Social Cohesion and the Notion of 'Suspect Communities': a study of the experiences and impacts of being 'suspect' for Irish communities and Muslim communities in Britain

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In this article we consider how the practice of conceiving of groups within civil society as 'communities' meshes with conceptualizations of certain populations as 'suspect', and consider some of the impacts and consequences of this for particular populations and for social cohesion. We examine how Irish and Muslim people in Britain have become aware of and have experienced themselves to be members of a 'suspect community' between 1974-2007 and investigate the impacts of these experiences on their everyday lives. The paper is empirically grounded in the findings of a recent comparative research project focused on the construction of 'suspect communities' in relation to counter-terrorism practices and the impact of these representations on Irish communities and Muslim communities in Britain. The study focuses on two eras of political violence. The first coinciding with the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) bombing campaigns in England between 1973 and 1996, when the perpetrators were perceived as 'Irish terrorists'. And the second since 2001, when, in Britain and elsewhere, the main threat of political violence has been portrayed as stemming from people who are assumed to be motivated by extreme interpretations of Islam, and are often labelled as 'Islamic terrorists'. The project was historically constituted, bookended by the Birmingham pub bombings in November 1974 and the arrests in Birmingham in January 2007 of people suspected of involvement in a suspected plot to kidnap and behead a Muslim member of the armed forces.

There has been no previous systematic research exploring the parallels and differences between these two eras of political violence in terms of the experiences of these communities. In this article, therefore, we explore the implications for social cohesion of the outcomes of processes of 'suspectification' on the everyday lives of Irish communities and Muslim communities and on the possibilities for the expression of a multiplicity of belongings. First, we consider the basis for the comparison between these two eras, noting similarities, whereas much public discourse see the two eras as clearly delineated. Second, we examine contemporary usages of the term 'community' in relation to problematised populations and the provenance of the concept 'suspect communities' in the context of analysing counter-terrorism strategies. Third, we describe how we conducted the research project from which we draw the data analysed in this article. In the next three sections of the article we present this data, organised into sections on: awareness of being 'suspect'; impacts of being 'suspect'; and similarities and differences between the two eras. Finally we discuss our findings and draw some conclusions.

Two eras of political violence: the basis for comparison

The dominant political narrative about terrorism in circulation in contemporary Britain delineates the two eras of political violence as distinct. In the past decade the

argument has been made that there is a big difference between Irish Republican violence and violence perceived as relating to extreme interpretations of Islam (Blair 2005). This is because the IRA bombing campaigns are in hind-sight being described as always in pursuit of political or strategic aims (Malik 2005). This retrospective characterisation of the IRA's strategies as ultimately about explicable and justifiable goals ostensibly marks the major difference between the period of 'The Troubles' and the contemporary terror threat in British political discourses. The current threat is perceived as 'more ideological', that is more ideologically opposed to 'the West', as having a global reach, and is therefore constituted as a greater threat than the IRA. According to Paul Berman (2003), Islamism, the radical political movement, is an example of a new kind of totalitarianism, an anti-liberal rebellion like fascism, Nazism or Communism. Differences in the strategies and methods of the IRA compared with 'suicide bombers' are cited as a further reason to characterise the two eras of political violence in Britain very differently. The recent, supposedly more ideologically based, terror threat, it is argued, has less inhibition about using indiscriminate mass violence (for example, Greer 2008; Wilkinson 2006, although the latter describes the Birmingham pub bombings as an act of indiscriminate violence). The emergence of this threat is also seen as coinciding with a historical moment when a political solution was agreed for Northern Ireland. Consequently in many people's minds the 'Irish threat' ceased to exist after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. This is cited in political discourses as further evidence for distinguishing between the two eras as it is assumed that Al Qaeda and similar groupings lack concrete demands that are negotiable. This discursive shift has led to the establishment of a clear line between the two eras in much public discourse and amounts to a strategic re-legitimisation of Irish republicanism.

Instead of following the narrative of the dominant political discourse we consider some similarities. The discursive shift described above has been utilised to paint the current threat as irrational and fanatical. However, as McGovern (2010) demonstrates irrational and fanatical is exactly how the IRA were portrayed in the earlier period of political violence (see also Schlesinger 1991). The main counterterrorism measures employed today in Britain stem directly from the measures developed during the period of IRA violence (Clutterbuck 2006). Also experiences of counter-terrorism methods for many Irish people living in Britain in the 1970s-1990s and many Muslims in the 2000s are similar: (see Hillyard 1993; Hickman and Walter 1997; O'Beirne 2005; Runnymede Commission 1997; Uniting Britain Trust 2004). A further similarity is that during both eras of political violence there has been media coverage speculating on the identities and 'nature' of people who would carry out bombings, such as the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974 and the tube and bus bombings in London in 2005. In the latter case the disturbingly 'new' aspect was said to be that the alleged perpetrators were 'home grown'. But throughout the period of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' people born in the United Kingdom (including England) who identified as 'British' as well as those who identified as 'Irish' were involved in political violence.

There is a fifth similarity, this is the positioning of Irish communities and Muslim communities in multi-ethnic Britain. Both these populations are largely the result of post-war migrations into Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, plus their children and grandchildren; and of subsequent significant immigrations since the 1980s of both Irish and Muslims. This common history of immigration is a contextualising

similarity. Both Muslims and Irish people form part of the complex and vibrant multiculture that characterises Britain's urban spaces and the complex interminglings that this ensures (Gilroy 2005; Hickman et al. 2008). The multi-ethnicity of Britain is accepted sufficiently that people who look different and/or sound different are constituted as a regular part of public space; everyday cosmopolitanism is rendered ordinary. A similarity exists, therefore, in the extent of their integration into Britain; members of both Irish communities and Muslim communities live and work as *normal* Britons (Sharma and Sharma 2003). This, it is arguable, is their most disturbing aspect, whereby the more others who are 'suspect' are indistinguishable from the rest of the population, the more of a threat they constitute. As Hardt and Negri note, cultural racism 'is hatred born in proximity and elaborated through degrees of difference' (2000:194; see also Blok 1998).

Community Cohesion and the notion of 'suspect communities'

The use of the term 'community' has widened in recent years and it now embraces both a dominant notion of sociation, such that we are all defined as members of communities based on places, relationships and identities, and it acts as a catch-all term for writing about problematised populations (see Clarke and Newman 1997). What is generally defined as a cause for concern within problematised communities are the forms of sociation they entail and furthermore the structures of interaction between communities can also become to be perceived as problematic (McGhee 2005). During thirteen years of New Labour government cosmopolitan Britain was portrayed as consisting of a 'mosaic pluralism, fixed communities and a multi-culturalism that is no longer working' (Wetherell 2008:306). This backlash against multiculturalism in Britain was cemented in the government's adoption of a policy of community cohesion (Cantle 2001). 'Community' came to be seen not as a source of social integration, rather as a set of inward looking bonding processes. Thus communities (especially those associated with minority ethnic or religious groups) were depicted as enclaves with little bridging to other groups in society (Blunket 2004; Cantle 2008).

We use the term 'communities' ourselves both because of its wide currency beyond the policy and academic arenas and because we subscribe to a more fluid definition of 'community'. That is 'community' as the experience of communicative belonging in an insecure world. This is 'community' as a sense of belonging peculiar to the circumstances of modern life and the fragmentation of society that is experienced (Delanty 2003). This definition of community recognizes that for most people a variety of cultural repertoires form the basis of their multiple attachments. Simultaneously, we recognize that community identity is constructed as much by the state as by individuals (Alexander 2007). The various community cohesion programmes, that have been developed in the past 10 years, do a particular type of 'identity work' in and through social capital. They aim to take what are perceived as narrow identities reinforced by bonding social capital and deantagonise and broaden them out by encouraging bridging social capital. This trajectory of public policy is about achieving the conditions for the eradication of difference (and the isolation or removal of those who resist) and the suppression of conflict.

Within this field of governmentality there exists a notion of 'suspect communities', and here we consider one manifestation of this, that which operates in respect of political violence. Our understanding of the term 'suspect communities' derives from Paddy Hillyard's study of the impact of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) on Irish communities in Britain. He explained the concept of 'suspect community' as the process of identification of a threat and of a sign of abnormality and that it worked in the following sense:

> 'a person who is drawn into the criminal justice system under the PTA is not a suspect in the normal sense of the word. In other words, they are not believed to be involved in or guilty of some illegal act […] people are suspect primarily because they are Irish and once they are in the police station they are often labelled an Irish suspect, presumably as part of some classification system. In practice, they are being held because they belong to a suspect community' (Hillyard 1993: 7)

An example of this process was the arrest and subsequent imprisonment in 1976 of the Maguire Seven. The seven family members including two children were tried and convicted for a crime that not only had none of them committed but also had not been committed in the first place: participation in running an alleged IRA bomb factory in their west London home. For this non-crime the family were sentenced between them to 73 years in prison (Maguire 1994; Maguire 2009).

There is a debate about the notion of suspect communities currently being waged in the *British Journal of Criminology*. Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton (2009) argue that Muslims have replaced the Irish as the main focus of the government's security agenda and argue that the categorization of Muslims as suspect may be serving to undermine national security rather than enhance it. They demonstrate how the fixing of Muslim communities rather than individual suspects within the gaze of counter-terrorist policing is underpinned by the discretionary nature of the powers contained in the Terrorism Act 2000 and has been reinforced by subsequent legislation. This is challenged by Steven Greer, who states that while there is evidence that certain individual Muslims, and certain Muslim organizations, networks and neighbourhoods, are, and have been, under official suspicion, there is no evidence that this is systematically based on Islamophobia, or that being a Muslim is in and of itself sufficient to arouse official suspicion, or that the majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom are under official suspicion (Greer 2010: 1186)

This debate primarily focuses on policing and 'official suspicion'. Our concern is not so directly with policing rather it is with the full range of everyday encounters in which an individual might become aware of being 'suspected', although obviously this can involve policing measures. With this focus, across two eras of political violence, we are exploring whether being either Muslim or Irish was in and of itself sufficient to be the subject of practices of suspectification in everyday life. Our contention is that some of the most pernicious impacts of the counter-terrorism climate result from the general circulation of discourses of suspicion sustained and encouraged by other social structures and processes in particular the media (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009:4). In our research we incorporate Hillyard's concept of 'suspect communities' but not, however, his approach – in that we were interested primarily in people who were not detained or arrested. Our aim was to explore the implications for social cohesion of the impact of representations and discourses of 'suspectness' on the everyday lives of Irish communities and Muslim communities. It is important to investigate how 'suspectification' works. While initiated by the authorities, the

process of detecting 'suspect' individuals and behaviours can gradually expand and be reproduced by a range of people and social groups, including the media, the general public, and members of the communities under suspicion.

Research methods

The research was structured across two dimensions. The first was an analysis of public discourses from 1974-2007. It consisted of a media study (see Nickels et. al. 2012a, Nickels et. al. 2012b, both forthcoming) and a policy analysis (the subject of separate articles in preparation). The second dimension was a study of the impacts, experiences and interpretations of members of Irish and Muslim communities and other key informants; this involved discussion groups and interviews. We report here on this second dimension of the project based in London and Birmingham. The two cities were chosen because they are areas with significant Irish and Muslim populations, and they are places where bombings and/or arrests have taken place in both eras of political violence. In interviewing key informants we were selectively sampling specialised knowledge of: journalistic coverage of the eras; elected politicians at local and national level; legal knowledge of the system of justice across the two eras; religious leaders; and local organisations that address the welfare needs and cultural activities of Irish communities and Muslim communities. The criteria for selection of the 42 key informants was that they be strategically positioned in one or more of these arenas and, where possible, have some knowledge or memory of both eras of political violence.

Our aim in holding discussion groups was to bring Irish and Muslim people together to hold a conversation about their comparative experiences and views about the representation of communities as 'suspect' in Britain, in part to see if the participants thought this a useful exchange. The seven discussion groups took place in London (four) and Birmingham (three), and each involved between four and eight participants. We recruited through existing contacts in both cities, a wide variety of mailing lists, through local community centres and in London through a large, private sector employer. Our aim was to include non-hegemonic voices, rather than community leaders or political activists, and this was achieved. It is possible that individuals who had been subject to abuse were more likely to respond to our search for participants. In our search, however, we stressed that the main criteria other than identifying as Irish or Muslim was to have lived in either city during one or both eras of political violence. We did not seek people who had been arrested, rather we sought people whose first response was often 'nothing has happened to me personally'.

The total sample consisted of 19 Muslim (10 men, nine women) and 19 Irish participants (nine men, 10 women). The Muslim participants, a majority of whom were migrants or second generation, came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds including Somali, Moroccan, Yemeni, white British convert, Pakistani, Eritrean and Mauritian. The Irish participants were either migrants from Ireland or Northern Ireland or of Irish descent. The participants ranged from early 20s to late 70s, so an intergenerational, as well as inter-ethnic and inter-religious dynamic was a significant feature of the groups. Despite differences of generation and experience, the strong empathy between Muslim and Irish participants was a striking feature of the discussion groups. Each group had its own specific dynamic, but without exception

attempts were made to understand the experience of others and to build bridges. A level of trust was established in some groups such that it allowed people to recount quite disturbing experiences. There was a consensus in all the groups that the comparison had been useful and beneficial.

The findings reported here are therefore based on the qualitative part of the project rather than the quantitative research we engaged in for the media and policy studies. We aimed in this part of the research to provide a map of the experiences and impacts in everyday life reported by key informants and in discussion groups. We cannot verify definitively that the catalogue of experiences and impacts of being 'suspect' described in these interviews and discussion groups are likely to be common ones for a sizeable proportion of Irish and Muslim populations. But the combination of key informant interviews, sampling specialized knowledge, with discussion groups, which brought together self-identified members of both sets of communities in mutually engaged exchanges, is suggestive that they may well be, particularly in the two cities concerned.

Awareness of being 'suspect'

This section draws on data from the discussion groups in Birmingham and London supplemented by evidence from the key informant interviews.

Everyday Encounters and Experiences

We begin with two examples of participants in the discussion groups relating how in their everyday lives they became aware of being suspect. It was striking that in both eras some of the worst abuse took place in workplaces. As this Muslim man's account in one of the Birmingham discussion groups illustrates:

> And like myself, about five, six years ago I was working somewhere where it was, I was the only Asian person there, and at the time it was, the Iraq war was about to start and there was some discussion going on, it was about cricket or something and it was about Pakistan losing. I wasn't from Pakistan anyway, I was trying to tell them I wasn't from there. I am an Arab. But to them, because of the ignorance as you were speaking about, they never even know what the difference was between an Arab and a Pakistani. So basically anyway the discussion went to Iraq and then a person made the comment that, 'When this war starts we're going to get you and hang you.' That's what they said to me. And I said, 'You're going to hang me?' And they said, 'We're going to hang you'. And I said, 'You and who?', you know, because I was upset at the time that he could make a statement like that and I thought that growing up in this area, in this community, why is it, suddenly it can just turn like that, the whole thing again. So I can see the similarities between us to be honest.

At work people mix and communicate more than in other public spaces outside the home and neighbourhood. It is therefore not surprising that this exchange took place in the work context. This man, who was distinguishable as 'the only Asian person there', was assumed to be Pakistani and by one person at least associated directly with the representations of Iraq at the time as a place with weapons of mass destruction

trained on 'the West' and with the 'war on terror'. This is an example of the deployment in an everyday encounter of one of the most important aspects of the dominant narrative of terror that 'Islamic terrorism' poses a massive threat to the security of 'the West'. Here it is operationalised by pinning responsibility on an assumed Pakistani; indicating how suspicion in the popular imagination attached to both Pakistanis in particular, all assumed to be Muslims, and a racialised Asian Other in general.

The ways in which friends, neighbours or acquaintances might communicate to an individual that they were being perceived as a member of a 'suspect community' were not always as directly threatening as the above example but could nevertheless be intimidatory and induce fear. For example, one Irish woman described leaving her flat in London one morning in the 1980s:

> I remember going to work one day and one of the tenants downstairs she called me coming out. What have I done wrong, you know. She said, 'Put your arms out' and she was kind of going like searching. Then I realised what it was all about, you know, the devastation, it affects you kind of, you know. Lots of underlying remarks and just ignore them.

This woman early in the discussion group described the experience of living in London at the time as not difficult and that it involved her going to work as usual and living her normal life. But as the discussion progressed she revealed more and more things that happened to her that she found both upsetting and exclusionary because she realised that people associated the fact that she was Irish with possible connection with or agreement with the IRA. She had rarely discussed these incidents with anyone. In this case a woman who will have known that her neighbour was Irish half jokingly but with serious intent communicated her suspicions about Irish people. These fears were fed in part by regular police injunctions to watch out for Irish accents and tell them about Irish neighbours or workmates (Hillyard 1993: 258-9).

We selected these two examples, but there were many others in both eras of verbal intimidation and physical attacks. Both Irish and Muslim discussion group participants described having suffered verbal and physical abuse in everyday encounters. Abuse could be at the hand of both people known to the person attacked and by strangers; these attacks occurred primarily either at work (especially in the Irish case) or on the street (especially in the Muslim case). There were similarities in the type of verbal abuse or intimidation experienced, which included: being confronted with media reports of bombings, being asked to account for Islam or Ireland, being called names in the street or even being directly accused of terrorism. For example, one second-generation Irish man said:

> … quite often during the working week, and when you were out with your friends socially, you might be defending yourself and your heritage and your background and your people and your country and your religion from their perceptions of what it was all about and what it meant and what they thought was my involvement or support for it

Key informants that we interviewed elaborated on this process whereby in the aftermath of violent incidents it was whole communities who were held responsible. This example is drawn from the era in which it was the Irish community:

> I was on a news desk of the Daily Mirror on the Saturday when the Birmingham bombs had taken place the night before and the vilification towards Irish people that came in from normal members of the public who were ringing in expressing their disgust.
> And there were other episodes such as the assassination of Lord Mountbatten.
> … I was approached in tears by a secretary who prodded me in the chest when the funeral was on TV and accused me, my lot of having carried out this terrible murder.

Another way in which people became aware in everyday encounters that they were viewed as 'suspect' was by being shunned. Muslim participants recounted being stared at and shunned in the street or on public transport. Irish participants talked about being ignored or shunned at work. This went on for months in Birmingham after the pub bombings in 1974. The other places participants described being ignored or shunned were shops and banks. One woman described how she was 'sidestepped' in the street by people who knew her for months. Public space was therefore the site of potential attack and abuse or of being ignored and shunned.

Being ignored or shunned was described by one key informant, the Chair of a Roman Catholic charitable organisation, as one of the practical consequences of 'being a suspect community' in that:

> … part of the notion of being suspect is if someone sees you on the street and if you belong to a community that they think might be attacking them, they will want to walk away or go in another direction or not encounter you or whatever and you maybe more friendly than everyone else on the street.

He went beyond the comparison being made here and pointed out that there were some similarities with the harassment from the police and other authorities that in his view young African Caribbean men experienced. He added: 'we for instance work now with second and third generation black and Asian young people and we are trying to build their self confidence and self respect. Partly because we feel society has undermined their self-confidence and self respect to a degree by slightly branding them a suspect group'.

The negative responses in public space recounted by Muslim respondents were based primarily on appearance, whereas the contexts in which Irish respondents were treated negatively involved speech, and thus the revelation of assumed Irishness through voice or through name recognition (a frequent way in which the second generation Irish were identified). In these ways in both eras of political violence the public realm became problematic to participate in and negotiate. Different locations were problematic with, for example, Irish people experiencing fewer problems on the street than Muslims (except from the police in Irish areas) but more in places like pubs (where they were expected to be and Muslims were not).

A number of the participants in Birmingham, both Irish and Muslim, wondered and exchanged views about how people who they had grown up with or lived and worked with in the same 'community' had become suspicious of them as it seemed 'overnight'. This was often deeply upsetting and of lasting impact and was recognised as a similarity of experience. This might prompt us to consider the process by which the familiar is made remarkable and then familiar again and how this is a fertile site for the mobilisation of political anxiety (Burman 2010:204). As Jenny Burman suggests in a discussion of similar processes in Canada, a process of affective recircuitry can occur whereby a 'crisis-based realignment of vectors of trust and suspicion result in transformations of resident's pcyhogeographic mappings – nourished by political and media fear-mongering (p.204). So in periods of crisis, at once manufactured and genuinely 'felt' people are called upon to police each other, which inevitably triggers anxiety in potential suspects and fears amongst those doing the suspecting.

Policing as part of everyday experiences

Part of the account of everyday experiences involved a discussion of policing. Although there were some positive comments on the role of the police, a predominantly negative experience of policing was shared in the discussion groups. A range of similar actions across both eras of political violence were described – stop and search, house raids, being stopped while travelling, being arrested – all of which left individuals in no doubt that Irish and Muslim people were perceived as potentially 'suspect' by the police. The two most discussed aspects - experiences while travelling and surveillance practices – are discussed below.

The experience of discrimination while travelling internationally is common to both groups, and both key informants (with personal experience of what they were describing) and discussion group participants felt they were subjected to extra or intrusive checks, particularly at ports in the past for the Irish and airports for Muslims. One second-generation Irish key informant described the regularity of the experience:

> I can remember being pulled in and given an extra form of questioning by immigration staff at Dover as to who am I, where had I been, who had I seen etc - and that happened to me quite a lot - Irish passports during those years in those queues were always singled out for greater attention - you just got used to be held for that extra 10-15 minutes if they chose to, to question you

While a young Muslim key informant, a community organiser, described his shock and disgust when one of his Mosque teachers was pulled aside on a plane to Saudi Arabia because he was wearing the Salwar Kameez, as is traditional for Pakistanis, had a beard because he was an Iman and because he had a hat on. This utilisation of combined markers of ethno-national origins and of religion made him and others he argued aware of how widespread the net might be and induced the general fear 'that anybody can get picked up at any time and nobody can do anything about it'.

This young man's concerns were echoed and given flesh by another key informant, an Irish man who was a community leader for many years and frequently visited police stations trying to establish what happened to people who had been picked up under the PTA. He describes his own and others experiences of harassment from the police:

> I had a little situation myself: I was working in a particular place at the time, and a Category A prisoner had asked for me to be added to the visitors. … and I get on quite well with Special Branch and I got to know a lot of the persons, we saw that each of us had a job to do etc etc - but the Special Branch went to my place of work and they were waiting for me to leave and only realised this later I went out on business and then they went into the office to ask for me. They already knew that I had gone out. And the person they were speaking to, it was in a small borough but he was the town clerk in a very, very small area. And they told him that I had applied for permission to become a visitor to a Category A prisoner. Now, I mean, that was quite deliberately to make things difficult for me. And as it happened I had told him [the town clerk] that I was going to visit a prisoner regularly.
> Now if they did that in my case, then what did they say to the neighbours of the person who had been picked up. Were they saying we suspect him of being involved in a bombing plot, whatever.

Fears of being 'picked up' can stem from incidents people hear of happening to others and also from direct experiences of police harrassment.

One other category of policing that frequently came up was that of 'being watched': the perpetual gaze of the authorities was cited as a pernicious aspect of being 'suspect'. In the discussion groups there was a strong sense that Irish areas or likely places of public congregation in the past and Muslim areas or buildings currently were under surveillance (these principally involved pubs and mosques respectively). A perception of being perpetually watched was therefore very strong and is obviously not illusionary as the example of Project Champion in Birmingham demonstrates. Project Champion was a secret police operation to place Muslims living in parts of Birmingham under permanent surveillance and implemented with virtually no consultation, oversight or regard for the law (see Lewis 2010).

Impacts of constructing communities as 'suspect'

At some length discussion group participants and key informants discussed immediate and long-term after-effects that constituted the impacts of being 'suspect'. Broadly these impacts can be classified as: low profile/silencing; alienation and psychological impacts; internal divisions; and resistance. A low profile was described as being either an enforced or an adopted response. It was seen as an enforced response when it resulted from the existence of such a skewed public debate that to speak up at variance with the predominant narrative of terror was often sufficient to render someone 'suspect'. This could happen anywhere outside of the home, for example at work or meeting friends, and was described as part of how people experienced constraints in public space. In this way individuals felt silenced. Maintaining a low profile as an adopted strategy was largely attributed to a collective siege mentality or, and this was the commonest impact reported, to fear. This included restricting the places they frequented for shopping, meeting friends and family, and being very careful about whom they spoke to. In the Muslim case, this involved not discussing politics (for example at work), avoiding certain areas of the city, being careful on the telephone and internet, and taking care not to mention al-Qaeda or terrorism, even in

jokes. Irish participants frequently described keeping quiet so that their accents would not be noticed and being reluctant to discuss Northern Ireland.

Another widespread longer-term after effect of being 'suspect' was alienation. This resulted in particular from policing practices, from having their loyalty questioned and from pervasive discourses of 'us and them' as this Muslim key informant explains:

> … the experience is very alienating. And I think, is alienating and creating, is promoting the concept of 'us and them' and dividing communities. And you know, the irony is that sometimes this is done in the name of cohesion … there is huge problems with the psychological impact of all this demonisation which it has never been measured and I think that needs to be measured, what psychological impact it has got and how that is going to affect the whole community - people have got a lot of psychosis that is connected to police and security and so forth.

For some young Muslims, apart from disaffection, alienation was said to lead to a variety of responses including an increased inclination to assert a Muslim identity, sometimes to join gangs and in a tiny minority of cases to develop politically radical views (not to be confused with what are referred to as extremist views, see Spalek and Imtoual 2007).

A further long-term impact was the creation of internal divisions either within communities or families. The suspicion of a fifth column could cause divisions in families which were sometimes expressed along generational lines. These divisions were seen as a direct result of anti-terror measures, which encourage internal community surveillance and an emphasis on this as a responsibility of individual citizens (for discussion of this process in the contemporary period see Mythen and Walklate 2006, Spalek and Lambert 2008). Finally, the participants in the discussion groups and interviewees discussed patterns of resistance to being 'suspect'. These practices were generated by the anger felt at being perceived as 'suspect'. Irish and Muslim individuals described deciding to challenge what was being said or done to them in public spaces: on the street, in shops and at work (see also Hickman and Walter 1997, Silvestri and Cherti 2007). It is these everyday encounters with 'the public' that have some of the most long-term impacts on their lives, including psychological impacts.

Similarities and Differences between the two eras

Key informants were specifically asked to compare the contemporary period with the period when the Irish were 'suspect'. Reinforcing what emerged from the discussion groups the similarity mentioned more than any other was that both Irish communities and Muslim communities were associated with terrorism and similar measures had been implemented in both eras. One second-generation Irish man working in a community organisation in Birmingham stated:

> Well, it's a bit I suppose the same as the Muslims are suffering now. Erm, all of the Irish people then were treated as terrorists and bombers and that…

Muslims, yeah. In general conversation, they say, 'oh, these Muslims, you know, they are all at it, they are all making bombs and that'. Same as the Irish. I mean, the Guildford Four. Look at how long they suffered.

A number of Irish key informants responded along similar lines. A young Muslim woman working in a community organisation in London commented on the similarities in another way:

I would have been very young sadly to remember too much about the Irish experience. But I do remember the bombing of the Conservative Party conference. I remember the notion of it being a threat as great as you now hear in terms of the terrorist threat you now hear from Muslim extremists identified… I think there were resonances of what Muslims are now experiencing in terms of questions to whether or not they endorsed parliamentary democracy, whether or not they showed allegiance to the Queen

In this response the similarity is drawn in terms of the marginalisation of Irish and Muslims as perceived endorsers of political violence and as potential traitors. Implicitly both were positioned outside of or in ambivalent relation to Britishness, and the values British citizens are expected to share. Both these key informants are making connections between the two eras and commenting on the process by which whole communities are rendered as 'risk repositories by virtue of sharing some or other of the characteristics of the "typical" terrorist' (Mythen and Walklate 2006:390).

The main differences discussed by significant numbers of the key informants related to their assessments of the relative vulnerability of Irish communities and Muslim communities as immigrants to discrimination and harassment and of their comparative public profiles. Many interviewees thought that Muslims were more straightforwardly identifiable and therefore could not hide and were more easily harassed. A civil liberties activist in London argued:

I am not saying there wasn't a racist element in the 1970s but you know, but you are more markedly different. I mean, what I am saying is in the 1970s you could probably lower your voice or not speak, which is not great for any human being but you can probably do that and be smart and get out of trouble and you can't, you know, lower your skin tone, that is an added dimension, I think, you know, that sometimes people forget.

A young Muslim professional in Birmingham viewed things to some extent differently:

… in terms of differences yes, I think the Irish people probably had it hard because we haven't seen that but when you look at our side maybe they had it more harder than us because they were very much involved with the English community, with the British people, whereas the Muslim community are kind of a Muslim community itself. The only time they probably face our non-Muslim colleagues is probably at work or if we go out of the area where we live. So we probably get it easier to a certain extent… So I think the Irish probably had it harder some points but then if you look at the other points maybe not as hard

because we don't just get attacked because of the religion that we follow, it's also because of the colour and the racism issue comes into it.

His perception of the positioning of Irish people in relation to the English/British results in empathetic comments on how things may have been harder for them in the past; he is implying that their degree of contact with the majority ethnic population and possibly their expectations may have led to a worse backlash. However, his description of Muslims being afforded protection from backlash through their place-based communities also implied the defensiveness against backlash that this can constitute as decisions have to be made about 'if we go outside of the area where we live'. He ends by echoing the point of the previous quotation that visible difference makes Muslims more susceptible to harassment than the Irish.

His analysis of the complexity was borne out in these comments by an Irish woman in Birmingham with long experience in local Irish organisations:

> See the sad part about the Irish as well is that in some cases erm, the older people now as well if they could … Because of the, how they felt and how they were discriminated against or how they felt not as valued as sort of like a, one of the host country, they felt like they were foreigners and that, if they could get away with being classed as English, they thought that was a great kind of achievement really.

Here she is expressing a view about the responses of many Irish people in the 1970s, and 'now as well', and their perception of not being valued (see also Hickman and Walter 1997). Her comments are similar to accounts of the 'confidence inside the Muslim community' being 'at an all time low' and that many feel like 'conditional Britons' (Bari 2011). Another Muslim key informant stated:

> … definitely being a suspect community has got a psychological sort of cost to it and that has never been measured - people's confidence has been affected so much that they see themselves as a second class citizen and actually want to conform into that sort of second class citizenship sort of basis

A final extract further illustrates the complexity of accounting for differences between the two eras and is taken from an interview with a worker in an Irish voluntary organisation in Birmingham:

> … in '74 it was fair game in factories and schools and services to racially abuse people… there was no legislation to protect people. But latterly there has been and that is a, I guess, a slight change in the two communities. Because, I mean I am sure that Muslim people are verbally abused but there was no legislation to protect people in the workplace and in schools etc. But nothing for the Irish in the early seventies. There was no kind of recourse … You know, an employee couldn't be disciplined for calling somebody an Irish whatever, murderer, murdering bastard in 1974. But latterly if that would have happened and you would hope that procedures would be followed.

A number of key informants, both Irish and Muslim, held the view that the Irish had had no protection in the past; and that by comparison, due to a number of legislative

changes, Muslims had more rights in the 2000s. This latter positioning, it was stressed, did not, however, deter being constructed as 'suspect'.

The contrast was also drawn between the more assertive public profile of some Muslims now compared with the lower public profile of the Irish in the previous era. Although the better legislative protection afforded for human rights and against discrimination was seen as underpinning this difference, the explanation was also seen to lie with the response of many of the younger generations of Muslims to being 'suspect'. One common response has been a reassertion of Muslim identifications amongst younger people, with many being proud to express this publicly. Their more confident public response was partly attributed to the second generation Muslims being older now than the equivalent Irish second generation were in the 1970s. Second and third generation Muslims are seen as claiming their place as British citizens. In contrast a majority of other Muslims, usually of the migrant generation, are characterised as keeping their 'heads down' in a similar manner to the response of many Irish in the 1970s.

In summary, the evidence of the discussion group participants and the key informants not only confirms that it has been sufficient to be identified as, or assumed to be, Irish or Muslim in order to be perceived as or treated as 'suspect' but it also details how for most people this is the result of everyday encounters and experiences. It is in their encounters with neighbours, workmates or strangers in shops or on the streets that our research participants have described becoming aware of being suspect. This does not happen all the time but the fear of it occurring can be ever present as a backdrop to daily life. A state of fearfulness was described by Muslims as existing in the present period and by Irish people in relation to the past, and in both cases, 'lying low' and 'keeping your head down' were common responses. The state of fearfulness and suspicion was said to lead at times to divisions within communities. However, anger and alienation were also felt, and both Irish and Muslim respondents made connections between being treated as 'suspect' and practices of resistance.

Discussion and Conclusion

A large majority of our key informants and discussion group participants provided evidence of the everyday nature of being 'suspect' in both eras of political violence. But a small number of our key informants (three out of 42) and discussion group participants (one group in London made up solely of young people) disputed that in general there either was or is in circulation a notion of 'suspect communities'. The three key informants who disputed the idea are all members of the political or legal establishment. One high-ranking legal office holder and member of the House of Lords said the following:

> I think suspect communities is a dreadful over-simplification. There are certainly communities from whose number, within whose number there may be suspects. I mean, if you were to ask a member of the public who reads the Daily Mail, for example, where would you expect to find terrorists, they might say to you, in Leicester or in Bradford. Which defines the community from which they emerge. However, I think to hold the whole of the Muslim communities, using that deliberate plural, as suspect communities is just too broad a brush…

> I don't think it's realistic to suggest that the Irish were a suspect community. It was known that certain Irish people were terrorists but I don't think that the public ever damned the whole of every Irish person, man or woman you've met, with the soubriquet suspect or terrorist. Even though unlike al-Qaeda the Irish terrorists included men and women. … I don't think the public at large look at a Muslim and say, if they know that he or she is a Muslim they are terrorist.

He went on to say that he thought 'there were elements in the police that had a mindset about suspect communities up to or maybe in the beginning of the Nineties' but that since the McPherson Report had been published he thought this had receded. What is interesting about the above statement is the strong, and no doubt understandable, wish not to believe suspect communities have been created as a result of policy making in either era. At the same time he acknowledges both the possible role of the press influencing readers to conceive of 'communities' and 'places' from which terrorists are likely to come and the possibility that the police did operate with a notion of 'suspect communities'. The young people in London who queried the use of the term 'suspect communities' did so more because of its negative connotations and they did not want to be viewed as 'suspect'.

There is no doubt that the term 'suspect communities' is freighted with negative connotations and it was not liked by those participants who thought the notion was in wide circulation. Our findings, however, offer evidence that individuals have been responded to and treated as members of 'suspect communities', in relation to political violence, across four decades in Britain and that the concept of 'suspect community' still has currency as a theoretical and analytical tool. In both eras, these notions of 'suspectness' were attached to 'communities' formed predominantly from immigrations to Britain and this has involved consequences for social cohesion to which we now turn.

The experiences of 'being suspected' that our key informants and discussion group participants relate may be, as has been noted, produced by fear on the part of those being abusive or threatening or who actively shun their neighbours or workmates. Communities are being constructed as 'suspect' in a traumatogenic environment (Hollander and Gutwill 2006). Lynne Layton (2008), discussing the United States, argues government has retreated from providing functions that might contain anxiety and trauma (while enforcing 'strong legislative measures' which further contribute to engendering fear and alarm) and, in concert with the media, has kept people frightened. As Lianos and Douglas (2000:268) explain 'presumed dangerousness is the major postindustrial criterion for distinguishing between those who should be avoided and those who can approach.' The possibility of a terror attack lies in the background everyday reinforced every time someone walks through detecting gates.

This is the backdrop to community cohesion policy making throughout the 2000s that called for the need to:

> 'have a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities' (Local Government Association 2002)

'emphasise what binds communities together rather than what divides them' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion 2007)

'bring down the barriers that divide people in our country today' (Cameron 2011)

This research has generated substantiation across two eras of political violence that processes of 'suspectification' operate with notions of bounded 'communities' and therefore are more likely to divide communities than bring them together. It was enough to be identified as, or assumed to be, Irish or Muslim in order to be treated as 'suspect' and although this did not occur each day the fear that it might could be enduring. 'Bounded community' both as an experience of belonging and as a social practice may be reinforced both for those who are perceived as 'suspect' and for their neighbours, friends and work mates who now view them differently. Identifying members of 'suspect communities' by generalised characteristics of ethnicity, religion, colour or accent, is inimical to social cohesion due to its potentially polarising effects on the population as a whole and its unjust consequences for Irish communities and Muslim communities. In fact, one of the ironies of the community cohesion agenda is that it creates the idea of minority ethnic and religious communities and fixes identities within these community boundaries, while demanding they move outside them (Alexander 2007).

Imposed boundedness as a 'suspect community' limits experiences of belonging by inducing a range of feelings and responses – anger, alienation, resignation, fear, resistance – all of which are potentially exclusionary in impact and undermine feelings of acceptance. The evidence is that the impacts of these experiences of being 'suspect' include the process whereby forms of belonging that previously were part of a wider set of identifications for an individual can become more important as a result of being 'suspect'. This is usually accompanied by a motivation to express this enhanced identification in the public realm (some young Muslim women in the discussion groups described how they now choose to wear the headscarf, whereas previously they would not have done so). In other cases, the impact of being 'suspect' is, due to fear or another constraint, to adopt as low a profile as possible, to stay 'with one's own', and retreat from the public realm (two Irish participants expressed nervousness about attending a discussion group because of their still resonant memories of being part of a 'suspect' community in the past). Nevertheless, the reinforcement of boundedness by the construction of 'suspect communities' is, we found, in tension with the cosmopolitanism that characterizes places like London and Birmingham. Both Irish communities and Muslim communities are part of immigrations that are strongly culturally marked as well as deeply connected to those around them (Hall 2002). The empathetic connections established between participants in the discussion groups, where discourses of suspicion were not in operation, indicate the limitations and flaws of the community cohesion agenda with its identification of 'communities' as the site of the problem of political violence and as the site of interventionist strategies of cohesion.

One last argument about 'communities' and counter-terrorism is worth considering in the light of this research. There have been calls to engage community involvement more positively in a fight against extremism (Spalek and Lambert 2008, Jackson 2008, Bari 2011). Our research suggests that any positive representations of and

engagement with Muslims in the current context would be beneficial. But our conclusion is different. Our focus has not been on extremism and we would agree with Michael (2008) that extremists are part of these 'suspect communities' as a result of the boundaries which have been drawn by public authorities and the media. The latter constantly speak of 'moderate Muslims' and 'extremist Muslims' (see Nickels et. al 2012b). We have been concerned to chart the impact of being 'suspected' on the everyday lives of Muslims in general. It is necessary to change the negative impacts of the process of constructing communities as 'suspect'. This requires a change in the practice of conceiving of certain communities within civil society as problematic for social cohesion and of conflating this with conceptualising certain populations as 'suspect' where political violence is concerned.

The current government has stated that it seeks to separate the community cohesion agenda from the counter-terrorism agenda. This is useful but their location of the problem of political violence and the focus of counter-terrorism remains fixed on Muslim communities and a strategy of rooting out extreme ideas (Home office 2011). This is a classic counter-insurgency strategy of the type that was unsuccessful in Northern Ireland. We have outlined here that there are many more continuities between the two eras of political violence, particularly in counter-terrorism policies, than politicians and policy makers readily admit. A dominant aspect of the narrative on terrorism in Britain, that there is a divorce between these two eras of political violence, needs challenging. This idea has led to insufficient lessons being learned, from one era to another, especially as regards the negative impacts of practices of suspectification on Irish communities and Muslim communities. This, possibly, unintended consequence of counter-terrorism strategies has also had negative consequences for the stated objectives of cohesion policies. The discussion groups demonstrated that with the removal of discourses of suspicion the common ground of Britain's urban multiculture was a sufficient basis for sympathetic exchanges. The people participating drew lessons from the comparison of the two eras in a way policy makers have not.

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