

## SUSPECT COMMUNITIES PAST AND PRESENT

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The difficulty we face in challenging the myths around ID cards being good for you is that the conversations are fractured, the conflicting arguments supporting ID cards are presented in different conversations or key discourses in isolation of each other and a policy of playing to the gallery can be pursued. The result is squeezing out the central issue of basic human rights to the edge of each conversation, where they can be more readily discounted.

Many ordinary decent human beings believe and are led to believe that, in an increasingly complex society, their lives would be significantly easier if they had something like an identity card. In particular, the most vulnerable, most alienated and most 'suspect' people (who haven't yet realised that they belong in that category) may think: 'If I had a small card in my pocket that would mean people would not always ask me all the awkward questions they do ask, my life would be less stressful and complicated'. This myth is routinely perpetrated amongst ordinary decent citizens and 'non-citizens', or rather 'citizens of somewhere-other-than-here'.

The second myth is that if you are not a citizen of the United Kingdom, you are a 'non-citizen' which of course you are not. Some of the most vulnerable people on the planet do not have citizenship of anywhere or have contested citizenship, but most people arriving in or living in the Northern hemisphere have citizenship of somewhere. What they do not have is citizenship of 'here'. However, the term 'non-citizen' immediately sets them in the inferior category. To be a real person here, to have real status, to have meaningful rights, increasingly you must be a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Everybody else becomes categorized as some lesser thing. Other powerful countries behave in the same way. Nonetheless, regardless of where their own citizens find themselves, they are never perceived as non-citizens, they remain identifiable citizens of – somewhere-more-powerful-than-this-place, and routinely expect the rules of their country of citizenship to continue to apply. The definition

of non-citizen is a definition of powerlessness and poor fit.

We, Irish citizens of N Ireland, have significant experience of that definition by non-conformity to the 'norm'. We used to all be 'non-unionists.' That defined us collectively as people who historically had not actively voted for British citizenship. The term was used to categorise absolutely everybody, in the entire diversity of thinking, status, aspiration, identity, who could be described as not likely to have voted for the Unionist party. We used to live quite happily or unhappily, nobody really cared because we were just all 'non-people'. Then, when the 60s became revolting and people in N Ireland revolted against the implications of their 'non-person' status, we were moved from the 'non-person' category into a more dangerous place, the 'anti-person' category. We were defined, and allowed ourselves to be defined as 'anti-unionists'. This classification was used to create a new profile for of some of the people who used to be simply 'non-unionist'. Defined as 'anti-unionists' they were clearly understood to be a danger to society in general and to individuals self-defining as Unionist, who made up 'society'.

Most people did not describe themselves in that way. They saw themselves as ordinary people – as male, female, with different statuses, different identities, different aspirations, but others profiled, defined them and determined the 'pro-' and 'anti-' box in which they would be placed. This latter category carried an element of danger: given the right circumstances who knows what you would be up to. Your point of reference, in terms of being in the mainstream, in terms of the acceptable, in terms of the hallmark of goodness, responsibility, and citizenship was further outside the circle than not being one of them you were profiled as against them! No need to ask 'what are you for?' They already knew what you were against, so personal and collective relationships were negotiated around that and as things got worse, some of us became further boxed and removed as even worse than an 'anti-unionist'. We were for something else and therefore classified as apologists for ...something unacceptable, threatening, and if not unlawful, ought to be. A person could be reconfigured and moved from being nothing, to being awkward, potentially dangerous, to being actively supportive of something dangerous and illegal and the next categorisation was 'terrorist' – the non-person was considered a threat to the state. You could actually be sitting, minding your own business, simply wondering whether or not you would get another Phenobarbitone (the country lived on prescribed medication handed out for 40 years by doctors who had no other solution to people's problems) and be totally unaware that, while you had not changed in

yourself, others had moved you from being a person of absolutely no significance to being a person who could legitimately, and with massive public support, be deprived of every vestige of human right you thought you might call on in a tight corner.

That is a very short tour of how the rights journey in N Ireland from 1921 to 1991 when we began to negotiate the peace. There is a lot more to it than that, but much of the current discourses around identity cards and citizenship fit into these same boxes. It is how we collectively contribute to a culture which allows people to be defined, processed and acclimatised to absence of /exclusion to democracy, through tolerating human rights violation, then naked abuse of power and people, through to a culture of absolute control. When discussing where UK policy is going it is important to remember that the experimental playground for developing this obsessive determination to categorise and control was not built in isolation of the past 40 years in Northern Ireland.

What we had here initially was special legislation, special powers that derogated from human rights standards. Over the years this has changed and such powers have become part of the norm. The law became the instrument of abuse for our own good. This has also happened around the discourse on identity cards. We are told it would be good for us all to be clear about our identity and status. Individual cards would help everybody know who we, who the isolated and potentially vulnerable individuals are, and what our respective isolated individual position in society is. All of this could be held on a small electronic ID card. It will help us to avoid being mistaken for others. Is there anybody here who doesn't already know who they are?

We get carried away with technology and fail to see the simplicity of the rationale behind it. The Nazis had a much simpler idea. If what you really want to know is who is eligible as a human being, and who is not, then the cattle brand, the tattooed stamp cost-effectively serves that purpose. Removed of its sophistry, this is our stamp – the ID card – this is where we ware going with this:

STAMP the outsider; STAMP the different; STAMP the anti-; STAMP the dissident; STAMP them all; STAMP them out.

Do we need to do it? We do not. We have to understand what is underlying the drive towards individually stamping every human being within the territory of the United Kingdom. When Jeremy Paxman repeatedly asked Tony Blair "how many 'illegal' immigrants are

there?", there was a simple and honest answer. "I don't know". Nobody does. But the question could not be simply answered because people are obsessed with knowing how many non-people are in the country. Why is this? There is a quasi-rational argument that we need to count because we need to know numbers for public services. However, the quantitative discourse is around who is entitled to access, not about who needs the service. The conversation is not about who is starving and needs fed, who is dying and needs emergency care, which child needs protection, who is vulnerable and needs help, but about who is eligible and who is not. We have to know who is eligible for access to the public purse and who is not, and that creates a culture of eligibility on the basis of status and kinships, rather than universal entitlement to basic rights. It opens the door for the new 'eligibility' discourse. Who is eligible for care; who is eligible for rights; who is eligible for greater degrees of control; who is eligible for deportation and denial of the integrity of their human need? In the last analysis, who is earmarked for exclusion, dehumanisation, and even death?

When we look beyond the legislative context and the intellectual discourse the whole thing comes together as a question of culture. What we are actually doing and where we are going is developing a culture of unfettered State control.

Once you get into a control culture, you have to sort out who are 'we'. The first important question is who are the 'we' doing the controlling, and what, and who is being controlled?

In a collective equitable world 'we' would all agree that there are things that we as human beings should protect ourselves from. If that was the 'we' we were talking about we would need to be talking about the control of contagious diseases that threaten the species; we would need to be controlling rampant poverty; we would need to be controlling the rampant greed of capitalism.

But when we look at what we are now controlling you begin to see it cannot be and is not driven by any sense of a collective human 'we'. It is the same old 'us and them' that has always been about. In the current political discourse the 'real citizens' are being protected by controlling the outsiders and people are being cajoled into thinking they should support this control in their own interest.

This brings us back to the question of identity as control is about 'protecting our territory' and protecting our 'national purse'. It is

about a notion that if all the people who 'are not eligible' gain access to the territory and the purse, then 'we' who are more worthy will have to make do with less. Once people have been convinced that the need to control is real, then we are almost there. There is of course, no conversation to be permitted around increasing the purse by controlling the greed, or changing the economic system – that would be invasive of the private right of the citizen!! No discussion about how the wealth and power of the Northern hemisphere was built on invading and colonising other territories and purloining the entirety of their purses. Present discourse is around a definition of 'citizenship' that is embedded in citizenship as culture rather than universal rights.

Once we have decided who is controlling and who is controlled, we are in business. The controlling people will be the controllers of the 'real citizens' those who are 'really eligible' and 'entitled'. The 'we' are the British citizens and remember – however, disunited the United Kingdom may be in terms of national identity, legislatively 'we' are all British citizens, but we will not all be equal within the control system. The core reference in relation to the 'we' is about stopping others getting in and staying in. All others are the 'non- British citizens'. However, in terms of who 'they' are, it is Britishness v non-Britishness that counts. They are people who came here from somewhere else; maybe elsewhere in Europe, maybe beyond, maybe 100 years ago, maybe 50 years ago, maybe last week: wherever and whenever is irrelevant – they are not the real thing, they lack quintessential Britishness. There are additional complexities if you come from a fellow imperialist country that made money in other people's countries and left a trail of destruction around the world. The historical play-out of that is many of these people, in the terms of Rudyard Kipling's *Death of Honour*, might get an opportunity to prove themselves truly British. Don't count on it.

There is an implied meritocracy. What will those of us who are 'non-people' do in order to demonstrate our cultural eligibility for citizenship? We will be good citizens! How will we be proving we are good citizens? We will uncritically accept what our leaders tell us. We will uncritically help to identify the people who do not fit. We will be the defenders of eligibility. A culture of guilt is also created. You are guilty if you are a 'real citizen' and challenge the government proposals which from a control perspective define bad citizenship. From the position of a culture of control we have created a culture of eligibility, a culture of compliance, a culture of fear of difference and a culture of blind loyalty. History demonstrates (the history of the world, not just Northern Ireland or Europe) that once we get those

building blocks in place, the rights of vulnerable people are already endangered, the rights of dissidents and free thinkers are already endangered and the rights of collective advancement of humanity is in retreat.

We have seen from the experimental playground of the Northern Ireland experience where we were told that the crisis that we were facing necessitated certain things – like suspending people's rights. We had had a 40-year period of special powers and emergency legislation.

If we listen to the legislative conversations and arguments, we can actually see all of the control powers being quietly introduced into normal everyday legislation. In Northern Ireland, you would think that coming out of the place we have been, there would be a consensus on protecting ourselves from the power of Government with a human rights bill. But we cannot get consensus on the concept because the culture of control has not been challenged here, and is intensifying. Who is categorised as 'in' and who is 'out' is all that has really changed. People who for a long time were the controlled now have opportunities to be included among and in support of the controllers. We have re-organised the definitions of outsiders and have access to a whole new constituency of outsiders who are non-citizens and non-UK, and come to live here. They do not even figure in the questions important to 'us' around UK or Irish citizenship, they are just non-citizens /non-national, regardless of their actual citizenship of and national identity with somewhere else. Their exclusion brings us closer together as the new insiders, as long as we prove our cultural eligibility by compliance. In Northern Ireland, we have the added benefit of blaming the old internal 'others' for the worst excesses of the new hatreds.

Some of the mechanics around the culture of control have also changed. One development is the move from violations of human rights being committed through special temporary legislation (that derogates from human rights standards) towards starting to citizenise and nationalise the concept of human rights. One of the biggest problems we have within the conceptualisation of our Bill of Rights is a deeply held cultural belief that it is for Northern Ireland people. We need different rights than other people, because we are different. This position argues that we do not need to embed in our local systems 'UN' rights or mainstream rights of other British citizens, because they don't have the nuance of Catholics and Protestants and walking the Garvaghy Road that make us special. We need different, negotiated

compromised, lower standards of rights.

Within that culture that does not see human rights in the context of the inalienable rights of human beings, people will be prepared to agree that we need to ensure no more special powers legislation that would allow you to be carted out of your bed in the middle of the night just because you vote for Sinn Féin or the PUP. However, the culture will not facilitate objections to a Brazilian person without an identity card having their door kicked in the middle of the night and an immigration officer carting them away. This is because the culture in which we operate is not a rights based culture. It is a culture that says, 'I know what my rights are and you are a non-person and don't have any'. We have moved on to the normalisation of human rights being mitigated through identity and national status. Not identity as a human being, but identity as an eligible citizen-a compliant, aspiring, loyal, non-critical, non-dangerous citizen. We are moving personal and national (ethnic) identity from cultural artefact to ideological basis of citizen status and basing human rights on the basis of this dubious status. Consciously or otherwise, this road can ultimately only lead us to a very frightening place. Don't take my word for it. Think it through.

The creation of our culture of control and our culture of fear of difference has diminished our culture of support for human rights, developed after World War II. This is the context in which we think we should give power to our governments, our police and our public authorities to require people to put the complexity of their lives on a single piece of card and hand it over to whoever asks for it. Our experience has been that whilst everybody might have to have possess one, 'we' the insiders will not be asked for it every day, or interrogated over our cards. 'We' will be ok. 'We' will be told, go ahead and have a nice day. But I have a colleague from Peru and, citizen or non-citizen, I would say she is in trouble. The perception of whether you are part of the 'we' is filtered through hundreds of years of history of imperialism, capitalism, racism and genderism and fundamentalism. She will press all the alarm buttons precisely because she is a good global citizen. I also have colleagues who think their white male faces and accents will save them, but I know it will not: they are clearly identifiable as disloyal citizens and will not be getting ID cards that say otherwise. That is how it works and we are normalising that oppressive culture. Within it comes the culture of abuse of power and persons, whether petty or not, that we lived with for years and years. It also creates a culture of stupidity.

To give you a simple example: there is a well-known story of a bank robbery in Tyrone during the 'Troubles'. The local police arrived but could not figure out how the robbers got away. The police had done everything they needed to do once the alarm was raised, completely sealing off exit streets, rounding up all the usual suspects, and stopping every rough-looking person they could find in the street. They, of course, had to let important people, officials, through without question to go about their lawful business – that is men who carried brief cases, drove expensive cars, wore pinstriped suits, and could have produced ID cards.

Apparently this is how the robbers got through, they had English accents, good haircuts, good suits that fitted them and they drove very expensive cars. They took all of the money out of the bank and said 'good evening officer' at the checkpoint. They knew there would be a checkpoint and they could get through it because, from experience, they knew the decision to stop and check would be filtered through culture and prejudice. They knew if somebody robbed a bank during the 'Troubles' every person who had ever said anything against the government would be a suspect, but people who looked like they owned the bank, worked for and supported the government would not.

People used to be stopped at roadblocks all the time. Why? In the hope that the underpaid part-time officer would randomly stumble on a dangerous terrorist? There were citizens sitting in cars, rolling down their windows, being abused by uniformed officers whilst guns were being passed over hedges or taken around the country in small boats, uninterrupted. There is a wealth of evidence in Northern Ireland for those who want to counter terrorism that there are easier and more effective ways of doing so than making the entire population queue up at roadblocks. It leads to abuse of the people who you do not like, the letting through of the people you think you do like, and suspicion against the people who will not produce identity cards. Technology, intelligence and creativity are actually not the hallmarks and exclusive preserve of those in power. Identity cards will also not work because at some early point somebody will be making a fortune out of forging them. There is also the idea that you can have a culture of abusing peoples' rights, through a measure like identity cards, and be protected from people's anger over it. You cannot. A measure like ID cards will not protect those who control society from the wrath of those who do not. Our own history proves to us that if you want to control something, violation of human rights is not the way to do it. You simply end up with a culture of abuse from the front line of the police officer, the immigration officer, the person at the job's desk and

the person at the housing desk. It is not just a naked power abused on the front line by police and immigration officers: it goes further up the chain where abuse is more hidden but information is abused and knowledge is abused.

This happens in the financial markets. In the village of Coalisland, where we were defined as a terrorist community, amongst the things that we did not get was access to be private finance. Up until the peace none of us could get mortgages, you could not get a Marks and Spencer's card. It did not matter how much money you had, you could not access credit because the abuse of information in one area was shared amongst the people who share the spoils of system. Ironically, we were protected from current financial turmoil up until the peace as forced to live within our means we had little debt. Knowledge can be abused within policing, housing, employment, and elsewhere. This means alienation builds up. Identity cards are not solving anything for us. Society's need for identity card is the simplest, starkest indication of what is wrong with our society and our belief that some magical piece of technology will protect us from all the things we fear.

Through this focus on identity as eligibility, your own identity (whether you like it or not) is channelled into a very narrow concept of national status and compliance with defined national cultural traits and loyalties. The focus on identity cards is doing what we were supposed to be doing away with, and bringing back the whole concept of supremacy of nationalisms. You have to be a British citizen to determine whether or not you are one of us, or one of them. Within that definition of British citizenship, it is to be determined whether you are a British citizen who can be relied on or a British citizen who needs extra control. If you are not a British citizen at all you will be monitored and treated differently, you will always be vulnerable to alienation, victimisation, exclusion.

There is no human rights justification for identity cards. Using territorial citizenship and ethnicity as justification for diminishing human rights reinforces the belief that some human beings can be entirely disposed of without concern. It will signal a significant step towards the destruction of limited liberal democracy and the resurrection of fascism as an acceptable ideology. Intentionally or not, identity cards are a first step in that direction and we should not allow them.