

Constructing 'suspect' communities and Britishness: mapping British press coverage of Irish and Muslim communities, 1974–2007

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Constructing 'suspect' communities and Britishness: Mapping British press coverage of Irish and Muslim communities, 1974–2007

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Abstract

There exist many parallels between the experiences of Irish communities in Britain in the past and those of Muslim communities today. However, although they have both been the subject of negative stereotyping, intelligence profiling, wrongful arrest and prejudice, little research has been carried out comparing how these communities are represented in the media. This article addresses this gap by mapping British press coverage of events involving Irish and Muslim communities that occurred between 1974 and 2007. The analysis shows that both sets of communities have been represented as 'suspect' to different degrees, which the article attributes to varying perceptions within the press as to the nature of the threat Irish and Muslim communities are thought to pose to Britain. The article concludes that a central concern of the press lies with defending its own constructions of Britishness against perceived extremists, and against abuses of power and authority by the state security apparatus.

Keywords

Irish, media, Muslims, suspect communities, terrorism

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This article examines the construction of Irish and Muslim communities in Britain as ‘suspect’ in the British press between 1974 and 2007. This period has been marked by events involving these communities that have threatened social cohesion (i.e. ‘the cohesion of the social fabric of society’; see Hickman et al., 2008: ix) and others that have conversely had the potential to heal rifts in social relations. Although many parallels exist between the experiences of Irish communities in Britain in the past and those of Muslim communities today (negative stereotyping, intelligence profiling, stop and search, wrongful arrest, anti-Irish and anti-Muslim sentiment), there has been little research comparing and contrasting the construction of these communities in public discourse and its effect on the communities concerned.

The larger project of which this article forms part addresses this gap in the research, seeking to identify mechanisms through which the fear of potential terrorist threats intersects with notions of ethnicity, religion and identity. The project achieves this through critical analysis of newspaper coverage, anti-terrorist legislation and police and government statements following events involving Irish and Muslim communities in Britain, complemented by an investigation into the experience of ‘being suspect’, which was achieved through holding key informant interviews and joint Irish/Muslim discussion groups in London and Birmingham between March 2009 and March 2010. Here, we present the findings of one component of this project, namely mapping British newspaper coverage of events involving Irish and Muslim communities between 1974 and 2007. Through this, we seek to evaluate the extent to which these communities are represented as ‘suspect’ in the national and diaspora press. The article argues that one of the principal concerns of journalists and commentators in reporting Irish- and Muslim-related events has been to defend their own constructions of British values and Britishness against groups they perceive as posing a threat to British civil society.

Constructing Irish and Muslim communities as ‘suspect’

A substantial body of research has shown that Irish and Muslim communities in Britain have been and continue to be confronted with racism, discrimination, prejudice and relatively poor socioeconomic conditions (Abbas, 2005; Ballard, 2007; Hickman and Walter, 1997; Jacoby and Yavuz, 2008; Lloyd, 1995; Miller, 2006; Peach, 2006; Rehman, 2007). Both sets of communities have also been the targets of counterterrorism, sometimes with tragic consequences, as exemplified in cases of wrongful arrest of Irish and Muslim people over the years, such as the Guildford Four, Birmingham Six or inmates at Guantanamo Bay. Since the inception of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act (PTA) in 1974, 86.9% of Irish people detained under suspicion of terrorism and 53.1% of those detained under suspicion of international terrorism were released without charge (Table 1). Although the latter were not all Muslims, 34 out of 42 organizations proscribed under the terms of anti-terrorist legislation have some form of agenda they proclaim is related to Islam (Home Office, 2009a). Also, ‘at 31 March 2008, there were 142 extremist/terrorist prisoners in England and Wales, of which 125 were terrorism related. . . . The majority (91%) of terrorist prisoners classified themselves as Muslims’ (Home Office, 2009b: 6–7). Against this backdrop, it is remarkable that little research comparing the social construction and experiences of Irish and Muslim communities in Britain has been

Table 1. Detentions, exclusions/deportations, charges and releases without charges of suspected Irish and international terrorists in Britain, 1974–2008.^a

Origins	Detentions		Exclusions/ Deportations		Charged under Terrorism Acts		Charged under other legislation		Released without charge	
	Irish ^b	Int'al	Irish	Int'al	Irish	Int'al	Irish	Int'al	Irish	Int'al
Cases	7546	2024	414	56	475 (6.3%)	237 (11.7%)	930	444	6477 (86.9%)	1074 (53.1%)

^aCompiled from: Home Office (1984, 1991, 1998, 2001, 2009b).

^bData on Irish cases cover the period 29 November 1974 to 11 September 2001. Data on international cases were not included in the statistics until 22 March 1984, when the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1984 came into force.

carried out, with research tending to focus on evaluating anti-terrorism legislation (Greer, 2008; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Peirce, 2008).

So far, research has focused on one or other of these communities, with particular emphasis on Muslims in the current period. The focus of investigation has been on terrorism and political violence (English, 2003; Jackson, 2005); violence connected to Islamism (Abbas, 2007); terrorist threats and state responses to them (Briggs et al., 2006; Clutterbuck, 2006; Wilkinson, 2001); the relationship between violence and religious beliefs (Stern, 2004); or the curtailment of civil liberties and human rights in the context of counterterrorism (Blick et al., 2006; Hillyard, 1993). The dearth in comparative research is also evidenced in studies on the representation of Muslims in the British media (Moore et al., 2008; Poole, 2002; Poole and Richardson, 2006; Richardson, 2001, 2004) often referencing little previous work done in the Irish context (e.g. Miller, 1994). Nonetheless, research on the media has shown that Irish and Muslim communities are often represented negatively, which contributes to their construction as 'suspect', as a threat, or as a security challenge (Ameli et al., 2007; Ansari, 2004; Brighton, 2007; Brown, 2006; Cesari, 2006; Curtis, 1998; Curtis Jr, 1997; Eatwell, 2006; Esposito, 1995; Flood et al., 2011; Foster, 1993; Halliday, 2003; Jacoby and Yavuz, 2008; Kyriakides et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2008; Morgan, 1997; Poole, 2002; Poole and Richardson, 2006; Richardson, 2001, 2004; Said, 1981; Schlesinger, 1992; Werbner, 2000). However, according to Statham (2002: 407), research pre-dating 9/11 suggests that 'the standard norm for British media reporting is in general to perpetuate anti-racist stances that are in fact in line with the official policy stance of the state on Race Relations'. That is why we followed his recommendation that to escape 'the tautological proposition perpetuated by cultural studies that the media is always racist', there is a need for 'empirical studies, that over time . . . chart and analyse the thematic contents of the messages carried by the media when covering issues relating to migrants and minorities' (2002: 397). In doing so, we aimed to make connections between coverage of events involving Irish and Muslim communities and to examine the construction of these communities as 'suspect' in the British press between 1974 and 2007.

Irish and Muslim communities in the British press, 1974–2007

Our analysis of newspaper coverage focuses on 19 events (Table 2), which we hypothesized were catalysts for the emergence and recycling of multiple and sometimes contradictory discourses relating to the perceived threat posed to British civil society and its values by Irish and Muslim communities. We analysed coverage in the national press (*Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday, The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph, The Guardian/Observer, The Sun/News of the World*) and in the diaspora press (*Asian Times, The Irish Post, The Muslim News*). Each of these newspapers has its own identity, character, political orientation and readership, which affect how Irish and Muslim communities are constructed within their pages. The defunct weekly *Asian Times* targeted the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional British Asian market. Its readership consisted of ‘opinion makers, teachers and lecturers, social workers, and people involved professionally in the UK Asian community at all levels’ (Asia Major, 1996).

The London-based weekly *Irish Post* ‘target[s] the second-generation Irish in the UK and more affluent young Irish people who are coming to Britain to work in business and the professions’ (Lagan, 2005). The readership of the monthly *Muslim News* is mainly second and third generation Muslims, and it claims to ‘report . . . on what the non-Muslim media does not report’ (*The Muslim News*, 2009). The national newspapers under analysis cater to the British population as a whole and are widely read; between January and December 2009 the combined readership of the dailies under analysis was

Table 2. Key events, 1974–2007.

Irish-related events	Muslim-related events
21 November 1974: Birmingham pub bombings	14 February 1989: fatwa on Salman Rushdie
29 November 1974: adoption of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act	Spring/Summer 2001: race riots
3 December 1974: arrest of the Maguire Seven	9 March 2004: release of the Tipton Three
17 December 1983: Harrods Bombing	7 and 21 July 2005: London bombings
19 October 1989: release of the Guildford Four	22 July 2005: shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes
14 March 1991: release of the Birmingham Six	30 March 2006: adoption of 2006 Terrorism Act
26 June 1991: final exoneration of the Maguire Seven	2 June 2006: Forest Gate anti-terrorist raid
23 September 1996: shooting of Diarmuid O’Neill	5 October 2006: Jack Straw veil controversy
10 April 1998: Good Friday Agreement	31 January 2007: Birmingham anti-terrorism raid
20 July 2000: adoption of Terrorism Act 2000	20 July 2000: adoption of Terrorism Act 2000

31.6% of the total newspaper readership in Britain, while that of the Sunday papers was 32.3% (National Readership Survey, 2010).

In order to evaluate press representations of Irish and Muslim communities as ‘suspect’, we collected all the news items mentioning the events chosen for analysis for one month after each event took place, except for the Good Friday Agreement and the 2000 and 2006 Terrorism Acts, where periods covering the span of the policy-making process were collected; a three-month period was covered for *The Muslim News*. Only news items referring to British Muslims were collected for the July 2005 bombings in the national press, using the following search string in the Nexis newspaper database: ((London! terror!) OR (London! bomb!)) AND ((homegrown!) OR (British! Muslim!)). This step was taken as the number of news items collected for these bombings would otherwise have been in the thousands. This yielded a total of 2798 news items (Figure 1). Note that because the adoption of the PTA 1974 and the Birmingham bombings were often mentioned in tandem, they were collated into one for the purposes of the present analysis. With the exception of the Good Friday Agreement, which attracted the most coverage in our sample ($n = 441$), Muslim-related events tended to be covered more extensively than Irish-related ones.

It is notable that the arrest (7) and exoneration (16) of the Maguire Seven, although significant for Irish communities in Britain, attracted little press attention, especially when compared to the releases of the Guildford Four (109) and Birmingham Six (122). A number of factors may explain this. First, their arrest took place immediately after the Birmingham bombings that accelerated the adoption of anti-terrorist legislation, events that attracted a large degree of press attention (186). Second, their arrest took place at a time of heightened IRA (Irish Republican Army) activity, when many suspects were arrested. Their arrest could then be argued to have been subsumed under discourses relating to IRA activity and how British civil society should deal with it. Third, the exoneration of the Maguire Seven followed swiftly on that of the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six, which suggests that it became absorbed in discourses relating to miscarriages of justice; wrongful arrest; and the modus operandi of counterterrorism.

A telling example of differences in the construction of Irish and Muslim communities as ‘suspect’ relates to coverage of three shootings by police included in our sample: Diarmuid O’Neill in September 1996 (46); Jean Charles De Menezes in July 2005 (209); and Abdul Koyar during the Forest Gate raid in June 2006 (171). All three events have broad societal relevance in that they involve the shooting of individuals without recourse to legal process, and in two cases the shootings were fatal. In all three cases, the diaspora press was more sympathetic to the victims than was the national press, choosing to highlight failures of intelligence that led to the shooting of people because of their assumed status as dangerous terrorists. It is striking that the raid in which O’Neill was killed attracted little coverage compared to the other two events. O’Neill was represented as an IRA sympathizer in the national press, and sometimes as a member of the IRA (*The Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 1996: ‘IRA man killed as police foil bomb attacks’; *The Sun*, 25 September 1996: ‘IRA’s kid cashier. Gunned-down Provo stole loot from bank for terrorist coffers’). In fact, in 1989 O’Neill had been convicted of stealing money from the Bank of Ireland, and in the trial police claimed he had transferred £34,000 to the IRA, for which he was sentenced to 12 months in a youth detention centre. This conviction

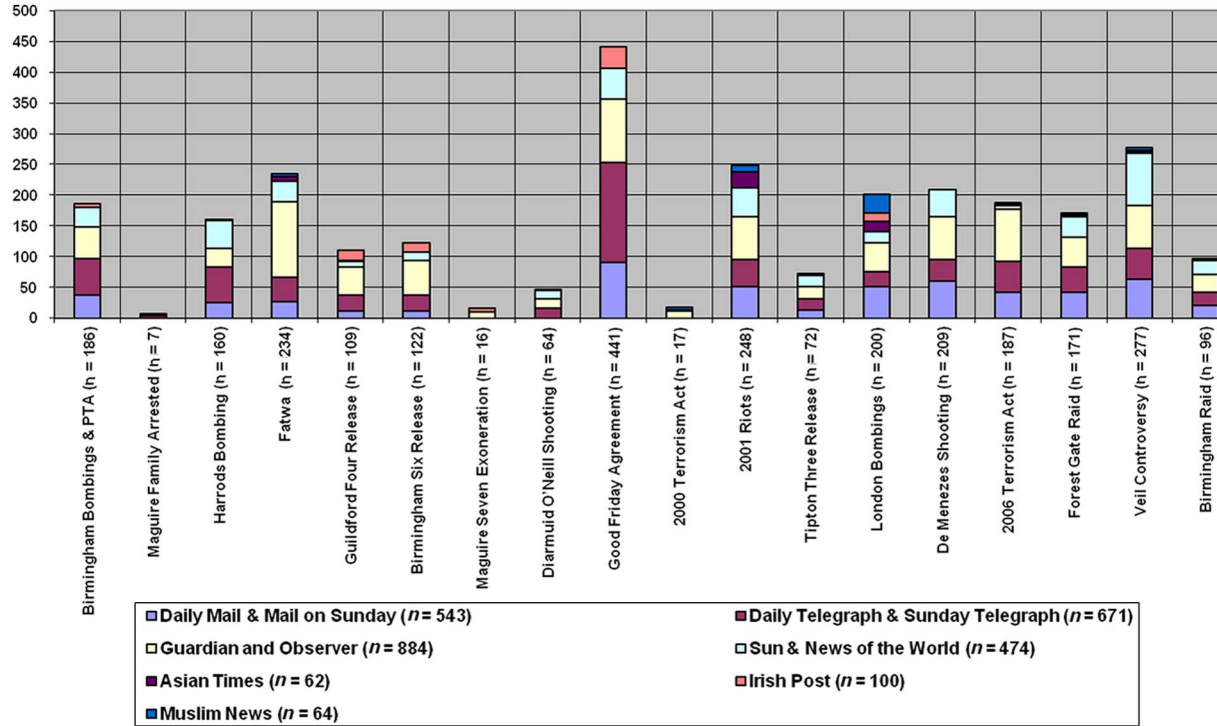


Figure I. Number of news items by event, 1974–2007.

contributed to him being constructed as a ‘terror suspect’, a status that apparently renders the point-blank, fatal shooting of an unarmed man, unproblematic, or at least excusable. This uncritical stance was adopted across the national newspapers under analysis, which is surprising given that the actions of the police and judiciary had come under intense scrutiny in the aftermath of the releases of the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six.

The anti-terror raid in Forest Gate during which Koyar was shot attracted almost four times more coverage than the shooting of O’Neill. Clearly it was considered a more newsworthy event. This might in part be an effect of the De Menezes case, where a Brazilian man was shot dead because of his ‘Asian/Muslim’ appearance, combined with the press spotlight on Muslims after the events of 9/11 and July 2005. It is notable that in this case – although coverage did focus on the excessive use of force – journalists and commentators in the national press also chose to ‘criminalize’ the victim after the event, accusing Koyar and his family of scrounging off the state or of having criminal connections (*Daily Mail*, 13 June 2006, ‘Losing your legs on 7/7 justifies a £500,000 payout . . . losing your liberty for a few days doesn’t’; *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 June 2006, ‘Anti-terrorist police found £30,000 in a suitcase during raid’).

The De Menezes shooting attracted the most coverage of the three, perhaps precisely because he was not a member of a ‘suspect’ community, but because he was treated as a ‘suspect’ because of his appearance. This may explain why most of the coverage focuses on the modus operandi of the police in the shooting, with the effect of the police itself becoming ‘suspect’. Nonetheless, even here, the victim is criminalized in the national press, which questioned the authenticity of his immigration status (*The Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 2005, ‘Victim said to be illegal immigrant from Brazil’; *The Sun*, 26 July 2006, ‘Shooting victim’s visa had expired’). This is an early indicator of the press’s concern with defending what it perceives are British values.

Related to this, we identified a strong concern within the press in relation to perceived threats posed by Muslim communities to British civil society, as illustrated in extensive coverage of the fatwa on Salman Rushdie (234) and of the controversy fuelled by the media on the veil sparked by comments made by then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, on wearing the full-face veil during surgeries at his constituency (277). Not only are Muslims connected with the terrorist threat in the press, they are also constructed as a cultural problem for Britain and sometimes uniformly represented as challenging the values and principles the press associates with Britishness (for similar considerations relating to the Irish, see de Nie, 2001). One aspect of this ‘cultural problem’ relates to gender equality, as evidenced in the extent of coverage of the ‘veil controversy’. While in 2005 the press focused on the actions and thoughts of young Muslim men, in 2006 the focus was on Muslim women and their appearance and dress. In this context, it is perhaps ironic to note that much of the coverage of the fatwa focused on the perceived threat posed by Muslims to freedom of speech, which was upheld as a fundamental British value. Muslim communities were constructed as threatening through their approval of the fatwa.

We now turn to an analysis of word usage in the headlines of the collected news items to draw an overall picture of coverage of these communities in the press between 1974 and 2007. We focused on the headlines because research has shown that ‘skilled newspaper readers spend most of their reading time *scanning* the headlines – rather than reading

Table 3. Top 20 terms used in the headlines of Irish- and Muslim-related events, 1974–2007.

Irish-related terms	N	Muslim-related terms	N
PEACE	132	POLICE	204
IRA	124	TERROR	170
ULSTER	107	RUSHDIE	100
SIX	72	MUSLIM	99
BOMB	71	BLAIR (Sir Ian)	95
POLICE	69	VEIL	94
BLAIR (Tony)	66	MUSLIMS	79
BIRMINGHAM	59	LONDON	72
DEAL	51	RACE	67
YES	47	BRITAIN	62
IRELAND	43	ATTACK	57
IRISH	40	BILL	48
SINN FEIN	39	OUR	48
VOTE	39	CHIEF	47
FOUR	37	MET	46
JUSTICE	34	STRAW	46
GUILDFORD	33	RIOTS	45
TERROR	30	DAY	44
VICTIMS	30	RIOT	44
RELEASE	29	US	44

the stories' (Dor, 2003: 696; emphasis in original). The first thing to note is that a more diverse vocabulary is used in Muslim-related headlines (4003 different words) than in Irish-related ones (2644). This discrepancy may be a reflection of constraints imposed upon newsmakers when covering Irish-related issues. Schlesinger (1992: xviii) points out that PTA 1974 'was unquestionably seen in broadcasting circles as instituting an effective ban on interviews with members of illegal organizations, especially Irish republican ones'. This self-censorship was followed by state censorship, when the Broadcasting Ban was enforced between 1988 and 1994, which had a knock-on effect on the press and for which there exists, as yet, no 'Muslim' equivalent (although see Cram, 2006; see also Curtis, 1998; Lloyd, 1995).

There is little overlap between words used in Irish- and Muslim-related headlines, which suggests that Irish and Muslim communities are portrayed differently in the news (Table 3). POLICE and TERROR are the only words used in the top 20s of both sets of news items, albeit with greatly varying frequencies. POLICE (204) is the most frequently used word in Muslim-related headlines, with associated terms such as (Sir Ian) BLAIR (95), MET (i.e. London Metropolitan Police, 46) and CHIEF (47) also figuring prominently. In contrast, POLICE appears 69 times in Irish-related headlines. This difference is striking when considering that the modus operandi of the police was questioned intensively in the press in the aftermath of the releases of the Guildford Four and the Birmingham Six, just as it was after the De Menezes shooting and after the botched terror raids in Forest Gate and Birmingham. Although we identified intensive scrutiny of the

security apparatus in our sample of Irish-related events, this scrutiny is even more intensive in the recent period of Muslim-related events. This may have been influenced by a number of factors, such as the publication of the Macpherson (1999) report on the enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, which related to institutionalized racism in the police. Also, while large sections within the press were initially uncritical of police operations targeting alleged Irish terrorist suspects, this attitude changed with the release of wrongfully arrested people on the basis of unsafe forensic evidence. When compared with coverage of Irish-related events, the press was quicker to criticize the state security apparatus in its reporting of Muslim-related events, adopting a more guarded stance when covering anti-terrorist operations.

The prevalence of terrorism in Irish- and Muslim-related headlines suggests that these communities are constructed as 'suspect' and as a threat in the press, although a more direct association is made between Muslim communities and terrorism than is the case for Irish communities. Indeed, TERROR is the second most frequently used term in Muslim-related headlines, where it appears 170 times, with the associated term ATTACK appearing 57 times. In Irish-related headlines, TERROR only appears 30 times, but the associated terms IRA and BOMB appear 124 and 71 times, respectively. This leads us to conclude that while terrorism is more frequently associated with the IRA than with Irish communities, Muslim communities as a whole tend to be associated more directly with terrorism. This is also evidenced in al-Qaeda only appearing twice in Muslim-related headlines, with no other comparable organization mentioned. The absence of paramilitary organizations other than the IRA in the headlines is remarkable in its own right, in that the Northern Ireland conflict comes to be defined almost exclusively in terms of the IRA's agenda, thereby eliding the complexity of the conflict. One potential effect of this is that Irish communities come to be indirectly associated with the IRA, thereby reinforcing the notion that *the Irish* are a threat to Britain.

There is a remarkable difference in usage of the terms OUR and US (excl. the USA) in the headlines, where they appear for a combined total of 18 times in the Irish context, compared to 81 times in the Muslim context. Also, OUR and US only appear once in the headlines of *The Irish Post*, in the same article ('Give us peace in our time', 11 April 1998); OUR appears once in the headlines of *The Muslim News* ('Not in our name', 25 November 2005); and neither term appears in those of the *Asian Times*. These differences are indicative of a tendency within national newspapers to portray Muslims as separate from the rest of the population, with the subtext being that 'they' (i.e. Muslims) are not wholly part of 'us' or of 'our' community (i.e. Britain). The finding that distinctions are made between 'us' and 'them' in the press is reinforced by frequent references to BRITAIN (62) in Muslim-related headlines, as opposed to in Irish-related headlines, where the term only appears 9 times. The lower frequency of appearance of OUR, US and BRITAIN in Irish-related headlines does not necessarily imply that the Irish are represented as being part of 'us' or of 'our' community, but it indicates that the Irish experience is portrayed differently to the Muslim experience.

Another example of this is discrepancies we identified in usage of terms with religious connotations. Muslim-related headlines unsurprisingly emphasize religion, with MUSLIM/S (178), ISLAM (23), ISLAMIC (15) and VEIL (94) appearing regularly. This contrasts with the near absence of religious terms in Irish-related headlines, a surprising

finding considering the strong religious undercurrents of issues associated with Irishness (Fulton, 1991; Mitchell, 2005). The only terms with openly religious connotations used more than once in Irish-related headlines are CATHOLIC (3), FAITH (3), ORANGEMEN (3) and CHURCH (2). From this, we can infer that religious difference is a key element of the contrast between press representations of Irish and Muslim experiences, with Catholicism/Protestantism made invisible in news discourse in contrast to Islam. In the Irish context, a 'suspect' community is framed in terms of ethno-national characteristics, thereby eliding religious identities and allegiances instrumental in many aspects of the conflict in Northern Ireland. In the Muslim context, in contrast, a 'suspect' community is framed more in terms of a homogenized religious identity, thereby masking a range of ethnic and denominational communities.

There are notable differences between the newspapers in the terms they use to report on the events under analysis. These differences probably originate in the identities, political orientations, readerships and values of the newspapers, and they suggest that the construction of Irish and Muslim communities in the national and diaspora press is not uniform. For instance, ULSTER does not appear at all in the headlines of *The Irish Post*, with IRA only appearing once, while both terms appear regularly in the national press. This is indicative of great differences between the diaspora and national press in how they cover Irish-related news. As our analysis confirms, Ulster is often used as a synonym for Northern Ireland in public discourse (three of the nine counties within Ulster are part of the Republic of Ireland), a terminological choice *The Irish Post* is unlikely to make, considering it caters to an Irish audience that would be *au fait* with the political implications of using one term over another. Referring to Ulster, Northern Ireland, the north of Ireland or the Six Counties are political choices aligning the utterer with a particular agenda: Loyalism, Unionism, Republicanism or Nationalism. As Beresford (1987: 7) argues, 'There is no neutrality in Northern Ireland, at least in the terminological sense: the use of the term "Northern Ireland" places a writer on one side of the conflict, because to an Irish Nationalist there is no such entity' (see also BBC, 1996 [1993]). The almost complete absence of the IRA in *Irish Post* headlines is an unexpected finding. The reason for this absence may be a conscious effort on the part of *The Irish Post* to portray Irish communities in a positive light, or not to give the IRA the 'oxygen of publicity', or perhaps clearly to separate the Irish from the IRA.

There is more commonality in the words used in Muslim-related headlines than in Irish-related ones, which suggests a greater degree of homogenization of Muslim than Irish communities in the press. MUSLIM/S is used extensively in the headlines of all the newspapers under analysis, and one effect of this may be that issues or problems covered in the news come to be seen as being inherent to Muslim communities. This contrasts with the lower number of times IRISH is used in the headlines. In this respect, Irish communities (and perhaps mainly the IRA) may be said to be constructed as a problem for the state, with Muslim communities constructed as a problem in and of themselves. Indeed, the regular appearance of RUSHDIE, VEIL, RACE and RIOT/S suggests that Muslim communities are portrayed as a symbolic threat to perceived British values. A caveat needs to be introduced here though: the high incidence of RACE in Muslim-related headlines is solely a result of coverage of what were dubbed 'race riots' in 2001. Nonetheless, issues raised by the fatwa, the 2001 riots and Straw's comments on the

full-face veil relate to societal debates concerning the policy of multiculturalism. In fact, the failure of multiculturalism is repeatedly identified in sections of the national press as the failure of Muslims to integrate in British society.

The newspapers under analysis are greatly concerned with what they perceive to be threats to British values and Britishness. To explore this concern further, we coded the news items we collected according to four sets of mutually exclusive (although overlapping) criteria that resonate with values and issues associated with the ideological project of Britishness (see Hickman et al., 2008) and with the research questions of the larger project this article forms part of:

COMMUNITIES: Suspect Irish, Non-suspect Irish, Irishophobia, IRA/Sinn Féin, Suspect Muslim, Non-suspect Muslim, Islamophobia, Muslim Terrorist.

SOCIAL COHESION: Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism, Race Relations.

RULE OF LAW: Civil Liberties, Shoot-to-Kill-to-Protect, Rule of Law, Suspect Police/Judiciary, Wrongful Arrest.

BRITISHNESS: Britishness, Freedom of Speech, Religious Tolerance.

The *Suspect Irish* and *Suspect Muslim* categories cover items where members of Irish and Muslim communities are referred to as terror suspects or as a threat. *IRA/Sinn Féin* and *Muslim Terrorist* cover items where members of these communities are referred to as being part of the IRA or Sinn Féin, or as terrorists inspired by Islam(ism). Conversely, *Non-suspect Irish* and *Non-suspect Muslim* cover items where they are referred to in terms depicting them as not being a threat, with *Irishophobia* and *Islamophobia* relating to backlashes against these communities. *Suspect Police/Judiciary* covers news items where the security apparatus is reported as performing its duties in ways unbecoming its assigned social role. In total, 1068 news items responded to these categories (Figure 2).

The relatively high incidence of the *Suspect Muslim* category (12.5% of coded news items) suggests that Muslim communities are represented as ‘suspect’ in the press, or at least as more ‘suspect’ than Irish communities. *Suspect Irish* appeared in 2.4% of coded items, which is almost equal to *Non-suspect Irish* (2.3%), with *Irishophobia* appearing in about 1% and *IRA/Sinn Féin* in 3.3%. This suggests that, in our sample, Irish communities as a whole are not represented as ‘suspect’ as frequently or as overtly as are Muslim communities. *Non-suspect Muslim* appears in 2.8% of coded items, with *Islamophobia* and *Muslim Terrorist* appearing in 3% and 4.1%, respectively. At face value, this would suggest that no concerted effort is made in the press to dispel popular notions that Muslim communities are ‘suspect’, at least when compared to coverage of Irish-related events.

The percentage of coded items referring to the police/ judiciary as ‘suspect’ is 9.1%, which suggests that the press casts a critical eye on the authorities, albeit often in retrospect, as evidenced in the coverage of the releases of the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six. In fact, what the press deems ‘suspect’ here is not so much a community as a way of operating. Hence the high incidence of news items with policy and legal implications. Between them, *Civil Liberties* (12.1%), *Rule of Law* (11%), *Shoot-to-Kill* (9.8%) and *Wrongful Arrest* (6.3%) cover 39.2% of all coded news items. This indicates that the

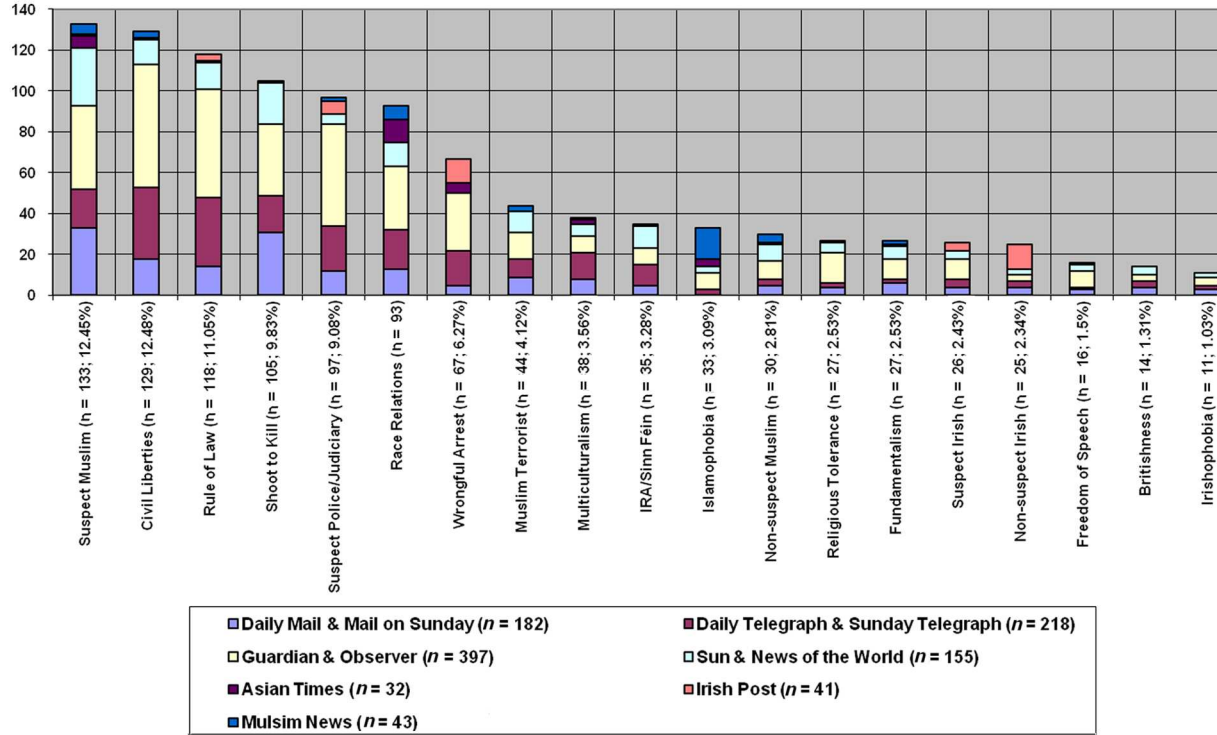


Figure 2. Number of coded news items per coding category, 1974–2007.

press is very concerned with corruption within the British establishment, which is reflected in its concern with British values, as evidenced in *Race Relations* (8.7%), *Multiculturalism* (3.6%), *Fundamentalism* (2.5%), *Religious Tolerance* (2.5%), *Freedom of Speech* (1.5%) and *Britishness* (1.3%), accounting for a combined total of 20.1% of coded items. Perceived threats to British values and Britishness are therefore very much part of the subtext of coverage of Irish and Muslim communities in both the national and diaspora press.

Conclusion

Our mapping analysis of national and diaspora press coverage of events involving Irish and Muslim communities in Britain between 1974 and 2007 has shown that the British press participates in the construction of these communities as ‘suspect’ to varying degrees and in divergent ways. Variance in representation is not only related to the targeted readerships and political orientations of the newspapers under analysis, but also to the perceived significance of the events and issues reported. We found that the diaspora press tends to focus more on events and issues directly relevant to their readerships; to provide more positive coverage of Irish and Muslim communities; and to focus on the effects of being perceived as ‘suspect’ on members of the communities they cater to, thereby confirming the findings of previous research on how alternative press organs report events relevant to their readerships (e.g. Baker, 2005). In the national press, in contrast, we found a strong tendency to represent Muslim communities as threatening perceived British values, with Irish communities tending to be represented as a threat to the British state, although with much greater emphasis on the IRA than on the Irish as a whole. However, previous research suggests that there is a strong likelihood of a negative association of the IRA with the Irish occurring in public discourses (Morgan, 1997). We found that a more obvious conflation is made in the press between Muslim communities and extremism than is the case for Irish communities. In both cases, however, it is mainly perceived extremists within these communities who are represented as ‘suspect’ and as a threat to Britain and its values.

This echoes the observation made by Schlesinger (1992: 205) in the context of the reporting of Northern Ireland in the British media that ‘extremist violence . . . becomes the moral object of repugnance, whereas the legitimate violence of the security forces is handled within a framework which emphasizes its regrettable necessity’. However, our analysis has also shown that the security apparatus is not always portrayed as holding the moral high ground when dealing with perceived extremists. The state security apparatus is held to account in the national and diaspora press, as evidenced in extensive coverage of fundamental examinations of the judiciary and security forces that followed several of the events under analysis. This is especially true when the security apparatus is perceived as endangering what it is charged with defending through an aggressive pursuit of counterterrorism measures. Furthermore, the high incidence of news items relating to the rule of law and Britishness, in the largest sense of the terms, demonstrates that the national and diaspora press are deeply concerned with preserving the integrity of the British state, its

institutions and its values. Abusing these is deemed intolerable, whoever the perpetrators may be. In this way, the newspapers under analysis defend their own constructions of Britishness against perceived extremists and against abuses of power and authority by the security apparatus.

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