COMMUNITY POLICING WITHIN A COUNTER-TERRORISM CONTEXT: THE ROLE OF TRUST WHEN WORKING WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT TERROR CRIME

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Abstract

Recently, community-based models of policing have gained increasing prominence within the context of counter-terrorism, an area that has traditionally been dominated by ‘hard’, top-down models of policing. The following article draws upon a research study that examined community policing within a counter-terrorism context within the UK in order to help shed light upon how police officers might work with communities in order to prevent terror crime. The article focuses in particular upon the notion of trust within a counter-terrorism context and reflects upon the importance of cultural intelligence for policing within a counter-terror context, a context marked by suspicion, distrust and secrecy.
Introduction

Since 9/11 the prevention of al-Qaeda inspired and/or instigated terror-related crimes has become a significant policy issue internationally, in countries across Europe, South Asia, North America, the Middle East and Australasia. Government officials and security experts have been arguing that western liberal democratic states in particular face a heightened risk specifically, though not exclusively, from home-grown acts of terrorism. Within this heightened security context, countering terrorism has become a significant policy issue, and importantly, policing is viewed as playing a key role in initiatives aimed at preventing terror crime. Thus, in the UK, under the Prevention of Violent Extremism policy agenda, local authorities and the police are viewed as taking the lead in any strategies developed to counter terrorism (HM Government, 2008). Communities are also seen as being key to countering terrorism, and in the case of al-Qaeda inspired or related terrorism, Muslims’ responsibilities as active citizens are being increasingly framed by anti-terror measures so that Muslim citizens are expected to work with the authorities to help reduce the risk of terrorism (Spalek & Lambert, 2008).

Emerging from within policing efforts to counter terrorism are community-based initiatives based upon engagement and partnership work between police officers and members of Muslim communities. Community-based policing models are being drawn upon, and utilised, in order to work towards preventing terror crime (Innes, 2006; Innes et al. 2007; Lowe & Innes, 2008; Hanniman, 2008; Ramirez, 2008; Lambert, 2009; Spalek et al. 2009). Whilst the utilisation of community-based policing models within a counter-terrorism context raises many questions, the focus of this article is not upon community policing per se, but rather, the article focuses in particular upon the question of trust between police and community members within community-based models of policing in relation to the prevention of terror crime. Trust is a notion that features significantly in policing literature, however, within a counter-terrorism context the issue of trust is rarely discussed in any depth despite it being argued that trust is a prerequisite for community
intelligence. This article aims to specifically focus upon the complexities to building trust within a counter-terrorism context, drawing upon a recently completed research study that examined engagement and partnership work between Muslim communities and the police for the prevention of terror crime. It is argued that trust-building within a counter-terrorism context requires police officers to have a sophisticated level of cultural intelligence as it is important for officers to understand the complexities of the communities that they are working with, including understanding the local, national and international political dynamics that are at play. This article argues that it may be that police officers working within specialist units like the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) are best placed for developing a sophisticated understanding of Muslim communities in order to be able to build trust with communities so as to work with community members to prevent terror crime. Before discussing this in any detail, however, it is important firstly to set out the increasing role that community-based models of policing are playing in counter-terrorism, as will now be discussed below.

**Community Policing within a Counter-Terrorism Context**

In the UK, although counter-terrorism policies and practices have been dominated by ‘hard-sided’ strategies involving surveillance, intelligence gathering, the use of informants and the implementation of a number of anti-terror laws under the Pursue strand of the government’s CONTEST strategy (HM Government, 2006), post 7/7, the Prevent strand within the CONTEST strategy is being given greater prominence (see Smith, 2008). Importantly, the ‘Prevent’ strand has emphasised community-based policing principles for preventing al-Qaida inspired terror crimes, working with members

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1 For a related study, see Lambert (forthcoming, 2009) *London Police and Muslim Londoners: Countering al-Qaida in Partnership* Unpublished PhD. University of Exeter

2 CONTEST is the UK government’s counter-terrorism strategy. The strategy is divided into four principal strands: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare. [http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-strategy/about-the-strategy/](http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-strategy/about-the-strategy/)
of Muslim communities (Klausen, 2007; Gregory, 2009). This emphasis upon ‘softer’, bottom-up, approaches to counter-terrorism can also be seen internationally. For example, in the US, whereas counter-terrorism has traditionally relied on the analysis of domestic and friendly foreign government intelligence information rather than the engagement of communities and the development of partnerships between communities and local law enforcement agencies, more recently, there has been a movement towards the utilisation of community policing within a counter-terrorism context, with partnerships being developed between Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian American communities and police (Ramirez, 2008). Similarly, in Canada, there has been a movement towards the adoption of community policing within the remit of national security policing (see Hanniman, 2008).

Community policing is not something that can be easily defined because it involves an organisational strategy that redefines the goals of policing whilst leaving the means to achieve those goals to police officers. Therefore, community policing models are diverse (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997; Herbert, 2006). Nevertheless, community policing might be considered to comprise of the following characteristics:

Community policing relies upon organizational decentralization and a reorientation of patrol in order to facilitate two-way communication between police and the public. It assumes a commitment to broadly focused, problem-oriented policing and requires that police be responsive to citizens’ demands when they decide what local problems are and set their priorities. It also implies a commitment to helping neighbourhoods solve crime problems on their own, through community organizations and crime prevention programs. (Skogan & Hartnett: 1997: 5)

3 The UK ‘Prevent’ strategy clearly focuses upon ‘..Al-Qaida – influenced terrorism ..’ which is seen as being the “new extremism” (HM Government, 2008, p.5) which includes ‘.. violent extremism ..’ (HM Government, 2008, p.4). ‘Violent extremism’ is not defined, but according to Gregory (2009) by reference to what HM Government sees as the causal factors of ‘violent extremism’ it can be understood as any conduct which promotes, justifies, supports or carries out acts of or related to terrorism, as defined in the current anti-terrorism legislation and related laws (Gregory, 2009).
Importantly, Skogan & Roth (2004) view community policing as being the most important development in policing over the last twenty-five years. Indeed, according to Virta (2008), although it has previously been argued that community policing is no longer ‘in vogue’, having been replaced by intelligence-led policing, community policing is still very much prominent in policing agendas. In Britain, since 9/11, and as a result of events such as the urban disturbances in northern English towns in 2001, and the more recent spate of terror attacks in the UK, community-based and intelligence-led policing models have come to be viewed as being complementary, with police services engaging with communities as part of a wider strategy of securing community-based intelligence so as to respond to local, regional, national and international security risks (Hughes & Rowe, 2007). Community intelligence might be thought of as comprising of community sentiments and concerns, concerns that may be linked to more standard forms of intelligence that police gather in terms of information about criminal activities, but which may also go beyond to include information about tensions between individuals and communities, tensions which may have cultural, geographical, religious, racial and other underpinnings.

Within the post 7/7 counter-terrorism context within England and Wales, linkages between community-based policing and intelligence-based models of policing can most clearly be seen in the way in which the recently established ‘neighbourhood policing’ (NP) model is explicitly being connected to intelligence-gathering. It has been argued that under the NP model, which contains elements of community policing, in responding to individuals’ routine security concerns around issues such as anti-social behaviour or crime police officers will be more likely to persuade community members of the benefits of assisting them. NP is being explicitly linked to counter-terrorism activities in that it is argued that ‘neighbourhood policing is a process that can be harnessed to establish the presence of any suspicions about potential terrorist activities’ (Innes: 2006: 14). Moreover, it is argued that the indicators for suspecting terror activities may be subtle and not known to any one individual, therefore, NP should be well placed to handle the diffuse information coming from different individuals, due to the beneficial ‘weak
community ties’ developed between police and community members through such a policing model (Innes: 2006: 14). More recently, Thiel (2009) has argued that joined-up working between SO15, NP teams and various ‘multi-agency’ organisations, including local authorities, religious groups and other community organisations, is indicative of a shift in the direction of traditional UK counter-terrorism towards an increased emphasis on community-based approaches. Whilst community-based models of policing have generated much discussion and some criticism (see Oppler, 1997; Fitzgerald et al. 2002), for the purposes of this article, the notion of trust in relation to community policing in a counter-terrorism context will be specifically focussed upon. As highlighted in the introduction, trust is a notion that is often referred to in policing literature, and is increasingly being written about in relation to policing within a counter-terrorism context, however, this complex social phenomenon is rarely given sufficient focus despite the literature making an explicit between trust and the gaining of community intelligence.

‘Hard’ Policing Strategies and the Erosion of Trust

One theme that can be found in the literature relating to policing in a post 9/11 context is how ‘hard’ policing strategies can erode trust within those communities that are targeted. Within the notion of the ‘new terrorism’, as constructed by government officials and security experts in a post 9/11 era (Mythen & Walklate, 2006), is the construction of Muslim minorities as ‘suspect’, requiring state surveillance and control. Young Muslim men in particular have been viewed as constituting a ‘problem group’ and a ‘fifth column enemy within’ by media, politicians, the security services and criminal justice agencies. Muslim minorities have been approached by the security services in order to act as informants, they have been detained without charge, some have had their homes raided and some have been stopped and searched and questioned. These ‘hard’ policing strategies have had significant consequences upon individuals’ lives, leading to ostracisation from their wider communities, family breakdown and job losses. Moreover, these ‘hard’ tactics can significantly undermine any attempts that police make to engage with Muslim communities as experiencing anti-terror laws in this way may reduce individuals’ motivations to engage with state authorities (Spalek et al. 2009). Indeed, previous research has established that

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trust and confidence in the police can be seriously undermined in situations where communities feel that they are being over-policed (Sivanandan, 1981; Bridges and Gilroy, 1982; Smith and Gray, 1985; Jefferson et al., 1992; Macpherson, 1999; Jones & Newburn, 2001; Waddington et al., 2004; Sharp and Atherton, 2007; and Bowling and Phillips, 2007). The classic study by Hall et al. in 1978, *Policing the Crisis*, illustrates how divisive ‘hard’ policing tactics have been for Black communities, particularly for Black youth who experienced the brunt of intensified street policing.

This brief discussion illustrates the difficulties of establishing trust between police officers and community members when taking into consideration the impacts upon communities of ‘hard’ policing strategies such as the use of informants, surveillance, and stop and search tactics that can be linked to national security and intelligence-led policing models. According to Gregory (2009), there is tension between community-based ‘soft’ models of policing, which involve engaging with Muslim communities under the ‘Prevent’ agenda, and the ‘hard’ policing tactics traditionally used for intelligence gathering, investigations and arrests, under the ‘Pursue’ strand of the British government’s CONTEST strategy. According to Demos (2007), the targeting of particular minority ethnic communities makes trust-based relationships more necessary but less feasible than ever. With this in mind, the next section will look at the policing literature that explores trust in relation to generating community intelligence, particularly from within a counter-terrorism context.

**Trust, Community Intelligence and Community Policing**

A number of research studies highlight the importance of trust in obtaining community intelligence. For example, Virta (2008: 30) views trust and confidence towards the police as a precondition to community intelligence, thus, she argues that ‘trust and confidence towards the police is a precondition to community intelligence…. It would be very difficult for the police to get community intelligence if people do not trust the police’. Innes et al. (2007) argue that low trust in the police can inhibit the willingness of individuals to pass community intelligence about a range of problems and issues, and a report by Demos (2007) highlights the importance of high trust relationships between communities and the police for effective national security in the age of ‘home-grown terrorism’. According to
Hillyard (1993; 2005), a breakdown of police-community relations can have serious consequences for policing, and in the context of counter-terrorism can halt the flow of vital information from communities (Hillyard, 1993; Hillyard, 2005). A lack of community intelligence may then lead to further intrusive, ‘hard’ based policing strategies to be employed because suspicion tends to be of the community as a whole rather than being limited to specific groups or individuals and so generating and/or reinforcing community anger, frustration and paranoia (Murphy, 2005). Indeed, according to Body-Gendrot (2007), Muslims as a faith community are deemed an ‘at risk’ group, with little attention paid to the complexities of multiple communities, or in differentiating between a terrorist threat and Muslims in general. Moreover, it has been argued that Islam is viewed in a number of normative discourses, including academic discussions, to be the source of ‘the threat’, a sentiment that further increases Muslim alienation (Jackson 2008:10).

‘Hard’ policing tactics in a post 9/11 and 7/7 counter terror context may have served to erode trust between Muslim communities and the police (Spalek et al. 2009), making the use of ‘bottom-up’ community-based models of policing within a counter-terrorism context extremely problematic. Indeed, Pantazis & Pemberton (2009: 21) have recently argued that ‘it is difficult to see how such skilful, yet ultimately fragile ‘soft approaches’ can thrive, when the full weight of state suspicion and the brutality of ‘hard’ methods have fallen on these communities’. Moreover, with the use of police undercover work to gather human intelligence, state officially sanctioned deception can further erode trust between communities and the police (Marx, 1988). The erosion of trust is a significant issue because according to Loader (2006), security is not only about the levels of material threat that individuals face but also is about the degree of trust that individuals have in institutional arrangements and so where hard and covert policing strategies decrease individuals’ trust this also impacts more broadly upon individuals’ perceptions and feelings of security and therefore individuals’ sense of belongingness. According to Thacher (2005), who draws upon a case study of the US city of Dearborn, surveillance and information-gathering can detrimentally affect a city’s social life through undermining trust and cooperation with police. At the same time, through targeting a particular social group for intrusive policing, rather than targeting a general and abstract
class of suspected criminals, police officers can stigmatise an entire social grouping, thereby potentially damaging individuals’ honour (Thacher, 2005).

In a post 9/11 era, within a context marked by suspicion and distrust, police services have been working towards trying to build trust with Muslim minorities, drawing upon various models of community policing. It is important to highlight that community-based models of policing have been criticised, for one they have been viewed as potentially being merely a superficial veneer, the sugar-coating over a bitter pill (Fitzgerald et al. 2002). Also, some critics have argued that community policing is an attempt at surveillance and control of communities by the police and that police officers may be resistant to adopting principles of community policing, making this very difficult to achieve (Oppler, 1997; Herbert, 2006). Indeed, according to Hanniman (2008), who draws upon the work of Murphy (2005), the adaptation of community-based policing within a national security context can be problematic. There are tensions within national security policing that are rooted in its political histories and purpose. National security policing derives its authority from a state or government and so national security police are agents of government and their primary purpose is its protection. National Security policing traditionally employs policing strategies that are secret, and so do not require public consent or support and are not open to public or legal scrutiny. Furthermore, according to Hanniman (2008: 280):

The national security-based version of community policing can view the community simply as a source of security information and criminal intelligence rather than as strategic resource. In the former case, community members are encouraged to reaffirm their "suspect" citizenship and political loyalty by watching, calling, and sharing information on suspicious neighbours or friends with police. Surveillance shifts from watching strangers to watching suspect neighbours or friends. National security law enforcement agencies might also encourage local police to use their community-policing programs and relationships to penetrate local communities to provide criminal intelligence. These can quickly alienate a community.
Perhaps the above kinds of complexities have led policing strategists in the UK to draw upon a new model of policing, Neighbourhood Policing (NP), which as previously described, is a model that contains elements of community policing, and utilise this as a community-focussed approach to countering terrorism. It has been argued that NP should improve levels of trust and confidence in the police and thereby should improve the community intelligence available to the police. This is because police officers will be engaging with Muslim communities to address their local security concerns, and as a result will be able to build interpersonal relationships with community members (Innes et al. 2007). It is argued that personal relationships will constitute the working capital for building trust in order to allow for community intelligence to be passed to the police, and that moreover, police may operationalise ‘soft power’ through processes of persuasion, negotiation, and agenda setting, providing a far more subtle mode of influence (Innes, 2006). NP is thereby being viewed as a way of generating community intelligence that might be useful for countering terrorism within a context whereby police officers are working with communities on a daily basis to address the crime and security concerns that community members have – targeting drug selling, burglary and so forth. Also, it has been argued that the model of NP may prove to be more effective than expanding the number of counter-terrorism police officers and security service personnel as NP aims to build trust (Innes, 2006). More recently, it has been suggested that NP officers are increasingly working with counter-terrorism police officers in order to help work with communities to gather community intelligence (Thiel, 2009). Nonetheless, little empirical investigation of this work has so far been carried out so that it is difficult to make any valid observations about the remit or efficacy of this work. What is clear, is that the prevention of terrorism within policing is helping to blur distinctions between the role of the police and the security services (Lowe & Innes, 2008). Moreover, the dangers of using local policing for homeland security purposes have been highlighted by Thacher (2005), who argues that local policing can end up being used for any purposes that policy makers desire, thereby potentially politicising the police, and damaging the social life in particular of those cities being targeted for intrusive policing methods by policy makers.
Importantly, the model of NP, whilst acknowledging that NP is vulnerable to Muslim communities being placed under surveillance and thereby having the potential to corrode trust (Innes, 2006), is in danger of over-simplifying the human aspects and dynamics to trust between police officers and Muslim community members. A recently completed research study of an innovative unit, the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU), by X (2009), highlights the complexities to trust-building in a counter-terrorism context, which community-based policing models will increasingly need to take into account. Establishing trust between police and community members for the purposes of gathering community intelligence in a counter-terrorism context involves a sophisticated level of policing which draws upon the cultural intelligence of police officers. The skills that police officers require within this context are perhaps more easily acquired through specialist counter-terrorism units based upon the model of the MCU. Although national security, 'high level', policing is traditionally linked to 'hard' policing styles in terms of the use of informants and surveillance techniques, the study by X focussed upon the work of the MCU which has been underpinned by principles of community policing, and as such the unit has utilised 'softer' community based models of counter-terrorism. After 9/11, the MCU was established by two Special Branch police officers within the Metropolitan Police Service whose skills had been honed through long-standing work with a wide-range of communities for the purposes of countering terrorism. The MCU has built up a portfolio of police-community initiatives. Within its remit, the MCU has succeeded in reclaiming a mosque from hard-core violent extremist supporters; helped to put together community-based initiatives aimed at preventing violent extremism in London; provided support to minority sections of the Muslim population who have experienced stigmatisation in relation to them being categorised as ‘suspect communities’; enhanced trust in policing with sections of the Muslim population by supporting victims of racist and Islamophobic attacks; and has introduced Muslim police officers into counter-terrorism policing.

The study by X (2009), focussing upon the work of the MCU, illustrates the complex aspects and dynamics to engagement and partnership work between police and
communities within a counter-terrorism context which shed important light upon the strands underpinning the notion of trust. This research illustrates that there is space for important community-focussed work within specialist counter-terrorism policing units, but this work needs to be carefully implemented, with the establishment of trust between police and community members being a core goal. But before this is discussed more fully, the next section will briefly outline the research study undertaken by X (2009), from which the analysis that follows has been drawn.

The Research Study

This was a small-scale, but in-depth, research study utilising qualitative research methods involving semi-structured interviews and participant observations of community and police meetings. The research was principally designed in order to examine police-community engagement and partnership work in a counter-terrorism context, focussing upon two case studies in London: the MCU and the Muslim Safety Forum (MSF), an umbrella organisation consisting of a wide variety of Muslim groups which engages on a regular basis with police officers from the Metropolitan Police Service. Whilst semi-structured interviews were conducted with MCU police officers and also with MSF members (current and past members), other actors involved in police-community engagement in London were also interviewed in order to gain an understanding of the wider policing context. Thus, in total, forty-two individuals were interviewed. Thirteen of these participants were police officers – six were working as officers within the MCU, whilst three were police officers working within the National Community Tension Team (NCTT). The NCTT is an Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) unit whose remit is engagement with diverse communities, including with Muslim communities. The NCTT also monitors community tension issues. The remaining four police officers that were interviewed were ACPO officers. In the case of the MCU, access to officers was negotiated through liaising with the Head of the MCU as well as through a process of snowballing. Access to officers working within the NCTT and ACPO was negotiated through a process of snowballing, with initial contacts coming from those suggested by MCU officers. Twenty-nine research participants were members of Muslim
organisations involved to varying levels in engagement with the police, either through the MSF or directly with the MCU or NCTT or ACPO. Access was negotiated through liaising with the MSF but also through contacts suggested by MCU officers. In terms of the research ethics, all participants were told that they were able to withdraw their consent from the research study at any time and that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. The study was funded by the AHRC/ESRC and there were no restrictions placed upon publishing the research data that was gathered.

The sampling process for gaining interviews with police officers enabled the researchers to not only obtain the views of police who were working in the MCU but also the views of police officers involved in community engagement working outside of the MCU, through the NCTT and ACPO. The sampling process also enabled researchers to gain access to Muslim participants who have been key individuals in engaging with the police in a counter-terrorism post 9/11 context, as the MSF is a key forum through which engagement takes place, and moreover, interviewing individuals who have engaged directly with the MCU and/or NCTT and ACPO outside of the structure of the MSF enabled a wider set of views and perspectives to be documented. However, it is important to bear in mind the limitations of the study. The study was small-scale and so although generating data from in-depth interviews, the data is in no way representative of a wide spectrum of views and experiences. At the same time, there were individuals, police officers and Muslims, that researchers did not manage to access for interview, and some of these individuals potentially had views that might be very different from the views of those individuals agreeing to take part in the study. However, the study’s strength is that it helps shed some light on the sensitive and under-researched area of police-community engagement in a counter-terrorism context.

Interviews took place between December 2007 and July 2008. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken from a concern to document the experiences and perceptions of police officers and Muslim community members. This approach is significant because
within counter-terrorism arenas research has often been dominated by state-centric perspectives founded on secondary sources and lacking the input of primary data collection and analysis (Breen Smyth, 2007; Jackson, 2007). The interviews lasted between 90 and 180 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis that was used here involved elements of grounded theory in that the first few interview transcripts were compared and interrogated, so that analytical categories could be established which could encompass a large amount of data, with subsequent interview data being used to refine these initial categories (Arksey & Knight, 1999). During 2007 and 2008, researchers also attended and observed three MSF community meetings, taking place in a mosque in London, and three MSF meetings with senior police officers taking place in New Scotland Yard. During these meetings the researchers made hand-written notes on paper, focussing on things like what issues were participants talking about, what were the points of conflict, what was the body language of the participants? These notes were then later typed up and used as further data, in addition to the interview data, in relation to shedding further light upon the dynamics of police-community engagement.

The research study focussed upon examining the following questions:

- What are the key components to effective partnership work between police and Muslim groups for counter-terror purposes? What is meant by ‘partnership work’, and how does this differ from other forms of engagement? How do different participants view partnership?

- How, and in what ways, might partnership work be compromised?

- How, and in what ways, are the experiences and religious knowledge of Muslim groups working with the police important to the development of counter-terror strategies?

- How do Muslim groups challenge religiously, or other, endorsed violence in counter-terror partnerships developed between themselves and the police?
This study highlights the importance of the notion of trust within a counter-terrorism policing context, as will now be discussed below.

**Building Trust between Communities and Police within a Counter-Terrorism Context**

Although there has been previous reference made to the politicised context of counter-terrorism and the difficulties that this creates for police officers working with communities (Innes, 2006; Thiel, 2009), there has been insufficient unpicking of the notion of trust and the ways in which this can be generated within the highly charged environment of counter-terrorism, despite, as highlighted previously in this article, the notion of trust being key to gaining community intelligence. Indeed, approaching police with information means that the individual loses control of that information and this can lead to a number of different policing outcomes, with immediate criminalisation being warranted in only the most dangerous instances. Therefore, trust is key to building the right kind of context in which sensitive information can be relayed to police.

Within accounts of community-based models of policing within a counter-terrorism context, often the human aspects and dynamics to police-community engagement are overlooked, and yet the interactions between police officers and members of Muslim communities takes place within a highly politicised context, with power processes and inter- and intra-community and individual dynamics at play, which may have historical, cultural or political roots, and so there are many tensions to engagement that persons involved in interaction have to confront and effectively negotiate through or distance or disengage themselves from.

*Communities as Complex; Cultural Intelligence*
The study by X (2009) reported in this article reveals that Muslim community members have a variety of motivations and goals that underpin their active engagement and partnership with police: primarily as part of dedication to preventing violence underpinned by feelings of social justice, protection and security of British society, diverse communities and future generations; as a religious duty, which includes factors such as a feeling of being able to affect social change, to help bring communities together, to improve the image of Muslims and Islam; to represent a particular ethnic, religious, gender, political or ideological perspective; and to contribute a community voice to debates. The following are quotations from research participants illustrating some of the variety of motivations:

*I look at my children and I look at society's children and I look at my childhood and I feel that our children should be able to grow up knowing the differences and sharing in the commonalities between other fellow citizens, British citizens in that instance, so it’s a motivational fact of looking at my children.*

*I want to be, if anything, remembered as being a British Muslim and try to revive that as a Muslim and as a British citizen, to show that the cohesion in this society can exist. This drives me more than the other factors that I've mentioned.*

*As a Muslim as well that is, I think, the pinnacle, that’s the main impetus of my motivation, to try and show Islam in the correct context that there are areas where we can compromise but I can be a Salafi Muslim, British Muslim who has a correct understanding.*

These motivations and goals are sometimes shared, and at other times very different to those of police officers, illustrating the importance of shared goals, but also to the possibility of there being fundamental differences between individuals involved in engagement and partnership work. This study illustrates that MCU police officers have shown what might usefully be referred to as a sophisticated level of cultural intelligence, whereby cultural intelligence might be viewed as being ‘skilled and flexible about understanding a culture, learning more about it from your ongoing interactions with it,
and gradually reshaping your thinking to be more sympathetic’ to it (Thomas and Inkson: 2003: 14). The Muslim population of London is extremely heterogeneous in terms of ‘race’, ethnicity, gender, age, class, culture, politics, country of origin, religious strands within Islam and schools of Islamic thought. This super-diversity makes it a complex task for police officers to understand Muslim communities. As one MCU officer observed:

*You know, if you look at where Muslims come from in Britain you know it’s a...every area of the world is represented in London in terms of the Muslim community and I can't think of any other Muslim area that is as diverse as London is and so you’d have the full diversity of Islam within here. But people somehow think that Islam, if you’re Muslim, that you’ve got to be a certain type of Muslim and I think the issue we have Shia, Sunni, aren’t really understood. You know, I know senior police officers who, who policed very, very diverse Muslim areas who’ve said to me well, just what is, what is the difference between Sunni and Shia and you think well, you know, if somebody is policing those areas and let’s face it anywhere in London has got a significant population, you’d have an understanding of those issues.*

Of course, with this level of diversity, as with other communities, there are intra-community dynamics and at times complex divisions that may have historical, political, doctrinal, familial, tribal, as well as other, roots. These complexities come into play when working towards countering terrorism and interviews with MCU officers have revealed that an important aspect to cultural intelligence displayed by police officers is in relation to being sensitive to, and aware of, intra-community dynamics. As one MCU officer observed in relation to intra-community generational dynamics in relation to his experiences of police-community engagement:

*You can see it for yourself when you sit there in the meeting, you can see the kind of comments that the youngsters are making, the kind of comments that those in the middle are making, the kind of comments that the ones at the top are making and each one switches off with the other. When one speaks, the other lot switch off and the other ones*
switch off and you can see the subtleties of it, if you’re very clever about it, you’ll see the eye contacts and you’ll see, you know, the little flicks and other stuff that you can see. It might take a few meetings for someone to work it out but it happens.

MCU officers have spent many years gaining an in-depth understanding of the Muslim population of London, a major task due to the layers of complexity making up this diverse population. This has involved many years of sustained and focussed engagement, which may include things like taking part in seminars about terrorism hosted by community members, attending wedding or death ceremonies, responding to religious hate crimes experienced by community members. As one Muslim community participant observed:

And he (MCU officer) used to visit people in their homes. Not to ask for information, but on social gatherings. To participate in weddings, in death ceremonies. So he made good social relations…. This is social. So they (MCU officers) attended all my seminars, especially on terrorism and the training courses.

It might be argued that as social and cultural context is key to interpreting and evaluating pieces of community intelligence that are often far from being clear-cut and further still from constituting criminality, it is vital for police officers in units such as the MCU to develop an in-depth understanding of Muslim communities and their perceptions and experiences, particularly when Muslim representative bodies may at times be far removed from grassroots level individual and community dynamics. Therefore, it may be that police officers need to have highly culturally competent skills, skills which perhaps are more suitably placed within specialist counter-terrorism units rather than within the more generic model of NP. At the same time, developing an in-depth understanding of Muslim communities can be viewed as being part of a broader empathy-building strategy which is crucial to developing trust between communities and police, as will now be discussed below.
Empathy Building

Underpinning the methodology of the MCU has been an active concern to understand and explore the root causes of terrorism and ways of countering it from the perspectives of Muslim community members. This methodology, implicit within the working practices of the MCU, may be conceptualised as a more grass roots orientated, horizontal ‘bottom-up’ approach to engagement, within a counter-terrorism arena dominated by state-centric ‘top-down’ approaches that fail to understand terrorism and counter-terrorism through the perspectives and experiences of those who comprise ‘suspect communities’. Dialogue involves, for example, police officers showing genuine interest in learning, understanding and entering into an ongoing exchange about community perspectives and experiences of relevant issues including racism, Islamophobia, and violent extremism. Meaningful dialogue also involves police officers endeavouring to answer queries that communities have in relation to issues such as the scope of counter-terror powers and investigations and possible impacts on communities, and reassuring community members that police officers are keen to support communities if experiencing Islamophobic attacks and/or racism. For example, one MCU officer said:

*We are very transparent you know, we are counter-terrorism police officers, our interest is Al-Qaeda, you know, do you have any kind of, any broad knowledge of this phenomena, can we have a discussion and that was our question that I think we, at the outset, we were also very equally interested in communities’ wider responses you know, how they felt, how they felt about 9/11, how they felt about the response to 9/11 so far, so those early discussions were very broad ranging.*

This kind of engagement is separate from an informant-led engagement that traditionally has dominated the counter-terrorism context. The MCU has drawn upon officers’
previous experiences with engaging with Irish communities in London, particularly with respect to the harms that informant-led approaches can create and so an important aspect of MCU engagement has been one underpinned by consent and respect, as the following quotation from an MCU officer illustrates:

*This was another part of our experience that counter-terrorism done well, kind of helps to increase community support and counter-terrorism done badly can alienate communities and that leads back to your question about Northern Ireland experience and our experience was that some counter-terrorism that had been done very badly and had alienated London Irish communities as well as some Irish communities in Northern Ireland, but we were particularly aware, having worked in London, of London Irish communities being alienated by counter-terrorism done poorly, so I think we had a very kind of rudimentary, although I think sufficient, understanding of partnership at that stage, which was simply that a community representative is someone who deserves and expects to be treated in exactly the same way that the leader of Lambeth Council expects to be treated you know, what other starting point is there?*

The role of Muslim police officers within the MCU also has to be noted here, as Muslim police officers have been instrumental in building bridges with members of mosques, developing trusting relationships with mosque communities and then extending these relationships to the non-Muslim police officers working on the MCU, as well as in bringing important cultural and religious understandings to the unit. The following is a quotation from an interview with a Muslim MCU police officer:

*Well one critical factor in our success is having officers on the unit who are experienced Special Branch officers, working together hand in hand with Muslim officers who have an experience in policing community matters and live and work amongst that community with a certain degree of religious credibility and respect. Why? Because when you’re*
dealing with people who are very passionate about their religion, who are prepared, in many cases, to die for their religion because Jihad or whatever, they feel very strongly… You have to have religious sincerity and credibility, again community credibility and respect to be able to turn round and engage and help engage. There are people that we go and talk to where we open the doors for our colleagues to come and join us and talk to them.

Interestingly, the number of Muslim police officers engaged in community counter-terrorism work is extremely low – 27 individuals nationally at the time of writing, of whom two are women (NAMP & Demos 2008:8).

In attempting to understand violent extremism from the perspectives of those communities who have been particularly affected by extremism, the approach enables empathy to be built, with MCU police officers attempting to understand the fears and hopes of Muslim community members. This may be viewed as an important aspect to building trust, because as argued by Booth & Wheeler (2007), trust requires empathy. Empathy might be defined as being the ‘power of identifying oneself mentally with (and so fully comprehending) a person’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). It is important to further note that empathy-building is a two-way process and so initiatives that enable communities to understand and learn about police perspectives and experiences are also important. The NCTT has played an instrumental role here through the implementation of a series of weekend empathy-building initiatives whereby Muslim community members are asked to place themselves into the role of being police officers and to engage in a series of decision-making activities under the Operation Nicole programme. It might further be argued that the MCU’s approach to policing lies closely with Loader’s (2006) conceptualisation of democratic policing in that the MCU has developed an approach that places community perspectives and interests at the heart of responding to questions of national security, thereby providing space for the perspectives and demands of communities within counter-terrorism. This is significant, given that counter-terrorism
is a field dominated by the demands of ‘hard-ended’ approaches to policing driven by state or government and not community concerns and priorities. Therefore, by recognising the legitimate claims of Muslim communities affected by terrorism and counter-terrorism, MCU officers are helping to reaffirm individuals’ sense of belonging to a democratic political community.

Reciprocity through Community Empowerment

Another important aspect to trust-building between police officers and Muslim community members, as highlighted by the study by X (2009), is the notion of empowerment, where empowerment might be viewed as consisting of ‘achieving reasonable control over one’s destiny, learning to cope constructively with debilitating forces in society, and acquiring the competence to initiate change at the individual and systems levels’ (Pinderhughes: 1995: 136). Police officers within the MCU have facilitated community participation at the highest level, by supporting independent community interests, and providing advice or other forms of support to help communities develop their own projects aimed at preventing violent extremism. For example, community members have approached the MCU with ideas for projects which officers have been instrumental in facilitating, such as helping to provide advice on sources of funding and the writing of applications and so forth. This study has found that an important way for police officers to build trust with communities is through empowering them by helping individuals and groups to access funding for projects as well as helping communities to implement changes that they wish to implement in order to prevent terror crime. Thus, the MCU has helped to facilitate a change of leadership within mosques under the influence of extremists. It has succeeded in such sensitive operations by working with members of the mosque communities, including brokering meetings between influential individuals to facilitate change, through trust-based relationships between community members and MCU police officers (see Lambert, 2009 for more details). Thus, the MCU has worked towards contributing to Muslim community members’ security through empowering communities with some of the resources they need for managing unease and uncertainty (Loader, 2006). The work of the MCU
illustrates the importance of reciprocity – that for communities to work with police, it is important for officers to reciprocate efforts by helping communities tackle issues of concern to them. This includes responding to hate crimes experienced by members of Muslim communities. It also includes providing space for proper partnership. Partnership work has a number of inherent difficulties. For example, there may be differences in the resources that are available to different groups in the engagement process, and different organisations are also likely to have, to varying degrees, diverging sets of priorities. As such, there can be considerable difficulties arising from, and tensions within, partnership approaches. In addition, partnership work can be difficult as it involves power differentials: in the case of police focussed work, community groups may not feel that they are actual partners in the policy process. In cases where there are power imbalances between partners it is important for those in positions of relative power to create spaces within which all partners are equals, included and respected (Thacher, 2001; Friedman, 2003). This is especially important in the context of police-community engagement as police officers are in positions of relative power over community members. Within a counter-terrorism context that is based upon the involvement of communities, it is important to stress that partnership work is characterised by the absence of coercion – all parties are free to stop interacting as and when they choose (Lambert, 2009; Spalek et al. 2009).

It is important to highlight, however, that although so far this article has been focussing on trust in the sense of Muslim communities trusting police in the context of counter-terrorism, trust is reciprocal and partnership work is enhanced in situations where police trust the individuals that they are partnering. This may be particularly difficult given that research exploring ‘cop culture’ has highlighted the often inward-looking nature of police culture (Reiner, 2007). It may be that in the context of counter-terrorism, it is the role of police to make the first move and to seek and act to bring about a relationship of trust. This may involve ground-breaking police officers taking a policing ‘leap into uncertainty’ in initiating a process of trust-building, particularly when the context of counter-terrorism is embedded in a system of distrust rather than trust. Within the
context of counter-terrorism, it is important to point out that risk is an element to police community partners. Both police officers and community members are taking risks in working together towards countering terror. It may be, for example, that community members view the police as a ‘last resort’ in preventing violence, preferring to first appropriately challenge and prevent violence themselves before seeking help from the police, although making police officers aware of the dynamics that are taking place. Community leaders cannot be seen to be overtly and repeatedly seeking help from the police as this can undermine their credibility with community members who may be suspicious of police. This kind of scenario of course involves risks because police officers are placing a certain amount of trust in community members to be able to sort out the issue themselves, only seeking direct police action as a last resort.

Specialist Skills

The highly sensitive context of counter-terrorism work, and the politicised environment in which it takes place, means that it is important for police officers to possess a high level understanding of the wider social and political context which includes understanding power dynamics that take place at a global level between different nation states and the intersections of Islam and the 9/11 ‘War on Terror’ discourse. Participants in the study by X (2009) spoke about how, from its conception, the ‘War on Terror’ has been perceived by many as a war on Islam, causing reluctance within Muslim communities to help the police. For instance, one Muslim participant said the following:

*Why would I want to help anything or anybody or do something that’s going to help somebody who’s got a particular agenda against Islam or against the Muslim community?*

Indeed, in a survey carried out in 2006 by the 1990 Trust, based on a sample of 1,213 British Muslims, 91% of British Muslims surveyed disagreed with UK Government foreign policy; 93% felt that UK Government policy on terrorism is dictated by the US; and 81% believed the ‘War on Terror’ to be a war on Muslims (Thiel: 2009: 27).
MCU officers have worked towards creating spaces for the development of initiatives aimed at countering terrorism through approaching the prevention of terrorism as a public safety issue that goes beyond politics and therefore beyond the ‘War on Terror’ and its associated ‘war against Islam’. To do this, officers have had to have a good working understanding of the wider politicised context and Muslim communities’ experiences and perceptions of this in order to then be able to develop and support initiatives that might be criticised by certain politicised factions in wider society for being ‘radical’ or constituting a threat to democracy (and to deflect those criticisms) but which have as their core aim the prevention of terrorism.

The work of the MCU illustrates that community-based approaches to counter terrorism require ‘high level’ forms of policing. Community-based approaches require police officers to not only to have an in-depth understanding of their local communities but also to have a nuanced understanding of politics – at international, national and local levels. Internationally, international relations between nation states will influence British Muslim communities’ perceptions of the British state, influencing their engagement with and perceptions towards state actors including the police. When engaging with members of Muslim communities it is important to know about the issues that individuals care about and in the context of global politics this may include understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, dynamics taking place in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as in other countries around the world. This is no small undertaking given the complexities of, and the multi-dimensional layers to, the conflicts involved. Indeed, in contexts of deep conflict such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, contestations regarding ‘truth’ in relation to crime and victimisation issues are often the catalyst for the exercise of violence at both local and global levels. What counts as ‘real knowledge’, whose voices are listened to and why, and how is that listening constructed, are all particularly pertinent questions for locales which are marked by contestation. Within these contexts there is no common acceptance of appropriate law and order responses, and moreover, those communities in conflict may oppose the legitimacy of each other, so that violence is often invoked (Findlay, 2007). These contestations, taking place globally, comprise important
background context to British Muslims’ viewpoints, particularly when individuals may have members of families living in zones of conflict around the world, and so when engaging with Muslim communities part of the engagement process involves discussion around these kinds of complex questions, particularly when engaging with individuals who may be political activists, working to achieve social justice globally. The study by X (2009) highlights that in some cases it is also important to understand the theological strands within Islam and their geo-political contexts as these may also shape some British Muslims’ experiences and perceptions. Theology may be part of a de-radicalisation strategy and so it may be that police officers will need to develop some basic working knowledge of theological arguments.

National politics also come into play. Within the Prevent agenda there appear to be normative assumptions about what kinds of Muslim identities should be engaged by the police and other state authorities. Muslim identities that appear to value the ummah over or even alongside feelings of Britishness, or who appear to isolate themselves from wider society, can be negatively judged, viewed as a threat to social cohesion and thus actively marginalised from engagement processes (Spalek & Lambert, 2007; Spalek & Intoual, 2007; Spalek et al. 2009). Events that take place outside of police community engagement, for example, the bugging of MP Sadiq Khan, can create tension, placing strain upon ongoing dialogue and partnership work. As one Muslim community member observed:

*The main issue just at the minute is the bugging of the MP when he visited Babu Ahmed recently ... bugging an MP in this country is totally illegal and ... of course why was it a Muslim MP? I cannot imagine the authorities going eavesdropping upon a non-Muslim MP. Directly we get the impression well we are being targeted. It’s always our community that seems to be zoned in on or focused upon as being a threat.*

Police officers need to be aware of these wider political dynamics as they shape police-community engagement. Local politics are also crucial to consider for there are intra-
community tensions and divisions that police officers need to be cognisant of when working with Muslim communities. There are likely to be rivalries taking place between different community members and groupings and it is important for police officers working within a counter-terrorism context not to add further stresses to these rivalries, requiring the skills of diplomacy as much as policing. It may be, for example, that some community members dislike police officers engaging or working in partnership with particular groupings, and so police officers will need to be skilled in negotiating their ways through this challenging terrain so as not to alienate community members.

Conclusion

This article has focussed upon the issue of trust within a counter-terrorism policing context as trust is a key component to working with communities in order to prevent terror crime. The article highlights how, in a post 9/11 and 7/7 context, ‘hard’ policing strategies may have served to undermine trust between Muslim communities and police and so community-based models of policing are being implemented in order to help build trust between communities and police officers. This article highlights some key strands to building trust, including empathy building and community empowerment. Moreover, this article further highlights that sophisticated cultural skills are required in police officers working within a counter-terrorism context due to the complex global, national and local terrain. Specialist knowledge of Muslim communities is vital given the highly politicised and globalised counter-terrorism context that requires a detailed and sophisticated understanding of individual and community dynamics and how these relate to the wider social context. It would appear that police officers within specialist units are perhaps best-placed to develop such an in-depth understanding of Muslim communities within the locale within which they operate, taking into consideration local, national and international dynamics. The case study of the MCU illustrates that specialist counter-terrorism units, perhaps more traditionally associated with ‘hard’ intelligence-led models of policing, can effectively develop ‘softer’ community-based approaches to counter-terrorism if appropriately guided towards building trust between police and communities. More research is now necessary in order to explore these dynamics further.
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