

<b>Institution:</b> University of Birmingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 28, History		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Birmingham Pub Bombings and Post-Terrorism Societies: Facilitating Commemoration, Reconciliation and Wellbeing in "Suspect Communities".		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2006–2017		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Prof. Gavin Schaffer	Professor of Modern British History	2010–2020
Dr. Saima Nasar	Teaching Fellow	2015–2016
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015–2020 (ongoing)		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>The aftermath of the Birmingham Pub Bombings of 1974 marginalised Birmingham's Irish community as well as victims and their families. Individuals directly involved with the Pub Bombings, and the Irish community more broadly, have struggled to come to terms with this history, mostly choosing silence and disengagement. Similarly, the collective blaming of minority communities after subsequent acts of terrorism, has caused political and social marginalisation. We have benefited individuals, communities and practitioners living and working in the aftermath of the Pub Bombings by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Increasing cultural participation by marginalised and under-represented</b> Irish and youth communities in Birmingham through witness seminars, memorial planning and the production of cultural artefacts.</li> <li>2. Changing attitudes towards <b>commemoration, memorialisation and reconciliation</b> within and between Irish communities, and victims and their families in Birmingham by facilitating the building of a new city centre memorial, thus <b>enhancing understanding of victims' needs in reconciliation processes</b>.</li> <li>3. Co-creating new cultural artefacts (two new plays) that have informed <b>the awareness and attitudes of sections of the public both within and beyond the marginalised communities</b>.</li> <li>4. Informing <b>professional practices and methods</b> of counsellors and psychotherapists dealing with collectively blamed communities in post-terrorism societies, both regionally and internationally, <b>influencing CPD and training standards</b>, and <b>changing care practices</b>.</li> </ol>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>Since 2006, Schaffer has researched the consequences of terrorism, crisis and war on specific ethnic communities. [RO1, RO2, RO3] This work has focused on a range of migrant groups in different twentieth-century British contexts: Jews, Black and Asian people, Germans and Italians. Schaffer's key research insights (RFs) have held that:</p> <p><b>RF1:</b> In twentieth-century Britain, racial violence directed towards minority ethnic communities intensified in times of crisis, as minorities were punished collectively for crimes ascribed to their individual members. [RO1, RO2]</p> <p><b>RF2:</b> Collective blaming triggered behaviours within minority communities which long outlasted the period of crisis: specifically, a reluctance to display ethnicity in public, internalised feelings of shame and a desire to silence and ignore specific periods of community history. [RO2, RO3]</p>		

Building from these insights, between 2013–16 Nasar and Schaffer worked together using witness seminars to research a group labelled a 'suspect community' by Paddy Hillyard (1993), specifically the Birmingham Irish community in the wake of the 1974 Birmingham Pub Bombings. The research aimed to understand the effects of collective blaming on this group from the 1970's to the present day and was co-produced with, and informed by, Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP) and the Birmingham Irish Heritage Group (BIHG).

The key research insights held that:

**RF3:** Overall, the failure to properly commemorate and memorialise the Pub Bombings had contributed to feelings of marginalisation both among victims' families and in the Birmingham Irish community. [RO3]

**RF4:** More specifically, the impacts of the Pub Bombings on individuals, communities and the city had been buried in a history of shame, which had particularly damaged the collectively blamed Irish community, and triggered specific behaviours, such as the cancellation of the St Patrick's Day Parade between 1975 and 1996, accent masking and the public disavowal of Irishness. [RO2, RO3]

**RF5:** Many Irish people had never felt able publicly to discuss this history and felt socially marginalised as a result of it. [RO2, RO3]

**RF6:** Communal decisions to gloss over difficult and potentially divisive histories had limited public commemoration and memorialisation regarding the Pub Bombings. There was only a small churchyard memorial to the victims, and no attempts had been made to begin a process of reconciliation between victims and the Irish community. [RO3]

### 3. References to the research

The research on which the project was based is as follows:

**[RO1]** G. Schaffer (ed.), *Racialising the Soldier* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2013). ISBN: 978-0-415-62617-0. DOI: [10.1080/02619288.2010.484250](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2010.484250)

**[RO2]** G. Schaffer and S. Nasar, 'The White Essential Subject: Race, Ethnicity, and the Irish in Postwar Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 32 (2), 2018: pp. 209–30. DOI: [10.1080/13619462.2018.1455031](https://doi.org/10.1080/13619462.2018.1455031)

**[RO3]** S. Nasar and G. Schaffer, 'The Poetics of Narrativity: Understanding Trauma, Temporality and Spatiality 40 years after the Birmingham Pub Bombings', *Journal of Social History*, Summer, 2020: pp. 1–25. [Now published in 'online first form'] DOI: [10.1093/jsh/shz004](https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz004)

### 4. Details of the impact

Individual, community and practitioner understandings of, and engagement with, the social aftermath of the Birmingham Pub Bombings, regionally and internationally, have been transformed. The project has (1) **increased cultural participation** among marginalised, under-engaged and diverse audiences; (2) contributed to **commemoration, memorialisation and reconciliation, enhancing understanding of victims' needs in reconciliation processes**; (3), **improved awareness** of this history and its present-day implications among **under-represented and marginalised communities** through **co-production of new cultural artefacts**; and (4) **changed care practices of healthcare professionals** as regards the treatment of individuals and communities in the aftermath of terrorism, **influencing CPD and training standards**.

#### 1. Increased cultural participation of marginalised, under-engaged and diverse audiences

Decades of silence and civic disengagement have been reversed since 2014, as members of Birmingham's minority Irish and Muslim communities have confronted their historic experience as victims of collective blaming in the wake of terrorism. (RF2, RF4) This new engagement was captured in co-created activities, events and processes.

Sites for cultural participation were created through engaging marginalised and under-represented communities, in a process that enabled and empowered them to discuss, often for the first time, the impact of terrorism on their lives. (RF5) As attested by the Chair of Birmingham's Irish Heritage Group (BIHG): 'For the first time since 1974 [Irish people] were able to talk openly to one another where a fragile détente came into being; all as a direct result of Professor Schaffer's project' (S10). 110 people attended witness seminars and were actively involved in the discussions which took place, a number which stands in contrast to the pre-existing silence within these communities. One participant recorded how the seminar had finally rendered them 'able to speak openly'; another that they felt that 'so many people found their voice for the first time' through this programme. The research findings, they asserted, had 'made me aware of the disavowal of my Irishness'. (S1)

Overall, this drove a process of healing which **empowered cultural participation** and **restored civic engagement**. (RF3) As the Chair of BIHG attests: 'I know from the testimony of Birmingham Irish Heritage Group's members, and others of the Irish community, how the burden of remorse, pain and grief was greatly eased, resulting from the oral history project'. (S10) In response to the high levels of participation from hitherto not-engaged Irish people seen in the witness seminars, the Birmingham Irish Association (BIA) felt able to assert city-wide leadership and pursue what became the New Street memorial in 2018, **transforming a marginalised group to one that plays a central role in civic commemorative activity**. (RF5) As the CEO of the BIA stated: 'At the witness seminar, there was discussion about how a new memorial for the victims would be an appropriate gesture to make and I was keen, following the arguments made, that the Irish community should be front and centre in this project, that it would support peace and reconciliation, and do much to heal the wounds of Irish people in Birmingham. As a result, I established the Misneach Memorial Committee.' (S6)

## 2. Contributing to **commemoration, memorialisation and reconciliation, enhancing understanding of victims' needs in reconciliation processes**

Prior to this project, a prominent memorial to victims of the Birmingham Pub Bombings had been deliberately avoided, the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, who had created the previous (much smaller) Cathedral Square memorial, admitting that the city 'didn't seek to push it', fearing the 'damage' that could be caused. (RF6) We **enhanced cultural understanding** of the impact of the Bombings and **changed attitudes to memorialisation** among key stakeholders in the city and region, fostering greater reconciliation between affected communities. As a result, a prominent public memorial to the victims of the Birmingham Pub Bombings was opened in 2018 at the heart of the City. It was created by the Misneach Memorial Committee (MMC), chaired by the CEO of BIA, who secured agreement for a major new memorial outside Birmingham's New Street Station funded by Network Rail in 2017.

The creation of the MMC constitutes a major act of peace and reconciliation, bringing together numerous influential Irish organisations with victims' families, **thereby enhancing understanding of victims' needs in reconciliation processes**. Schaffer's research directly and materially contributed to this change. The Chair of the BIHG attests: 'If not for the work [...] both sides of our communities might have remained apart never having the chance to meet and air their long-held grievances: ultimately, it brought "closure" to the community'. (S10)

Positioned in close proximity to both blast sites, at the most prominent entrance and exit point to the city, the new memorial reflects a significant **informing of public and civic attitudes** relating to the aftermath of terrorism, **improving social and educational inclusion of marginalised groups** such as the Irish community and victims of terrorism. (RF2, RF3) Its unveiling, on 21 November 2018, was a major civic event of memorialisation, bringing together 300 invited guests for a ceremony attended by faith leaders, the West Midlands mayor and City Council leader, and generating international media coverage. It was recognised as marking a significant change in Irish **opportunities for social inclusion and equality** in Britain. (RF5) The President of the Republic of Ireland argued that the memorial encapsulated 'a legacy' that 'celebrates transition and coming together.' (S2) For the CEO of BIA, Schaffer's and Nasar's research 'has

changed the lives of Irish people here and in Ireland' and 'has had a real impact on peace and reconciliation.' (S6) The co-leader of Justice for the 21, who lost her sister in the Bombings, highlights a similar impact for the families of victims: 'This memorial is not only important to the families and the survivors, but it is of even more significance to us as families to bring together the Irish community in rebuilding and solidifying what was lost'. (S7)

Such change was felt beyond Birmingham with the MMC's CEO recognising that 'Gavin's research [...] has made a massive difference to the behaviour and feelings of Irish communities far beyond this city'. (S6) (RF4) The importance of the memorial as **enhancing understanding of victims' needs in reconciliation processes** was formally cemented by a state visit from the President of the Republic of Ireland in February 2019. (S2) Following this visit, the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in the Republic of Ireland invited the victims' families to participate in new peace and reconciliation programmes with other victims of the Troubles. Schaffer and the families held meetings about the treatment of victims of terrorism with the President, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and members of the Irish Parliament.

### 3. Improving awareness among young people and non-Irish communities, generating new cultural artefacts

Impact was achieved by enabling minority communities to re-situate their experiences of racism in broader historical and cultural contexts. Attitudes about collective blaming and its impacts on communities, particularly amongst young people (a group often missing from discussions of historic racism in Birmingham), have been **challenged through the process of co-creating and performing new cultural artefacts**. (RF1, RF2)

In 2015, Irish in Britain (IIB; the National Welfare Organisation of Irish people in Britain) secured a £4,000 grant from the Irish Youth Foundation for a creative arts programme for ethnic minority youth who, it thought, would benefit from Schaffer's historical analysis of collective blaming, having themselves experienced similar phenomena in their lifetimes following events such as 9/11 and 7/7. (RF1, RF2) Supported by GAP Arts, ten young people engaged with an education source pack created by Schaffer and Nasar and then wrote and performed a play. The CEO of GAP Arts recalls how 'Recreating moments from first-hand accounts made powerful, human connections and enabled empathic understanding of complex situations and dilemmas. Working on the material made a huge impact on all participants [...] Back home it sparked intergenerational dialogues within families who had previously been silent on the whole period.' (S4) (RF2)

Awareness of collective blaming and its long-term effects on the treatment of ethnic minorities in climates of crisis was extended through another new cultural artefact, 'The Silence'. In 2018, GAP Arts secured £8,000 from the Peggy Ramsden Trust to commission a professional playwright to write this play about the Pub Bombings and £16,000 from Arts Council England to produce it. 'The Silence' was performed in Birmingham to sell-out audiences over four nights in March 2019, reaching in excess of 200 attendees (S9). As a result of its popularity extra nights (also sold out) had to be put on (in the end it ran for eleven nights). The play was hailed by audience members as offering a 'mentality-changing message' which altered understanding of the treatment of ethnic minorities in climates of crisis. (S3) Another audience member asserted: 'This play has opened up a whole history for me'. (S3)

Altogether, these **cultural productions brought marginalised people across different communities into social discussion** and **enhanced public understanding** of the process of collective blaming. (RF1) For example, a leading Muslim ex-prisoner from Guantanamo Bay participated in the post-play discussion with family members of victims of the Pub Bombings. The CEO of GAP Arts explained: 'A number of important dialogues ensued between Irish and Muslim attendees to the play, which helped to build intercommunity relationships and understandings.' (S4) Reaching beyond Birmingham, a BBC television documentary



(*Birmingham Irish I Am*) was broadcast in February 2020, with Schaffer as a historical advisor, utilising Schaffer's and Nasar's research findings. (RF3, RF5)

#### **4. Informing and engaging professional healthcare practices working with post-trauma communities and influencing new CPD and training standards**

The project changed the professional healthcare practices of counsellors and influenced CPD and training standards by underlining the need to consider how structural and institutional prejudice can impact individuals over long time periods and the extent to which Irish Britons continue to suffer psychological trauma as a result of the Troubles. (RF3, RF4, RF5) In 2016, Schaffer and Nasar co-produced the witness seminars with Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy (ICAP), the only specialist British-based counselling service for people from the Irish community (based in London and Birmingham). Listening to the participants, engaging with the research and being involved in these processes led these counsellors to reflect on their practice and drove the generation of new CPD resources.

The impact on therapeutic practice has influenced mental health professionals beyond Birmingham, opening new discussions about how to offer therapy to racialised people across international communities of practice. (RF1) For example, the research project team were invited to give the keynote address and run a workshop at a social justice conference jointly held by the American Counseling Association (ACA), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) on 11 October 2019. (S8) Here, they shared research findings and highlighted the integration of research into counselling practice with trauma communities in Birmingham, as well as leading a further workshop on the Birmingham Irish project. The keynote paper was live-streamed and recorded, and has evolved into an important CPD resource for BACP therapists, which has been purchased for viewing over 300 times. One participant reflected: 'the ability to understand the Troubles, and how to help communities and clients who have been traumatized by violence and hatred, was inspired. I left knowing that this conference has literally changed my life.' (S11) Working with such clients in the wake of Schaffer's and Nasar's research, one counsellor reflected on the change to their practice: 'I certainly think about it more now. If I'm looking at a client's timeline, almost. And I certainly think about how to bring it up'. (S5) (RF3, RF4) Another counsellor argued that Schaffer's and Nasar's research has caused these issues to surface in client interactions, where previously there had been silence. It had, she argued, 'freed up a lot of Irish people' whose 'parents had a very very bad experience'. (S5) (RF5)

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- [S1] Witness seminar participant feedback and evaluations.
- [S2] Media and press coverage (see evidence PDF), [film about MMC](#).
- [S3] Audience and participant feedback/reviews from participants and audiences of both 'Suspect Communities' and 'The Silence' plays and workshops.
- [S4] Testimony from GAP CEO.
- [S5] Workshop reflections/feedback with ICAP counsellors (transcribed from audio of seminar), education source pack.
- [S6] Testimonial letter from CEO of Birmingham Irish Association (also CEO of MMC).
- [S7] [News article and video footage](#) of victim relative and head of Justice for the 21 campaign group.
- [S8] 'Helping Community Healing': 'Spotlight' Interview with ICAP Senior Therapist in *Therapy Today*, the flagship BACP magazine (September 2019).
- [S9] GAP Arts activity report on 'The Silence'.
- [S10] Statement from Chairman of the Birmingham Irish Heritage Group.
- [S11] Practitioner feedback forms from 'Let the Voices be Heard' conference on impact of research on professional practice.