Thomas, P. (2011). *Youth, multiculturalism and community cohesion.* Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Majid Hussain
Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

This book was written by Paul Thomas in 2011. Therefore this is a piece of literature which is relevant in modern society. This book relates to Multiculturalism, youth and community cohesion. These three issues are relevant and important to modern day Britain. This book discusses a range of material that is useful for youth and community practitioners, Community Psychologists and students amongst other professionals. I believe the reason why this book was produced is in recent years the UK has seen defragmentation of certain groups in society. Alongside this the British economy has suffered from recession. These economic woes have transferred the spotlight to migrant communities.

Themes, Debates and Implications for the Youth and Community Army

The book introduces itself discussing community cohesion and the subsequent policy agendas. Following the riots of 2001 in towns such as Oldham, Burnley and Bradford there was a huge change in British policy making and the idea of promoting community cohesion was brought to the forefront. The idea of promoting commonality and a single culture i.e. Britishness was becoming more popular. Multiculturalism was finding itself being overtaken by community cohesion agendas. The book goes on to discuss international issues of cohesion and Multiculturalism specifically in France and Holland. Places such as Holland have seen the rise of Far Right politics with the likes of Girt Wilders. Anti-Islamic and anti-immigration sentiments have become popular in parts of Europe over recent years.

Chapter three is inherently quite interesting as it focuses on some of the criticisms of community cohesion. The fourth aspect of this book takes a look at cohesion and how has been emerged into practice. Chapter five enhances this discussion and looks at the wider picture of social cohesion. Chapter six discusses Pakistani and Bangladeshi identity relating to faith and issues of extremism. Chapter seven contrasts the prior chapter by showcasing research with young white people, their identity, the far right, and white working class people. The final chapter before the conclusion discusses a controversial policy debate revolving around 'preventing violent extremism'.

A key theme towards the end of the book looks at a contradiction to community cohesion in the form of 'preventing extremism' agenda. "An initial £6 million pathfinder, pilot fund…" (DCLG, 2007c, cited in Thomas, 2011). This funding was given to councils with 5% and above Muslim populations in 2007, to prevent extremism. There have been attempts to engage Muslim youth. Some young Muslims have had an uphill struggle as they have faced "… educational and social exclusion" (SEU, 1999, cited in Thomas, 2011). Recently students, teachers and even the general public have been asked to spy on certain Muslim students in Universities, colleges and communities. This is very controversial and will it lead to conviction or prevention of terrorist attacks? This type of rhetoric may have an opposite affect and polarise and isolate Muslim communities and individuals. As youth and community practitioners we need to be aware of the implications of this type of method of inquiry. We have to be able to reach out and communicate with young people in particular who may be disillusioned or at risk of terrorism.

As well as this, another key theme is some young people feel they are not being treated equally in different community settings. This is also relevant for young white working class groups. "Views expressed by some white young people supported the notion of a 'sense of unfairness'" (Hewitt, 2005, cited in Thomas, 2011). Some of these groups feel they have been ignored by their peers and government. This may lead to some of those young people becoming disaffected and joining Far Right groups. Youth and community

workers need to be aware of challenging these views and suggest alternatives for young people such as becoming community activists, volunteers, lobbying etc.

Reflection: What have I Learnt, How does this Affect my Practice?

I have been involved in youth and community work on a voluntary basis for 14 years. I have been involved in projects which promote community cohesion. On reflection these projects involved White and Asian groups from different parts of the Rochdale Borough and working in partnership to promote cohesion. Reading this particular book allowed me to reflect on those experiences I have had. This will affect my practice because reading this book made me aware of a growing white working class segment of society who may feel neglected. I think it is important for me as a practitioner to try and engage some of these people and undertake further social cohesion projects. This will help build bridges and reduce barriers between different ethnic groups in society.

In terms of reflecting on my own identity as a Muslim I didn't like terms such as Islamist which were used in this book. I believe this links the peaceful religion of Islam to violence which is not the case. Also on reflection, page 122 discusses issues revolving around safe and unsafe areas in communities. I think this is important because in my practice as a youth and community worker I have seen territorial wars fought on local streets and I understand why some young people are afraid to venture to far from their local areas.

I believe there is a sense of exclusivity of youth and community workers. I think this book highlights the difference professional workers can make in communities in their professional role. Other professionals and institutions may not be able to reach young people on the grassroots and street levels; the exclusivity of the youth worker allows these professionals to engage with young people mutually and respectfully. In conclusion I believe undertaking this book review and reading this book has increased my knowledge and awareness of issues relating to community cohesion.