‘I grew a beard and my dad flipped out!’ Co-option of British Muslim parents in countering “extremism” within their families in Bradford and Leeds

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Abstract

Research on the effects of counter-terrorism has argued that Muslims are constructed as a ‘suspect community.’ However, there remains a paucity of research exploring divisive effects membership to a ‘suspect community’ has on relations within Muslim families. Drawing from interviews conducted in 2010-11 with British Muslims living in Bradford or Leeds, I address this gap by examining how co-option of Muslim parents to counter extremism fractures relations within Muslim families. I show that internalising fears of their children being radicalised or indeed radicalising others, means parents judge young Muslims’ religious practices through a restrictive moderate/extremist binary. I advance the category of ‘internal suspect body’ which is materialised through two intersecting conditions: the suspected Muslim extremist to lookout for and young Muslims at risk of radicalisation. I delineate the reproductive effects of terrors of counter-terrorism on Muslims’ experiences as they traverse state, intra-group and individual levels.

Keywords: counter-terrorism, extremism, Muslim, radicalisation, suspect

Word Count: 9,248

Introduction: Co-option of Muslim parents in countering extremism

Young British Muslims have come under intense public scrutiny because of their perceived vulnerability to radicalisation (Choudhury 2007; McDonald 2011; Shterin and Spalek 2011; Hosseini 2013; Robinson et al. 2017). Hamid (2011, 247) notes that ‘In
the popular imagination the words “Muslim” and “youth” together most often trigger associations with violent extremism.’ Such conceptions are stoked by a populist account of young Muslims being turned to extremism produced from a range of sources, including state actors. This narrative is premised on Islamist enemies of western civilisations encouraging young Muslims to launch suicide attacks against their fellow citizens within Britain’s borders. For example, in 2006, former Home Secretary, John Reid, attended Leyton cricket ground to meet the East London Muslim community ‘to warn Muslim parents’ (quoted in Travis 2006; also Lambert and Parsons 2017, 57) about the threat from extremism. Reid urged them to surveil their children for ‘telltale signs’ and confront extremism within their households:

There is no nice way of saying this but there are fanatics who are looking to groom and brainwash children, including your children for suicide bombing. Grooming them to kill themselves in order to murder others… look for the telltale signs now and talk to them before their hatred grows and you risk losing them forever…in protecting our families we are protecting our community (Reid quoted in Travis 21 September 2006).

The warning spread through the media and sparked immediate protest amongst Muslims, including Ahmed Versi (quoted in Travis 2006), editor of Muslim News, who argued that it was ‘farcical for him to ask parents to spy on their children and report them to anti-terrorist police.’ Reid’s account highlights political uses to which terror are put within preventative counter-terrorism and its pernicious effects by inculcating fear and suspicion of fellow Muslims, including family members. Young Muslims are deemed vulnerable to radicalisation and Muslim parents, potential harbingers, making
the (Muslim) household a suspect site. Nickels et al. (2012, 340) argue that construction of suspect communities in news discourse fosters a socio-political environment where state violations of civil liberties are permitted. Terrorism-related discussions dominate the ‘Muslim public sphere’ so that Muslim communities are not only ‘embroiled in the debate; they passively monitor the individuals around them and the events that affect their community’ (Spalek and Weeks 2017, 967).

The security agenda has ‘crept into the ordinary and the mundane,’ burdening families with preventing extremism (HM Government 2015). Focus is placed on Muslim families’ role in assisting security and law enforcement agencies by offering a ‘protective resource’ (Crown 2017, 1) such as self-esteem and belonging or ‘ethical anchoring’ (Mattsson et al. 2016, 253; Huq 2017, 1045) against radicalisation and terrorist recruitment to redress the tide of British foreign fighters travelling to Syria (Awn and Guru 2017) or daughters becoming ‘jihadi brides’1 (Saeed 2016, 1, 2; Pearson and Winterbotham 2017). A number of government-sponsored initiatives involving Muslim parents/families have been devised including Families Against Stress and Trauma (FAST), Educate Against Hate site portal (Department for Education and Home Office 2018) offering parental support to keep ‘children safe from the danger of extremism,’ and #MakingAStand campaign (Home Office 2014) working with Muslim women, particularly mothers, to counter terrorist recruitment. The Prevent strategy places onus on parents to police their children, including removing their passports if suspected of travelling to join IS (House of Commons 2017, 27). Failure to intervene is regarded as Ashencaen Crabtree (2017, 259-6) notes, as ‘complicity and irresponsible parenting as well as being guilty of failing to inculcate proper British citizenship values in progeny.’
Muslim parents are enlisted in countering terrorism, but are also deemed responsible for its allure. The Radical Awareness Network (RAN) (2017, 55; also Anderson QC 2016, 126) argues families may provide ‘risk factors’ to reintegrating returned foreign fighters depending on their ideological influence or relationship to the returnee, citing the family as a potential ‘breeding ground’ for radicalisation. Family law has entered the realms of counter-terrorism to ‘safeguard’ children that have been taken to Syria and Iraq (Crown 2017, 15; Pearson and Winterbotham 2017). A notorious case was Bradford-based sisters Sugra, Zohra and Khadija Dawood who travelled to Syria with their nine children in 2015. Stanley and Guru (2015, 353; also Robinson et al. 2017) note the emergence of ‘childhood radicalisation’ as a new ‘category of abuse,’ that places the (Muslim) family under increased scrutiny from social workers, community workers, nongovernmental as well as security and law enforcement agencies involving psychological repercussions on children and families.

A limited number of studies have documented detrimental impact of counter-terrorism measures on Muslim families (Brittain 2009; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011; Guru 2012; Stanley and Guru 2015; Ragazzi 2016; Ashencaen Crabtree 2017). Literature on the ‘suspect community’ notes how families are stigmatised within their communities following arrests or home raids (Author forthcoming; Choudhury and Fenwick 2011, 77). There remains a paucity of empirical research exploring Muslim parents’ role in countering extremism (Awan and Guru 2017). In addressing this gap, this article draws on qualitative interviews with 26 Muslim males and females living in Leeds or Bradford undertaken in 2010-11 to explore how co-option of Muslim parents to counter extremism within their households produces ‘internal suspect bodies’ through intersecting fears of the Muslim groomer and Muslim youth at risk of radicalisation.
Ascendance of ‘Muslim’ as a political category has particular salience in Bradford following the 1989 Rushdie Affair and ‘riots’ of 1995 and 2001. Emergence of the ‘home-grown terrorist’ following 7/7 is significant to Leeds through its connection as home-place to three of the 2005 London bombers. During my fieldwork, the Coalition Government issued their revised Prevent strategy (2011) which identified Leeds and Bradford as two of 25 ‘priority areas’ for tackling terrorism. Elsewhere (Author forthcoming) I explored how the internal suspect body is produced through fears of Muslims informing on fellow Muslims within the context of Prevent, producing mistrust within Muslim communities. Here, I contribute further examination of the terrors of counter-terrorism (Hillyard 1993, 262) by exploring Muslim parents’ roles in undertaking internal surveillance of their children’s religious identities, Islamic spaces and networks in which they engage. Hickman et al.’s (2012, 93) research on ‘suspect communities’ contends that ‘suspectification’ (the practice of making an individual or a community suspect) although initiated by state authorities, is reproduced by a range of individuals/groups, including within the suspect community. In adopting a networked approach, I shift analysis of the effects of counter-terrorism on the suspect community from state-centric approaches (for example, Greer 2010, 2014) to explore how Muslims are co-opted into diverse positions of suspect/suspector. Terrors of counter-terrorism traverse state/Muslim relations (Bonino 2013, 385) to infiltrate Muslim households and are retransmitted by the subjugated group (Foucault 1977, 27). As Butler (1997b, 2) contends, subjection ‘signifies the process of becoming subordinated by power as well as the process of becoming a subject.’ Internal suspect bodies are produced within Muslim households where Muslim parents internalise external Islamic markers such as the hijab, jilbab and Islamic beard as signifiers of extremism, precipitating internal disciplinary measures. Muslim parents/family members become complicit in governing
young Muslims’ religious identities within the parameters of ‘moderate Muslim’ which
domesticates Muslims (Tyrer 2008, 63) and, by extension, subjects them to the system
of white dominance from fear of their children being targeted by state counter-terrorism
measures. Anderson QC (quoted in Joint Committee of Human Rights 2016, 4), UK
Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, found that Muslim parents fear talking
about terrorism to their children in case they are referred by ‘half trained’ teachers
under Prevent. Subjection has ideological, psychic and emotional effects on both those
that suspect and are suspected, creating intra-familial tensions. New subjectivities are
nonetheless produced as relations are (re)negotiated.

The article contextualises how co-option of Muslim parents in countering
extremism maps onto wider challenges occurring within Muslim households. These
concern the role of religion and its relationship to culture, which has meant young
Muslims’ religious practices often differ from their parents, and raises questions of
parental responsibility to instruct on Islam that have increasingly become embroiled
with countering extremism. I then discuss key findings to illustrate how internal
surveillance is undertaken within Muslim families involving monitoring young
Muslims’ religious identities and engagement in Islamic spaces through two key fears,
firstly, becoming radicalised or indeed, radicalising others, and secondly, being targeted
by state counter-terrorism police and the impact of these measures on Muslim families.
I conclude that Muslim families are (in)securitised by counter-terrorism measures,
legitimised by a pathological account of Muslim, particularly Pakistani families, as
simultaneously a threat to national security and British values within narratives of
extremism.
Religious revivalism

A notable body of research since the 1980s recognises increased salience of religion as a ‘marker of identity’ (Choudhury 2007, 3; also Hutnik 1985; Lewis 1994; Hamid 2011; Ryan 2014; Robinson et al. 2017) for Muslims. Researchers contend that religiosity or ‘new’ Islam is characterised by disassociation from culture towards ‘pure’ Islamic tenets (Kashyap and Lewis 2013) involving heightened reflexivity and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions concerning being Muslim (Kibria 2008, 245), particularly amongst Muslim migrant youth. Jacobson’s (1997) ethnographic study of young British Pakistanis in London found that they made a ‘fundamental distinction’ between religion and ethnicity as identity categories. Parents were criticised for holding onto culturally bound interpretations of Islam leading to divergent religious practices between parent/child that strains relationships between Muslim youth and their parents and local community (Lynch 2013, 251). Ryan (2014, 446) contends that young Muslims’ revived interest in Islam presents a means of ‘carving out space and identity in migratory contexts.’ Further, it supports a ‘critical stance’ in respect to the ‘host’ society and parental authority circumscribed by ethno-cultural norms. Religiosity is also gendered; a ‘strong’ Muslim identity offers a ‘sense of masculinity among young Muslim men’ (Choudhury 2007, 3). For women, religion provides a counter to parental and community constraints.

Religious leadership and parental responsibility

Ashencaen Crabtree (2017, 257) notes that trust in parenting as a ‘private domestic matter’ has been undermined by government bodies. Conservative and religious
parenting, particularly Muslim parenting, is viewed with suspicion as potential seedbeds for Islamist extremism and separatist cultural values (Scourfield et al. 2013; Fathi and Hakak, in press). Perceived failure for Muslim parents to answer young Muslims’ questions concerning religion (Abbas 2012, 350) or balancing mainstream and ethno-religious culture of their families with societal demands (Robinson et al. 2017, 268), has prompted concerns of their vulnerability to radicalisation. Pathologised accounts of parent/child relations, for example, Bolognani’s (2007, 359) study of young Pakistani males in Bradford, argue that the ‘generation gap,’ ‘scarce interaction between parents and children,’ parents’ ‘obsolete or inappropriate principles for dealing with the problems of urban Britain’ and delegation of ‘moral education’ to mosques and madrasas are to blame for young Muslims becoming radicalised. This view is reflected in former Prime Minister, David Cameron’s (2011), infamous ‘failure of state multiculturalism’ speech presented at the Munich Security conference in which he argued that in the UK, ‘some young men find it hard to identify with the traditional Islam practiced at home by their parents,’ that along with failure to identify with British values, makes them vulnerable to radicalisation. More recently, the controversial Casey Review (2016, 128-131) commissioned by David Cameron to review integration, details a litany of challenges affecting Muslims including sectarian divisions, lack of formal hierarchy and English-speaking imams, and ‘need for clearer interpretation of Islam for life in the UK’ that present Muslim populations as a threat to social cohesion.

Concerns of growing religious extremism and estrangement from British society (Cantle 2001; Casey Review 2016) abound in policy and academia. Reporting on a survey examining Muslim religiosity, Policy Exchange note, ‘religiosity amongst young Muslims is not about their parents’ cultural traditions’ but is ‘more politicized.’ This is evidenced by ‘asserting one’s identity in the public space, such as by wearing a Hijab’
(Mirza et al. 2007, 5). Since the government’s definition of extremism is ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values’ (HM Government 2011, 107), public performances of Muslim identities risk conflation with extremism (Brown and Saeed 2015). There remains limited work exploring how young Muslims negotiate their religious identities with their families within the wider context of counter-terrorism that this article addresses.

**Surveilling Islamic spaces**

Current religious activism is influenced by youth movements from the 1990s and 2000s (Hamid 2011). Organisations such as Young Muslims UK stimulated religious revivalism among second and third generations and influence contemporary debates concerning religious authenticity and authority and citizenship requirements. Spaces in which young Muslims access Islamic knowledge have come under scrutiny following the growth of militant Islamist movements and fears of young Muslims becoming radicalised (Hamid 2011; Brown and Saeed 2015; Saeed and Johnson 2016). Islamic Student Associations (ISAs) in particular have become ‘sites of suspicion by parents’ (Michael 2011, 212) following concerns of young Muslims becoming radicalised by militant or reformist movements that adopt teachings not shared by parents. ISAs have increasingly been framed by the security agenda. The 2015 Counter-terrorism and Security Act (HM Government 2015) placed a statutory duty on public agencies, including universities, to report extremist activities (Saeed and Johnson 2016, 37). Michael (2011, 212) observes that constructions of Muslims as suspect by state and society has influenced how Muslims understand ‘risks within their own local
worlds.’ Pressure to monitor ISAs not only perpetuates young Muslims’ association with extremism and role of such groups in radicalising Muslim youth, but incites fears amongst Muslim parents of their children being targeted by state counter-terrorism measures (Saeed and Johnson 2016, 42-3). Dominance of the moderate/extremist binary means visibly Muslim students face heightened securitisation.

Methodology

The research is informed by what I term an ‘inter-bodily-relational’ (IBR) theoretical framework. It approaches identity formations as operating through a ‘network of relations’ (Foucault 1977, 26) involving embodied, affective, vocal, and spatial subjects that are located within intersecting contexts (local, national, and international). The IBR builds from relational approaches that seek to draw connections between experiences of race/racism across time and space (see Goldberg 2009). A relational approach sensitised me to the difficulties of researching a ‘suspect community,’ including how I could be positioned as both challenging and reproducing the culture of fear (Hunter 2009) experienced by Muslims in Britain. I was an insider as someone of Muslim heritage and shared concern of the effects of the ‘war on terror’ on Muslims’ experiences, but an outsider as a non-Muslim who could ‘pass’ as ‘white English.’ As I was not expected to know about Islam or being Muslim, participants provided in-depth explanations of religious observance which enriched accounts.

The sampling criteria comprised Muslim males and females from any denominational, ethnic or national background aged above 18 (for ethical reasons). Half were from the Pakistani diaspora and a further six from other South Asian regions reflecting official statistics where 82 per cent of the Bradford Muslim population are
Pakistani and 65 per cent in Leeds (DCLG 2009, 31). However, these categories mask important distinctions regarding culture, denomination, language and patterns of migration (Nasser 2003, 9). The remainder were Iraqi heritage (reflecting the growth of a sizeable Leeds-based Iraqi community following the first Gulf War) or white British reverts. 24 were British and 17 British-born. The sample was equally split by gender. The majority of women were Bradford-based reflecting mobilisations following the 1995 and 2001 disturbances involving Pakistani Muslim women ‘(re)defining intra- and inter-community relationships’ (Burlet and Reid 1998, 270). Only one woman did not wear hijab; three wore both hijab and jilbab, enabling me to examine how Islamic markers contributed to (gendered) practices of identity construction, how these changed during participants’ life-courses and impacted familial relations. However, I did not speak to women wearing the face veil or niqab which would have diversified the sample. One participant wore the niqab occasionally but did not classify herself as a ‘niqabi.’

For the male sample, one participant wore a topi (Islamic cap) and had a beard; another had a ‘light beard’ (Moustafa’s description) but the remainder did not adopt Islamic markers except during prayer.

Sampling combined purposive, snowball and opportunistic techniques. The Bradford-based sample developed from a research placement with a racial justice organisation. The Leeds-based sample built from participation with a local Stop the War group, Leeds University Islamic Society and other university contacts which helps explain why 15 of the Leeds-based participants were aged 18-30. This enabled me to explore particular challenges facing young Muslims within spaces associated with extremism such as universities and ISAs. It is important to note the methodological limitation of reading parents’ responses through their children’s accounts. However, the article also draws on parents’ accounts, providing a diverse picture of the impact of
counter-terrorism measures on Muslim families. I also attended relevant events/meetings to get a sense of what was happening ‘on the ground,’ which informed interview questions.

Methods included a participatory social map which took participants’ situated positions as the starting point of inquiry and oriented in-depth qualitative interviews. Maps explored the different contexts comprising participants’ social worlds (religion, family, education and so forth) and relations formed within them. This approach enabled participants’ interpretations to emerge rather than pre-empting the significance of the ‘war on terror’ on Muslims’ life-worlds.

Data analysis examined how participants are embedded in various intimate and wider social relations (Gilligan 1982) which impact identity constructions. Analysis focused on the forms of governance involved in managing Muslim identities and how these traverse state, group (intra- and inter-), and individual levels of social experience. What emerged through the analyses were diverse ways participants’ experiences were shaped by a culture of fear. The next sections present research findings to explore British Muslim family members’ role in countering extremism within the context of increased religious revivalism and association of young Muslims with radicalisation.

**Religious resurgence**

In Bradford, participants reported that movements such as Young Muslims and adult branch, Islamic Society of Britain, have been influential for young Muslims, including women, since the 1990s. A significant change reflected in scholarship (Hutnik 1985; Lewis 1994; Hamid 2011; Ryan 2014; Brown and Saeed 2015) has been the shift from ethno-cultural ascriptions to religion. As Zanaib, a 32-year-old Pakistani-heritage Muslim woman living in Bradford explains, ‘15 or 20 years ago
people defined themselves far more with their ethnicity – Asian or whatever – now it’s more their faith.’ A number of participants reported differences in Islamic practice to their parents and siblings showing that generational division is not the only explanation for divergent understandings of Islam within Muslim families. Nonetheless, participants explained that there was a gap in Islamic knowledge (Bolognani 2007) from their parents as Ula expresses:

[My sisters and brothers] haven’t found answers through our childhood and upbringing from our parents so I think we’re all on our individual journey trying to find it ourselves.

-26-year-old Indian-heritage Muslim woman, Bradford

Religious differences may invite scrutiny from family members. Whilst emphasis is placed on Muslim males as susceptible to radicalisation, my research showed that Muslim parents also feared for their daughters (Saeed 2016). I draw from Hamida to explore how fears of young Muslims being turned to extremism transmitted by state actors co-opts Muslim parents into looking for ‘telltale’ signs of extremism. Hamida is recounting when she started university at the age of 18. From late adolescence she performed a more recognisable Muslim identity through religious observance and affiliation to her university’s ISA. She had worn the hijab from age seven but decided to wear the jilbab at 19. Hamida tells me increased focus on Islam post-9/11 and being questioned about being Muslim encouraged her to undertake a ‘religious journey.’ This explains differences in religious observance to her parents and siblings. Her transition prompts her parents to treat her as an internal suspect body:
[parents were being asked to look for] signs that people were becoming radicalised...when young people start you know becoming a bit more reclusive, joining different - have different friends...which are symptoms of being a young person, but these are the things that my parents were hearing and then they were realising that I was becoming a bit of a recluse because I was a young person and I just wanted to hang with myself and I didn’t want to sit with my family because they’re obviously not cool [both laugh]! Or...that I had a new group of friends because I’d gone to university...but these are the signs that the government were telling people to look out for and obviously for my parents they did kind of think ok so...does this mean that...our child is –? ‘Cos I’m the youngest as well, and ‘cos my brothers and sisters are very different to me and they just kind of got on with life...whereas I’ve gone down the more religious path...they were proud but at the same time they were wary of what was happening with me and who was influencing me because...the influence wasn’t from home...so it was that fear...of the unknown – where is she getting this knowledge from? Who is she talking to? ...What groups is she...involved with?

-24-year-old Pakistani-heritage Muslim woman, Bradford

Narratives of inter-generational tensions perceived as characterising Muslim communities (Lewis 1994) have bolstered claims of young Muslims’ vulnerability to radicalisation by fusing ideas about cultural pathology and identity conflict (Alexander 2000). Important here is how this narrative comes to frame interactions between Muslim parents and their children where young Muslims’ estrangement from their parents and desire for solitude are viewed through the prism of extremism. By looking for signs of extremism, Hamida’s parents are co-opted into reproducing pathologised
constructions of Muslim youth as vulnerable to extremism and thus suspect, and as fundamentally different from normative young people (Hamid 2011, 247). Khalida Khan (2009, 15), Director of the faith community organisation, An-Nisa, explains that singling out young Muslims limits understanding of ‘the wider picture of youth disaffection’ that is not specific to Muslims’ experiences. Normal life changes including attending university and making new friends are no longer seen as innocuous ‘symptoms’ of being a young person, with significant implications for relations within Muslim families.

Internal surveillance involves disciplinary techniques; subjected to a ‘normalizing gaze’ (Foucault 1977, 184), Hamida’s behaviour must be questioned and justification provided. Hamida highlights psychological effects on both the suspect and suspector. Her parents experience an internal conflict: ‘proud’ yet fearful of their daughter’s religiosity arising from the possibility of radicalisation. Psychological costs of being suspected are indicated where even in Hamida’s re-telling the word extremist remains unsaid: ‘does this mean that…our child is…?’ The internal suspect body is another example of pre-emption characterising counter-terrorism (McCulloch and Pickering 2009) where suspicion is enough for intervention. State definitions of moderate/extremist infiltrate Muslim households meaning Islamic practices are re-signified as ‘signs’ of extremism. Importantly, this binary encourages intra-familial divisions where choosing a ‘more religious path’ singles Hamida out from her siblings as worthy of suspicion.

Saba, also a Bradford-based Pakistani-heritage woman (aged 22), takes a comparable religious journey to Hamida. She becomes more observant whilst at university, deciding to adopt the hijab and jilbab aged 19, which causes her family concern:
Interviewer: You mentioned about this divide between moderate and extremist – how do you think that operates?

Saba: To me it’s like really frustrating because...I had that...from my family – they were like ok yeah you can do the whole Islam thing but why don’t you just be a bit more moderate? The more changes you make the more they kind of go – and then sometimes they come out with these words that they don’t really understand like “Wahhabi” and it’s like ok let’s talk about what “Wahhabi” is and they don’t actually know.

Saba’s account shows that the moderate/extremist binary is not the remit of state governance (Tyrer 2008), but structures how Muslims govern family members. The more religiously observant Saba becomes, the more restrictions she faces. Judged as having gone beyond the parameters of acceptable Muslimness, Saba is subjected to internal controls to ‘be a bit more moderate.’ As with Hamida, internal surveillance involves bringing Saba in line with a normalised Muslim identity, the ‘moderate Muslim.’ Pantazis and Pemberton (2009, 646) observe that specific groups such as Salafists and Islamists are ‘singled out’ by police as posing a particular threat. Here, the internal suspect body materialises where young Muslims’ identities conform to dominant conceptions of ‘extremists’ such as Wahhabis. Saba’s family’s judgement is not based on Islamic knowledge, but subjection to state understandings of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslims (Mamdani 2005; Jacoby 2017), indicated by her family’s use of ‘Wahhabi’ without understanding its meaning, which frustrates Saba.
Family members countering extremism within Islamic spaces

The category ‘internal suspect body’ emphasises the significance of the body to suspectification. As Saba illustrates, Muslim parents interpret young Muslims’ adoption of Islamic markers as signifiers of extremism and in turn, subject their children to surveillance and control:

…when I was part of the [ISA] I got a lot of girls and boys calling me and saying I started to grow a beard and my dad flipped out, he’s taken my phone off me, he’s looking through my phone saying I can’t go to uni tomorrow, you can’t go to Friday prayers ‘cos you’re turning to extremists...something as simple as the beard – if they’re waking up for morning prayers some parents do get quite scared because of the way we’ve been conditioned.

Saba describes how visual markers and religious activities are no longer interpreted through religious frameworks, but political categories of moderate/extremist. Foucault (1977, 26) notes the ‘subjected body’ is also the ‘productive body.’ Muslim parents actively participate in governing young Muslims in accordance with state parameters of ‘moderate Muslim.’ Following Butler (1997b, 2), subjection involves dependency on the discourse of extremism which is not of Muslims’ choosing but ‘paradoxically, initiates and sustains’ agency. Muslim parents become complicit in constructing young Muslims as suspect where the body is central to this production. Shterin and Spalek (2011, 148) contend that ‘emphasis on the conspicuous Islamic aspects of identity’ such as growing the beard or wearing the headscarf, ‘raises suspicion of alienation from and
“radicalisation” against the rest of society.’ Subjection has psychic effects (Butler 1997b). Perceptual frameworks are altered so that the beard triggers fears of loved ones ‘turning to extremists’ because parents are ‘conditioned’ to equate visibly Muslim bodies with extremist bodies. Psychic impact is demonstrated here by one father ‘flip[ing] out’ after his son grew a beard and subsequently restricting his son’s communications and movements, particularly spaces associated with extremism.

The internal suspect body is located within what Moustafa (British-Pakistani Muslim male aged 26) termed ‘internal politics’ within Muslim communities ‘among competing internal and among external representations’ (Brubaker 2013, 4). This is not to divorce the internal suspect category from the wider counter-terrorism context, but to highlight how ‘suspectification’ traverses state/Muslim relations. The category ‘moderate Muslim’ attracted criticism from several male participants. The beard (and clothing) functions as measures of ‘degrees of alterity’ (Tyrer 2010, 105) from acceptable performances of Muslimness in Britain. Abrah, a British Muslim male of Bengali heritage (aged 30) who does not have a beard and wears western clothes (except at mosque), says he would be identified as a ‘moderate Muslim,’ but disagrees with the term since it involves ‘conforming to western society’ by placing British norms above outward expressions of Islam: ‘giving in and shedding off to fit in.’ Comparably, Mohammed, a 43-year-old Iraqi-born British Muslim male associates the ‘long beard’ with problematic expressions of Islam that hinder ‘ordinary’ Muslims from integrating. For him, outward expressions are not markers of Islamic principles:

They call them you know with long beards and burqa…fundamentalists and…us “moderate Muslims”…I’m sorry I’m the fundamentalist…I adopt the fundamentals of Islam – they adopt the outer surface…
Mohammed also rejects the ‘moderate Muslim’ category which he argues misrepresents Islamic observance. Instead, he takes up the position of ‘fundamentalist’ which for him means following authentic Islam. He realigns fundamentalism with a non-extremist subjectivity defined by peaceful observance. Mohammed highlights that the body can be deceptive in expressions of Islam and is embroiled in conflicts within Muslim communities concerning external/internal religious observance. Being a ‘good Muslim’ means following Islamic principles rather than adopting outward expressions such as the beard (he is clean shaven) or burqa for women. Mohammed nonetheless reaffirms state logics governing Muslim populations by reading certain visible expressions of Islam (the long beard and burqa) as extremist and incompatible with integration.

Parental responsibility to instruct Muslim youth on ‘correct’ Islam is bound up with countering extremism, which shifts the focus from moderate/extremist to deciphering in/authentic Islam since participants associated extremism with inauthentic interpretation. This role involves suspecting Muslims of being extremists and importantly, their children being radicalised by them. Farooque, a British-Muslim parent born in Kashmir (aged 44) highlights the complex network in which the internal suspect body operates as a relational and unfixed category that may be aligned to a particular community, here a local (Leeds-based) mosque, yet does not reflect a homogenous ‘Muslim community’ indicated by diverse claims to so-called Islamic interpretation in contention:

I’m not denying that there are nutters – like I was saying to my son, you know he goes to local mosque and he used to come out and talk to other geezers who seemed like the religious figures you know, young lads. So I said…one thing…I
want to make sure is that you understand we all are human beings…the problem is that people…tend to tell you the extremist view…I want them to learn that you don’t go on other versions of interpretation or what people…make up…

[My son] said and I have trusted him…it’s ok dad I understand that – so I trust him – he’s not going to concoct a plan against certain individuals.

Suspecting there ‘are nutters’ (internal suspects) compels Farooque to undertake internal surveillance of the mosque his son attends to ‘make sure’ he is not being radicalised. Farooque treats the mosque as a suspect site or ‘seditious space’ (Michael 2011, 212). He is unsure whether the presumed religious figures can be trusted, illustrating how suspicion infiltrates Islamic spaces amid lack of consensus concerning Islamic interpretation and fears of the dangerous uses to which teachings may be put.

For Farooque, parental responsibility requires ensuring his son understands ‘correct’ Islamic interpretation that is inclusive rather than closed characteristic of ‘extremist’ viewpoints. Extremist views are treated as inauthentic interpretation (‘what people want to make up’) with potentially violent consequences. As suspicion is premised on uncertainty, Muslims occupy unstable positions along the spectrum of suspactor/suspect. Farooque’s suspicions are alleviated after checking his son has not been influenced by extremist ideology, enabling him to move from suspected to trusted.

Muslim fathers have an active role in countering extremism which paradoxically involves treating young Muslims as internal suspect bodies to mitigate risks of radicalisation.

Similarly, Shahid, a British-Pakistani Muslim male and father (aged 29), discusses internal surveillance he undertakes in his self-ascribed role as ‘watcher’ of a Leeds-based Mosque following 7/7 from fear of infiltration by extremists:
…I watch them [attendants]…because I…believe…it takes one person who then
entices other people…and it’s finding that one person…the last thing I want is
somebody from my own immediate family…to be enticed…so when people go
into…a new culture I like to have a better idea of them so that some young
person isn’t hoodwinked…

Like Farooque, Shahid treats the mosque as a suspect site which he actively watches to
protect family members from being radicalised. He treats unknown attendees as
internal suspect bodies until he can ascertain a ‘better idea of them.’ Muslim families’
trust in the mosque potentially makes it a site for exploitation:

…the way that many people are brought up, religion is the be all and end
all…you can go to 100 houses in Leeds and drag the kids out at two o’clock in
the morning – as long as the word “mosque” gets mentioned, parents are quite
happy you know.

In this imagined scenario, Muslim families are insecuritised through failure to recognise
risks of extremists infiltrating the mosque and radicalising their children; a fear Shahid
says is felt within the mosque.

Muslim parents also viewed university spaces as suspect sites. Radical groups
like Hizb ut-Tahir operating on campuses, including in Bradford in the 1990s, affected
how Muslim parents interpreted their children’s current religious activities (Brown and
Saeed 2015, 43). Family members intervened to ensure young Muslims were not
radicalised by groups operating on university campuses. Jacinta discusses her uncle’s
fears after she began performing a more religiously observant Muslim identification whilst at university:

[my uncle] was concerned that there were a lot of Islamic groups up and coming then – he didn’t...know what I was involved with...he just wanted to make sure that I was aware that they’re not all right...most times you’ve got to follow your heart...and I think he was concerned that what if she does get in with the wrong one...and she’s radicalised?

-30-year-old Pakistani-heritage Muslim woman, Bradford

Crucial here, as with Farooque, is family members intervening to ensure young Muslims are able to distinguish between ‘correct’ Islam and extremism (‘the wrong stuff’) to protect them from radicalisation. Extremism is again positioned beyond the boundaries of Islam. Jacinta is treated as an internal suspect body. This category operates relationally: those who are ‘risky’ (Muslim groomers) and those who are ‘at risk’ (young Muslims like Jacinta) (see Heath-Kelly 2012, 78). Family members are co-opted into the ideological battle against extremism that evokes a ‘hearts and minds’ approach. Jacinta must ‘follow her heart’ to ensure her religious journey takes the right path.

Parental fears are centred on internal conflicts not only between culture and religion, but between Islam and political Islam. Hamida must convince her parents that her ISA ‘represents Islam, not political Islam,’ and thus a non-threatening interpretation. She undergoes a ‘family intervention’ with her parents and siblings to ensure she is not becoming radicalised:
Interviewer: Did you feel that [your parents] were spying on you?

Hamida: No, thankfully my parents – they weren’t spying on me...But they had the conversation with me...at one point I had a family intervention to make sure...I was alright and not doing anything wrong which made me laugh...they...all sat down and my brothers and sisters and my mum and dad said look what are you doing? Can you please just explain to us what’s happening? Are you part of anything extreme? Is anything wrong...? And I was like no, I’m just part of the Islamic Society – nothing is happening, we just put on random events and that’s it! ...after them understanding what I was doing they were...fine...it was that fear of – she’s our youngest daughter – we don’t know what could happen, we don’t know who her friends are, we don’t know what she’s doing...

Although Hamida says that her parents were not spying on her, she is materialised as an internal suspect body by them where intervention is required. In part, the intervention is a protective strategy to ensure she is ‘alright.’ It also involves checking she is ‘not doing anything wrong.’ This second motivation highlights how the internal suspect body operates through intersectional fears of young Muslims being turned to extremists and culpability in endangering others. That Hamida does not explicitly name ‘the conversation’ indicates the pervasiveness with which conversations concerning
radicalisation are being had within Muslim households. Her laughter at being treated as suspect contrasts starkly with the formality of the family intervention which is planned in advance to ensure all immediate family members are present. Hamida is the target of collective suspicion with potentially detrimental consequences for her familial relationships. Distrust concerning who might be influencing their daughter and the type of knowledge being inculcated, illustrates how Muslim parents are enlisted in the ideological battle to counter extremism that potentially involves parents closing down social spaces young Muslims engage in to mitigate risks of radicalisation (Saeed and Johnson 2016). As ideological effects of extremism are difficult to detect, Muslim parents experience powerlessness and uncertainty: ‘we don’t know what could happen.’ Their fears are compounded by Hamida’s gender and age. Gendered scripts concerning vulnerability to radicalism have been strengthened by cases of British Muslim women deemed ‘jihadi brides’ travelling to Syria (Saeed 2016, 1) to marry fighters, mother children and propagandise (Pearson and Winterbotham 2017). Nonetheless, as with Farooque, trust is recuperated where young Muslims reach an ‘understanding’ with their parents concerning their religious views/activities.

Parents protecting Muslim youth from state counter-terrorism measures

So far accounts have focused on internal surveillance Muslim parents undertake to ensure their children are not radicalised or radicalising others. This section explores another effect of heightened securitisation of young Muslim identities: parents’ fears
that their children will be subjected to state counter-terrorism measures. Unsurprisingly, Muslim parents are wary of their children becoming politically engaged because legitimate protests are often conflated with extremism (Song 2012, 147; Lynch 2013, 249). Parents are influential in depoliticising Muslim youth to protect them from state targeting, as Ali discusses:

…as I was telling you before about the beard – I can’t do that…and like my parents are always saying…don’t join Stop the War and these other political things because they’ll take you away…they see that they should protect me because I’m only young and they see what’s going on and I’m thinking yeah I shouldn’t really get involved and I think that’s most of the Muslim community like they’re keeping quiet because they don’t want to be locked away.

-23-year-old Pakistani-heritage male, Leeds

Ali’s parents intervene to ‘protect’ him from terrors of state counter-terrorism (‘they’ll take you away’) emerging from heightened securitisation of young Muslims’ identities. Muslim parents are complicit in reproducing the conditions of being suspect – a position which Ali internalises, resulting in a depoliticised Muslim subjectivity. The culture of fear permeating Muslim families and communities inhibits opportunities for young Muslims’ engagement with legitimate political process where they can vent frustrations, potentially increasing their vulnerability to radicalisation (Kundnani 2009, 6). Subjection operates here through self-surveillance: ‘keeping quiet’ and deciding not to grow a beard, further evidencing the significance of the body to suspectification.

Having witnessed multiple interviews undertaken by counter-terrorism officers with Muslim male staff members at her place of work following 7/7, Samrina, a 43-
year-old British-Pakistani Muslim mother living in Leeds, notices how counter-terrorism officers align wearing ‘traditional clothes’ with extremism. As a mother of a devout Muslim male in his twenties whom she describes as having a ‘Muslim beard’ and wears ‘traditional clothing’ whilst at mosque, her observations raise personal concerns:

My son, he goes to mosque and he’ll change his clothing – it’s about comfort because you’re sitting on the floor for a long time listening to sermons or praying…and it’s like, you need some training – can I offer you some training because I train on these issues? …and of course [the officers] don’t want training – they want to stay in that level of ignorance…some of the assumptions they make about Muslim, Pakistani families are amazingly inaccurate and ignorant and I think they get away with far too much because…they don’t want to improve on it…it’s the power and…control – and you people need to fit in with us and the way that they oppress us through the government and the media…

Samrina locates state counter-terrorism measures within a racialised trajectory of pathologised Pakistani Muslim families (Alexander 2004) posing a risk to security and British values to legitimise state intervention. Households are treated as suspect sites based on racialised ‘assumptions’ transmitted through government and media discourses rather than wrong-doing which in turn, insecuritises Muslim families.

By violating private/public boundaries, the home raid most clearly exemplifies how families are insecuritised by counter-terrorism measures. Samrina narrates how Hassan, a British-Pakistani Muslim male and father living in Leeds, is charged with
intention to commit acts of terrorism after two of his friends undertake a family trip to Pakistan. On their return, the two men are charged with training for terrorism. Due to Hassan’s friendship with them, he is treated as a terror suspect, leading to his home being raided and subsequent detainment in the highest security prison, Belmarsh, for two years before being exonerated:

They raided his house and took him...they accused him of...intention to commit acts of terrorism and they accused the other two for going for training...when they couldn’t make that stick they changed it – because he went for an appeal...they were using things like personal letters him and his wife had written to each other before they got married...that they wanted a large number of children and...they wanted them to be...practising Muslims – they were using this kind of information to imply...this is your agenda...He was completely exonerated...but he’s had two years of his life taken away...it’s damaged that family in so many ways.

Hassan is traumatically removed from his family and subjected to repeated court appearances meaning children and families are ‘retraumatised’ (Brittain 2009, 5; also Ragazzi 2016, 735). Hassan’s desire to have a large family of practicing Muslims is used as evidence of his terrorist ambitions, illustrating how constructions of (Pakistani) Muslim families as risky are propagated within the criminal justice system. To support the family, Samrina puts herself within the gaze of counter-terrorism by acting as a character witness and driving Hassan’s wife and children to Belmarsh. Samrina is interrogated at home by counter-terrorism officers which demonstrates why families placed under state suspicion may become ostracised within Muslim communities.
through fear of association (Author forthcoming). Devastating impact of home raids within Muslim communities prompted the Association of Muslim lawyers to produce *A guide to anti-terror raids for Muslim communities* (Nawaz and Warraich 2007) to prepare families. Homes are subject to a Police Search warrant meaning family members are denied access to their home and belongings following arrest, bank accounts are frozen, and transport seized. Wives and children of suspected terrorists become ‘invisible victims of state protection of the political and civic body’ (Ashencaen Crabtree 2017, 261) that as Samrina laments, ‘damages’ Muslim families ‘in so many ways.’

**Conclusion: (In)Securitising Muslim families**

The study contributes an important theoretical and empirical gap concerning the psychic, emotional, ideological and disciplinary effects of state counter-terrorism measures on Muslim families. It highlights how Muslim families are simultaneously (in)securitised through increased focus in government and media discourses on countering extremism within their households, engendering intra-familial tensions. I contribute the internal suspect body category to address how suspectification is undertaken by Muslim parents, involving surveilling their children’s religious performances and instructing young Muslims to adopt a ‘moderate Muslim’ identification in line with state prescriptions. This category is materialised where Islamic markers such as the beard and jilbab and religious practices are treated as signifiers of extremism. Parental responses are connected to fears of their children becoming radicalised or indeed radicalising others, as well as to protect them from state targeting. By viewing their children’s behaviour that is typical of young people as they find out who they are and make new friends through the lens of extremism, Muslim
parents perpetuate conceptions of young Muslims’ vulnerability to extremism and as fundamentally different from their non-Muslim peers. Terrors of counter-terrorism are networked across state and Muslim relations and are internalised within Muslim households and retransmitted (Foucault 1977, 27). Effects of being suspect are thus more pervasive than those under official suspicion and prompt a range of subject positions to be taken up: suspected, suspsector, trusted, which are unstable and relational.

The study thus also contributes an important political argument of the need to move beyond state-centric accounts of the suspect community to understand how counter-terrorism measures pervade Muslim families and communities, not just those under official suspicion. Racialised framings of Muslim families, particularly Pakistani families, as seedbeds of extremism transmitted through policy and media discourses, legitimises state intervention and burdens families with countering extremism within their households. A shift in the narrative of Muslim households as suspect sites is required. Further, challenges facing young Muslims to navigate religious expression with societal demands need to be viewed outside the scope of extremism.

How the body is read affects practices of suspectification. Participants highlighted an important re-focusing from moderate/extremist to in/authentic Islam which posits extremism outside the fold of Islam. Importantly, Islamic principles cannot be read off the body. External markers do not mean Islamic principles are being followed nor that Muslims adopting Islamic dress or the beard are extremist. However, emphasis on sectarian divisions shifts focus from the negative impact of state policies, both domestic and foreign, as a problem endogenous to Muslim populations that conceals western influence (Jacoby 2017, 1658) and further subjects Muslims to delimitations of state governance. Rather, what is required is more acceptance of a range of Islamic identities that can enable young Muslims to belong in Britain and
mitigate not only fears of state intrusion, but intra-family tensions that are produced as a result. Since the internal suspect body is an unfixed and relational category, young Muslims can move from suspect to trusted by opening up communication channels with family members to challenge, learn from and ultimately accept their religious identities.

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Notes

1 Deputy Assistant Commissioner, Helen Ball (2015), stated 60 women have travelled to Syria to join ISIL, 18 of which are youths.

2 Revised Prevent Duty guidance (HM Government 2015, 8) states that the Home Office will ‘continue to identify priority areas for Prevent-related activity.’

3 The term ‘niqabi’ refers to Muslim women who wear the niqab (face veil).

4 Names are anonymised to protect participants’ identities.

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