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Thomas, Paul

Enacting the Unenactable - The Local State and Britain's Prevent Programme

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Enacting the Un-Enactable?
The Local State and Britain’s Prevent programme

Paul Thomas
European experiences of radicalisation and counter-radicalisation - critical approaches: Sciences Po
25th October 2013
Britain’s Prevent – a complex ‘hearts and minds’ counter-terrorism programme

Until 2011, two separate national state departments involved (Home Office/DCLG)

Direct work with Muslim young people and communities through a large number of local authorities

Also work with young offenders and prisoners

Enhanced surveillance arrangements around Universities

Large number of new Police posts and CTUs

Distinct historical phases and clearly identifiable tensions
Prevent – local enactment

- A new phase in British multiculturalism – ‘policed multiculturalism’ (Ragazzi, 2012)?
- British multiculturalist policy and practice has significantly developed from the ground upwards – understanding local experience and enactment is important
- Drawing on my empirical research around enactment of both community cohesion (Thomas, 2007; 2011) and Prevent (Thomas, 2009; 2010; 2012) in the north of England
Available Now!
Prevent: what the evidence suggests

- Prevent has always been seen as highly problematic and largely counter-productive by local state policy-makers and practitioners implementing it.
- Post 2001 multiculturalist policy of community cohesion has much more support as an anti-extremism approach but Prevent contradicts it.
- This highlights that the problem with Britain’s Prevent has not just been organisational (i.e. unhelpful overlaps or confused delivery structures) but a fundamental, conceptual one – at ground level, both the analysis and preferred solution/approach of Prevent have NOT been accepted as helpful or achievable.
- Prevent Review of 2011 did NOT solve this conceptual problem, just obscure it. Prevent is now more securitised than before.
Community Cohesion?

- A significant policy shift post-2001 riots
- Focus on dangers of ‘parallel lives’ and problem of ‘hot’ (McGhee, 2006), separatist and mutually antagonistic identifications within an increasingly diverse society
- Inherent problematisation here of previous policy phase of ‘political multiculturalism’
- Discursive shift and political attacks on multiculturalism suggest a lurch back to assimilationism, but ground level evidence (Thomas, 2011) suggests a ‘re-balancing’ of multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2009) towards greater concern with commonality
- Key vehicle for this commonality is cross-community work, utilising ‘contact theory’ and focussing on common issues to de-racialise social perceptions
Implementing Prevent on the Ground

• Involving DCLG/Local authorities (with their wider focus on cohesion and equalities work) was a deliberate strategy:

‘There was a deliberate attempt to get the Local Government Department to lead this, and to try and do it in a way that is based on the locality and not the ethnicity’ (Sir David Omand, APPGHS, 2011:106).

• However, local authorities (for example in West Yorkshire: Husband and Alam, 2011) saw this as immediately problematic in that they saw cross-community cohesion work as the most effective response, but government insisted that Prevent work should be with Muslims only and be organisationally distinct from cohesion

• Prevent rapidly implemented with heavy national government pressure (NI 35), but there was initially a parallel cohesion policy agenda and comparable funding
Implementing Prevent on the Ground

Conceptual problems of Prevent implementation were clear from the start:

- Prevent title was consistently avoided in practice because of its stigmatising terrorism connections, so young people and communities have often been unaware of the true purpose/funding of work (e.g. Kirklees call it ‘Pathfinder Project’)
- Very considerable funding for strengthening local Muslim civil society (with some inevitable positive outcomes) within essentialised and reified ‘Muslim faith’ communities– anti-terrorism funding for mundane community development, with a simplistic deployment of ‘radicalisation’ (Kundnani, 2012) and inevitable resentment within ‘at risk but risky’ (Heath-Kelly, 2012) Muslim communities
- Very predictable ‘virulent envy’ (Birt, 2009) from other communities not receiving funding – replicating antagonisms that drove 2001 northern riots and the on-going ‘white backlash’, and explicitly contradicting policy recommendations of Cantle (2001) and the Commission on Cohesion and Integration (2007) re. future multiculturalist policy/funding approaches
- Clear evidence of increasing Police/CTU control, even within actual community-based delivery (Knight, 2010)
Implementing Prevent on the Ground

Much local Prevent work has avoided actual political/social drivers of radicalisation/terrorism (Thomas, 2009) because of lack of policy and practitioner clarity/confidence about purpose and content of Prevent:

- Incoming DCLG Minister (2008/9) John Denham identified:

  *I found in the DCLG, after some very rigorous examinations with officials that there was no understood model of how Prevent was meant to work.*

(O’Toole et al, 2013:57)
These conceptual problems were inter-related to organisational problems:

- *It’s virtually the same individuals who are involved in the cohesion bit that are predominantly involved in the Prevent.* (O’Toole et al, 2013:61)
- National government pressure to implement Prevent and its local multi-agency structures meant neglect of the developing community cohesion policy agenda – local structures on this weak or absent in comparison in West Yorkshire (Monro et al, 2010) (but national funding for cohesion did continue until 2010)
- This local Prevent overshadowing of community cohesion was replicated nationally - O’Toole at al (2013:57) quote a senior civil servant at the OSCT as acknowledging that, because of the sheer power of OSCT, ‘so what happened was Prevent took over Cohesion’. 
Prevent’s Crisis Points

• ‘Spooked’ (IRR, 2009) allegations of large-scale surveillance reflected both the ‘embedding’ of Police/CTU within mundane community education and engagement, and Muslim perceptions of being targeted as an entire community

• CLG Select Community saw this as an opportunity to get their department/local authorities out of a policy programme that they did not support

• Evidence submissions clearly showed Prevent as ‘failed and friendless’ (Thomas, 2010) – either too much or too little securitised focus!

• Committee Recommendations apparently called for organisational change but were actually making a fundamental, conceptual challenge to Prevent per se
2011 Prevent Review – The worst of all worlds?

• Organisational change of DCLG removal from Prevent and reduction in ‘Prevent-funded’ local areas from 80/90 to 28 – succeeded in taking Prevent off media/political radar

• However, all local autonomy/Muslim community involvement ended and now rigid national control of all Prevent activity by OSCT in London- further securitisation of state/Muslim relationship

• Meanwhile, community cohesion/Integration (DCLG, 2012) policy has been completely dismantled – end to all funding, guidance and monitoring on this policy area, whilst same local authority staff responsible still have to actually deliver Prevent

• Prevent Review represented triumph of ‘values-based’ (Birt, 2009) approach that questions attitudes of Muslims per se – as shown in Cameron’s Munich speech
Contact details

Paul Thomas
School of Education and Professional Development,
University of Huddersfield, UK

d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk