also limits to their Christian hospitality towards migrants. They opposed an amnesty for undocumented migrants (led in most part by other Christian organisations) and their compassionate approach to immigration is restricted by three other interests - a strong commitment to law and order, anxiety about an enlarged welfare state, and a sense of Christian supremacy. Often these concerns fold in to an argument that bears markers of the assimilationist turn in liberal politics within the UK, echoing crude claims about causal links between immigration, social disintegration and a crisis in the white majority sense of belonging (such as made by David Goodhart, 2004 and Eric Kaufman, 2017). DeHanas and Pieri (2011) have rightly pointed out that, since 9/11, these perceived threats associated with ethnic diversity are often articulated as spatial threats focusing on the construction of Muslim places of worship as the Islamisation of the public sphere. This is discussed further below.

Much of the new 'faiths literature' in the UK applauds the Christian philanthropic contribution to migrants struggling at the margins of welfare state provision (for instance, see Bretherton, 2010 and Furbey, 2012) but there is little, if any, comment on the specific ways in which Christian Right organisations are utilising the predominant discourse on community

cohesion, terrorism and Britishness to salvage and strengthen a Christian character for the UK.

CPA documents recognise religious diversity and claim to believe in the equal representation of minority religions in the UK. They espouse a multifaith defence of all religiosity in the public sphere and they assume an affinity with other religions based on presumed opposition to secularism (and occasionally also human rights). However, they also expect an Establishment position for the Church of England (see CPA, 2013, p. 4) and there are multiple statements on restoring the Christian heritage of the UK (see CPA, 2013 Manifesto). Assertions about the Christian character of the UK and Europe are intertwined with a critique of Europe (disappointment that the EU constitution does not seek to protect Europe's Christian heritage), an attack on secularism and human rights. Their 2014 Manifesto alleges that this Christian heritage has been compromised by government and judicial support for same sex marriage and they berate the imposition of a European Council on Tolerance and Reconciliation (ECTR) as this will likely impact faith schools and religious organisations. Indeed, they unequivocally defend faith schools, particularly Christian schools (including the teaching of Intelligent Design otherwise known as Creationism) but not Muslim schools. Women's rights and opposition to terrorism are instrumentalised in their differential treatment of Muslim schools:

Schools with another faith ethos such as Muslim schools need to be treated differently from Christian schools and be the subject of a review. Taken into account has to be support for violence, attitude towards women and attitude towards those of other faiths if their people wish to convert. Indoctrination should never be allowed to operate in British schools.

[CPA, 2016 Manifesto, p. 16]

The Christian Right's emphasis on Christian heritage is intertwined with anti-Muslim sentiment - Andrew Brown (2010) argues that the CCF harbour 'considerable suspicion of Muslims and of Islam. These people do

not want a "faith-based" society: they want a Christian one'. I would argue that this is also true of the CPA. The CPA's 2015 Manifesto states the following:

It is the fashion to separate "moderate Islam" from "radical Islam". However there has been no proper analysis of where the one is separated from the other. For this reason, we say as follows - We want a full debate on the place of Islam in society which will include very important questions about promotion of violence against people because of their faith, attitude to women and attitude to people who want to leave Islam.

[CPA, 2015: p. 17]

Alan Craig's interventions on the construction of a Tablighi Jamaat mosque in Stratford, east London must be viewed in light of this partial defence of rights, a sense of Christian superiority, a commitment to god's law as espoused by Christianity and their differential racialisation of Islam.

In 1996 the Tablighi Jamaat purchased land from Newham Council to the tune of £1.6 million (DeHanas and Pieri, 2011). They opened a makeshift mosque, in lieu of planning permission. For around twenty years the site saw approximately 2500 worshippers per week. But in 2006, the site became the centre of national public controversy as the right-wing press claimed that the group were planning to develop a state of the art mosque complex, intended to become the largest mosque in Europe and hosting up to 70,000 worshippers.<sup>15</sup> The eventual application was only for a capacity of 12,000 capacity (10,000 spaces for men and a separate 2000 spaces for women), a school and a conference centre. A normative multiculturalist practice granting planning permission to diverse places of worship was knocked sideways by the affective impact of claims about the scale of this project as compared to Christian sites across the UK (DeHanas and Pieri, 2011). Growing disquiet about the development led the group to scale back its plans. These proposals were rejected by Newham Council in 2012 on the basis of concerns about traffic, poor planning and design.<sup>16</sup> Following a series of appeals by the Trust, the government's Planning

Inspector convened a public inquiry in June 2014 and the Department for Communities and Local Government subsequently rejected all three appeals on the basis that the site could more productively be used to construct housing and because the proposal did not meet local and London wide regeneration objectives. Interestingly, these local and central state decisions did not refer to the controversial nature of the Tablighi Jamaat sect, concerns that the expected £100 million cost of the plan would be funded by Saudi Wahhabis, and allegations of links to terrorism.

Importantly, Alan Craig was at the forefront of a highly visible public campaign against the Tablighi Jamaat's proposals. He established a website entitled 'Mega Mosque No Thanks' and gained significant media attention, so much so that the press appeared to adopt his alarmist renaming of the development as the 'Olympic Mega Mosque'. Craig also established an organisation called Newham Concern whose website gives little away in relation to its founders though there is speculation that the group was established by two CPA councillors and Andrea Williams (of the Christian Legal Centre as discussed in the previous section).<sup>17</sup> The Mega Mosque No Thanks site and Newham Concern avoided direct reference to their Christian beliefs. In fact Craig distanced himself from a national petition against the mosque (which accumulated 255,000 signatures) on the basis that the wording - "We the Christian population of this great country England"<sup>18</sup> – excluded 'non-Christians who oppose the mosque, as well as Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh opponents'.<sup>19</sup>

Craig (as Newham Concern) accused both the Tablighi Jamaat and Newham Council of a lack of transparency and couched his concerns in relation to the regeneration of the local area, specifically local housing and employment needs.<sup>20</sup> Alan Craig's public statements, took care not to come across as anti-Muslim, stipulating their defence of mosques in general and their specific concerns about Tablighi Jamaat. They alleged that Tablighi Jamaat are a proselytising organisation with a separatist ideology and 'expresses itself in cultural chauvinism and gender discrimination', that Tablighi followers make strong distinctions between

believers and non-believers, and as such the organisation would be unable to deliver benefits to the wider Newham population and more likely to reproduce the monocultural area that has developed around their headquarters in West Yorkshire. Elsewhere, Craig issued concerns that the proposals would create a 'Muslim enclave' and 'shariah controlled zone', reiterating national discourse around segregation and cohesion.<sup>21</sup> In terms of gender discrimination, Craig's Mega Mosque website submitted evidence of the Tablighi Jamaat's 'subjugation of women'.<sup>22</sup> Although the website recognised that the Tablighi Jamaat are an introverted pietist movement that have renounced jihad, as with much of the press coverage of the issue, they drew attention to links between the Tablighi Jamaat's mosques in the UK and terrorist activity.

It is not that these concerns are baseless, the links are important and similar points have been asserted by liberal Muslims equally opposed to the Tablighi Jamaat's plans for the Abbey Mills mosque. But there was no other local campaign against fundamentalism, terrorism and social conservatism so it seems that even progressive Muslim activists signed up to Craig's interventions. Craig could capitalise on these and couch his concerns as less about Christian supremacy and the perceived threat of Islam and more as a stand against terrorism and sexism and for cohesion, community and integration. However, there is an intense contradiction between the Christian Right's assertions about the impact of socially/ultra-conservative and right wing Muslim formations and their deafening silence on equally problematic positions among Christians and other minority religions. For instance, east London is home to a growing number of particularly secretive and expansive Christian groups that have been implicated in corruption and child abuse but there is nothing at all from Craig or the CPA on these organisations.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding, I draw on Michael Keith's (2005) assertion that it is useful, if not necessary, to make a distinction between conditions of possibility and modalities of identification. The CPA and the CCF have benefitted from an

exponential growth in evangelical Christian networks in the UK and the USA. They are able to position themselves as the vanguard against the long-term impact of neoliberal economic policies, increasingly centralised party political structures and problems with local democracy. In part this is because national political, policy level and academic herald religious organisations as offering important moral frameworks and social glue to rectify and counteract the damage done by neoliberalism. Both organisations make use of multiple contemporary registers to legitimise their political interventions – selective use of human rights language, women’s rights, cohesion and integration, British values, terrorism and security. Moreover, the absence of local and national campaigning against Christian, Hindu and Sikh fundamentalism means that the right-wing ideologies of these organisations are rarely understood even by progressive activists challenging Muslim fundamentalists. What appears to be fooling progressive activists into thinking that these groups are potential allies in progressive struggles is the fact that their ideological commitment to creating God’s law on earth is often obscured from view. Christian fundamentalists attach themselves to struggles against a lack of local democracy and market forces. The rhetoric of big business and regeneration plays a significant part in their interventions, their outward expression is rooted in material concerns and there is often little reference to the Bible or their Christian values. This means that one must seek out documentation to understand their ideological world view. Ironically, it is the neoliberal and undemocratic but avowedly secular local Labour council that is clearest about the fundamentalist tendencies of the CPA.

Both the CPA and the CCF meet a number of the defining features of fundamentalism discussed by Cowden and Sahgal (in this Issue). They are neo-patriarchal, supremacist organisations that claim Christianity as the absolute truth and they clearly assert their opposition to secularism and human rights. Both organisations advocate financial incentives for marriage and to encourage women to stay at home and raise children. Abortion is depicted as a reflection of the moral degeneration of society.

The same language of holding big business to account underlines their attacks on reproductive rights as charitable organisations are pushed into the same box as profit oriented, corrupt, multi-national corporations. These are sophisticated organisations that reframe their arguments in equality and pro-women terms, thereby feminising fundamentalism and the anti-abortion lobby.

They are, however, willing to stand against anti-immigrant sentiment and are largely immersed in campaigns to improve the material conditions and life chances of local people, even the CPA's campaign against the Tablighi Jamaat mosque is framed as a campaign about transparent government and the need to prioritise the material needs of local people in relation to housing and jobs. Nonetheless, their claims to stand for equality and cohesion are ruptured by their far from universal application of human rights, a commitment to Christian supremacy and differential treatment of Muslim formations. Gender equality is appropriated as a value that reflects not just 'British values' but specifically Christian values and an allegedly inherent Christian character for the UK, without acknowledging the intimidatory tactics of SPUC and Abort 67 or the implication of Christian organisations in child abuse and corruption. In part, this focus is made possible by the rise and rise of a national rhetoric about British values and the UK as a Christian country.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on fieldwork undertaken between 2007 and 2011 as part of doctoral research. Interviewees signed consent forms and agreed to the use of extracts from their interviews in publications and presentations. This doctoral fieldwork is supplemented with additional insights from analysis of secondary materials on Christian Right interventions in national debates.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, David Cameron referred to religion as a moral framework and "a guide to life". See 'Teachings of Jesus are a "good guide to life" says Cameron' by Jenna Lyle dated 6/11/09 posted on *Christian Today* and available at: <http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/teachings.of.jesus.are.a.good.guide.to.life.says.cameron/24555.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Alan Craig conducted on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.friendsofqueensmarket.org.uk/2156/2182.html> [last accessed 12th March 2017].

<sup>5</sup> See Friends of Queens Market website: <http://www.friendsofqueensmarket.org.uk/> [last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2017].

<sup>6</sup> See 'Newham mayor's attack on Christian Peoples Alliance success: "He is lashing out blindly at something' posted on 15/05/06 at: <http://www.cpaparty.org.uk/index.php?page=news&id=208&highlight=queens%20market>

<sup>7</sup> See: [http://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/news/stratford\\_casino\\_creating\\_400\\_new\\_jobs\\_in\\_five\\_years\\_1\\_4459382](http://www.newhamrecorder.co.uk/news/stratford_casino_creating_400_new_jobs_in_five_years_1_4459382)

<sup>8</sup> See Hattersley, R. 'Family values 2011: Labour's elder statesman visits Britain's newest casino - and is appalled at the way it's being sold as family friendly and socially responsible' dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 2011 and published by *The Daily Mail*. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2074308/Roy-Hattersley-appalled-Britains-newest-casino-sold-family-friendly-socially-responsible.html> [last accessed 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017].

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-34678230>

<sup>10</sup> As quoted by Angela Saini in 'Say no to casino' dated 28 October 2014 and published by *BBC News*. Available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2007/01/31/anti\\_casino\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2007/01/31/anti_casino_feature.shtml) [last accessed 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017].

<sup>11</sup> The Casino Advisory Panel report is available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090213101914/http://culture.gov.uk/cap/proposals/Newham.pdf> [last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2017].

<sup>12</sup> See 'Drawing All Faiths Together - Against Sexual Freedom' posted 8/11/11 to: [http://paulstott.typepad.com/i\\_intend\\_to\\_escape\\_and\\_co/2011/11/drawing-all-faiths-together-against-sexual-freedom.html](http://paulstott.typepad.com/i_intend_to_escape_and_co/2011/11/drawing-all-faiths-together-against-sexual-freedom.html) [last accessed 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017].

<sup>13</sup> According to Chris Cook (2010), Fiona Bruce MP for Congleton had around 300 local people actively campaigning for her through Christian networks because of her links with the New Life Church.

<sup>14</sup> A copy of the Bill can be downloaded here:  
[http://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/files/guide\\_to\\_nadine\\_dorries\\_t\\_mrb.pdf](http://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/files/guide_to_nadine_dorries_t_mrb.pdf) [last accessed 24th March 2017].

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3632591/The-shadow-cast-by-a-mega-mosque.html>

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9725631/Plans-for-new-east-London-mega-mosque-rejected-by-local-council.html>

<sup>18</sup> The petition and the government's response can be found here:  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20071227182534/http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page12552.asp>

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.megamosquenothanks.com/faq#g3>

<sup>20</sup> Newham Concerns objections spelt out in a letter from their solicitors to Newham Planning Officer – interestingly little on the politics of the group, very much couched in the language of regeneration, planning and development  
<http://www.megamosquenothanks.com/sites/default/files/currentnews/Formal%20letter%20to%20Newham%20Council.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See: <http://www.megamosquenothanks.com/content/mega-mosque-muslim-place-worship-four-times-capacity-st-pauls-cathedral-planned-east-london->

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.megamosquenothanks.com/evidence/subjugation-of-women>

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