IDEOLOGY AND COMMUNITY: THE COMMUNITARIAN HI-JACKING OF COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Simon Green, The University of Hull

Abstract
This article aims to explore the ways in which the concept of community is utilised within criminal justice. The argument will be made that Amitai Etzioni's communitarian ideals underpin the current application of the concept at a political and policy development level. Etzioni's communitarianism offers a vision of community where social harmony is engendered through a careful balance of individual rights and responsibilities. This article will provide a critical analysis of this vision by questioning both its philosophy of community and the application of some of its ideas in the field of community justice. The concern is that an increasingly moralistic invocation of individual responsibilities has hi-jacked the concept of community and threatens to subvert community justice.

Introduction
The application of the concept of community to criminal justice is not new. Even before the birth of the modern penitentiary the community was seen as playing a vital role in the public spectacle of punishment (Foucault, 1977; Ignatieff, 1978). Since the early 1960s the use of the term has proliferated to community-based punishments, community policing, community crime prevention, community safety and so on. Crawford (1997: 44) suggests that during the 1990s the term became a 'policy buzz word'. Whilst few would argue with this suggestion what is less clear is what is meant when politicians and policy makers refer to community. Willmott (1987) has noted that a reference to community:

> can conceal more than it reveals, and is often intended to. Those advocating a new initiative, and similarly those attacking or defending a particular point of view, often invoke the community in support of their case, without making it clear which community they mean or in what sense it is likely to be affected (Willmott, 1987: 2).

Community justice is no exception to this. Although it is a comparatively new term with an ongoing debate as to its meaning, Williams (2002) provides a succinct overview of its
characteristics. Similarly, Altschuler (2001) strongly equates community justice with the principles of restorative justice. What is less clear is what notion of community is being invoked and whether this invocation represents a particular political ideology. This article will therefore attempt to explore the ideological values attached to the political utilisation of community.

To do this, a brief summary of the process of ‘responsibilisation’ and the devolution of responsibility from the state to the community will be outlined (Garland, 1996; 2001). Following on from this a discussion of the relationship between New Labour and the communitarian movement in the United States (Etzioni, 1995; 1997) will be undertaken. This will demonstrate New Labour’s ideological commitment to the communitarian concern with rights and responsibilities. Communitarianism will then be outlined before going on to question the appropriateness of New Labour’s communitarian vision. Finally, the implications of this communitarian ideology will be explored before concluding that a highly politicised notion of community threatens to subvert the principles underpinning community justice.

**The Devolution of Responsibility**

In broad terms community justice refers to informal neighbourhood justice and increased citizen participation in crime related matters (Altschuler, 2001). This entails the involvement of a large range of individuals and community groups working in partnership with the statutory agencies to help deliver a more inclusionary form of justice. It is often held up as a viable alternative to an increasingly retributive, exclusionary and managerial conventional justice (Williams, 2002). As such it advocates reintegrative processes (Braithwaite, 1989) that address the harm caused by offending without stigmatising the individual. Restorative justice would therefore be a good example of community justice. In essence community justice believes that justice should be administered from within the community, involving the participation and cooperation of community members. If this process is to be successful it demands that the community must take some responsibility for crime control. This is what is meant by the devolution of justice: the devolution from state to community for crime control responsibilities.

The devolution of justice involves what has been referred to as ‘strategies of responsibilisation’. Garland (1996) suggests that these strategies reflect one of the ways in which the state has adapted to its inability to control high crime rates in modern or late modern society. Essentially, Garland (1996) argues that the normality of high crime in contemporary societies undermines the myth that the state is able to ensure ‘security, law and order, and crime control within its territorial borders’ (Garland, 1996: 448). On the one hand the state pursues what Garland refers to as ‘adapts’ whilst on the other it behaves as if in denial of the problem. Garland identifies five adaptations. The first is what he refers to as ‘the new criminologies of everyday life’ which presumes the normality of offending in modern societies rather than a more orthodox explanation that assumes criminality is a type of deviation. The second is the ‘responsibilisation strategy’ which seeks to devolve criminal justice responsibilities from the state:
Ideology and Community:  
The Communitarian Hi-Jacking of Community Justice

Its key phrases are terms such as ‘partnership’, ‘inter-agency co-operation’,  
‘the multi-agency approach’, ‘activating communities’, creating ‘active  
citizens’, ‘help for self-help’. Its primary concern is to devolve responsibility  
for crime prevention on to agencies, organisations and individuals which are  
quite outside the state and to persuade them to act appropriately (Garland,  

The third is ‘adapting to failure’ which describes how the statutory agencies have had to  
modify themselves to cope with the increased demand on their services. The fourth is  
‘defining deviance down’ which effectively decriminalises some petty offences and reduces  
the sanctions associated with others. This then relieves the burden on the system. The  
fifth is ‘redefining success and failure’. This involves altering the criteria by which success  
and failure are measured.

In his more recent work, Garland (2001) reiterates and elaborates on this perspective,  
arguing that the sovereign state can no longer provide security or social control for its  
citizens without devolving power and responsibility to the community:

> In the complex, differentiated world of late modernity, effective, legitimate  
government must devolve power and share the work of social control with  
local organisations and communities (Garland, 2001: 205).

Garland (1996, 2001) provides a structural explanation for the state’s need to redefine  
both the nature of the crime problem and where responsibility for its prevention lies.  
Arguably, community justice could be said to be one of the manifestations of this  
redirection. Although Garland (1996; 2001) clearly identifies the impetus and  
desirability for the devolution of responsibility, the ideological direction behind  
contemporary ‘appeals to community’ (Crawford, 1997) is left unexplored. This will now  
be considered in an effort to determine the ideological assumptions that underpin how the  
devolution of responsibility is disseminated.

**New Labour, New Ideology?**

In 1997 the Labour Party rose to power after eighteen years in opposition. Since this time  
there has been persistent speculation regarding the ideology and motivations of New  
Labour. This section aims to explore the New Labour rhetoric of ‘rights and  
responsibilities’ and its focus on building ‘strong and safe communities’ (Labour’s  
Manifesto, 2001). The intention is to demonstrate that New Labour’s efforts to engender  
individual responsibilities derive, in part, from a communitarian ideology developed in the  

Over the last 200 years there has been significant discussion of ideology. The most  
prominent and enduring discussion probably dates back to Marx and Engels (1965) who  
argued that ideology was a shared set of ideas or beliefs that reflected the interests of the  
ruling class. Such ideologies therefore provided a distorted image of the world that was
used to justify the subordination of one group by another. There has been significant elaboration on the early works of Marx and Engels (Mannheim, 1960; Althusser, 1969; Gramsci, 1971) but in essence they remain within the Marxist tradition. Whilst the tensions between ideology, power and conflict may well remain a central concern to discussions of ideology, the aim here is to explore whether New Labour has a set of shared ideas or beliefs, and if so, what are they?

Over the last five or six years Tony Blair and New Labour have repeatedly talked of the need to balance individual rights with responsibilities. This emphasis is apparent within both their general policy framework and their criminal justice rhetoric. For example, the 2001 Labour Manifesto states:

> We all know the sort of Britain we want to live in – a Britain where we can walk the streets safely and know our children are safe. We have a ten-year vision: a new social contract where everyone has a stake based on equal rights, where they pay their dues by exercising responsibility in return, and where local communities shape their own futures (Labour Manifesto, 2001: 31).

The implication of this is that a lack of responsibility is somehow to blame for society’s ills. In his pamphlet, *The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century* Blair (1998) reiterates this theme calling for the need to create a strong civil society, based on a balance of rights and responsibilities.

In addition to the rhetoric of New Labour, Anthony Giddens (1998; 2000) has significantly contributed to the development and formation of ‘The Third Way’. His two influential texts concern themselves with the political, economic and social challenges of contemporary society. Within them Giddens details the ‘death of socialism’ in the light of the neo-liberal domination of the Thatcher-Reagan administrations. As a result of the impact of these New Right ideologies the traditional left had to modernise in an effort to respond to both electoral pressures and a shift in the political landscape. Giddens (1998) views ‘The Third Way’ as the basis from which social democracy can be renewed. Within this context, Giddens refers to the need to reinvest in the civil society, a society where there are ‘no rights without responsibilities’ (Giddens, 1998: 65). Underpinning this assertion is the belief that ‘The Third Way’ requires:

> a new social contract, appropriate to an age where globalisation and individualism go hand in hand. The new contract stresses both the rights and responsibilities of citizens. People should not only take from the wider community, but give back to it too (Giddens, 2000: 165).

Whilst by no means the total extent of Giddens’ (1998; 2000) commentary, his two texts are peppered with references to rights and responsibilities and the importance of community in providing a locus in which these rights and responsibilities are practised.
What this suggests is that there is, at least, a set of ideas underpinning New Labour's policies. Tony Blair's notion of the 'stakeholder' society strongly resonates with the 'no rights without responsibilities' mantra. Giddens (2002) responds to the criticism that New Labour exists in an ideological vacuum by arguing that it may well have done itself harm by asserting 'what counts is what works' (Giddens, 2002: 36), a position that suggests New Labour has no ideological basis for the advancement of policy. This 'what works' principle is heavily infused within current criminal justice reform (Crow, 2001; Underdown, 2001) and is based on the idea that improvements to the criminal justice system should be led by examples of best, or most effective, practice (Chapman and Hough, 1998).

The ideological ambiguity of such an approach can be used to refute the notion that New Labour is ideologically driven. Yet this is at odds with the commitment to community and civil society promoted in the rhetoric and vision of New Labour. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that there is a New Labour ideology underpinning the development of community, namely strategies of 'responsibilisation' and community participation in crime control (Garland, 2001). The growth of restorative justice and parenting orders are examples of such strategies. These are complimented by an approach to community safety that vigorously endorses a zero-tolerance stance on anti-social and disorderly behaviour (McLaughlin, 2002).

Crawford (1996; 1997), Levitas (1998) and Nellis (2000) have argued that this approach broadly reflects a communitarian ideology. This relationship has been confirmed by Giddens (2000). Recent public statements from the Prime Minister also suggest a continuing commitment to rights and responsibilities. His suggestion that child benefit should be removed from parents who fail to ensure their children attend school (The Observer, May 5th 2002) is but another example in a long list of policy suggestions that attempt to impose individual responsibilities through the threat of sanctions. If indeed New Labour draws some of its ideas from communitarianism and given its particular salience to notions of community justice, a closer inspection of the communitarian ideology is in order. This will provide a platform from which to consider how the concept of community is understood and applied by New Labour.

The Communitarian Vision

Communitarianism (MacIntyre, 1981; Sandel, 1984; Taylor, 1985) originally began with a critique of neo-liberal philosophies developed by the likes of John Rawls (1971), Frederick Hayek (1960) and Robert Nozick (1974). In response to a neo-liberal conception of justice, an ongoing debate between the two opposing paradigms of liberalism and collectivism was rekindled. On the one side the liberals keenly support the supremacy of the market and the rights of the individual as the only fair and equitable method of distribution. They see the autonomy and freedom of the individual as a fundamental prerequisite to the good society. They believe the only way to guarantee this is to reduce state interference to a bare minimum and allow the market free reign in the allocation of goods and resources. The political representation of this ideology is referred to as the New Right although there is also a strong neo-conservative element contained within this
paradigm (Levitas, 1986). The New Right is characterised by a belief in laissez-faire capitalism, market freedom and individual liberty.

It is in response to this approach that communitarianism has developed (Kymlicka, 1989). The liberal belief in the importance of the individual and the liberal assertion that the human race is essentially selfish and self-seeking is strongly contested by communitarians. Unlike liberals, communitarians:

- make descriptive claims about the nature and essence of persons, arguing that individuals are social creatures whose identity is shaped by their community,
- Secondly, communitarians make normative claims and defend the value of the community, public participation and civic values,
- Thirdly, communitarians make a meta-ethical claim about the status of political principles and they eschew liberalism’s universalism, arguing that correct values for a given community are those that accord with the shared values of that community (Caney, 1992: 273-274).

Essentially, communitarianism refutes the liberal conception of the self and the market as the most important components in society. As a political philosophy communitarianism asserts that the real self is not autonomous but constituted through interactions with the community. Further, it argues universal laws are not pertinent to societies in which each community’s view of rights will be relative to their circumstances (Kymlicka, 1989). Communitarianism stresses the importance of the community in shaping individual ideas and practices and upholds the values of social obligation and civic behaviour.

Within the communitarian movement there is a number of competing paradigms. Hughes (1996) distinguishes between the ‘moral authoritarian’ version espoused by Amitai Etzioni (1995; 1997) and the more radical ways in which communitarianism has developed. Hughes (1996) identifies three alternative communitarian agendas: new local governance; radical egalitarianism; and restorative justice. Each of these approaches veers away from Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) ‘moral authoritarianism’ whilst maintaining a belief that communities are the medium in which the good society can be realised.

Arguably it is Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) communitarianism that most strongly reflects current New Labour values. As Driver and Martell state:

- Labour increasingly advocates conditional, morally prescriptive, conservative and individual communitarianisms at the expense of less conditional and redistributional, socioeconomic, progressive and corporate communitarianisms (Driver and Martell, 1997: 43).

Etzioni believes that American society has developed an unhealthy pre-occupation with individual rights and liberties at the expense of responsibilities. This leads Etzioni to
Ideology and Community:  
The Communitarian Hi-Jacking of Community Justice

advocate a regeneration of community life concerned with balancing individual freedoms with responsibilities:

If there is no civil order we risk a police state. We must aim for a moral dialogue and agreement on what is right. We cannot leave everything to the state. We must take responsibility in our families and communities (Interview with Amitai Etzioni in The New Statesman, 1995: 21).

It is Etzioni’s (1995) political ‘vision’ that New Labour has latched onto (Crawford, 1996). For Etzioni (1995) it is the decline of community that is responsible for the decline of public morality. As such he sees the revaluation of families and schools as the fundamental community institutions that can lead to the regeneration of public morality and the civil society. For this to be achieved Etzioni (1995) also argues that there needs to be a moratorium on individual rights so that the equilibrium between rights and responsibilities can be restored.

Hopefully this brief discussion of communitarianism highlights the origins of the movement and the relevance of Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) vision to the earlier debate regarding the ideology of New Labour. This is important as it underpins New Labour’s normative commitment to community. This commitment delineates both New Labour’s assumptions regarding the nature of community and its ideas about what a community ‘ought’ to look like. Community is therefore the mechanism that protects against normlessness and social disorder. The good society can be realised by creating communities in equilibrium, where rights and responsibilities carry equal weight.

The Problem of Community

Amitai Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) version of communitarianism extols the virtues of community and its capacity to ‘shore up moral values’ (Etzioni, 1995: 30-33). These ideas appear to influence New Labour’s ideology and provide a platform from which it can progress a strategy for crime control. Yet because this is a vision of what communities ought to look like there is very little acknowledgement, either within Etzioni’s or New Labour’s communitarianism, of the possible problems that accompany appeals to community.

A range of sociological, anthropological and political observations call into question the exclusively positive imagery engendered by the invocation of community. These observations concern the exclusionary potential of communities and their restrictions on individual freedoms. Whilst Etzioni (1995) does disavow authoritarian and puritanical communities, these are seen as contrary to the communitarian vision and easily put to one side. Etzioni (1995) does distinguish between coercive and suasive communities, the first being the unacceptable pressure of community, the second, legitimate pressure to conform to shared moral values. However, Etzioni (1995; 1997) is less clear how coercive communities are to be protected against or at what point shared moral values oppress those who do not, or cannot, conform.
Kymlicka (1989) expresses concern about the communitarian assertion that there are shared ends that can be utilised to realise the common good for all groups in society. His concerns are twofold. The first is that communitarians have never provided examples of such shared ends, arguably because there probably are none. The second is with the communitarian belief that these shared ends can be found in historical practices and roles. Kymlicka (1989) argues that these practices and roles are founded on the interests of propertied white men. Even when women, ethnic minority groups and the working class are allowed to participate, these practices remain gender, race and class coded:

The problem of historically marginalized groups is endemic to the communitarian project. As Hirsch notes, 'any “renewal” or strengthening of community sentiment will accomplish nothing for these groups’. On the contrary, our historical sentiments and traditions are ‘part of the problem, not part of the solution’ (Hirsch, 1986: 424 cited in Kymlicka, 1989: 87).

In a similar vein, Crawford (1996) points out that Etzioni (1995) fails to appreciate the ways in which ‘community membership and the process of inclusion and exclusion’ (Crawford, 1996: 253) are bound to the power structures embedded in society. He goes on to say that the process of inclusion is accomplished by reference to outside ‘others’. In this sense Crawford reiterates Anthony Cohen’s (1985) interpretation of community which includes the ways in which members of one group define their identity by distinguishing themselves from members of other ‘putative groups’ (Cohen, 1996: 12). For Crawford (1996), the failure to acknowledge that discourses of community are intrinsically linked to assessments of ‘us and them’, inclusion and exclusion, ignores the difference between the social and the communal and invites bigotry and racism. This point is reiterated by Hughes (1996) who argues:

‘community’ used in this context sounds like a prescription for bigotry and parochialism, given its attempt to resolve the complexity and antagonisms of an increasingly diverse population through the ideological device of a ‘regressively imagined people’ which excludes ‘aliens’, ‘lone mothers’ an the ‘underclass’ from its naturalised ranks (Hughes, 1996: 25).

The general point is that communitarians do not adequately engage with the ways in which individuals construct their sense of identity or the implicit power structures that exist within communities. To clarify, it is not that Etzioni (1995) is unaware of the potential dangers of community but that he sees these dangers deriving from extreme forms of coercion and repression rather than integral to the nature of community. Exclusion, competition and power differentials exist both within communities and between communities (Crawford, 1997).

In addition to this Zygmunt Bauman (2001) has commented on the relationship between community and freedom. Bauman (2001: 1) essentially argues that community represents
'a warm place, a cosy and comfortable place'. It offers security and safety. Within it there is no danger, no strangeness and no ill will. Community stands for:

the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we
would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess (Bauman,
2001: 3).

Community therefore signifies a type of utopia. A medium in which conflict and risk are swept away. Unfortunately Bauman (2001) argues that to obtain the security available from community there is a cost. This cost is the loss of freedom and autonomy. For Bauman (2001) this cost is inoffensive up until the point at which community is realised. He sees both freedom and security as equally valuable but cannot imagine a society that manages to provide both:

we will never stop dreaming of a community, but neither will we ever find in any self-proclaimed community the pleasures we savoured in our dreams (Bauman, 2001: 5).

Bauman (2001) sees no resolution to this dilemma but asserts instead that we must not deny its existence lest we face the consequences. The significance of this discussion to Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) communitarianism is that it demonstrates a further obstacle to his conception of the good society. Firstly, the notion that community represents an unobtainable yearning suggests that the communitarian vision is striving for an impossible goal and secondly, that should it ever be realised, then it would not fulfil our needs, as individual autonomy would be compromised.

Bauman (2001: 4) also issues a warning that there is a difference between the ‘community of our dreams’ and the ‘really existing community’. The ‘really existing community’ is a collective that masquerades as the real thing and demands the submission of personal freedoms in return for security. Non-compliance with these demands is considered tantamount to treason and therefore social pressure is applied to relinquish autonomy for the common good. Yet this does not provide community but rather:

a besieged fortress being continuously bombarded by (often invisible) enemies outside while time and again being torn apart by discord within; ramparts and turrets will be the places where the seekers of communal warmth, homeliness and tranquillity will have to spend most of their time (Bauman, 2001: 15).

This vision appears to have a particular salience to the current New Labour claims that we can create stronger, safer communities by engendering individual responsibilities. The intention is that we develop communities that will foster shared moral values that apply subtle forms of social control; instead we will sacrifice freedom and autonomy by shutting ourselves away within ‘gated communities’ (Garland, 2001). The implications of this, and
other concerns, is that by pursuing an ideologically infused notion of community, New Labour will subvert the potential of community justice to deliver a viable alternative to conventional justice.

**Hi-jacking Community Justice**

So what is the relevance of this discussion to community justice? Community justice aims to engage the wider community in an effort to address the harm caused by crime (Nellis, 2000). This involves attempts both to strengthen communities and engender responsibilities (Williams, 2002). These ideas resonate very strongly with the New Labour invocation of ‘rights and responsibilities’ and rebuilding communities. Yet it is not the same thing. Whilst both may well contain a commitment to community the roots of this commitment stem from very different sources.

Community justice promotes processes and practices that involve the community in both criminal justice and the control of crime. Whether it is restorative justice, community safety and crime reduction or increased partnership, the common purpose of such practices is to involve the community to address the problem of crime (Altschuler, 2001). Altschuler (2001) strongly equates restorative principles with community justice. He argues that community justice therefore represents an alternative to retributive justice, which has traditionally focused on individual treatment and largely ignores the needs of victim. Community justice is fundamentally concerned to:

1) repair the damage or harm experienced by individual victims and the community, and 2) to meet the needs of victims, communities and offenders (Altschuler, 2001: 28).

These restorative principles (Johnstone, 2002) represent an attempt both to empower communities and obligate offenders through negotiated settlements. The aim is to encourage individuals to take responsibility for the harm caused by crime (Crawford, 1997). Thus community justice is concerned with the damaging consequences of criminality for the social harmony within communities. Utilisation of the community acknowledges its status as a ‘victim’ of the anti-social consequences of offending and its ability to respond to such anti-social behaviour.

In contrast, New Labour’s appeals to responsibilities and community appear to be premised on quite a different set of ideals. For New Labour, it is by developing a particular form of community that crime, and other social problems, can be overcome. Community justice is concerned with the needs of communities and the ways in which they can be used to help prevent crime (Cohen, S. 1985; Garland 2001). New Labour is concerned with engineering a particular notion of community that will enforce moral standards and individual responsibility (Levitas, 1998).
Ideology and Community: 
The Communitarian Hi-Jacking of Community Justice

Some of the problems associated with this commitment to community have already been mentioned. The failure to acknowledge the potential problems of pursuing strong community means that rather than create widespread social inclusion minority groups could be further excluded from:

the organisations and communities of which the society is composed and
from the rights and obligations they embody (Room, 1995 cited in

New Labour has called for communities to take responsibility for crime repeatedly over the last five years. Jack Straw, the former Home Secretary called for the end of the ‘walk on by’ society where we ignore our responsibilities to confront low level disorder and anti-social behaviour (The Guardian, February 19th 1999). Underpinning these calls is a persistent rhetoric regarding the importance of family and its ability to defend itself against anti-social behaviour (Levitas, 1998). These features have manifested themselves in a package of legislative reform that attempt to engender responsibility in parents. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act introduces a range of such measures including local child curfews, final warning cautions, parenting orders and reparation orders.

These reforms share a common theme in that they are designed to engender parental responsibility for juvenile delinquency. This is coupled with public statements from the Government regarding the value of traditional two parent families (The Guardian, 5th November 1998). This reflects an ideological agenda concerned with developing strong communities via the social institution of the family.

New Labour’s concern with strengthening communities by encouraging responsibilities shares much of the same terminology and rhetoric as community justice. Yet, it has become increasingly concerned with the enforcement of individual responsibilities rather than the careful fostering of them. Roy Hattersley notes this controlling tendency in the recent debate regarding the withdrawal of child benefits for parents whose children persistently truant:

The idea that rights are part of a bargain – which the state can make dependent on obedience to rules that it invents from time to time – is obvious nonsense (Roy Hattersley in The Guardian, May 6th 2002: 14).

The message seems to be one of compliance with an ideologically driven notion of moral virtue. Community is seen as the vehicle for these virtues and as such, the prize to be won. Underpinning this are the limitations associated with Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) notion of community. Bauman’s (2001) warning of the unacceptable demands made by ‘really existing community’ in the name of the ‘true community’ seems particularly apt to the New Labour rhetoric that we must respond to anti-social behaviour in a certain way and bring our children up under certain conditions.
The danger of this is that the concerns of community justice are subverted to a political ideology that appears to share the same values but is in fact based on a notion of community that is distinctly different. Instead of a community justice concerned with addressing the harm and needs of communities; instead of a community justice that pays careful attention to the nature of the communities it engages with there will be a community justice that panders to a political doctrine. A doctrine that pays little heed to the dangers of over-dominant communities, and is directed not at more inclusive and effective justice, but at the enforcement of moral values. It is in this sense that community justice is in danger of being hi-jacked by a communitarian agenda.

Conclusions: Disentangling Community Justice

Etzioni’s (1995; 1997) ‘moral authoritarian’ communitarianism appears to underpin much of New Labour’s ‘responsibilisation’ rhetoric. Whilst there may be a myriad of different perspectives contained within communitarianism (Hughes, 1996; Driver and Martell, 1997) the Government’s appeals to community are increasingly driven by moralistic overtures that demand compliance with socially prescribed norms. Whether it be parenting, schooling or law and order we must all take responsibility for ensuring the stability and security of our communities. To do this we must conform to New Labour’s vision of community. We do not have jurisdiction over the sort of community we wish to belong to; this is decided for us. Unfortunately this is based on an ideological notion of community that pays scant accord to the exclusionary, socially restrictive aspects of strong communities.

Community justice provides the ideal avenue for instilling New Labour’s moral values. Not only does it employ similar notions of responsibilisation and community empowerment, it promotes these notions with the laudable intention of reducing the harm caused by crime. To prevent community justice becoming the vehicle by which New Labour promotes its ‘moral authoritarianism’ there must be an attempt to disentangle the different ideological strands that make appeals to community. This must be done so that community justice can define its own conception of community. It may be that proponents of community justice will be entirely at ease with the New Labour agenda but this should not be taken for granted. Without such a debate there is little basis for either critically assessing or defending against alternative perspectives.

Crawford (2000) points out that criminologists have too long ignored normative questions about the sort of society we want to live in, and the sorts of institutions we ought to be building. If this is true perhaps we have also failed to recognise when other people are making normative claims. Community justice must therefore be concerned both with its own normative position and that of others. Otherwise the danger remains that it could be unwittingly subverted to someone else’s agenda.
Ideology and Community: 
The Communitarian Hi-Jacking of Community Justice

References

Simon Green

Observer, The (2002) ‘We should link benefits to duties: Mr. Blair’s way can be made to work’, May 5th.