Islamophobia online: The English Defence League and the ‘Clash of Civilisations’

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Overview of presentation

• Outline the English Defence League (EDL): ideology, aims and membership.

• Explain how symbolic boundaries are constructed within Social Networking Sites.

• Explain how the EDL coordinate events and how anti-Islamic identity is mobilised.

• Provide an overview of a key emergent theme of study: the ‘Clash of Civilisations’
Introducing the EDL

- **Formation of the EDL**: 2009 homecoming, social movement
- **Ideology and aims**: ‘new far right’, anti-Islamism
- **Strategy for achieving its aims**: SNS, demonstrations
- **The organisation’s structure**: centralised and grassroots, splintered
- **The typical membership**: disenfranchised: hooligans, nationalists, ex-servicemen, online demographic?
In-group and ‘othering’

• The in-group
  – Imagined community linked to an abstract notion of Englishness / Britishness
  – Incorporates other avowedly anti-Islamic elements: LGBT, Jewish, Europe, US
  – Values: rejection of Islam, the nation, cultural purity, civil liberties
  – Social and political debate with EDL ideological slant
  – Shared information polarises opinion
In-group and ‘othering’

• The ‘other’
  – Muslims (even moderates), politicians, anti-fascists, journalists, police, academics
  – Homogenised as facilitating Islamic expansionism, immigration, cultural erosion, terrorism
  – Values: Sharia, violence, misogyny, homophobia, paedophilia
  – Despised ‘other’ contrasted with greatness of the nation
  – Immoral behaviour and Muslim atrocities globally and locally
Coordination and mobilisation

• **Coordination**
  – EDL events and armed forces events are advertised
  – Supporters directed toward regional officers
  – Travel arrangements made via Facebook, fine details shared privately

• **Mobilisation**
  – Dedication to attend events stimulated, often by central administration
  – Invokes empowering discourse: love for their cause, hate for the ‘other’
  – Use of YouTube videos and media articles
  – E-activism, whereby campaigns can be mobilised by members
‘Clash of Civilisations’

• **Boundaries consolidated between Muslim / non-Muslim world via impending war**
  – Failure of democratic politics to resist expansionism
  – Fears and insecurities generated: Jihad, Taqiyya
  – Creeping takeover via cultural, socio-political subversion, inevitable war
  – The EDL regards itself as the only genuine site of resistance: self-importance of disenfranchised
Summary

• Key points
  – SNS used to construct / mobilise identity and coordinate activities
  – Defending against products and processes of globalisation
  – Infuses purpose into lives of disenfranchised / disaffected
  – Cathartic expression of love and hate creates in / out group
  – Latent Clash of Civilisations will ultimately culminate in violent confrontation