

“BYE-BYE FASCISTS”

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at addressing public opinion towards the Right-Wing group, the English Defence League (EDL). Having received the label of extremists by the media, this paper seeks to examine such claims that the English Defence League is an extremist organisation. What we hope to achieve is a more detailed understanding of the accusations being made against the EDL, as well as identifying who the EDL are and what they stand for. It is hoped that by accomplishing these two objectives, we will also begin to see that support for Right-Wing policies within Britain is stronger than ever, and so it may (or may not be proven) that such sentiments are able to manifest itself in support for Right-Wing groups such as the English Defence League. An examination of hate crime, Islamophobia, extremism and populism will take place using academic literature. Material regarding the English Defence League will be sourced from their own website as well as media articles on the subject. This method has been adopted due to the impracticality of interviews and surveys in such a study.

Attempts were made to conduct surveys on the EDL forum which was met with much suspicion and little cooperation and it could only be deduced that attempting to interview EDL members would yield similar if not worse results. This paper shall begin with an examination of the literature on hate crime, Islamophobia, extremism and populism. It will then be followed by an overview of the English Defence League, their aims, values, beliefs, tactics and methodology. A combining of theory and practice will then follow as we apply the literature material to the EDL. Finally a brief overview of the media criticism the EDL has received which has aided its negative reputation and public image. To conclude, a summary will bring together the areas explored throughout the paper and attempt to bring home the initial hypothesis.

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“Bye-Bye Fascists”²

A Critical Analysis of the English Defence League

Introduction

March 2009 saw the birth of a new grassroots protest group in England. Stemming from an increasing sense of cultural alienation in the face of minority ethnic groups in Britain, this group set about ‘educating’ the public and raising awareness of Islam, and the cultural divisions that exist in society today. A subject which few politicians are willing to address. Dismissing the immediate public and media accusations of racism and extremism, the group have steadily, through a number of protests, marches and television appearances, gained a strong following amongst the British working class. The group has since become known, as the English Defence League.

Since their emergence in 2009, a number of similar groups have rallied to the call for a pan-European approach to fighting militant Islam. This exponential growth in support both at home and abroad brings into question some of the accusations made by the British media, labelling the group extremist, racist, and fascist. This paper aims to disprove such claims, or at least address the other side of the debate, on the grounds that the English Defence League’s (EDL) increasing support, would entitle the group to the status of a populist movement, as opposed to an extremist one.

This shall be attempted through addressing the available literature examining the subjects of hate crime, Islamophobia, extremism, and populism. Once an understanding of the subjects has been achieved, it will then be possible to overlay these theories or concepts over evidence of EDL activities, or rhetoric acquired from their own website, as well as other sources available on the internet.

What we hope to achieve is a more detailed understanding of the accusations being made against the EDL, as well as addressing, without media bias, what the English Defence League stands for. It is hoped that by accomplishing these two objectives, we will also begin to see that support for Right-Wing policies within Britain is stronger than ever, and so it may (or may not be proven) that such sentiments are able to manifest itself in support for Right-Wing groups such as the English Defence League, and the policies or arguments that they put forward.

Although the main objective of this paper is to distinguish, to what extent the English Defence League is an extremist organisation, or a populist movement; there exists a secondary objective in the desire to further enlighten people as to the effects of biased media reporting. It is important to be aware of the fact that through emotive language and the apparent authority that the media are able to wield, we as the general public, are often easily convinced and manipulated by mass media. Therefore, an analysis of the media reporting surrounding the EDL and their demonstrations will follow, once we have examined to what extent the EDL is extremist or populist.

² Title name adopted from a Muslim Defence League chant directed at the EDL. It was thought appropriate as this paper wishes to attempt to remove the ‘fascist’ label applied to the EDL.

This study shall be carried out using resources taken from academic literature on hate crime, Islamophobia, extremism and populism. Material regarding the English Defence League will be sourced from their own website as well as media articles on the subject. This method has been adopted due to the impracticality of interviews and surveys in such a study. Attempts were made to conduct surveys on the EDL forum which was met with much suspicion and little cooperation and it could only be deduced that attempting to interview EDL members would yield similar if not worse results.

This paper shall begin with an examination of the literature on hate crime, Islamophobia, extremism and populism. It will then be followed by an overview of the English Defence League, their aims, values, beliefs, tactics and methodology. A combining of theory and practice will then follow as we apply the literature material to the EDL. Finally a brief overview of the media criticism the EDL has received which has aided its negative reputation and public image. To conclude, a summary will bring together the areas explored throughout the paper and attempt to bring home the initial hypothesis.

Hate Crime and Islamophobia

Hate crime, as with crime in general, is notoriously hard to define, as crime itself is generally agreed upon as being a social construct. This creates a myriad of conceptual, practical, political and moral complexities, which are often unique to a native culture; which must be taken into account when attempting to define crime, and more specifically, hate crime (Perry, 2001; from Hall, 2005:1-2). Upon accepting that simple definitions do not adequately provide us with a view to hate crimes many facets and complexities, Wolfe and Copeland offer us a standard definition:

[Hate crime is] violence directed towards groups of people who generally are not valued by the majority society, who suffer discrimination in other arenas, and who do not have full access to remedy social, political and economic justice. (Wolfe & Copeland, 1994:201 cited in Hall, 2005:2).

Upon reflection, however, a number of criticisms come to light. Wolfe and Copeland describe hate crime as “violence directed towards groups of people”, thereby failing to take into account that many hate crimes are conducted against individuals, and that they may or may not be violent in nature. Verbal insults, as well as damage to property, could also be construed as hate crimes, neither of which is physical violence towards a person. Wolfe and Copeland then go on to state that victims of hate crimes are effectively marginalised from society. Does this then mean that crimes conducted by minority, marginalised groups or individuals, against majority groups or individuals due to their group affiliation, are then excluded from the category of hate crime? With these criticisms in mind, it may be that Perry’s definition of hate crime is much more thorough and accurate:

Hate crime involves acts of *violence and intimidation*, usually directed toward already stigmatised and marginalised groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterise a given social order. It attempts to recreate simultaneously the threatened (real or imagined) hegemony of the perpetrators group and the ‘appropriate’ subordinate identity of the victims group. (*emphasis added*; Perry, 2001:10 cited in Hall, 2005:3).

Such a definition highlights the fact that hate crime is not exclusively violent but can also, and is usually, intimidating in purpose. Perry also removes the limits of applying hate crime victims as ‘generally marginalised from society’, by stating that hate crimes are ‘usually’, not exclusively, conducted against such types. Perry also addresses the common

motivations behind such crimes as hierarchical beliefs, and attempts to establish one groups superiority, or 'hegemony', over another. Using Perry's definition of hate crime as a foundation for understanding such offences, it may now be appropriate to specifically focus on a branch of hate crime which better addresses the focus of this paper, Islamophobia.

The phenomenon of Islamophobia is one which is highly debated in the literature. Some critics argue there is no such thing as Islamophobia, and that it merely constitutes an area of hate crime. Whilst it is largely agreed upon that Islamophobia can be encompassed under the umbrella of hate crime, it is becoming increasingly prevalent through political and public discourse that an individual phenomenon of Islamophobia is on the rise within the UK, and large parts of Europe (Allen, 2010). At a time where relations between Muslims and the 'West' are fragile at best, Allen (2010) argues that this illusive concept must be addressed.

The Runnymede report, published in 1997, was an incredibly influential source, which addressed the phenomenon of Islamophobia in a political context. Whilst containing its own inaccuracies and criticisms, the Runnymede report has considerable relevance in terms of beginning to understand Islamophobia and, in order to do so, the report espouses its own, albeit simplistic, definition of the phenomenon as a 'shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims.' (Runnymede report, 1997 cited in Allen, 2010:15). What initially stands out about this definition is its use of emotive and subjective language such as 'fear', 'dread' and 'hatred'. These terms, it could be argued, provide more definitional problems than they solve. How do you define fear, dread and hatred? To what extent must negative feelings be felt before they constitute these emotions? Also the Runnymede definition fails to provide examples in any way, of the forms that Islamophobia may take, or why such sentiments may exist. Whilst a more comprehensive definition is provided by Allen (2010:190), it is both long winded and needlessly in depth for the purposes of this paper, as it is the authors aim to provide only a brief overview of the literature and debates surrounding Islamophobia, not to resolve them. Therefore for the benefit of this paper and to ease understanding, it may be helpful for readers to bear in mind the Runnymede reports definition of the term Islamophobia.

Edward Said (Allen, 2010:29-30), introduced the concept of Orientalism. Throughout history, during the Crusades in particular, popular myths and stories have been disseminated throughout the Christian West about their Islamic counterparts. Stories of Islamic practices being barbaric and backward were common. Including stories of the Prophet Muhammad being greedy, violent and licentious. Islam became known as the polar opposite of the West. Said suggests that these views of Islam (the Orient) and its believed (true or untrue) polarity to the West (the Occident), still remains today in the form of Islamophobic discourse. A crucial milestone for the West's perceptions of Islam came in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution. Up until this point, the Orient had been a distant entity which the West was protected against via the great geographical distances separating them from the Middle East. However, during the Iranian Revolution, events were televised and broadcast around the globe, and so the events of a Westernised government in Iran, being overthrown by an Islamic movement, were viewed by thousands in the West. This highlighted the fact that the Orient was not as far away as first believed, and with the rise of fundamentalism both in the Middle East, and the West, Islamophobic ideals once again came to the fore (Allen, 2010: 38-39).

Whilst the debates on what Islamophobia is, and how it came to be recognised in public and academic literature, are many and varied; it is Said's theory of Orientalism which, it could be argued, would best explain the existence of Islamophobia within Britain today. What we do and do not know about Islam and Muslims as a culture and a people has a great

influence on how we perceive and ultimately treat them as a demographic within society. What must be examined is whether these views are held by the English Defence League, in reflection of society's ignorance of Islam. Do the EDL hold uneducated views of Islam and Muslims? Do they view Islam to be backward and barbaric, and the polar opposite of the West? This must be examined in order to determine whether or not the English Defence League is indeed Islamophobic.

Right-Wing Extremism

'Extremism', or 'extremists', have become somewhat demonised throughout public and political discourse. Commonly associated with violence, fascism, racism, authoritarianism, and even fundamentalism; it is a label applied to those who espouse political or moral values which greatly differ from the cultural norm. However, are these associations valid? It has been agreed that a common factor of extremist groups across the globe, and throughout history, have used violence as a method of disseminating their message (Hainsworth, 2000) such as the Ku Klux Klan in America. Indeed Ignazi (1997), suggests that extreme right parties can be split into subtypes, those which have fascist elements, such as the BNP in Britain, and those that distance themselves from fascism yet express anti-democratic views, for example, the Austrian FPÖ (Hainsworth, 2000:5). Mudde (2000) argues that whilst difficulties defining the 'extreme right' exist, there are three 'pillars' of extremism that can be applied to the majority of Right-wing extremist groups in Europe. These pillars are: authoritarianism, ethnic nationalism and xenophobia (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010: 147-149).

Authoritarianism involves a strongly held belief in the rule of law and tradition. Commonly found to a lesser extent in Conservative voting in Britain, authoritarians seek to reinforce order in society and maintain the status quo. They perceive as threats to be those who challenge these fundamental aspects of society, often, in some cases, this results in violent retaliation in order to expel the threat (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:148). Ethnic nationalism refers to the cultural or ethnic group, to which one is born. Those of a strong Right-wing persuasion often espouse ideals of nationalism and pride in ones ethnic origins. This can occasionally manifest itself in policies of discrimination to those of other ethnic groups (Minkenberg, 2000; Betz & Johnson, 2004; from Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:148). Finally, xenophobia can be seen as the tie that binds the previous two aspects of Right-wing extremism together. Referring to the belief that outside, or 'foreign' influences (whether it be people, religion, culture or morals), have a detrimental effect upon society, and ultimately degrade it (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:148). This can be seen in the authoritarian attitudes by the perceived threat of those who seek to challenge the status quo via integrating their foreign influences upon the host society. Also the same can be applied to ethnic nationalism, where a suspicion of other ethnicities leads to discrimination and often violence. Eatwell and Goodwin (2010:149) go on to argue that such beliefs are diametrically opposed to a democratic society, and pose a serious threat to the way we live.

How then, do such sentiments come to be felt by those living in one of the most democratic states in the world? Much of the literature stresses that causes of Right-wing activity can range from personal experience, to economic hardship, to cultural identity crises. Eatwell and Goodwin put it most simply when they argue:

Perceptions that the distinctive cultural heritage of the ethnic majority group is under threat from migration and multiculturalism have been one of the strongest predictors of extreme right voting in other European countries. (Emphasis added; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:151).

By citing Ivarsflaten (2005), Eatwell and Goodwin are able to highlight the importance of the 'outside' group, integrating with the ethnic majority, or 'inside' group. The previous quote also corresponds to the three 'pillars' of extremism. Nick Lowles (2009), editor of *Searchlight*, observes another crucial dimension to the existence of an extreme Right-wing movement in Britain. Referring to the British National Party's (BNP) European breakthrough, Lowles argues:

It is an increasingly hard and loyal [BNP] vote which is based on political and economic insecurities and moulded by deep-rooted racial prejudice. This vote, with racism at its core, has a class dimension too, which the left and the trade unions ignore at their peril...The identity of the area has collapsed, leaving behind a confused, resentful and alienated minority. (Lowles, 2009 cited in Perryman, 2009:36).

The white working class within Britain has for decades, been the target of mainstream political parties. Constituting a large percentage of the British population, the working class is able to either support, or condemn political parties via voting, protests, strikes, or utilising the trade unions. As the economic climate declined in the last decade, we have seen a growing resentment of foreign ethnicities migrating to Britain. Allegations of immigrants receiving employment, housing, benefits, and education, over British citizens have spurred this resentment and fuelled the extreme Right sentiments in Britain (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:151-152). It is also interesting to note that according to Eatwell and Goodwin's (2010) research, on the latest public opinion polls (available at the time), the British working class harboured greater negative views, prejudices, or impressions as to the preferential treatment immigrants and Muslims received in Britain. For example, according to the 2008 YouGov poll, 72% of working class citizens believed "special treatment of immigrants meant ordinary people are losing out", compared to 69% of the general population (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:153). It is from this largely untapped well of support that extreme Right-wing political parties such as the BNP draw their support. However, if we argue that the white working class constitutes a large percentage of the electorate, then does this not make their concerns those of the majority? Or at the very least of a significant proportion of the minority; even if those concerns have been labelled as extremist by others?

Right-Wing Populism

In its simplest form, populism refers to the "political ideas and activities that are intended to represent ordinary people's needs and wishes" (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2011). Canovan (1981), argues there are two key elements to populism or populist movements, these involve "some kind of exaltation of, and appeal to 'the people,' and all are in one sense or another anti-elitist." (Canovan, 1981; from PublicEye.org, 2011). American populism can be said to have drawn upon numerous themes (see Table 1.0) which helped to develop the face of populism, for better or worse.

Table 1.0

Producerism	The idea that the real Americans are hard-working people who create goods and wealth while fighting against parasites at the top and bottom of society who pick our pocket. Sometimes promoting scapegoating and the blurring of issues of class and economic justice, and with a history of assuming proper citizenship is defined by White males.
Anti-Elitism	A suspicion of politicians, powerful people, the wealthy and high culture. Sometimes leading to conspiracist allegations about control of the world by secret elites, especially the scapegoating of Jews as sinister and powerful manipulators of the economy or media.
Anti-Intellectualism	A distrust of those pointy headed professors in their Ivory Towers. Sometimes undercutting rational debate by discarding logic and factual evidence in favor of following the emotional appeals of demagogues.
Majoritarianism	The notion that the will of the majority of people has absolute primacy in matters of governance. Sacrificing rights for minorities, especially people of color.
Moralism	Evangelical-style campaigns rooted in Protestant revivalism. Sometimes leading to authoritarian and theocratic attempts to impose orthodoxy, especially relating to gender.
Americanism	A form of patriotic nationalism. Often promoting ethnocentric, nativist, or xenophobic fears that immigrants bring alien ideas and customs that are toxic to our culture.

(PublicEye.org, 2011)

For the purpose of this paper, we can attempt to apply these themes of populism to the British context. ‘Producerism’ and ‘Anti-elitism’ can be construed as the discontent with politicians within Britain, following the expenses scandal of 2009, as well as recent public spending cuts and tax rises. Betz (1994:37) goes further by arguing that across Western Europe, political parties have faced growing public dissatisfaction. He goes on to attribute this loss of public confidence, to the fact that political parties have, over time, become to be perceived as self-serving, and not respecting, or appealing to the needs of the public majority. Therefore, ‘Majoritarianism’ is perhaps the strongest or most influential theme of populism, and can be identified clearly in the British public’s attitude towards crime and punishment, and immigration policies:

A desire for conformity, order and protection is very widespread in Britain, and voters are perfectly willing to sweep aside concerns about the rights of individuals or groups when they consider themselves to be threatened. Seemingly radical BNP proposals, such as the reimposition of the death penalty, the abolition of all multicultural policies in favour of coercive assimilation, or large expansions in police powers, enjoy support from majorities of British survey respondents [...] such ideas could easily pass into law if put to the public via direct referenda. (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:150).

The British public is more than willing to sacrifice individual liberties, for the sake of society. These policies however are often greatly opposed by mainstream political parties. ‘Moralism’ in the British context could be referred to as the opposition to Sharia law in Britain, and the emphasis on reinforcing traditional Christian values in the face of the perceived threat from Muslim, or Islamic integration. ‘Americanism’, or perhaps ‘Britishness’

in our context, would refer to the nationalist, patriotic views held by many within British society. With nationalism commonly associated with the Right-wing of politics, it is not uncommon for negative feelings of resentment, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism to be present. Combined, these six elements constitute the makings of the populist right-wing in Britain. Originally constructed within an American context, these values can still be seen in populist British society today. It is these elements which, it could be argued, can be seen amongst allegedly 'extremist' or 'radical' Right-Wing groups such as the English Defence League.

The English Defence League

The last decade has seen a myriad of political, social, and economic dilemmas, which can be said to contribute either directly, or indirectly, to the current animosities which exist in our social environment. Increasing levels of immigration from Middle Eastern states, has resulted in fewer jobs being available for British citizens. This has been exacerbated by the recent economic recession, with thousands of workers being made redundant, in some instances being replaced by those of foreign origin, that are willing to work for lower wages. Further tension has been heaped upon the tinder box of cross-community relations, as perceived erosions of British culture have taken place (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:150-151).

Since the British government began adopting a firm policy on political correctness, many members of the British public argue that their culture is being repressed, whilst those of other nationalities are encouraged to express their cultures. This has materialised itself in the discouraged use of Christmas decorations and nativity scenes, for fear of discriminating against those who do not follow the Christian faith (*Telegraph*, 2006), as well as instances where the government, or even the criminal justice system, has been lenient on those of other nationalities for fear of being perceived as racist. For example, extremist Muslims burnt poppies on Armistice Day 2010 and were fined £50, while a man in Derby received the same fine for dropping a burnt match down the drain (Sloan *et al.* 2011).

As the threat from Islamic extremists and international terrorism became apparent, many Muslim communities found themselves alienated and discriminated against. The Islamic community as a whole had been tarnished by the atrocities committed by extremist groups. Consequently this marginalisation led to a rise in British Muslims turning to extremism through various forms of indoctrination, largely through media and manipulated interpretations of the Muslim faith. 7/7 bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Jermaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain, were all British citizens, born and raised in Britain (with the exception of Lindsay who emigrated from Jamaica to Britain at the age of 5); this placed further mistrust and suspicion on the Muslim community, and fuelled the rise of Islamophobia in Britain (Hewitt, 2008:50).

The spark which ignited the fire of Right-wing protest in Britain was undoubtedly the Muslim protest during the home coming parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment in March 2009 (English Defence League, 2011). As British troops marched through the streets of Luton to the sound of rapturous applause from the British public, a group of Muslim protestors assembled in opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The protestors wasted no time in expressing their views through offensive language and rhetoric directed at the Royal Anglian troops marching by (Percival, 2009). Due to freedom of speech laws in Britain, the Muslim protestors were well within their rights to stage a peaceful protest, and so police officers on scene were powerless to prevent the uproar caused by the events that took place that day. In response to the Muslim protest, the United Peoples of Luton was formed, who eventually became the English Defence League we are familiar with today. Many commentators, as well

as EDL members themselves, agree that the events of 10th March 2009 highlighted the need for action against the spread of extremist Islamic ideology in Britain (EDL, 2010). It is from this belief that the English Defence League builds their own ideological foundations.

The English Defence League's mission statement, sourced from their website (www.englishdefenceleague.org), states five objectives the EDL hopes to accomplish. The first promotes human rights for both British and Muslim citizens. Describing itself as a human rights organisation, the EDL aims to protect the right to free speech, so as citizens can speak out against the threat of Islamic extremism without being persecuted. Mostly however, the mission statement regards the protection of the rights of the Muslim population.

We also recognise that Muslims themselves are frequently the main victims of some Islamic traditions and practices. The Government should protect the individual human rights of British Muslims. It should ensure that they can openly criticise Islamic orthodoxy, challenge Islamic leaders without fear of retribution, receive full equality before the law (including equal rights for Muslim women), and leave Islam if they see fit, without fear of censure. (English Defence League, 2011).

The lengths gone to in order to express this support and empathy for the Muslim population cannot be ignored. To a large extent the support for Muslims greatly outweighs that of the support for non-Muslims, who are barely mentioned at this stage of the mission statement. The one-sidedness could be construed as a meagre attempt by the EDL, to shake off their racist public view, and appease those on the political Left. Also the EDL claim to support free speech however they call for radical Muslim preachers to be arrested because they are exercising that very right. It seems free speech is only worth protecting when it is used against ones enemies.

The next section of the EDL's mission statement, regards the promotion of democratic ideals and the rule of law. The EDL argue that Sharia Law is incompatible with modern Western democracy and cannot work within a democratic state without becoming a complete alternative to the existing system. Opposing Sharia Law, the EDL claim:

Sharia law makes a fundamental distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the EDL will never allow this sort of iniquitous apartheid to take root in our country. The EDL will therefore oppose Sharia appeasement in all its forms, and will actively work to eradicate the sharia-compliant behaviours that are already being adopted, and enforced, in our society. (English Defence League, 2011).

Objective three of the mission statement, is to 'educate the public'. The EDL claims that both the government and the British public have been dealt 'sanitised and biased views of Islam'. In order to counter the negative effects Islam may have on our secular Western democracy, we must, the EDL claim, be able to debate the subject and educate others without the fear of being labelled racist. Although the subheading of this section of the mission statement reads "ensuring the public get a balanced picture of Islam", there seems to be more emphasis on the negative impacts upon society rather than the positive. Not one admirable quality of Islam is addressed, indeed the "sanitised and therefore inaccurate version of Islam" (English Defence League, 2011), that has been adopted by the British government is openly dismissed as false, almost implying that Islam has very few, if any, commendable qualities. This does not appear to present a "balanced picture of Islam". Perhaps the EDL has been developed a negative and sullied view of Islam, which they aim to spread amongst the British population through the facade of 'education' and 'debate'.

Part four of the mission statement reads “Respecting Tradition” and identifies the key goal of the English Defence League’s wish to see the active preservation of ‘British culture’. However, they do not attempt to assert what ‘British culture’ actually is. Under this pretence, the EDL can apply the label of ‘British culture’ to whatever policies or traditions they agree with, and dismiss those they do not agree with as erosions, or challenges to that culture. If the EDL do indeed wish to protect British culture then they should take steps to identify what it is they are protecting. Nevertheless, as stated previously, Britain is undergoing an apparent process of ‘Islamification’. The EDL argue that although they respect tolerance and diversity within British culture, they believe that it should be the responsibility of those coming to Britain to adopt our cultural practices and ideals.

If people migrate to this country then they should be expected to respect our culture, its laws, and its traditions, and not expect their own cultures to be promoted by agencies of the state. The best of their cultures will be absorbed naturally and we will all be united by the enhanced culture that results. The onus should always be on foreign cultures to adapt and integrate. (English Defence League, 2011).

There seems to be a degree of irony in this statement. A group of far-right, anti-Islamic, alcohol consuming, violent youths, who are often associated with football hooliganism and racism, are claiming other cultures must abide by British laws, when frequently EDL members are being arrested for breaking those very laws themselves.

The final goal of the EDL is to work internationally with others who hold similar beliefs. They argue that it takes a global response to fight a global problem, and they wish to maintain and defend western ideals against radical Islam and Sharia Law (English Defence League, 2011).

Due to the English Defence League’s Right-wing views, they have often been labelled as racists and fascists, by the media, politicians, and counter protest groups such as Unite Against Fascism (UAF). Moreover, connections are commonly made between the EDL and other Right-wing groups such as the British National Party (BNP) and Combat 18. Whilst it is possible, or even likely, that a number of EDL members would have associations with these groups, the EDL as a whole reject these claims. The EDL does not perceive its views to be racist, as they oppose only militant or extreme Islamic views, which they recognise as a legitimate threat to British public safety and culture (EDL, 2010).

In an attempt to gain a much more comprehensive view of the English Defence League, what they do, and how they do it; it may be beneficial to examine the rise of the organisation. In doing so, there shall be an emphasis on the key events which would later come to define them. To begin, however, it is important to understand the EDL’s organisational structure. Excluding the International, Cymru, Ulster and Scottish Defence Leagues, a brief overview of EDL structure shall be examined.

The English Defence League consists of a core leadership, consisting of most notably Stephen Lennon (more commonly known as Tommy Robinson), Kevin Carroll and Guramit Singh. Orders, or directions, are passed from the leadership to the different EDL divisions. The EDL consists of ten regional divisions with their own leadership structure, as well as their own subdivisions. In addition to regional divisions, the English Defence League also consists of a womens division, the EDL Angels, a youth division, the English Defence Youth as well as the EDL LGBT Division (Harris, 2011). The EDL commonly cite the LGBT division as proof of their non-fascist ways as they openly welcome homosexuals within the organisation. However, as with their over-emphasis on protecting Muslims in their mission statement, some

may see this as a front. It would be useful for an organisation to exhibit equality, when attempting to garner support from the public. The LGBT division is repeatedly used to parry accusations of the EDL being fascist.

Whilst there is a central leadership within the EDL, it is the responsibility of the regional divisions to organise themselves, public events or demonstrations as well as advertising and recruitment. It is also the responsibility of the leadership to police its members. February 2011 saw a member of the Jewish Division affiliate herself with the Jewish Task Force (JTF), the leader of which had been imprisoned for terrorist offences. Upon hearing of this, the EDL leadership were quick to distance themselves from Roberta Moore, threatening to sever ties to the Jewish Division if she did not cease contact with the JTF (Pitt, 2011).

Having briefly assessed the command structure within the English Defence League, it is perhaps suitable to review the demonstrations, events and ways that the EDL have used to raise their public profile. As previously stated, the birthplace of the English Defence League resides in Luton, Bedfordshire. Having gained a reputation as a hotbed for Islamic extremism (Beckford, 2010), Luton gave rise to one of the most prominent Right-wing protest groups in Britain today. The anti-war protestors at the Royal Anglian Regiments homecoming in 2009 evoked the anger of the patriotic people of Luton. The United People of Luton formed to thwart the calls for the implementation of Sharia Law within the UK, as well as to promote and encourage pride, and respect for British troops (Beckford, 2010).

Throughout 2009/10, the EDL have staged a number of fixed protests and marches around the country. A key phrase professed throughout the EDL is 'peaceful protest'; however a number of demonstrations escalated into violent confrontations with counter protest groups such as Unite Against Fascism (UAF). The protests in Dudley, Birmingham and Bradford, were perhaps the most violent and volatile. In the run up to the Birmingham demonstration in 2009, Birmingham Central Mosque chairman Dr Mohammad Naseem, encouraged Muslim youths to counter demonstrate and "vent their feelings" against the EDL. Violence ensued in the busy New Street area of Birmingham, with nearby shoppers and members of the public, running to escape the bottles and bricks thrown by demonstrators on both sides (Mail Online, 2009). In April 2010, the English Defence League held a protest in Dudley in opposition of plans to build a 'Mega Mosque'. High street shops were closed down in preparation for the protests, as high levels of violence and disorder were anticipated. Whilst there were a number of minor outbreaks of disorder, the violence failed to reach the scale previously experienced in Birmingham (BBC News, 2010). The EDL travelled to Bradford in August 2010, home to a large population of Muslim families. In 2001, the National Front marched through Bradford, sparking riots between the Right-wing protestors and the local Muslim youth. Great efforts were made on behalf of the Bradford community to prevent a repeat of the events of 2001. Despite the measures taken, police reinforcements had to be called in as EDL members, riled up from chants and jeers from Muslim youths and Left-wing activists, began to break through police lines and throw bricks and bottles at their rivals (Telegraph, 2010).

In addition to raising awareness through protests, the English Defence League also utilises mass media outlets, such as the internet, television, and radio. The EDL have a central website (www.englishdefenceleague.org), which contains information on the organisation, ranging from their mission statement, to news stories/articles, to radio and television interviews, as well as promotions for upcoming events. Through this website, which is accessible to the public, the EDL are able to educate and inform the public and other EDL

members, as to the beliefs, events and issues that are relevant to the EDL. There exists, on the website, accounts of those demonstrations stated above. However the EDL are quick to deny any responsibility for the violent actions experienced at these events. A popular tool adopted by the EDL, is to blame the attacks on UAF, or Muslim aggravation, or outright lies from the media.

Links to the English Defence League forum (http://s1.zetaboards.com/EDL_The_Forum/index/) can also be found on the website. This forum contains sections ranging from introductory messages to new members, political issues, upcoming demonstrations, as well as those sections dedicated to the English Defence Youth division as well as the Cymru, Scottish, Ulster and International Defence Leagues. Through the forum, members are able to debate amongst themselves and critics of the EDL as to the activities and beliefs of the organisation. It is on the forum where much of the debate on Islam takes place. Here it is not uncommon to find offensive or derogatory language directed at the Muslim population. It appears that the EDL website acts as the public face of the EDL yet the forum is a more accurate representation.

As well as websites and forums, the English Defence League also makes good use of popular social networking sites such as Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/?ref=hp#!/English.Defence.League.EDL>). The EDL currently have approximately 72,800 fans on Facebook (Facebook, 2011). By openly publicising their activities online, the EDL creates an element of transparency, and a “nothing to hide” attitude. They reinforce this by appearing on television and radio news programmes. Numerous appearances on BBC Radio 5 Live have been undertaken by the English Defence League, more specifically its leader ‘Tommy Robinson’ (English Defence League, 2011). Featuring prominent figures within both the British and Muslim communities, these interviews have often been used by the EDL as an opportunity to broadcast its political message, and to do so in a respectable debate with critics and supporters. Appearances such as the recent appearance of ‘Tommy Robinson’ on BBC Newsnight with Jeremy Paxman serve a similar purpose (BBC iPlayer, 2011). However the more astute viewers will notice much of the EDL’s argument remains the same. Throughout each television or radio appearance the EDL is constantly regurgitating the same catch phrases, slogans and arguments time and time again. Consequently the EDL run the risk of losing momentum as people begin to see that rather than having a constantly developing argument, the EDL are recycling the popular parts of their previous debates in an attempt to curry support through catch phrases and propaganda. Albeit opportunities such as these, give the English Defence League a platform from which to disseminate its message to potential supporters, in order to increase pressure upon central government to heed its message. This combination of public demonstration, controversy, and transparency in terms of advertising its presence and message through the media, has culminated in the English Defence League developing an increasingly popular public profile. How long that support will last without a developing argument is yet to be seen. However it is this apparent popularity that motivates the research and writing of this paper.

Dispelling the Myths

In order to answer the debate on whether the English Defence League is, as the media claim, an extremist organisation, or a populist movement; it is clearly imperative to examine the groups discourse outside of the media realm. This ensures media biased to be excluded from the equation and enables us to gain a more accurate understanding of what the EDL is like. In order to do this, an analysis of the articles, videos and audio material from the English Defence League website (www.englishdefenceleague.org) has been undertaken. This is

believed to be important as it is still in the realm of who the EDL are and what they do. What they say in their articles, television, and radio interviews, still constitutes evidence to what the EDL believe in. Of course this is not without its own biased slant. Naturally the EDL have their own agenda. Therefore, in order to gain further material, exempt from any political interest or bias opinion, the use of popular video-sharing website YouTube (www.youtube.com) has been adopted. In order to apply the findings of this research to the literature on hate crime, and Islamophobia, I have taken key aspects from the definitions mentioned above and attempted to identify those elements throughout EDL discourse. Table 2.0 below, shows the results of this research.

In seeking to uncover any elements of hate crime amongst the English Defence League's motives or actions, I used the previously stated definition of hate crime by Perry (2010:10):

Hate crime involves acts of *violence and intimidation*, usually directed toward already stigmatised and marginalised groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterise a given social order. It attempts to recreate simultaneously the threatened (real or imagined) hegemony of the perpetrators group and the 'appropriate' subordinate identity of the victims group. (*emphasis added*; Perry, 2001:10 cited in Hall, 2005:3).

As expected, when searching for evidence of "violence or intimidation" amongst the material found on the EDL website, little was to be found. The only references of violence or intimidation were the condemnation of a minority of violent members at protests. Throughout, the EDL have been relentless in promoting the idea of peaceful protest with many leading members pleading with protestors to remain peaceful and well behaved. There was certainly no hint of approval for committing acts of violence towards those of the Muslim community. However, when the analysis included videos from YouTube, the picture became clearer. Whilst the EDL as an organisation claims not support or approve of any violent action against anyone regardless of race, colour or religion; the same cannot be said for individual members. On a number of occasions, groups of EDL protestors have been responsible for breaking through police lines, throwing projectiles at the police and counter protestors, and engaging in street fights (Mail Online, 2009). Out of the 43 videos taken from the EDL website and YouTube, surprisingly only 12 of these had references to acts of intimidation or violence. These included taunting counter protestors in an attempt to escalate the situation. Regarding any attempts to recreate superiority of one group over the other, the findings were very positive. Only one reference was found amongst the 106 pieces of material. Moreover, this article was only included due to its reference to Muslims as 'barbarians', because of their beliefs and customs involved in Sharia Law.

In order to assess any Islamophobic evidence, I adopted the aforementioned definition by the Runnymede Report: "shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims." (Runnymede report, 1997 cited in Allen, 2010:15). As previously addressed, the subjectivity of terms such as 'dread', 'hatred', 'fear' and 'dislike' make interpretation highly biased and open to debate. In order to circumvent this problem, only articles, videos or audio material, which openly used those terms, were included in the research. Of course this means that the numbers found in Table 2.0 below, may be much higher, but for the sake of impartiality, only clearly stated expressions of such emotions were accepted. Out of a combined total of 106 pieces of material, only 7 showed evidence of Islamophobic behaviour in accordance with the Runnymede Reports definition. Understandably, anyone who is familiar with the English Defence League will have a hard time believing this figure. However, what became apparent throughout this research was that

many of the arguments put forth by the English Defence League were aimed at the British government or institutions such as the BBC (31 out of 106), or the defence of British culture and values (34 out of 106). These two arguments recur more often than any other found amongst the research material. Any real anti-Islamic sentiment is directed towards the implementation of Sharia Law in Britain (which is often when the argument turns towards resentment of British government, politicians and councillors).

Table 2.0

	Video	Article	Audio
Suggestions or acts of violence or intimidation	12		
Suggestions of acts aimed to recreate the superiority of the host group over the minority group		1	
References to dread or hatred of Islam and to fear or dislike all or most Muslims	3	1	3
Resentment of British government, or institutions	11	17	3
Defence of British values	19	13	2
Total viewed	43	60	3

In light of this evidence, it could be argued that the whilst the English Defence League cannot be said to hold a clean record in terms of a total absence of violence or racism, the organisation as a whole is not violent or racist. With protests reaching high numbers of inebriated working class youths who carry a great deal of anger at the apparent declining state of their country; it is inevitably going to result in occasional violence. This cannot always be avoided and can be found in many such protests, on any subject, at any place around the world. The combination of passion, anger, camaraderie, and alcohol is a dangerous mix. On the other hand this could be dismissed and the English Defence League could be accepted as a violent gang of youths, attempting to put forward a front to the public in an attempt to appease their opponents and gain support from the public. However further research must be done in this area before such conclusions can be made.

Regarding Said's theory of Orientalism, the findings were again, quite interesting. Through reading, watching, and listening to what the English Defence League had to say (both on their website and YouTube) it soon became apparent that these people were not ignorant racists. They were people who had done their research and held valid grievances against a perceived threat to their way of life. The arguments found in the research material were, for the most part, well put forward with evidence to support their line of thinking. Despite the previously mentioned repetition of argument. Whether their research is accurate, or their interpretation valid, is another debate entirely. One best left to Islamic scholars.

However there were numerous references to Islam being a 'backward religion' and 'barbaric'. Therefore if we agree on Said's theory of Orientalism to be of a strong likeness to the Islamophobia found in Britain, it could be strongly argued, on the evidence on the EDL website, that the English Defence League are anything but ignorant of Islam, however they do still abide by Said's theory of Orientalism due to their perception of Islam being 'backward' and 'barbaric'. Therefore we can consider the English Defence League to be an Islamophobic organisation.

The media are often keen to portray the English Defence League as a far right extremist organisation. They often associate the EDL with the Nazi's, fascists and racists. To what extent are these allegations true? As mentioned earlier, extremism can be defined very simply as 'political or moral values which greatly differ from the cultural norm'. If this point is agreed upon, then as we shall see the moral and political values of the EDL are very similar to the cultural norm. For example 68% of the British working class believe that British Muslims are more loyal to fellow Muslims abroad than to other Britons (BSA, 2003; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010:153), one of the grievances espoused by the EDL. 57 % of the British working class, or 48% of the British population, believe that Britain is in danger of losing its culture if Muslims continue to immigrate to Britain (ICM, 2008; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010: 153). Cultural erosion is one of the key concerns of the English Defence League. As you can begin to see, the EDL are not so far removed from public opinion than the press would like us to think.

By applying Mudde's (2000) 'three pillars of extremism', we are perhaps able to gain a more comprehensive picture of what elements of extremism, do or do not apply, to the English Defence League. The first of Mudde's pillars is authoritarianism. The maintenance of society's status quo, and the resistance to any threats, which seek to alter this. From examining the English Defence League's propaganda, it has become clear that not only do the EDL agree with this, they consider it the very foundation of who they are and what they stand for. The English Defence League see the implementation of Sharia Law as a great threat to Britain, its culture, its morals and its democratic values. By allowing Sharia courts to be established in Britain, the British government has stirred up much anger amongst the British people. The fact that Muslims who adhere to Sharia Law do not necessarily have to abide by British law is a contentious issue for many. Advocates of Sharia Law such as Anjem Choudary, argue that Britain should become a Sharia state, which only serves to further stoke the flames of discontent amongst those who are proud to live in a secular democracy, such as the English Defence League.

The pride felt by the EDL towards their country, can also be described as a sense of ethnic nationalism. Similar to authoritarianism, a change, or a threat to the status quo, or British way of life, is something to be avoided and opposed if necessary. This sense of loyalty towards the state of ones birth or ethnic origin is responsible for the English Defence Leagues passion for their cause. Throughout the material on their website, the EDL frequently mention the threat to their great country, and their pride in being British. They often invoke examples of traditional British institutions such as public houses in order to both send a message and reinforce that sense of pride. One of the most noticeable displays of ethnic nationalism is their use of the English flag, both at demonstrations and television interviews. The EDL also commonly chant common football songs on their marches. This sends a very powerful message, as football is known to be one of the great British past times, with many of the chants reflecting English pride. The downside to this, is that through using such symbolism, the EDL are further reinforcing their apparent links to football hooliganism. If one were to view footage of fans from the World Cup and an EDL demonstration, few would be able to

tell the difference. What is present in each is a deep rooted pride in England and a similar dislike or resentment towards anything, or anyone that is not English. If the EDL were to use more refined symbolism, they may be able to begin to shake off such connections to hooliganism. However the popularity of such techniques cannot be denied and the EDL are aware of this.

Xenophobia, within the English Defence League is almost completely absent. In EDL press releases, interviews or in the articles on their website, the EDL are always keen to praise the tolerance and diversity of multicultural Britain. As previously noted, it is not Muslims that the EDL opposes, it is the threat that Islam poses to the British culture and way of life, to which the English Defence League are opposed. However this does not prevent them from using negative, derogative terms towards Muslims. Whether this can be put down to xenophobia, racism, or misdirected insults, is not clear. However, as seen earlier in their mission statement, the EDL often keen to sympathise with moderate Muslims who they argue are often the first victims of Islamic, or Sharia Law. By the very definition of xenophobia, such sympathies would not be found amongst EDL members, if they were an extremist, Right-wing organisation. Therefore can we call the EDL extremist? By only subscribing to two of the Mudde's three pillars of extremism, does this make them moderate or even populist?

Having concluded that the English Defence League cannot, confidently, be classed as an extremist organisation, we can now venture to the other end of the populist-extremist spectrum, in order to assess whether the EDL's views are held by a majority; or at least a significant proportion of the British population. Returning to Canovan's (1981) argument, that populist movements consisted of "some kind of exaltation of, and appeal to 'the people', and all are in one sense or another antielitist." Can these two key elements of populism be applied to the English Defence League? The EDL's objective of defending British culture and traditions, and opposing those influences (namely fundamentalist Islam and Sharia Law) which seek to undermine them, naturally exalts the British people. The fact that a great number of people are willing to face public humiliation, persecution, anger, resentment and slander in order to protect the rights that the British government itself is not always prepared to protect; creates a feeling of value. The feeling that British culture and British pride is something to be cherished and fought for, not rolled back in order to appease a foreign culture. The example set by the English Defence League has definite appeal to the population because of this very fact. With approximately 73,000 fans on Facebook, as well as receiving increasing amounts of support from the public, councils and the police during marches and demonstrations; goes some way to demonstrating that the English Defence League is slowly shedding its media-imposed image of racist thugs and is steadily winning round the general public. With regards to anti-elitism, whilst the EDL does not seem to want to overthrow or even revolutionise the British government, their frustration, anger and resentment of politicians could be enough to qualify the EDL as having anti-elitist attitudes. Summarised in the popular chant "We need leaders, not appeasers", the EDL cry out for the government to stop flailing in the face of political correctness and cultural sensitivity, and do what must be done for the benefit of the country and its people. Therefore according to the Canovan's argument, the English Defence League, does indeed qualify as a populist movement.

We may go one step further in our efforts to discover whether, and to what extent, the EDL could be classed as a populist movement, by applying the EDL to the areas outlined in Table 1.0 on American populism, which we then adapted to the British context. Evidence of 'producerism' can be seen in the huge support from the British working class received by the EDL. Much anger and frustration is often felt by those who have had to work hard to support

their families, and yet they are witnessing immigrants receiving shelter and benefits from the government without having to have worked or paid taxes. This has bolstered support for anti-immigration policies and Islamophobia within Britain, especially since the economic crisis began and unemployment levels rose to a record high.

‘Anti-elitism’ has previously been addressed. Frustration towards politicians’ appeasement of minorities over fears of racist perceptions, cause much discontent amongst the British public who are allegedly being pushed aside for the benefit of minority populations within Britain. This manifests itself greatly in the EDL’s campaign against Halal meat in schools, restaurants and fast food chains, such as the KFC campaign. Moreover, the EDL’s objections to Sharia Law courts being established in the UK, is further evidence of the preferential treatment of minorities in Britain. This in a sense could be linked to ‘Anti-intellectualism’, as one criticism from many EDL supporters is that politicians, like academics, are out of touch with society and do not know what it is like for those who live in such divided communities.

‘Majoritarianism’, as exemplified earlier in Eatwell and Goodwin’s (2010) quote on support for issues such as the death penalty within Britain; has a strong presence in the UK. This is reflected in the recent poll conducted by *Populus* which found that:

48% of the population would consider supporting a new anti-immigration party committed to challenging Islamist extremism, and would support policies to make it statutory for all public buildings to fly the flag of St George or the union flag. (Townsend, 2011).

It could be argued, based on this evidence, that the British public are actually more ‘extremist’ in their views, than the English Defence League are. The EDL are not calling for anti-immigration laws or public displays of national pride, they are fighting for a citizen’s right to do so if they choose.

‘Moralism’ can be found in the EDL’s efforts to combat the erosion of human rights which would be inevitable in a Sharia state. By opposing the implementation of Sharia law in Britain, the EDL is attempting to protect those rights afforded to us in a democratic state. A worthy cause which few would wish to contradict. Finally ‘Americanism’, or ‘Britishness’ in our context, needs no discussion. The English Defence League would wish to appear as British pride personified, manifested into a public movement, aimed at protecting its ethnic and national origins, from the very name of the organisation, down to the clothes they wear and the chants they sing at demonstrations. However as mentioned earlier, although the symbolism is powerful and effective it is not without its negative connotations.

Having looked at hate crime and Islamophobia, extremism, and populism, and overlaid the English Defence League’s actions and rhetoric over the theory behind the literature; we are able to unravel the myths and legends the media would have us believe regarding the EDL. However, such an analysis would not be complete without addressing the myths and legends themselves. What is the media saying about the English Defence League? Which stories are true? Who would benefit from saying such things?

The Media

Media coverage of the English Defence League has been decidedly uneven. Without resorting to labelling (for the most part), the mass media in Britain has nonetheless taken an unsympathetic view towards the EDL. By highlighting the negative effects of EDL

demonstrations, and the violence and racism which inevitably takes place at such events, the media have been able to manipulate public perceptions of the group.

For example, popular Left-Wing newspaper *The Guardian*, has a history of highlighting the worst of the EDL demonstrations. A video on *The Guardian*'s website shows undercover footage of the English Defence League (Taylor, Grandjean & Smith, 2010). Whilst on the surface, the video appears to show damning footage of the EDL and its racist members, however it does not take long to realise that the video focuses on one or two individuals who repeatedly make racist remarks. The video has been used by *The Guardian* to manipulate the public into thinking that the select few presented on the video represent the organisation as a whole. The EDL as a group allegedly does not support racism, however it would be incredibly naive to believe that there would be no members within the EDL who are not racist.

It claims to be a peaceful, non-racist organisation opposed only to "militant Islam". But many of its demonstrations have ended in confrontations with the police after some supporters became involved in violence, as well as racist and Islamophobic chanting. (Taylor, 2010).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the *Daily Star* in February 2011, printed "English Defence League to become political party", as their front page headline. This sparked a great deal of controversy at the *Daily Star*'s overt display of support for the far right group. Followed by a rare, sympathetic view of the EDL in which it boasted that 98% of *Daily Star* readers supported the EDL (Greenslade, 2011b), many condemned the newspaper for using far-right propaganda to sell news papers (Greenslade, 2011a). Following the negative reception of its headline, the *Daily Star* proceeded to remove any evidence of the matter from its website, and began to write more critical articles on the EDL (Greenslade, 2011b).

In a similar vein of rarity, Nick Lowles, editor of *Searchlight* magazine and leader of the *HOPE not hate* campaign, was witnessed admitting that a number of far right activists from groups such as Combat 18 and the BNP, were latching on to the EDL in order to manipulate it into carrying out their alternative goals (Taylor, Grandjean & Smith, 2010). This is quite a concession from a leading Left-Wing opponent of the English Defence League.

Nick Lowles' *HOPE not hate* campaign is aimed at countering the negative and divisive effects the EDL could have on certain areas of society. Promoting multiculturalism and diversity in Britain, they claim:

We try to build relationships, give confidence to those who dislike racism and empower communities to provide a more positive alternative to the politics of despair. We both challenge the myths and lies put out by the BNP and their ilk and also positively mobilise those people who are opposed to racism. (*HOPE not hate*, 2011a).

HOPE not hate campaigners often argue that the English Defence League are encouraging Islamic extremism rather than fighting it. By increasingly demonstrating in such aggressive and confrontational ways, the EDL is driving angry Muslim youths into the hands of anti-Western Islamists. It is because of this, as well as its increasing support base amongst the British working class, that they argue that the EDL poses the greatest risk from the far-right that we have faced in a long time (*HOPE not hate*, 2011b).

It is a threat that is potentially far more significant than anything we have seen in Britain for a very long time because it is just one manifestation of a much bigger cultural and political battle against Muslims. (*HOPE not hate*, 2011b).

Support from the Left has made this “cultural and political battle against Muslims” all the more difficult. Not only does the English Defence League face resistance from the Muslim community but also its own. The power of media reporting such as that carried out by *The Guardian* and the *Daily Star* have the power to swing favour with the public either for or against groups like the English Defence League. It could be strongly argued that media reporting surrounding the EDL so far has contained a decidedly negative perception of the EDL and this has inevitably trickled down to the general public. Despite this however, great swathes of the British population sympathise with the policies of the English Defence League. Perhaps if the media were less biased in their reporting, the EDL would gain support amongst those sections of the population which have been misled by the media. Alternatively, people may still disagree with the EDL and the change in reporting would have little or no effect on EDL support.

The only indication we have of this is the *Daily Star*'s headline in February 2011, and its claim of 98% of its readers being in support of the English Defence League. However this cannot be taken as hard evidence. Realistically only 98% of *respondents* to the poll would be in support. Not all readers are likely to answer the poll, with it being likely that those in support of the EDL would wish to show their support by defending them in a poll in a popular newspaper. Therefore, supporters would comprise a disproportionate number, compared to non-supporters, who would even contemplate answering the poll in the first place. So it is no surprise that such a result occurred. Perhaps the greatest indicator of populist support for the EDL would be the tone of reporting itself. When the overall perception of the EDL in the media improves, then we will know that the public have become much more sympathetic to their cause. Not only can the media influence the people, but the people can influence the media through sales. However this is undoubtedly much more difficult.

Conclusion

To summarise, the English Defence League has been branded racist, fascist and extremist. Yet are these labels legitimate or merely a propaganda tool adopted by the media and those on the political Left? This paper has set out to address these issues and shed some light on the matter. The hypothesis that this paper aims to prove is that although these labels are used to describe the EDL, they do in fact have an increasingly large support base. Therefore can the English Defence League truly be called ‘extremist’, or is it more appropriate to call them ‘populist’?

In a society where Islam is rapidly becoming a major religion, unemployment at record levels, and newspapers showing stories of immigrants allegedly taking England's welfare system for granted; it is no surprise that groups such as the EDL should exist and receive a great deal of support. Some sections of the British population are angry and resentful at what is happening to their country. This, it can be argued, is reflected in the growing support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). An increasing level of national pride is manifesting itself in the disagreement of having the European Parliament making laws for Britain.

The English Defence League also promises to defend British culture. Thousands of protestors at EDL marches, 73,000 people on Facebook, and 98% of *Daily Star* respondents recognise this. The English Defence League is steadily gaining support as they protest their way across the country. Unless the government takes more decisive action in tackling the issues of immigration and British culture then people will flock to Right-Wing groups such as the English Defence League who are prepared to take that action.

Therefore, to conclude, it is proposed here, that due to the support received by the English Defence League, they can no longer be considered an extremist organisation. They can be applied to only two of the three pillars of extremism outlined by Mudde (2000). Although they do seem to fit with the Orientalist model of Islamophobia, what can be deduced is that the English Defence League have done their research, and harbour a legitimate political grievance of which they aim to raise awareness through protests. They also show signs of a populist movement such as those outlined by PublicEye.org (2011). It can therefore be argued that the EDL's two years of existence have slowly seen a change in public perception and support, with the English Defence League currently transitioning towards being regarded as a populist movement, and away from the labels of extremism, racism and fascism. Upon having reached this conclusion, it is important to note that the morality of a movement such as the English Defence League is not debated here. Whether supporting such an organisation is right or wrong, or what effects the EDL will have on British multicultural society, is an area for further study in the future. What has been discovered here is that the English Defence League is growing in popularity. Something that the government, the public, and the press can no longer choose to ignore.

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