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Project Champion and the Securitisation of Muslim Space In Birmingham

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Introduction

"Whether we like it or not we are the 7/7 bombers. We are the ones who bought down the twin towers. We are Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. That's how people see us. We're the new Jews and we're the new blacks."

(Irfana, aged 27, from Birmingham interviewed in the aftermath of Project Champion)

The above remark was made in an interview and although it might be a striking one, it was not made in anger and passion. Instead when asked about how Project Champion and the Government's preventing extremism programme had made her feel, the interviewee had paused for a few seconds and then delivered the words with more than a hint of resignation. Since 2007, the interviewee had been one of a handful of young Muslims who had engaged with the British Government as its agencies in Birmingham sought to reach out to Muslim 'communities' and individuals in support of its anti-extremist agenda. By the summer of 2010 however, the city's efforts to engage with Muslims was in disarray after devastating disclosures that the region's police and city council had been involved in a clandestine scheme to effectively spy on areas in which Birmingham's Muslims were concentrated. The scheme was called Project Champion.

Project Champion involved the installation of 216 cameras in two areas of Birmingham, primarily spanning four electoral wards (Sparkhill, Washwood Heath, Springfield and Bordesley Green) which contained the greatest numbers of Muslims within its boundaries (Birmingham City Council 2003; 21). 144 of these cameras were overt and visible, with 106 of them rather than being standard closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras, had Automated

Number Plate Recognition functionality (ANPR). ANPR cameras are designed to track cars moving in particular directions through junctions by reading and logging vehicle registration plates. In addition to this 72 covert cameras were also installed on a number of sites, the precise locations of which remains unknown but which were also confined to these two largely Muslim districts. The total cost of the scheme was £3.5million with an additional £375,000 a year put aside annually for maintenance and running costs.

The impact of Project Champion however cannot be understood independently of two other contextual themes; firstly the character of the neighbourhoods upon which the surveillance scheme was imposed and secondly the political context and the agenda of reducing extremism which was the driving force behind the scheme. This conference paper uses ethnographic, documentary and interview data to tell the story of Project Champion. It contextualises Project Champion by addressing those aforementioned themes before describing how Project Champion was conceived, instigated and eventually dismantled following a groundswell of protests and negative media attention. Finally it briefly reflects on the implications of the project on the identity and feelings of belonging of Muslims among Muslims in the city.

The Social Context

Birmingham is the second largest urban conurbation in the UK after London. The city itself is home to a little over a million residents of which 62% are White British. Just under 20% of the city's residents are described by the Office of National Statistics as 'Asian' (from the

Indian sub-continent) and a majority of those are from a Muslim background (ONS 2003). Asian migrants began arriving in large numbers in the city in the 1960s from India and further waves of migrants arrived in the 1970s and 1980s from Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively. Like Afro-Caribbean migrants before them they initially settled in the poorest inner-city suburbs where rents were cheapest, and worked in manufacturing and heavy industry sectors which benefited from the migrant workforce. But as manufacturing declined from the 1970s onwards, many of Birmingham's inner suburbs began to suffer the kinds of multiple-deprivation that can be seen in numerous neighbourhoods around former industrial centres in Europe's developed economies (Hamnet 1983, Barber and Hall 2008)

The city's migrant population is now in its second and third generation, and demographic projections predict that the city will be the first in the UK to have a minority white population, a projection which, when revised rarely fails to capture the attention of the right-leaning press (Ellicott 2011, Hope 2007). Muslims living in some of those inner-suburbs including Aston, Sparkhill, Lozells, Balsall Heath and Small Heath have complex multifaceted identities, as migrants or second-generation and third-generation migrants, as Britons, as young people living in deprived inner-city neighbourhoods and also as Muslims. But there is a rarely acknowledged connection between everyday practices which sees Muslims move through their neighbourhoods and the feelings of belonging and attachment towards local spaces. For some of those interviewed, streets, buildings and even disused plots of land are intrinsically connected to experiences and history and memories. Migrants increasingly set up businesses and social and religious infrastructure to support their needs and those of their communities and these became focal points for new identities and modes through

which belonging was engendered. Concentrations of businesses often specifically catering for particular cultural groups have led to prominent high streets becoming characterised as 'Asian' and even 'Muslim' shopping areas, as anyone familiar to, for example, Alum Rock Road in Washwood Heath or Stratford Road which runs through Sparkhill and Sparkbrook, would testify. The are characterised by a plethora of grocery stores and eateries catering for the taste of Indian cuisine, sheesha bars and dessert shops for young Muslims who want to socialise without alcohol and tailors selling Asian fashion and Muslim garb inspired by both Indian sub-continental and Arab styles. One might also see Islamic bookshops as well as other less culturally specific yet Asian-owned stores. Their distinctive characteristics as places have led the city's governing institutions brand a collection of these high streets as the 'Balti Triangle', an area where the city's famous Balti curry-houses are concentrated.

The result of this imbuing of ethnic, religious and cultural character upon spaces is that they in turn inspire a greater place-attachment among residents. Similarly one need only scan through the pages of far-right websites to see that their multi-ethnic nature can make them targets of scorn for those unwilling to accept migrants as their fellow citizens. In the creation of Project Champion it seems unlikely that these facets of identity and the potential of a surveillance scheme to stigmatise an area and therefore its inhabitants was considered. In retrospect it is crucial to explaining the levels of anger that followed once the existence of the scheme was discovered.

Project Champion As A Counter-Terror Strategy

The first government strategy to tackle Al Qaeda inspired terrorism was first published in 2003. Dubbed the 'CONTEST' strategy, its development began in the aftermath of 9/11 and the war in Iraq which began earlier that year. Most of the original strategy's focus was aimed squarely at the detection and neutralisation of actual plots. It concentrated on the policing strategies associated with terrorism; to pursue and prosecute those responsible. However, in the aftermath of the 7/7 London bombing attacks the government's approach to extremism and the prevention of terrorism shifted. The new CONTEST strategy was eventually published in March 2009 and divided into four strands; 'Prevent', 'Pursue', 'Protect' and 'Prepare' (Home Office 2009). The Prevent strand was both unprecedented and significant ; it aimed to 'reach' Muslims at risk of extremism before any crime had even been committed and its success depended on working with Muslim groups and social and community workers on a local level. Money was set aside for projects; £2.4 million over three years in Birmingham, and with no little trepidation (even outright suspicion of authorities in some cases) and the dangling carrot of funding, the government began to engage Muslim groups in order to achieve the goals of the Prevent programme. In Birmingham trust was slowly being built between the police and Muslim 'leaders', representatives and organisations; the Police and authorities would gain some sort of capacity to deliver Prevent projects and Muslim groups would benefit through funding of projects which it would largely control.

It is in this institutional context of uneasy alliances that Project Champion would be conceived. On the 14th of February 2008 Project Champion appeared as an agenda item during a meeting of the West Midlands Police Authority (Birmingham City Council 2010; 27).

It was at this time that a decision was made to apply for funding for the scheme from the Association of Chief Police Officers' Terrorism and Allied Matters (APCO TAM). It was also at this meeting that Birmingham City Council agreed to invest £500,000 into the scheme and to share the running costs of it with West Midlands Police.

The strategic outline business case for the project (APCO TAM, 2007) gives an insight into the aims of Project Champion. This document was not available until Freedom of Information requests were submitted by anti-CCTV protestors in the summer of 2010; even then it was only released in a redacted form. The document stated its aims as being to capture large amounts of data, particularly about vehicle movements, as part of a 'net' of surveillance technology. The document progressed to describe the aims of the project as being around capturing data constantly on an, "as and when" basis (ibid 2007). The surveillance net would help track 'subjects' but data would also inevitably be gathered on all vehicle movements in the designated areas. Thus the aims of the project were rather about the building of 'surveillance capacity' as part of a counter-terror infrastructure *in preparation* for any future requirement to monitor movements of 'subjects'.

To provide advocacy for the Project, the Business Case cited the 'severe' nature of the security threat from international terrorism and points to the London suicide bombings in 2005, perpetrated by individuals living and working in West Yorkshire, as evidence that agencies needed to be able to operate, "across organisational and geographic boundaries," (ACPO TAM 2007; 1) in order to address the threat. The Project Champion Review (Thornton

2010) would later state that the terrorist attacks on Glasgow Airport and the 'Tiger Tiger' nightclub in London also demonstrated a need to be able to track vehicle movements across geographic boundaries as and when required (ibid 2010; 7). The report continued to cite another incident in which West Midlands Police thwarted a plot to kidnap and execute a Muslim soldier and went on to use a report in the Times newspaper to suggest that the Police Operation was focussed on British-born Pakistani men living in Birmingham and concentrated on Alum Rock and Sparkhill (ibid 2010; 7). However a subsequent look at the report in the Times shows the only reference of Sparkhill to be a non-evidenced quip about Sparkhill's residents being used to terrorist raids (Jenkins and McGroy 2007).

Nonetheless the Business case (ACPO TAM 2007) asserted that the West Midlands as a region contained, "significant features of vulnerability". Intended benefits, of the scheme included an increased quality and quantity of intelligence as well as evidence-capture from 'hits' of subjects on ANPR cameras (ibid 2007). One of the listed benefits was predicted to be the potential for 'evidential product' for investigations which were not related to counter-terrorism, but which would help incidents of 'serious harm' to communities. This however included the caveat that such use of the cameras would depend upon specific protocol arrangements (supposedly between counter-terrorism police and investigators of non-CT incidents). It would also not be used in any way in which the location of the covert surveillance equipment might be disclosed (ACPO TAM 2007).

If we put aside for a moment that the money for the scheme was being sought from a Terrorism and Allied Matters fund, itself a clear indication of the purpose of the project the business case background and outcomes section also makes it plain that the principle steer

of the scheme was against the threat of terrorism, and not local crime or anti-social behaviour. The contradictory claim that the scheme was targeted at preventing local more mundane crime as would later be made by, among others, Jackie Russell the then director of Safer Birmingham Partnerships (SBP), in public meetings once the scheme's existence was uncovered. What is more, the business document briefly noted only four risks associated with the scheme; firstly insufficient funding, secondly planning consent, thirdly, disclosure of the locations of the scheme and fourthly the co-operation of suppliers of the scheme. No note was made of how the scheme might be opposed by residents or the raising of objections by elected officials representing the communities affected by the scheme. By Janaury 2010 the installation of the cameras had begun, and in order to cordon Sparkhill and Alum Rock with cameras, wards around the two areas also had to host cameras. In total nine wards were affected by the scheme by having cameras installed within their boundaries (Thornton 2010; 25).

Consultation Process: Lies and Statistics

After developing Project Champion in relative secrecy, the challenge for authorities was to somehow secure consent for the scheme from elected officials overseeing the work of the Safer Birmingham Partnership. The method they chose was to deliberately mislead councillors by misrepresenting the nature of the scheme. The Thames Valley Police review of Project Champion (Thornton 2010) contains details on how senior police officers working on Project Champion would come to view their responsibilities with regards to consultation with the public. In January 2009, Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Patani and ACC Hyde were part of a meeting with 'senior officers' in which ACC Patani and Chief Inspector (CI) Marriot

(who heads Birmingham's Preventing Extremism programme) agreed to formulate 'a narrative' to support Project Champion which would involve details about 'high-crime areas' (ibid 2010; 16). It was at this meeting that ACC Hyde and ACC Patani spoke of the need to have a "storyline on which to hang the project". A decision was also taken to remove Counter-terrorism insignia from the scheme and replace it with a SBP logo. The project was effectively being rebranded as a scheme which did not relate explicitly let alone exclusively to counter-terrorism objectives. This narrative is presumably the one which was regurgitated in a number of public meetings once Project Champion was exposed, and it involves projecting the idea that the areas covered by Project Champion were being targeted because their levels of general (non-terrorism-related) crime were supposedly the highest in the city.

The same 'narrative' was also sold to elected officials on the 28th of April 2009 at a crucial meeting between Safer Birmingham Partnership (SBP), Birmingham City Council and local councillors in the affected wards. The minutes of this meeting (West Midlands Police 2009) were also restricted and only released in June 2010. ACC Stuart Hyde chaired the meeting, which took place under the pretext of consultation around the scheme. However, in conflict with the business case document for Project Champion which was by this time submitted by for funding approval, ACC Hyde then proceeded to misrepresent the scheme as a general crime-reduction project. The councillors were not shown a copy of that business case; instead ACC Hyde described how funding, "had been made available to Safer Birmingham Partnerships...for CCTV and ANPR (to) bring a greater sense of safety for local residents and

(to) increase revenue into the area by promoting small business in the locality." (West Midlands Police 2009; 1)

The prominent Muslim Councillor (Cllr) Salma Yaqoob was present, representing one of the affected wards, and she asked why her constituency had been chosen for imitative; the response from Chief Superintendant Turner was that, the new scheme represented, "an opportunity to localise these facilities and tailor make them to work for local issues such as anti-social behaviour and criminal damage" (ibid 2009; 2). Given that the business case for Project Champion was clear that in crimes outside the remit of counter-terrorism officers would need to be ones which involved serious harm to the community, this again represented the misleading of elected officials as to what Project Champion fundamentally was.

Cllr Salma Yaqoob also enquired as to how the scheme was being funded, and rather than mentioning the Terrorism and Allied Matters fund through which funding was channelled, according to the minutes of the meeting, ACC Hyde answered that the money came, "solely from the Home Office and it would not be used to provide additional Officers but would be used to Police in a new smarter way using up-to-date technology" (ibid 2009; 3). Towards the end of the discussion Cllr Yaqoob voiced her opinion that the meeting was somehow around the government's Preventing Violent Extremism agenda and this provoked a response from ACC Hyde:

> *"ACC Hyde responded that if he said that additional CCTV and ANPR facilities would not have any benefit around counter-terrorism then he would be lying, and that is why the element was in the briefing note..."*
>
> (West Midlands Police 2009; 3)

The review into Project Champion by Thames Valley Police (Thornton 2010) mentions this meeting in terms of it being an opportunity to improve oversight and it asserts that councillors asked prescient questions about the scheme and which, "should have been noted by senior officers as critical elements that required further discussion and a response" (Thornton 2010; 43).

Discovering Champion

> "I'm just an ordinary bloke in Moseley really and I accidentally got involved in this stuff. I had just been to visit friends in Leeds and walking back from the bus stop to my flat on Coppice route – every time, the same route, and I got half way and I saw this new lamp post thing which didn't look like any other lamppost and I thought that has got to be for a camera. And I thought 'why is that there? What's it doing there? What's it for? Cameras - here?' "
>
> (Steve Jolly, Interview)

The narrative provided by the protestors against the scheme provides valuable information as to how and why the scheme was challenged and who was responsible for challenging it. One counter-terrorism officer who was not involved in Project Champion but attended a

fractious West Midlands Police Authority meeting as 'an interested observer' quipped that were it not for 'one white, middle-class guy from Moseley', the vociferous pubic opposition to project Champion would never have come to the surface. The, 'white middle-class guy' in question is Steve Jolly, a former civil-servant who was unemployed at the time he noticed the surveillance cameras being installed on his road in Moseley, on the edge of the ring of cameras around Sparkhill. Moseley is a relatively affluent suburb of Birmingham, the history of which can be traced back as far as the publication of the Doomsday Book in 1086, in which it was listed as 'Museleie'. The centre of the suburb is still referred to as the 'Moseley Village', and it contains a range of shops and boutiques and hosts a weekly crafts and farmer's market. Increasingly it has a reputation for being a desirable place for young professionals and post-graduate students, with cultural enterprises, restaurants and small venues for live music looking to cater for such a demographic. Moseley Road runs through the suburb, but taking the road north towards the city centre takes you into Balsall Heath and roads heading east lead to Sparkhill, both of which formed part of the surveillance zones in Project Champion. In contrast these areas are populated by a large Asian and Muslim population, and the high street is characterised by take-aways and independent grocery-stores selling cheaper food catered for Asian households. Jolly acknowledges this distinction between the population of Moseley and that of the areas surrounding it;

> *"No I didn't really know any Muslims (before the Project Champion protests). I have a Muslim neighbour; a couple of Muslim neighbours...one of them is very friendly and comes to bring me food and stuff. And I know a few Muslim people from around who I say hello to, but they are really two separate communities side by side, who talk but who are quite distinct and different."*

(Steve Jolly, Interview)

It was from Moseley that complaints initially seemed to flow initially. Chris Jones, an IT consultant also living on School Road in Moseley was the first person whose complaints were recorded in the Birmingham blog The Stirrer on the 17th April 2010 (The Stirrer 2010). According to Jolly, the SBP attempted to reassure him after his initial complaints of the CCTV system being put in place, by informing him that they were targeted at the roads leading to Sparkhill and Sparkbrook:

> "They explained that they (the cameras) aren't there for local crime in Moseley but for roads that lead into Sparkbrook...They actually told us that! They sent a printed letter – in a press statement that they are there to cover rat runs into Sparkbrook...they just happened to be out in a different (electoral) ward but the purpose was to monitor people leaving and coming to Sparkbrook. They were told the choice of positions was 'intelligence led'. Knowing that they are here to put this ring around Muslim areas and they are not about local crime." (Steve Jolly, Interview)

Jolly claims that after these initial investigations he contacted local MPs including Liam Byrne and Roger Godsiff (the latter being sent several emails), only to get no reply from either. Nonetheless Jolly was able to advance his enquiries by contacting the press. The result was a front page article in The Guardian newspaper which gave the issue national publicity (Lewis 2010). As Jolly explains;

> "The big thing was The Guardian. I realised I wasn't really getting anywhere with councillors and MPs. I realised it was too political for them – they valued

their careers above the issues at stake and they didn't want the cameras, the publicity which was obviously going to erupt. So I knew we had to get the media onboard and it became a media campaign really. So I spoke to Liberty and The Guardian, and Paul Lewis from The Guardian came up here to see me and he came to see a lot of evidence." (Steve Jolly, Interview)

At this point other activists increasingly became aware of the story. In order to demonstrate the strength of feeling around the issue, I will refer to two interviews conducted with individuals who would soon actively campaign and petition for the decommissioning of Project Champion. They are Richard and Tasmin, both of who had campaigned previously for the Stop the War Coalition and they described hearing about the cameras at a party at around this point in time. Richard describes feeling 'absolutely furious' about hearing that Muslims were being targeted. Similarly Tasmin expresses her surprise and anger at the scheme;

"It was shock really – a proper punch in the face, like whoa, that's what we…these attacks on Muslims and this is the last hit I felt. I don't live in the area and someone said that to me but that's an attack on Muslims I said. Anyhow, I felt it was attack on me as a person." (Tasmin, Interview)

Three constituency meetings followed shortly after the Guardian article was published, in Hall Green, Moseley and Sparkhill, the first reportedly attracting 100 residents, and the next two over 60. At the Sparkhill Community meeting local councillors were also in attendance, including Salma Yaqoob, the well-known Respect Party councillor who gave an impassioned speech criticising the conduct of the police in implementing the scheme. Some seasoned

campaigners from Stop the War Coalition, The Muslim Public Affairs Committee, and Socialist Workers Party were in attendance, but the floor also seated many residents of surrounding areas who were not affiliated to organised groups and who did not hold positions at any relevant institutional level. What resulted was a raucous, passionate public ward meeting at which pointed criticism was levelled at Jackie Russell, chair of the SBP and CI Moore, who represented West Midlands Police at the meeting. Some of the criticism sought to directly challenge the narrative of the police which had been arranged by senior police as evidenced from minutes of the meetings that were not available at this point. Questions included whether or not local police would have access to data from the cameras (a question which was addressed but not answered by CI Moore). Cllr Yaqoob and another audience member upon hearing the narrative that Project Champion would help solve local crime, asked if the business case for Project Champion reflected that assertion that tackling local crime was a key objective. The seeming inconsistency between the redacted business case that was now distributed among activists present at the meeting, and the narratives provided by the Police and Safer Birmingham Partnership seemed to contribute to an atmosphere of mistrust, directed towards the Police and SBP. The following comments recorded from residents who spoke from the floor are indicative of this:

> *"Sparkbrook now – national media. Police are saying 11 arrests in this area due to terrorism – 0.001% of the population – so you've imposed these cameras and gone and spent 3 million quid on it. We don't normally take part in these sorts of things, but when the powers that be accuse us as being terrorists and terrorist sympathisers, that's when we have to speak up"*
> (Resident, Sparkhill community meeting 22/07/10)

"I'm a taxi driver – you drive around Birmingham, not many cameras. You reach Sparkhill and there's loads of cameras here. This isn't about crime and safety. At the end of the day Chelmesly Wood and Kingstanding are high crime areas and if they applied for the same funding would they have gotten it? This is just around Muslim areas isn't it." (Resident, Sparkhill community meeting 22/07/10)

From 'Spycam Summit' To Street Protests

Another defining moment in the success of the protests against Project Champion was the organisation of the 'Spycam Summit' on July 4th 2010. By this point in time Jolly was appearing on local and national radio and television criticising Project Champion and the slow reaction of the authorities to the protest movement. One of the protestors took the lead in organising an event which would feature prominent speakers from across the country including Muslim politicians and civil liberty campaigners. Among those invited to speak were the peer Lord Nazir, the director of Liberty Shami Chakrabati, Alex Deane of the lobby group Big Brother Watch and Cllr Yaqoob.

However, just as importantly for the protest movement's eventual success, another attendee was the newly appointed ACC Sharon Rowe. ACC Rowe was invited to speak at the event by organisers, and although she was booed as she stood up to speak, her apology to community members for the handling of Project Champion drew applause. Rowe promised

the audience that the future of Project Champion would not be decided without some form of community involvement, and assured protestors that their voices would be heard prominently as part of a process of review. It was the first real sign that authorities were moving towards engagement, recognising that for Project Champion to continue undeterred would be impossible.

In the meantime protests continued on the streets in both the districts affected by Project Champion and it was in these spaces that the effect of the cameras on feelings of identity and belonging could be observed more clearly. Some aspects of the anger of residents and visitors of the affected areas were notable. Many of the campaigners against the cameras carried with them slogans relating to civil liberties, and the civil liberties argument is indeed one referenced by many of the Muslims protesting against Champion, with whom I spoke. Others were equally angered at the scheme's targeting of Muslim communities by Champion. Residents had increasingly heard about the issue as the publicity drive continued and some would approach protestors to let their own feelings about the camera installations be known. For instance, during my first day attending the protest stalls on Alum Rock Road in Washwood Heath, a man driving past stopped abruptly in his black Mercedes Benz to peer out the window and offer to sign the petition, "It takes the fucking piss", he added before apologising for his language with his young daughter sitting in the backseat. Views expressed were generally supportive of the protestors, often passionate and the anger against authorities was palpable.

Whilst many protestors spoke of Project Champion as a local and national issue, others placed it within a broader pattern of behaviour by authorities, principally against Muslims not just in the UK but globally. The following is an excerpt from a field diary in which I described a conversation with a resident who signed a petition against Project Champion:

> *Young man: "They're gonna bomb Iran. That's next."*
>
> *Researcher: "What makes you say that?"*
>
> *Young man: "This is what they're doing. First Iraq and Afghanistan – they want that Muslim land, Muslim blood. And now they want to know what Muslims in their own countries are doing – that's what the cameras are about".*
>
> (Interview with a protestor)

Another protestor who spent a weekend handing out leaflets on Stratford Road, Sparkhill made a similar connection between the localised counter-terror scheme and a broader global conflict:

> *"...there are some people that will go to extremes – and we will see more terrorism and that will justify the cameras and they will say 'oh we told you that it was an issue in the community'. But they started them. And its nothing to do with the terrorism – it's just like a cover-up for the war on terror and exposing the imperialist war on the Muslims and so on"*
>
> (Interview with a protestor)

Global issues were never too far away when Champion was being discussed. On that sunny Saturday morning several young Muslims began to speak to me about their fears. Some

spoke of being 'targets' for government and many expressed the view that Champion was mere confirmation that Muslims were being singled out as security threats. There was frustration from Muslims and some non-Muslims too that politicians had succumbed to negative media stereotypes of Muslims in general as potential threats. This portrayal, it was felt, was given institutional legitimacy by virtue of Project Champion.

However the strong feelings of local belonging and place-attachment to these districts also contributed to the outrage that was being felt. On Alum Rock Road and Stratford Road where protests took place on weekends, watching the everyday lives of Muslim residents engaging in relatively mundane tasks and preparing for the month of Ramadan, the scene was a stark contrast and indeed an antidote to the conception of the neighbourhoods as places of danger. The shopping high streets at the heart of these 'dangerous places' were not just visited by residents from Birmingham but even by families living in other British cities who were usually visiting families in the Midlands and used the visit as an opportunity to visit the specialist Asian food and fashion stores. Some of those visitors also signed the petition against Project Champion, and it served as a reminder that the neighbourhoods and high streets themselves had a character and representation among Muslims and Asians more widely, and this representation was being challenged and subverted. Some residents were acutely aware of this and reported feeling the heavy oppressive gaze of the cameras;

> *"When I go out my house...and I go outside to buy milk, and I see camera*
>
> *after camera after camera...do you understand how I feel? Please – try to*
>
> *understand that. We're just meeting friends and family and there's one*
>
> *camera here and here – just coming to this meeting I was frustrated thinking*

> *'they've got one here as well.' Its so frustrating for us – we know some*
>
> *cameras have a purpose but its extremely insulting...live here for a week or so*
>
> *and then see how you would feel living under a cage of cameras."*
>
> (Resident, speaking at community meeting in Sparkhill 22/07/10)

Thus the security apparatus was for some at least, becoming intertwined with the very fabric of everyday life.

The Climb-down

On the 10th of August 2010 the West Midlands Police Authority held a meeting in one of the wards affected by Project Champion to discuss issues of trust and confidence in the Police. The West Midlands Police Authority is one of 43 such bodies in the UK. Its role is to both guide the regional police force's aims and priorities as well as providing a civilian scrutiny to their work. Members of the Police Authority had been in meetings regarding Project Champion, certainly by February of 2008 (Birmingham City Council 2010; 27). However at this meeting the chair of the organisation would insist repeatedly that responsibility for the cameras did not rest on the shoulders of the Authority, which was acting only in an oversight capacity. If this claim was intended to reduce the anger being directed at the stage at the meeting on the 10th of August, it failed. Steve Jolly and Cllr Yaqoob were among some of the attendees making impassioned speeches criticising the police response and what they saw as the avoidance of responsibility by the Police Authority. National and local press recorded the event which lasted for two hours; and footage of an angry resident equivocating Project Champion with the actions of communist and imperialist regimes

before storming out of the meeting was recorded and used in the national BBC news the following day. It would be wrong to characterise the West Midlands Police Authority meeting on August 2010 as being a crucial turning point in the way in which the police were approaching the future of Project Champion. However it returned the issue to prominence in the media and added to the public pressure on authorities to react.

By this point in time an advisory group (which was at the time referred to as a 'Reference Group') was being created in order to advise the West Midlands Police and West Midlands Police Authority on the future of Project Champion. The Reference Group would have oversight responsibilities for the Project Board, the group ultimately responsible for the future of the project, and would have two seats on the Project Board itself. It is difficult to ascertain precisely how the creation of the Reference Group took place and how members of it were chosen. One individual who sat on the Reference Group reported that delegates were chosen from groups reflecting the demographics of those affected by the scheme. Women's groups, local residents, faith representatives and campaigners were all sought to play a role. Some from the group had been known for the work they had done regarding the Preventing Extremism agenda; those who had represented Birmingham's Muslim communities, wittingly or otherwise were sought out once more to take part in a process designed to diffuse public anger. The willingness to allow critics of Project Champion to become involved was striking; one member of the Reference Group noted,

> *"It's interesting that 90% of the reference group are openly against the cameras. The police knew that and they still got behind the rest of the project board to actually allow that to happen. We got Steve Jolly in our reference*

group and in doing do, the police were taking a massive risk because you know better than I do how organisation works; if there is a perceived critical voice, it is highly unlikely that they are going to be round the table. More likely, they are going to be blacklisted and sidelined. To have him and others around the table is brilliant. They said that they want a critical oversight as opposed to an independent representation. They would rather have someone rather critical for it can't be seen that they're just bringing out yes-men. "

Anonymous Reference Group member (Interview)

By 30th September 2010 the Project Board was meeting and being advised by this newly created Reference Group. Shortly before the meeting on the 30th September 2010 another prominent member of the Reference Group told me that the group would not consider anything as an option short of the total removal of all cameras that were part of Project Champion, and that if offered anything less, the individual would publically resign from that position. Speaking to three members of the advisory group during this time period it is clear that there were a variety of attitudes among members. Two members were still deeply mistrustful of the Reference Group initiative, one stating that he might only be on it to turn the opposition into 'police propaganda', and the other fearing that the group would be pressured to keep Project Champion in some form, which he considered to be an unacceptable proposition. A third Reference board member was much more optimistic as to the developments;

"To have then community representatives sitting on in that board is unheard of and never happened before. What is actually happening there is cutting-edge for Birmingham. It will also be a litmus test as to whether this can actually work for any type of issue and project within the community."

Anonymous Reference Group member (Interivew)

The Thames Valley Police report into Project Champion which was released on September 30th 2010 (Thornton 2010) also contributed to the pressure for authorities to react radically and decisively. The report was highly critical of the project management throughout Project Champion, and by concluded that the separation of the 'political' part of the project with the actual delivery resulted in the scheme being advertised in way that did not match the delivery. The acknowledgement of the gap between how the scheme was sold to residents and how it had been planned satisfied some of the protestors though the diplomatic language in which this critical failure was catalogued was frustrating to others.

The conclusions on the compliance of the scheme with various ethical laws as well as police procedural law was also damning. The National CCTV Strategy includes a code of practice to which CCTV schemes must give consideration; the Thames Valley Police report concluded that, "there (was) no indication that the (relevant) research was carried out," (ibid 2010; 37)**.** which would have amounted to compliance with that code. The Thames Valley report concluded that, "there was nothing...that demonstrated that the authorisation process for use of the cameras had been considered, and there was no policy, plan or procedures in

place for their management in compliance with RIPA (Regulation of Investigation Procedures Act) or applicable legislation, codes or guidance." (Thornton 2010; 37-38)

The West Midlands Police Authority also came in for criticism of its oversight early on during the Project's inception, and then also failed to recognise the need for the project to be scrutinised when it was becoming a 'critical incident' in West Midlands' policing. And the report concluded in its analysis by confirming that the consultation phase was, "too little too late, and the lack of transparency about the purpose of the project has resulted in a loss of trust," (ibid 2010; 47). It cited and approved a comment by an unnamed community leader who had suggested that Project Champion had "set back community relations by a decade."

The nail in the coffin for Project Champion arrived at the West Midlands Police Authority meeting on the 25th October 2010, an event at which the general public were permitted to observe but not participate. At this meeting the Thames Valley Police report was discussed and the Reference Group's recommendations that Project Champion be dismantled in its entirety were formally offered to the Police Authority. In addition Birmingham City Council presented its own report from the Local Services and Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) (Birmingham City Council 2010). Criticism in this report was provided in harsher terms than the Thames Valley Police report, especially with regards to the consultation failures and accountability. On the very aims of Project Champion the OSC found that Safer Birmingham Partnership misrepresented the case for the project and went as far as misusing statistics, "to divert public attention from the real intent of the project

(ibid 2010: 47). The report also claimed that the West Midlands Police Authority were not fully enough informed of the project in February 2008 when funding for the project was provisionally agreed, and also that the city council was never formally ask to appropriate funds towards the project (ibid 2010; 48-49). Consultation on the by the Police and SPB was described as, limited and inaccurate" (ibid 2010: 49) and as being, "based on incorrect and at best incomplete information" (ibid 2010: 51). The consultation shortcomings were described as 'unacceptable' and the report outright accused those at SPB of providing 'false information' (ibid 2010: 52). It was scathing personally of Jackie Russell, the then Director of SBP who had asserted that Project Champion was about all forms of crime rather than being explicitly about terrorism;

"We find it very hard to accept that someone could attend agenda items of meetings of the Counter Terrorism Executive Project Board which had responsibility for implementing the project and fail, in this context, to understand the purpose of the Project." (Birmingham City Council 2010; 50)

The reports conclusions were summarised thus;

"At best it can be said that there was a catastrophic lack of inquisitiveness about this Project by the two organisations that should have been scrutinising the project on the Public's behalf: The Police Authority and the Safer Birmingham Partnership. Basic questions were not asked: what were the specifications for the Project, how was the data to be used, what would be the impact on community relations, how effective would the Project be, and more

seriously, they failed to recognise the significance of the Project and its impact upon local communities." (Birmingham City Council 2010: 60-61)

Conclusions

The case of Project Champion is rich in what it tells us about the ways in which the authorities at national and local level conceptualised a minority group, the way it perceived a threat from particular spaces and the impact that it had on those who felt they belonged in such spaces. What this paper demonstrates is that Project Champion was created due to institutional failures. These institutional failures included the unwillingness of authorities to trust Muslim representatives and community members to be part of this particular counter-terrorism scheme, a failure to fulfil legal obligation in rolling out the scheme and the deliberate dissemination of misinformation to obscure the reality of the Project Champion from public view.

Underpinning this negligence however was an atmosphere in which local authorities and security and policing services, in their attempt to find elusive evidence for terrorism gave no attention to issues of civil liberties and designed a policy that was discriminatory, disproportionate. The result was that neighbourhoods with distinctive ethnic character were stigmatised. Sparkhill, Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath are of course British spaces, but by treating them as potentially dangerous, many residents and detractors felt that the spaces were being excluded. No longer were these spaces 'British', but rather they represented a threat to British society; an enemy within. The installed cameras were also construed by

opponents as oppressive and demeaning. Rather than allowing Muslim citizens to feel part of British society, some Muslims interpreted Project Champion as a wider part of an illegitimate political and military project in which Muslims were being excluded and oppressed.

As authorities had begun to realise the scale of the mistakes that had been made, they had success in reviving public involvement, in deliberating upon the future of Project Champion, even allowing the most sceptical and critical of voices to be included. In June 2011 the last of Project Champion cameras were removed, but by that time a scheme that had been created to protect British society from terrorism had instead largely served to engender feelings of discrimination and division.

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