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Community Engagement for Counter-Terrorism in Britain: An exploration of the role of ‘connectors’ in countering Takfiri Jihadist Terrorism

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Abstract
So far there has been little substantive research about how individuals engaged in counter-terrorism initiatives, whether as community members or police officers or other professionals, negotiate this challenging terrain. This article suggests that community-based approaches to counter-terrorism rely upon the careful construction of certain forms of community engagement, rather than an all-encompassing claim that ‘communities defeat terrorism’. This article explores this issue further through analysing and exploring the role that connectors, rather than communities per se, may play in counter-terrorism.
Introduction

The role of communities in helping to endorse or counter-terrorism has generated substantial research and policy attention, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 and a number of subsequent takfiri jihadist linked acts of terrorism. In the US, the UK, Australia and Canada in particular, Muslim communities have been expected by state authorities to engage in efforts aimed at countering terrorism, as evidenced by strategies such as Prevent in the UK and the Countering Violent Extremism policy of the US Administration. Many community-based counter-terrorism initiatives have significant police involvement, with the development and implementation of community policing models. Such efforts often involve relationship-building between police officers and community members as a way of building trust; information sharing and provision; developing and implementing local solutions to local problems of violent extremism; and, in some cases, involving the development of partnerships between police and community members for the purposes of counter-terrorism.

This article firstly reviews some of the policy and academic literature that explores the role of wider public, and specific community, support in endorsing and/or countering terrorism. This will provide a deeper understanding of recent attempts internationally to engage Muslim communities in counter-terrorism initiatives, with community policing models being applied to try to build relationships and trust with Muslims. This article then highlights some of the complexities to engaging Muslim communities in countering takfiri jihadist linked terrorism. For instance, communities may perceive and experience engagement as intelligence gathering.
exercises with little sense of dialogue and exchange, particularly in light of the extensive use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS); communities may perceive themselves to be the targets of state control, reinforcing them as ‘suspect communities’.

This article suggests that, rather than viewing Muslim communities as being key in helping to prevent takfiri jihadist terrorism, it may be more helpful to look at the role that key individuals play in counter-terrorism initiatives. As counter-terrorism is sensitive, with there often being low trust between police officers and communities, it may be that counter-terrorism initiatives often rely upon key individuals who are positioned at the intersections of sometimes overlapping communities. This article suggests that ‘connectors’ can play an important role in counter-terrorism initiatives. Connectors comprise of state and non-state actors such as youth workers, police officers and community members and they are able to build, and draw upon, wide-ranging social networks. This article suggests that when exploring initiatives aimed at preventing the ‘violent radicalisation’ of young Muslims living in contexts marked by poverty and violence, connectors can develop important bridging relationships between themselves and other individuals, including with young marginalised Muslims. Furthermore, this article highlights that the role that connectors play in preventing terrorism is perhaps different from the kind of crime control mechanisms that researchers claim naturally exist within cohesive communities. Connectors may act within contexts characterised by low political and social trust, where there is little sense of agreement regarding the legitimacy of counter-terrorism approaches. As such, connectors carry the risk of being considered to be informants for the police. It is also important to stress that connectors are not necessarily community leaders. Some connectors may be
dissenters, for example, challenging social injustice as and when they perceive or experience it, and so they may be viewed as ‘troublemakers’, by wider communities or by those in positions of authority. In order to illustrate the notion of connector, and to demonstrate the kind of role that connectors play in potentially countering terrorism, this article presents some empirical data taken from interviews with youth workers, police officers and community members from a research study that was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council Religion and Society programme, examining community engagement for the purposes of counter-terrorism.

**Communities, terrorism and counter-terrorism**

Several policy documents in Britain, the US, Australia and other liberal democratic societies relate the view of the centrality of communities in the prevention or support of terrorism. In Britain, for example, rooted within the Northern Ireland experience, ‘communities defeat terrorism’ has become an accepted counter-terrorism maxim as evidenced by the Prevent Strategy. There has been, and continues to be, a significant onus on community ability and responsibility for counter-terrorism. Thus, in the Review of the Prevent Strategy in 2011 vulnerability to violent extremism in some places and communities has been highlighted, with resilient people, groups and communities seen as having the capability to ‘rebut and reject proponents of terrorism and the ideology they promote’. More recently, in the HM Government Tackling Extremism report it is stated that ‘challenging and tackling extremism is a shared effort. We welcome the spontaneous and unequivocal condemnation from Muslim community organisations and other faith groups in response to the Woolwich attack’. In the US counter-terrorism strategy, the role of communities is highlighted, for example, ‘...we will continue to
assist, engage, and connect communities to increase their collective resilience abroad and at home. Engagement efforts have included a wide range of initiatives too numerous to list here, involving communities, schools, universities, youth justice agencies, police agencies and others with a view to countering terrorism, particularly Al Qaida linked terrorism.

The role of public support and communities in supporting or countering terrorism has been examined by a number of researchers, each with slightly differing perspectives. According to Crenshaw, whilst there may be a lack of popular support at the start of any conflict, terrorists can gain public allegiance, and mobilise support, during the course of their terrorist campaign. According to Galam, passive support by communities may comprise the ‘backbone’ of terrorist action, in that only one passive supporter is needed to aid and/or allow a terrorist at any one time. If terrorism might be understood as involving threat and violence-based communication processes, then there is going to be a target audience, which may comprise of a wider community or set of communities. If the atrocities committed by terrorists are deemed disproportionate and have created significant suffering within a community then support for the terrorist group(s) may decline. According to Anderson, it is important to consider violence in relation to how this is committed for, or in the name of, particular communities – at local, national and transnational levels – as popular support is necessary for social change. It is also important to consider community perceptions of the legitimacy, or not, of the use of violence. For some researchers, wider support from within Muslim communities living in minority, or majority, Muslim societies is considered to be a key risk factor for takfiri jihadist terrorism, as this helps to
provide takfiri jihadist terrorists the means and justifications through which to engage in violence. For example, according to Kohn\textsuperscript{\text{xix}}.

The strategic center of gravity for militant Islamic terrorist groups is the popular support of the Muslim world. Popular support provides the terrorists invaluable sources of funding, manpower, legitimacy, and the real potential to threaten entrenched governments in Muslim countries. Without this popular support, Osama bin Laden and other violent global Muslims will not be able to achieve their desired end-state\textsuperscript{xx}.

For the Quilliam Foundation, Islamism\textsuperscript{xxi} itself is a key risk factor for Islamist-influenced terrorism because Islamism might be viewed as comprised of sets of beliefs and ideas that provide the passive support and a doorway/conveyor belt to active support or action in relation to terrorism, thus:

Some who follow an Islamist agenda do use their political/religious beliefs in order to justify acts of violence, including violence that deliberately targets civilians. As such, Islamists often provide a narrative in which Islam as a faith is portrayed as being under attack. Such an interpretation can play into the hands of those who argue that Islam is in need of self-defence, even if it includes attacking civilians, including Muslims. Non-violent Islamists can champion this narrative, providing the mood music to which suicide bombers dance\textsuperscript{xxii}. 
However, it is important to highlight that popular support for violent action within any community or set of communities seems to be rare. According to Crenshaw\textsuperscript{xxiii}, violent extremist organisations deliberately reject nonviolent means of opposition that are available to them within liberal democracies. Extremist organisations often adopt violence as a tactic because they are impatient with legal, time-consuming, approaches, or because they may distrust particular regimes, or because they are incapable of gaining wider public support for their causes and so represent only a minority of the population. Within different militant groups there are also differences regarding acceptance and use of violence and its targets\textsuperscript{xxiv}. Furthermore, the notion that Islamism comprises of a terrorist threat to the West has been challenged by British research, such as that conducted by Lambert, suggests that ‘radical’ Muslims have worked hard to engage in counter-terrorism initiatives\textsuperscript{xxv}.

For Bjorgo, counter-terrorism might be considered to be a form of violence prevention, where ‘prevention refers to reducing future crimes, or reducing the harmful consequences of such acts, by proactive measures’\textsuperscript{xxvi}. According to Bjorgo\textsuperscript{xxvii}, who applies a general model of crime prevention to counter-terrorism, one element in countering terrorism is that of establishing and maintaining normative barriers against committing terrorism. Bjorgo argues that ‘most people refrain from carrying out most types of criminal acts not out of a fear of punishment but because it is wrong … self-control, their conscience and a capacity to feel compassion for others … mean that committing such acts is beyond their action horizon’\textsuperscript{xxviii}. However, there may be a greater acceptance of the breaking of certain regulations within some communities or subcultures that would be considered to be serious breaches of norms and rules in other environments. For
Bjorgo, parents, schools, youth workers and positive role models can play an important role in prevention, whilst perpetrators, victims, religious authorities, the media and the criminal justice system can create wider norms regarding the justification, or not, of terrorism. It is interesting that Bjorgo highlights the importance of key actors and agencies, rather than communities per se, in preventing terrorism. This would suggest that the notion that ‘communities defeat terrorism’\textsuperscript{xxix} is rather broad. Importantly, not only is the notion that communities defeat terrorism rather unfocussed, but when applied to Muslim communities in particular post 9/11, it has led to a number of significant difficulties, which will now be discussed below.

Problematising Police and Community Engagement for Preventing Takfiri Jihadist Terrorism

Within counter-terrorism policy and practice, an increased focus upon the role that communities may play in endorsing or challenging terrorism has led to the development and implementation of community policing models\textsuperscript{xxx}. In Britain, the Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) was probably the first counter-terrorism unit to adopt community policing. According to Lambert, the former Head of the MCU, police and community engagement could lead to partnerships being developed which would offer an approach that enables there to be effective counter-terrorism\textsuperscript{xxxi}. For Lambert, treating community members as partners and not suspects or informants can be particularly effective, thus:

...although informants were an important source of terrorist intelligence – just as they were for criminal intelligence – our experience suggested that community leaders and representatives were more likely to cooperate with police if they were treated as partners and not as informants.
To be an informant, in our experience, was to risk losing credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness in the communities to which they belonged. In contrast, in our experience, that credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness could be safeguarded if community leaders or representatives engaged with police in wholly a transparent manner.xxxii.

The MCU is only one, small, community-based counter-terrorism policing unit within the Metropolitan Police Service. Neighbourhood policing teams (established in 2008 and a part of all police services of Britain) have been the main vehicle through which community policing has been used to counter terrorism. Under the neighbourhood policing model, Innes suggested that in responding to individuals’ routine security concerns around issues such as anti-social behaviour, or crime, police officers are able to demonstrate to community members the benefits in assisting them. This may then lead to community members providing information to the police about any potential terrorist activities. Innes further argues that because the indicators for suspected terrorist activities are diffuse, neighbourhood policing should be well placed to collecting different sources of information from different people due to the ties that police and community members develop.xxxiii. Furthermore, by responding to community concerns like hate crime and discrimination, police officers can build trust so as to then be able to counter terrorism through the involvement of communities.xxxiv.

The application of community policing in relation to counter-terrorism illustrates how police services in Britain have engaged 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\textsuperscript{xxxv}. This development can also be seen in other, international, contexts. For example, in the US after 9/11 there has been a movement towards drawing upon community policing models for counter-terrorism. As the focus has been on preventing takfiri jihadist terrorism, police officers have in particular attempted to engage with members of Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian American communities. Ramirez argues that engagement enables police to be provided with important cultural and linguistic insights, vital information and cooperation, and informed observations that can become part of a productive strategy for terror crime prevention\textsuperscript{xxxvi}. In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) has drawn heavily upon the model of the MCU in London, adopting community policing within its remit of national security policing. Within this context it has been argued that community-based policing enables trust to be built between the police and communities, particularly those minority communities most affected by national security measures\textsuperscript{xxxvii}. In Northern Ireland there have been attempts to use a community policing approach also, which has had mixed results. According to Topping and Byrne, whilst there are some positive examples of police outreach, there continue to be ongoing tensions between communities and police because of continuing terrorist threats\textsuperscript{xxxviii}. Most recently, the Office for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) put together a guidebook on community policing in relation to countering terrorism, predominantly aimed at community police officers based in 56 states across Central and Eastern Europe\textsuperscript{xxxix}.

The utilisation of community policing models, and engagement and partnerships between police officers and community members, is challenging and contested. Community policing in itself, outside of the context of counter-terrorism, is challenging. According to Skogan and Hartnett:
[c]ommunity 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 xl.

According to Waddington xli, community policing has been a new tradition within policing so that police officers have traditionally been more comfortable with action oriented rather than service provision approaches. Murray argues that police culture has, since its inception, focused on a crime fighting rather than problem solving approach so that it is difficult to change police cultures to accept community policing as a core strategy and approach. Community responses to community policing approaches also have an impact. Where police officers are meeting or engaging with hostile or fearful communities that are not willing to cooperate, this can act as a powerful inhibitor to community policing xlii.

Within a counter-terrorism context, community policing raises further challenges. Communities may perceive and experience police and community engagement as intelligence gathering exercises with little sense of dialogue and exchange; communities may perceive themselves to be the targets of state control, reinforcing them as ‘suspect communities’ xliii. Indeed, in a report by
the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the UK in 2011, into the impact of counter-terrorism legislation on Muslim communities, it was highlighted that:

When it comes to experiences of counter-terrorism, Muslims and non-Muslims from the same local areas who participated in this research appear to live ‘parallel lives’. Counter-terrorism measures are contributing to a wider sense among Muslims that they are being treated as a ‘suspect community’ and targeted by authorities simply because of their religion. Many participants, while not referring to specific laws or policies, felt that counter-terrorism law and policy generally was contributing towards hostility to Muslims by treating Muslims as a ‘suspect group’, and creating a climate of fear and suspicion towards themxliv.

Community policing models, which involve police and communities engaging with each other for the purposes of counter-terrorism, have been criticised as being intelligence-gathering exercisesxlv. This is partly due to the extensive deployment of Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS), which may seriously undermine efforts at engaging and partnering community members for counter-terrorism purposes. The role and use of CHIS generates much media attention. For example, in the US the FBI has also repeatedly and controversially used informants, who have been recruited partially through the mapping of ethnic communities that the Bureau has engaged in over the last several yearsxlvi. In Northern Ireland in 2012 a report by Mr De Silva QC into state involvement in the murder of Belfast solicitor, Pat Finucane, in 1989, focussed on intelligence-led security and, in particular the use and handling of informants in Northern Ireland. De Silva concluded that whilst the use of informants did play a significant role
in constraining all terrorist organisations during the Troubles, there was a lack of any adequate framework or guidance for the handling of agents, nor was there sufficient accountability of state agencies involved in intelligence gathering activities\textsuperscript{xlvii}.

The use of CHIS can undermine community engagement models in relation to counter-terrorism because community members, whilst engaging with police officers, are aware that their communities are being targeted by CHIS\textsuperscript{xlviii}. At the same time, those police officers who are involved in community policing initiatives may themselves have previously been covert police officers. Media revelations of their undercover activities may place significant strain upon any relationships that these police officers have built with community members. In Britain over the last few years there has been a spate of media allegations made about counter-terrorism police officers infiltrating activist and political protest groups, having sexual relationships, and children, with women whilst under cover. The former head of the MCU, Robert Lambert,\textsuperscript{xlix} has himself been the subject of such allegations. These allegations can damage the perceived credibility and legitimacy of any community-based counter-terrorism initiatives that have been implemented by those police officers against whom such allegations have been made, or, indeed, any of their colleagues. Such allegations are highly problematic for police-community engagement strategies based on trust, credibility, legitimacy and partnership. Spalek and O’Rawe argue that it is important to continue to explore engaging communities for counter-terrorism, even in the light of such allegations. Spalek and O’Rawe suggest that academic researchers in the counter-terrorism arena need to seek with an open mind, informed by a healthy dose of scepticism, to probe and challenge, to undertake research with sensitivity and respect for the human beings involved, who
may be community members and also police officers (who may have a history of covert policing activities)\textsuperscript{1}. In the absence of any real public debate about what might be a proportionate and legitimate use of CHIS, it is understandable that community members can be extremely cautious when engaging with police officers in relation to countering terrorism. Importantly, CHIS are not exclusively comprised of undercover police and military officers and security service personnel, they also comprise of community informants. In the US the FBI has repeatedly and controversially used community informants, who in some cases are paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in “sting” operations in which the informant has played an encouraging or even a lead role in a potential terrorism plot before then testifying in the subsequent trial against those arrested on terrorism charges\textsuperscript{2}. Research into the role and use of CHIS is rare. In Britain, Lambert\textsuperscript{3} makes some reference to the damage that infiltration and spying can sometimes do, when setting out a partnership-based approach to counter-terrorism. In Israel, Dudai and Cohen suggest that the systematic use of informers for countering terrorism creates a ‘culture of suspicion’ among Palestinians, which hampers the impact of the work of Palestinians who oppose violence\textsuperscript{4}.

Counter-terrorism structures, operational activities and mentalities are difficult to dismantle, and indeed cannot be removed if there continues to be a terrorist threat\textsuperscript{5}. It seems that legitimacy and co-operation are fundamental, without which community support for violence may increase\textsuperscript{6}. As argued by Pickering et al., it is important that law enforcement does not add to existing tensions within communities, which may help terrorists gain support for their causes. It may be that ‘suspect communities’ have been targeted by both ‘hard’ counter-terrorism measures
such as surveillance and the use of informants, and ‘soft’ counter-terrorism initiatives such as community engagement. Given the presence of intelligence gathering approaches within counter-terrorism, it would seem that this is a field that involves degrees and shades of risk when considering engagement and partnerships between community members and police officers. Those involved in counter-terrorism initiatives often have to decide for themselves what risks they are prepared to take\textsuperscript{lvii}. There may also be judgements about what people and organisations to include in engagement efforts, with those perceived as ‘radicals’ being excluded. Indeed, identifying the most effective partners is a difficult task for police officers\textsuperscript{lvii}.

So far there has been little substantive research about how individuals engaged in counter-terrorism initiatives, whether as community members or police officers or other professionals, negotiate this challenging terrain. It seems that community-based approaches to counter-terrorism rely upon the careful construction of certain forms of community engagement, rather than an all-encompassing claim that ‘communities defeat terrorism’. The next section explores this issue further, through analysing and exploring the role that connectors, rather than communities per se, may play in counter-terrorism.

‘Connectors’ and counter-terrorism

Although community is a popular term with policy makers and politicians, community as a notion has been criticised by researchers grappling with conceptualising what community
actually comprises and, in relation to terrorism prevention, what preventative mechanisms might community generate. Community has been criticised for its lack of specificity and for being a term that potentially can be used to exclude and marginalise those individuals or groups who are deemed to lie outside of any socially constructed notions of belonging. Young people, in particular, can be excluded. Research about young people living in contexts characterised by social and economic deprivation suggests that young people can be criminalised by political rhetoric and legislation designed to tackle terrorism, violence and anti-social behaviour. It might be suggested that post 9/11 young Muslims have experienced their formative years in which state and non-state violence – a ‘war on terror’, a war in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and a stream of terror attacks across the world – have been linked to their own beliefs and identities by dominant political and media discourses.

Certain counter-terrorism initiatives within Britain are based within socially and economically deprived neighbourhoods. Within these areas young Muslims may be involved in, or may be experiencing, gang crime and other forms of violence; they may also be experiencing challenging encounters with police, and they may be accessing violent rhetoric produced by takfiri jihadist terrorist networks. Within such contexts, it seems that specific individuals – whether police officers or other professionals like youth workers, and community members – can play a crucial role in working with marginalised young Muslims. These individuals have been working with marginalised Muslim youth, often in areas marked by poverty, exclusion and gang violence, to support and develop young people and to prevent their ‘violent radicalisation’. This article suggests that perhaps a useful way of better understanding the relevance of these
individuals in counter-terrorism is to conceptualise them as ‘connectors’. Empirical data from the AHRC funded research project referred to earlier in this article will now be presented in order to help explain the role of connectors in counter-terrorism further.

So how might the notion of connector be understood? Firstly, there seems to be an identity dimension to the role of connector. Connectors are people who are self-reflective and are able to consciously relate to others through any actual or perceived shared similarities they may have\textsuperscript{lxiii}. Identity is a key aspect to the role of connector because the notion of identity suggests sameness and difference - ‘...the notion of identity simultaneously establishes two possible relations of comparison between persons or things: similarity, on the one hand, and difference, on the other’\textsuperscript{lxiv}.

An appreciation of sameness and difference is important for those implementing counter-terrorism practices, because according to Spalek there are often complex, differing, allegiances and loyalties that need to be negotiated between different actors and organisations\textsuperscript{lxv}. Terrorism and counter-terrorism are concepts that are debated and contested\textsuperscript{lxvi}, with state and non state actors and agencies understanding terrorism and counter-terrorism differently, so that there are likely to be points of divergence regarding the aims and objectives of any particular counter-terrorism initiative. This is an important point, given that Thacher highlights that crime prevention initiatives involving wide-ranging actors can be extremely challenging as a result of competing institutional, cultural, political and other values and priorities\textsuperscript{lxvii}. Within the context of countering takfiri jihadist terrorism, connectors seem to be people who are able to negotiate
‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ in order to build relationships with people so as to create environments conducive to implementing counter-terrorism initiatives. This may involve building relationships on the basis of shared personal characteristics. For example, one Muslim female counter-terrorism police officer that was interviewed as part of the AHRC research study spoke about how being both a Muslim and a police officer within the counter-terrorism field enables her to appreciate both policing and community perspectives, which can be challenging:

_I put in for it (counter-terrorism) because (a) I believed I had the skills for what the job description required and secondly, I was interested in terrorism and the myth surrounding the Muslim community. And because I'm a Muslim officer I believe that not just as an officer, I've also got a duty as Muslim to, to actually help the community understand what it is and being a police officer you're stuck between the two lines really, because you've got procedure and your job and your duties but you've also got your beliefs you know it's not true. So you want to make a difference but in a positive way. But also make the organisation understand the community better._

For one youth worker, connecting with marginalised young Muslims in the local area was about constructing a ‘street’ identity that these young people could identify with:

_Well the street is your, is your credibility, is your kudos, is your ability to gain that respect in the eyes of young people initially. And I'd say the majority of our kids it probably is a_
prerequisite. You have to have that element of respect and kudos for them to be able to come and give you the time of day...

This same youth worker also talks about how street credibility is often about showing off items associated with material success, like nice cars:

So you could turn up in a Porsche and instantly you’ve got cred. ...because you’re in a Porsche and that’s it; that’s what they want to aspire to. These are their ideas of success. You’ve obviously made it. You’re a gangster because you’ve got a Porsche. So in the world where all our kids want to be gangsters, and I think they are already living in a ghetto, that’s your street, that’s your cred, that’s your kudos ... it’s not a wonderful thing but it is real.

However, young people can go beyond this rather superficial kind of respect, based upon materialism, to develop a more meaningful relationship with youth workers:

What can change after a certain amount of time is that then it moves on from that and it becomes slightly more, you know, less superficial and it moves on to more of a trusting relationship and then you don’t need to rely so much on the fast car, the slick clothes and you can dress like me you know.
Connectors may also build relationships with people by focusing on similarities in relation to shared life experiences. For example, one counter-terrorism police officer that was interviewed talked about sharing personal information with community members as a way of engaging and building trust:

"It’s not easy, it’s not easy to go to people and say, you know, ‘I work for the counter-terrorism unit’ which is what we’re supposed … we have to do … And you need to be able to talk about, you know, yesterday, your kids, the fact that you’re having a baby. You know, all that kind of … not just go in and go “well actually, I’m preventing violent extremism and I …”, you know, because that’s not what it’s about.

Connectors within a counter-terrorism context may also be people who identify themselves as being individuals who actively engage in initiatives aimed at preventing extremism. Some of these individuals are people who are aware of the issues around extremism facing communities, and who have been working to challenge the extremisms that they have encountered. To illustrate this dimension to the connector role, the following is a quotation taken from an interview with a male Muslim community member who talked about the work he has been doing in relation to extremism:

... one of the things that I've been doing throughout my life is to fight extremism within Islam and Muslim communities. That's been something that I've been doing way, way before George Bush announced the War on Terror. I mean I've been doing this since I was
you know a high school graduate. I’ve been going round and giving lectures and talks and seminars and the such about how we should engage and I was pelted with stones by the likes of Abu Hamza,... Because I was being accused of being a sell out.

Alongside an identity dimension to the role of connector there is also a social connectivity dimension. This means that individuals are interacting with wider networks of people and organisations, building bridges and connections\textsuperscript{lxviii}. In the context of counter-terrorism, connectors are therefore people who are socially networked, in that they are able to develop bridging relationships within and between different communities and organisations for the purposes of preventing and responding to terrorism. For example, some connectors may run local community centres where young people go and so these connectors are able to develop links between young people, local schools, police officers and others. The following is a quotation from an interview with a Muslim community member and connector, describing the role that he and his community centre plays in developing connections:

... but also the centre that we have here it allows young people to come in at any time of the day, you know, or evening, to engage and play pool or you know get involved in some activities but also to come and discuss some of the issues that they’re experiencing, or their friends are experiencing or also to sort of inform us of what’s going on basically... but we’re also working within a street environment, we have a lot of connections within local schools as well, with young people. So you know we find it very easy to access young
people on the street, in schools and the communities behind the walls of silence …it’s our, our specialist sort of field.

Perhaps Young’s social connection model of responsibility is applicable to the social networking dimension of connectors in relation to counter-terrorism. According to Young, a social connection model of responsibility comprises of responsibility as something that is shared and as something that can only be discharged through collective action. This links to the notion of the co-production of security, in that policing is increasingly being viewed as a shared responsibility between police, communities and other stakeholders. Counter-terrorism practice is therefore something that needs to be shared amongst different actors, and so connectors may play a key role in enabling various counter-terrorism initiatives to be implemented through their various and multiple social interactions and connections. As an example, one community member that was interviewed spoke about how police officers may ask him to find young people to help implement and deliver a counter-terrorism workshop. This is because if police deliver this then the workshop may be tainted and lack credibility with the target audience. At the same time, however, any young people delivering a counter-terrorism workshop may be criticised by their wider communities for being involved in programmes that would normally be carried out by counter-terrorism or uniformed police officers:

...cause obviously they see that when a police officer’s delivering some of these workshops, obviously it’s gonna be tainted ... so they want somebody from the community to deliver it. So young people may have a role and I think, again, it’s just one of those things that they
may lose the respect and the trust in the community as soon as they start delivering programmes that are normally delivered by counter-terrorism officers or by uniformed officers.

Another example of sharing the responsibility of counter-terrorism comes from a quotation from a Muslim community member, who talks about the role he played in dissuading young Muslims from retaliating against those taking part in an EDL march in the area. EDL stands for the English Defence League. This is a racist organization in Britain whose main activity is to undertake street protests against Muslim communities. The quotation below highlights the important connections that were built between a Muslim community member, young people and police in order to be able to intervene effectively:

... on the day I managed to speak to young people and dissuaded about a group of 20 to leave you know, the area and go back, because I knew them ... so they left. So again, that relationship building, the police were seeing that happening... the Silver Commander (senior police officer) on the ground was about to do something and I was there at the time and I felt that if he’d done that it wouldn’t have worked, so he pulled me to the side and we spoke.

It is also important to further highlight that the role that connectors play in preventing and responding to violence is different from the kind of crime control mechanisms that exist through cohesive communities. Much research has been developed around understanding what is meant
by ‘community cohesion’ and, moreover, how this helps provide the kind of social control that is evident in low crime areas. Community cohesion has been operationalised by researchers such as Wedlock to mean whether people pull together to improve an area, whether they feel safe walking at night, whether neighbours look out for each other and whether they trust people in their neighbourhood. It also includes a more general sense of camaraderie such as whether people enjoy living in the area and are proud of the neighbourhood. Indeed, according to Wedlock, cohesive communities have the following characteristics: a sense of community, similar life opportunities, a respect for diversity, political trust and a sense of belonging. Connectors are individuals who often are engaged in areas where there is low trust; areas where there are struggles over forms of belongingness. As such, the work that these individuals do in relation to counter-terrorism carries certain risks because the wider context to their work might well be within communities lacking in cohesion. Connectors are not necessarily community leaders, and moreover, they may be ‘dissenters’ in the sense that they may ‘cause trouble’ for the authorities because they are agents of social and political change. The quotation below is drawn from an interview with a Muslim community member who runs a community centre for young people within a deprived urban area of London. This person speaks about how his organisation challenges injustices, which may involve challenging the police, local authorities, community elders and young people themselves:

*we’re pretty much very challenging...We challenge police, we challenge local authorities, we challenge community elders, and we challenge those who portray a very distorted version of Islam, or false so you know...on the whole we are quite, we’re quite an edgy group.*
This same community member also talks about how this ability to challenge organisations and people gives him and his centre credibility:

... it gives us our credibility within that street environment and it allows our young people to feel comfortable to come and talk to us and discuss a range of issues. We’re not promoting as such as a representative, we’re promoting like if there’s any inequalities or any injustice that’s been carried out whether it’s by the police or by the young people or by anybody we would be that access point and we would challenge that up or down. Depending on who’s been an issue and sometimes it’s the police authorities have an issue with young people. So they’ll come to us and we’ll challenge down to the young people or the young people come to us, talk about the way they’re being treated or the way they’re being spoken to by authorities or by police or by their mosque imams, you know, and we challenge that, vice versa.

The next quotation is taken from an interview with a Muslim counter-terrorism police officer who was building relationships between Muslim community members and police. This quotation serves to highlight the risks that connectors can face in that not everyone is supportive of the work that they do and people can try and undermine their efforts:

The only setback I had was that one particular very influential guy had spoken about me in very negative, I have to say, had lied about me in terms of certain conversations and things
and I could prove it. So much so to the extent that he was calling me a fool and a hypocrite in certain circles that he was holding...and it shows the extent of this guy because my sister was at that talk and she was pregnant at the time. Now he had made life very difficult for myself in particular, for my wife and children and including my mother. And I had to go through a few months of very hard times where I was being blamed by my younger brothers and sisters who’d been married and were settling in with kids and things and they’re well known in the community.

The following quotation is taken from an interview with a youth worker who runs a ‘street-based’ community intervention programme to tackle violent extremism and gang crime. In this quotation the youth worker talks about the importance of coming from the same environment as the people that you are engaging and working with:

People who have killed people come in and hand themselves into XXX (community project), people involved in all kinds of atrocities will come and hand themselves in to us before the authorities. Why? Because we’ve got that respect of the community. Why have we got that respect of the community? Not because we’re any better than anyone else, because we come from the community, we’re part of the community, the community trusts us ...Because the community, you’re part of that community, you’ve not jumped down on parachutes and said we’re setting this up and setting that up, it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work.
Connectors seem to be individuals who have the legitimacy and credibility to work with, between and across both informal and formal efforts to increase safety and reduce crime and violence. By virtue of their authority; gained as a result of their level of connectedness or position in the community hierarchy, life experience or observable commitment to the community (or a combination of); connectors intervene directly to prevent violent incidents, mediate between groups to avoid conflict and/or work directly with individual young people to block their involvement in crime and terrorism.

Conclusion

The role that communities play in preventing and supporting terrorism has generated significant research and policy attention. Post 9/11 the notion that communities defeat terrorism has placed much responsibility upon Muslim communities in particular to help prevent takfiri jihadist terrorism. As demonstrated in this article, Muslim communities may experience community-based attempts at tackling terrorism as a form of state control and surveillance. This article raises the question of whether it is perhaps better to focus upon the role that key actors, rather than communities, play in counter-terrorism. The article suggests that as counter-terrorism is sensitive, with there often being low trust between police officers and communities, it may be that counter-terrorism initiatives often rely upon key individuals, connectors, who are positioned at the intersections of sometimes overlapping communities. This article has drawn upon data from a research study examining engagement in relation to preventing takfiri jihadist terrorism.
from amongst British Muslim youth living in socially and economically deprived contexts. The focus upon connectors rather than communities helps understand the role that key actors play in counter-terrorism, whether these are police officers, youth workers or community members. The focus upon connectors also serves to highlight that these are individuals with a significant ability to build relationships with other people and to develop and connect with wider social networks. From a localised policing perspective connectors may be gatekeepers to sections of youth who may be viewed as vulnerable to many social problems, including the possibility of violent radicalisation (racialised mobilisation, anti-social behaviour, gang membership), and who are therefore in a position to intervene and safeguard. It is important to further highlight that this article suggests that connectors are not necessarily community leaders, and moreover, they may be ‘dissenters’ in the sense that they may ‘cause trouble’ for the authorities because they are agents of social and political change. Importantly, it seems that connectors are key components of the intricate networks of connectivity that young people themselves can draw upon in order to manage the multiple impacts of their challenging environments, marked by poverty, victimisation, marginalisation and processes of criminalisation. Counter-terrorism initiatives that aim to include marginalized youth therefore perhaps rely substantially on connectors for their effectiveness and workability. Certainly, further research attention on the role of connectors is required.
Whilst the term jihadist is commonly used to denote Islamically inspired violent extremism, Githens-Mazer (2010) instead uses the terminology of radical violent takfiri jihadism. According to Githens-Mazer (2010: 63): takfir refers to radicalized Muslims who feel that it is a religious and moral obligation to wage jihad against kufir or non-believers. Takfiri often feel unconstrained by traditional fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence, as they see their goal of attacking apostasy and ensuring the emergence of a Muslim world as ends which can justify almost any means, whether this means violating any element of the fiqh, including eating pork, drinking alcohol etc.


In Britain, a recent taskforce on violent extremism put together by Prime Minister David Cameron, highlights that although other forms of extremism like far right extremism needs to be tackled, Al Qaeda linked terrorism continues to pose the most significant threat.


Prevent is a major strand of the British Government’s main counter-terrorism policy, CONTEST. See HM Government. Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy (London:HMSO, 2006). The Prevent strategy was revised in 2011 by the Conservative
and Liberal Democrat coalition government, see HM Government (2011) *Prevent Strategy*
London: HMSO.

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is a policy pillar of the US Administration’s approach to
countering terrorism Available at http://www.state.gov/j/ct/programs/index.htm#CVE (accessed
11 November 2013). The CVE policy has been targeted more broadly than jihadist terrorism,
however, CVE continues to be perceived as being associated with tackling jihadist influenced
terrorism.

iv Martin Innes, Martin, Laurence Abbot, Trudy, Lowe, and Colin Roberts. *Hearts and Minds
and Eyes and Ears: Reducing Radicalisation Risks through Reassurance-Oriented Policing*
(Cardiff: Cardiff University, Universities’ Police Science Institute, 2007).

Robert Lambert. 2008. “Empowering Salafis and Islamists against Al-Qaida: A London counter-
terrorism case study” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41(1) 31–35.

Anthony Baker. *Extremists in Our Midst: Confronting Terror.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave

v Frank Gregory.”Policing the ‘New Extremism’ in 21st Century Britain” in *The “New”
(London: Taylor & Francis, 2010).

Robert Lambert. *Countering Al-Qaeda in London: Police and Muslims in Partnership.* (London:

vi See Basia Spalek. “Community Policing, Trust and Muslim Communities in relation to ‘new

The study was undertaken between 2009 and 2010, and involved semi-structured interviews with counter-terrorism police officers, Muslim community members, local authority workers, youth workers and with policy makers, in London and Birmingham (a total of 42 interviews). Interviews with 9 Muslim young people (5 living in Birmingham and 4 living in London) and two focus group discussions involving 6 Muslim young people in each group (1 in Birmingham and 1 in London) were also undertaken. The interviews and focus group discussions were digitally recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The data generated much useful material, which has been published in other outputs. The data in this article is specifically data in relation to understanding the role of connectors in counter-terrorism. See also Basia Spalek, Laura Zahra McDonald and Salwa El-Awa. *Preventing Religio-Political Extremism Amongst Muslim Youth: a study exploring police-community partnership* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2011).


Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale were found guilty of murdering a British soldier, Lee Rigby, on the street near Woolwich barracks in South London in the first al-Qaida-linked


xviii Ibid.


xx Ibid.
According to Silvestri (2009: 1), Islamist groups can be identified primarily by their core objective of bringing about divine justice, which whilst in theory implies respecting and implementing ‘sharia law’, in practice it urges to a commitment to ‘social justice’ and ‘political reform’.


Page 5.

Ibid.

Ibid.Page 12.


xxxii Ibid. Page 60.


John Topping and Jonathan Byrne. ‘Policing, Terrorism and the Conundrum of
Community: a Northern Ireland Perspective’ in *Counter-terrorism: community-based
approaches to preventing terror crime* edited by Basia Spalek, 157-180 (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2010).

A forthcoming publication from the Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 2014.

University Press, 1997).

Limited, 1999).

John Murray. “Policing Terrorism: a threat to community policing or just a shift in priorities

Many researchers have argued that post 9/11 Muslim minorities have been constructed by
states as “suspect,” necessitating their state surveillance and control (Pantazis & Pemberton,
2009; Spalek, El-Awa & McDonald, 2009; Spalek and McDonald 2010; Hickman & Silvestri,
2011).

Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton. “From the ‘Old’ to the ‘New Suspect’ Community:
Examining the Impacts of Recent UK Counter-Terrorist Legislation” *British Journal of
Basia Spalek, Salwa El-Awa and Laura Zahra McDonald. *Engagement and Partnerships between Muslim Communities and Police Officers for the Purposes of Counter-Terrorism* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2009).

Basia Spalek and Laura Zahra McDonald. “Conflict within and between communities—with respect to the role of communities in helping to defeat and/or endorse terrorist and the interface with policing efforts to counter terrorism,” Connected Communities Programme Report (London: AHRC, 2011).


It has been alleged in the British press that Robert Lambert penetrated animal rights, green and environmental activist groups when he was a police officer in the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS), a top-secret unit within Special Branch that was formed in 1968. ‘By Any Means Necessary’ seems to be an unofficial motto of the SDS (Cadwalladr, 2013). Colin Cadwalladr (2013) ‘Undercover: The True Story of Britain’s Secret Police Paul Lewis and Rob Evans –
The Observer, Saturday June 29th

http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/jun/29/undercover-secret-police-lewis-evans-review

date accessed July 20th 2013. See also http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/oct/16/academic-bob-lambert-former-police-spy

1 Basia Spalek and Mary O’Rawe. (forthcoming) “Researching Counter Terrorism: a critical perspective from the field in light of allegations of covert activities by undercover police officers” Critical Studies in Terrorism


Brian Gabriel. *Evaluating the Transferability of Counterinsurgency Doctrine: From the Cold War to Global Insurgency* By Master of Science in Applied (US: Intelligence Mercyhurst College, 2010).


Basia Spalek and Mary O’Rawe. (forthcoming) “Researching Counter Terrorism: a critical perspective from the field in light of allegations of covert activities by undercover police officers” *Critical Studies in Terrorism*

Basia Spalek and Laura Zahra McDonald. “Conflict within and between communities – with respect to the role of communities in helping to defeat and/or endorse terrorism and the interface with policing efforts to counter terrorism” *Connected Communities Programme Report* (London: AHRC, 2011).


Laura Zahra McDonald. “Securing Identities, Resisting Terror: Muslim Youth Work in the UK and its Implications for Security” *Religion, State and Society* 39 (2/3) (2011) 177-190

Within academic research there is increasing focus upon the inter-relationships between terrorism, street gangs and organised crime. See for example, John Sullivan and Robert Bunker. “Drug Cartels, Street Gangs and Warlords” *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 13 (2) (2002) 40-53;


Steve Hewitt, Laura Zahra McDonald and Basia Spalek. ‘Communities as defeating and/or endorsing extreme violence: how do communities support and/or defeat extreme violence over time?’ Connected Communities Programme Report (London: AHRC, 2012).


According to Wedlock (2006), local areas with a high sense of community, political trust and sense of belonging show significantly lower levels of reported crime.


See Steve Hewitt, Laura Zahra McDonald and Basia Spalek. ‘Communities as defeating and/or endorsing extreme violence: how do communities support and/or defeat extreme violence over time?’ *Connected Communities Programme Report* (London:AHRC, 2012).