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Youth, terrorism and education: Britain's Prevent programme

Paul Thomas (University of Huddersfield, UK)

Abstract

*Since the 7/7 bombings of July 2005, Britain has experienced a domestic terror threat posed by a small minority of young Muslims. In response, Britain has initiated 'Prevent', a preventative counter-terrorism programme. Building on previous, general critiques of Prevent, this article outlines and critically discusses the ways in which Prevent has approached young Muslims and their educational institutions. The article argues that, rather than trust in broader and non-stigmatising processes of anti-extremist education, the police-led Prevent has 'engaged' with and surveilled young Muslims. Within Prevent there is little evidence of educational processes that explicitly build youth resilience against extremism. Instead, Muslim youth are viewed as both 'risky and at risk' (Heath-Kelly, 2013), 'at risk' of catching the terrorist disease, with the contested model of 'radicalisation' and child protection concepts utilised to portray risks of exploitation by Islamist extremists that necessitate a deepening process of education-based surveillance. The article identifies non-stigmatising alternatives to the approach of Prevent, approaches of anti-extremism education that learn from previously problematic anti-racist educational efforts with white young people. This enables the article to advocate for enhanced human rights-based approaches of citizenship education (admittedly, in themselves contested) with **all** young people as the most effective way of building individual and collective youth resilience against terrorist ideologies.*

Key Words: Education, Extremism, Terrorism, Youth, Muslims.

Introduction

In recent years, a number of western states have faced the challenge of domestic Islamist terrorism (Ragazzi, 2014b; Neumann, 2011; Government of Canada, 2011). Whilst the term 'terrorism' itself remains highly-contested (Gupta, 2008), particularly in light of the role played by western powers such as the USA and Britain in Iraq and Afghanistan, western states face the reality of small numbers of their Muslim citizens engaging in domestic terrorist planning and actions. This new threat pre-dates the current Syria crisis and arguably also pre-dates 9/11 and the so-called 'war on terror' (Thomas, 2012). A specific response to this threat has been policy approaches aimed to prevent and disrupt attraction towards such Islamist terrorist ideologies and actions, particularly amongst young people.

Britain was an early adopter of such a policy approach in the wake of the 7/7 London bombings of July 2005, which were carried out by four young men brought up in the north of England. This led to the rapid activation of 'Prevent' (DCLG, 2007a and b), a previously dormant strand of Britain's overall CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (Home Office, 2003). Since its inception in 2007, Britain's Prevent strategy has been both significantly influential on policy approaches adopted by other western states and highly-controversial domestically. Richard English (2009) argues that how states respond to terrorism is crucial, with a disproportionate reaction of repression, restrictions on civil liberties and scape-goating of specific communities representing effective victory for the terrorists. From this perspective, the adoption of a

policy approach aimed at prevention through community engagement and education should have been a positive development. However, I have previously argued (Thomas, 2009, 2010; 2012) that the reality of Prevent in Britain has been highly problematic, and possibly even counter-productive, in the way it has been conceived and implemented. That broad critique contended that Prevent has stigmatised entire Muslim communities, has blatantly contradicted the new approach to multiculturalist policy known as 'community cohesion' and represented a significant securitisation of British society.

This article develops a more specific focus on how Prevent has approached its priority target group of Muslim young people and their educational institutions (DCLG, 2008; HMG, 2011; Home Office, 2014) and the troubling direction of this work. In its initial phase of 2007-2011, Prevent prioritised making contact with young Muslims through youth and community-based settings; more recently, the priority focus has shifted towards formal educational settings of schools, colleges and Universities and is so deepening the problematic features of the programme. Throughout Prevent's history, there has been little evidence of encouragement of and support for educational processes that explicitly build youth resilience against extremism. In particular, I identify here the failure to invest in and trust processes of political and citizenship education for young people that directly address the challenge of extremist ideologies, and which re-enforce processes, standards and embodied values of equal, democratic citizenship. I argue that the absence of such processes of 'educating against extremism' (Davies, 2008) leaves Prevent unbalanced and tilting heavily toward a securitised engagement with and surveillance of Muslim youth that is now being deepened. Here, Britain's Prevent is

misappropriating child protection concepts (Coppock and McGovern, 2014) to increase surveillance of Muslim youth in formal education, an approach normatively justified by the unfolding Syria/Iraq crisis and by political exploitation of moral panics regarding supposed Muslim 'extremist' influence on British state schools (Clarke, 2014; Miah, 2014).

This article challenges Prevent's approach to youth and instead advocates for human-rights-based citizenship education processes (Osler and Starkey, 2000), in both schools or community-based settings, that allow controversial political issues to be debated by young people of all backgrounds openly and does so through processes that operationalise and embody the democratic norms and equal citizenship that western states are supposedly defending in the face of domestic and international terrorism. In doing so, it acknowledges that such an educational approach to extremism is in itself controversial, in that this stress on individual, human rights-based citizenship has been portrayed as Eurocentric and in conflict with the more collectivist cultures and values of many minority communities (Kiwani, 2008). It nevertheless argues that this approach can be a constructive vehicle for addressing racism, Islamophobia and inequality, as well as developing resilience against terrorism. Here, the resilience against extremist ideologies is resilience within and between communities, rather than simply individual. More importantly, the citizenship education approach advocated provides a positive and inclusive basis for policy, rather than the negative and stigmatising approach of Prevent's surveillance system.

To do this, the article first provides a factual overview of the development and approach of Britain's Prevent programme since 2007. It then summarises the

key critiques of the Prevent programme per se, critiques that provide the context for the more detailed critical analysis of Prevent's approach to young people and educational institutions that the article goes on to develop. This enables the article to argue for policy approaches that support, enable and trust educators to develop genuine programmes of anti-extremism education. Such approaches are, the article argues, the only effective contribution that Prevent and similar policies can make to challenging terrorism and ideologies that support it.

Britain's Prevent programme

The development of Britain's Prevent programme can be charted through two distinct phases. 'Prevent 1' ran from its inception under the-then Labour government in 2007 until the 2011 Prevent Review (HMG, 2011) initiated by the new Coalition government. 'Prevent 2' has run from 2011 to date. Whilst there have been some aspects on continuity within and between these phases, there have also been significant adjustments during each phase. These adjustments partly reflect unexpected events – Britain did not originally envision a domestic threat and so had to rapidly create Prevent in the wake of 7/7 (Hewitt, 2008); similarly the radicalising effects of the Syria crisis have provided new challenges. These adjustments also reflect tensions and different perspectives within national government (between different government departments and between different political parties during the 2010-2015 Coalition government: Thomas, 2012; 2014), and between the national state and the local government bodies being asked to implement Prevent.

Prevent 1 was rapidly operationalised through an initial 'pathfinder' year of 2007-8 and then significantly expanded between the 2008 and 2011 period

(Thomas, 2009; 2010). This development involved funding to all local authority areas having a certain number of Muslim residents via the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), attempts to develop more polyphonic consultation structures with Muslim communities (particularly with women and young people) both nationally and locally, promotion of more 'moderate' forms of Islamic practice through initiatives such as the 'Radical Middle Way' roadshow and over 300 dedicated Police and Counter-Terrorism Unit posts via the security-focused Home Office and its Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). Together, this programme represented almost £150 million pounds of spending on a programme described as purely being about community engagement, rather than crime detection (Thomas, 2012). Local authorities took a variety of approaches, with some distributing all monies to Muslim community organisations (Kundnani, 2009), while others used it to develop their own programmes. A significant priority nationally was developing contact with Muslim young people through youth work (e.g. Lowndes and Thorp, 2010) and the development of Muslim civil society, such as greater training for staff of Mosque schools (Thomas, 2008).

The rapidly-increasing dominance of the Police in the direction and even delivery of local Prevent work (Thomas, 2014) prompted hostile press coverage, accusations of 'spying' (Kundnani, 2009) and a critical Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry (House of Commons, 2010). The incoming Coalition government first paused the programme then launched a revised 'Prevent 2' in June 2011 (HMG, 2011). This removed the DCLG from the programme and focussed on a significantly smaller number of local authorities, supposedly identified on an intelligence basis. Funding for this work was to be centrally controlled by the OSCT, with this and the continuing Police element of Prevent emphasising the increasingly securitised nature of the programme. A new

priority was the 'Channel' project, a scheme whereby young people viewed as 'vulnerable' to radicalisation would be referred for individual counselling. This was to be supported by training through the 'Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent' (WRAP) for front-line professionals, such as teachers and health workers, on how to spot signs of individual radicalisation. Nevertheless, the public profile of the Prevent scheme seemed to be reducing until the twin events of the 2013 Islamist murder of a soldier in London and the Syria crisis led to a re-energising and re-growth of Prevent (HMG, 2013). In particular, focus was now on formal education with large-scale WRAP training for educators and a new legal duty on schools, Universities and other public bodies to implement Prevent. Alongside this, has come a new requirement for schools to promote 'fundamental British values' (Richardson and Bolloten, 2014).

Prevent - conceptually flawed?

Despite the adjustments to Prevent's approach outlined above, three fundamental conceptual problems can be identified with the programme from its inception to date. They are the way it has approached British Muslims as a single, essentialised community; the contradiction between Prevent and wider policy approaches of community cohesion; and the increasingly securitised nature of a programme supposedly about community engagement and education. Each of these is briefly outlined below.

From the start, Prevent insisted on focussing only on Muslims (DCLG, 2007a and b), with the terror threat portrayed as a problem of Islamic practice and community life, and utilised questionable concepts of 'conveyer belt' journeys

to 'radicalisation' (Kundnani, 2012). For instance, guidance to local authorities on Prevent's implementation talked of the need for '*demonstrable changes in attitudes amongst Muslims*' (DCLG, 2007b, p.7). An external, and highly critical, evaluation of activity in Prevent 1 concluded that: *We have been unable...to document any practical Prevent work in the community that is not directed in some way at Muslim communities.* (Kundnani, 2009, p.24). Such a frank state focus on British Muslims per se and on leadership and religious interpretation within Muslim communities prompted the allegation that Muslims had replaced the Irish as Britain's 'suspect community' within (Hickman et al, 2010). This explicit state concern with an essentialised Muslim community was also portrayed as part of a wider moral panic about the new 'folk devils', Muslim young men (Alexander, 2004), and as part of racism's wider shift to concerns with culture, rather than colour (Hall, 2000).

This Prevent engagement **did** involve very significant funding for generic community development activity within Muslim communities, and some benefits for Muslim civil society and participation in governance have been identified (O'Toole et al, 2015). However, this support came from an explicitly anti-terrorism programme. Muslim communities themselves understandably felt stigmatised by such a widespread focus on their entire community being justified through the actions of a handful of individual terrorists (House of Commons, 2010), whilst Prevent 1 explicitly avoided consideration of far-right/racist extremism (Thomas, 2012). Prevent 2 did formally extend the programme's focus to all types of extremism but there is little evidence to date of focus on non-Islamist extremism. A further development of Prevent 2 (HMG, 2013) mentions racism but its recommendations are all about 'oversight of religious supplementary schools' (p.5), 'extremist preachers' (p.6) in

Universities and the need for 'Muslim chaplains' in prisons (p.6). The perception that Prevent continues to be about Muslims was highlighted by schools in an area of Britain where far-right racism has been an issue assessing their majority white pupils as 'no risk' and stating that 'staff continue to monitor BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) cohort' (Newman, 2015).

Community cohesion was the new British policy approach to ethnic relations launched in 2001 following riots in northern towns and cities that largely involved young Muslims. The resulting community cohesion analysis identified ethnic 'parallel lives', ethnic physical and cultural segregation and associated racialized tensions, and the need to overcome these through policy approaches that prioritised commonality, shared values and inter-community contact (Cantle, 2001). This was portrayed by many academic commentators as a retreat from multiculturalism and as a re-assertion of assimilationism in this stress on commonality (Alexander, 2004; Flint and Robinson, 2008).

However, it is important to identify that many aspects of British multiculturalism have either been created from ground-level upwards, such as multicultural education, or have been significantly mediated and 'enacted' (Braun et al, 2011) by ground-level 'policy practitioners' (Jones, 2013) and front-line professionals. For that reason, the meaning of community cohesion can only be deduced from study of how it has been understood and operationalised at ground level. Here, my previous study (Thomas, 2011) of how youth and community workers in Oldham, Greater Manchester (scene of one of the 2001 riots) were enacting community cohesion showed that they were acknowledging, working with and even celebrating distinct ethnic, faith and social youth identifications but were augmenting them with stronger forms of commonality operationalised through approaches based on 'contact

theory' (Hewstone et al, 2007) and utilising a human rights-based conception of complex individual identifications (McGhee, 2006). This evidence suggested that community cohesion was both a re-naming and a 're-balancing' (Meer and Modood, 2009) of multiculturalism, rather than its demise.

Because of the significant ground-level support for this cohesion policy approach (Thomas, 2014), Prevent was unwanted and seen as a simply contradictory policy by many local authorities, including those in West Yorkshire, home of 7/7 bombers, (Husband and Alam, 2011). These local authorities fully recognised the domestic terror threat but simply didn't accept that the Prevent strategy was a helpful way forward. Instead, they wanted to tackle extremist ideologies and community tensions through the non-stigmatising policy approach of 'community cohesion' which saw extremism as having fertile ground in segregated monocultural communities. The results of the top-down imposition of Prevent were predictable. Non-Muslim communities displayed a 'virulent envy' (Birt, 2009) of the considerable resources directed at Muslims-only, despite government advisers suggesting that ethnic-specific funding was causal to the 2001 riots (Cantle, 2001; Thomas, 2011) and the more general sense of 'unfairness' at the heart of the 'white backlash' (Hewitt, 2005; Thomas and Sanderson, 2013) against multiculturalist policy approaches. Whilst under Prevent 1 there was at least comparable support for both community cohesion and Prevent, under Prevent 2 the Coalition government officially ended any national support for, and interest in, community cohesion (or 'integration', as they now termed it: DCLG, 2012), saying this was purely a local matter. Britain now has an increasingly centralised and securitised Prevent strategy and no national cohesion strategy at all (Thomas, 2014).

Prevent's central focus on 'radicalisation' and pathways towards it meant that, from early on, counter-terrorism Police became increasingly dominant in local Prevent direction (Bahadur Lamb, 2012) and even direct implementation with communities (Knight, 2010). This led to two malign effects. Firstly, although the Labour government funded community cohesion on an equal basis until their electoral defeat in 2010, the Police-led Prevent progressively squeezed out cohesion structures and activity at the local level (Thomas, 2014). Secondly, this increasing dominance of Prevent over cohesion, and the increasing domination of Police/CTU within Prevent, led to understandable perceptions of spying on Muslim communities and the educational professionals working with those communities (Kundnani, 2009).

The Coalition's approach of 'Prevent 2' was not to alter the logic and approach of Prevent but simply to down-size it by reducing the number of funded local authorities. This had the effect of further securitising Prevent by making its overall budget more weighted towards the Police/CTU element and by insisting that all activity carried out by local funded areas had to be approved by the Police/CTU-dominated OSCT in London, so removing local autonomy and the possibility within that of local Muslim community groups demonstrating Prevent leadership.

'Engagement', not education

Despite these flaws, Prevent has represented a very substantial policy engagement (Stuart Hall described it as '*an unparalleled internal penetration of an ethnic community*'; BBC, 2011) with British Muslims and young Muslims in particular. In doing so, it has demonstrated an apparent unwillingness to learn

from previous, problematic attempts to operationalise anti-extremist/anti-racist strategies with white young people holding strong racist views. Here, there has been significant engagement but very little actual 'educating against extremism' (Davies, 2008).

The scale of this engagement was particularly marked in the 'Prevent 1' phase of 2007-2011. National government boasted of engaging with almost 50,000 young Muslims in the initial year of 2007/8 (DCLG, 2008) and community-based, youth-focussed activities formed a very significant part of local Prevent programmes in the subsequent expansion (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; Iacopini et al, 2011; Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012). Such analysis of local programmes identified that large numbers of young Muslims were being engaged with in Muslim-only projects because of Prevent's logic and policy strictures (Prevent work with ethnically-mixed groups of youth was specifically ruled out: Thomas, 2008; 2012). The dangers of such a policy approach to Muslim youth, with the inherent suggestion of an entire, essentialised community having problematic features, should have been learnt from previous British attempts to operationalise anti-racist education with white young people through both youth work and schools. There, some working class white young people understood such ethnically-targeted strategies as negatively judging the language, manners and values of their 'racist' community with sanctions such as school detentions or expulsion from youth projects being deployed for individuals displaying 'racist' views. The effects of such approaches were to cause a racialised resentment, a feeling of unfairness, and to drive racist sentiment underground, rather than enable its educational interrogation. Such white youth resentment was described by Roger Hewitt (2005) as the 'white backlash'.

Alongside the large-scale Prevent engagement with young Muslims outlined above was clear evidence of a lack of actual educational discussion and processes. Kundnani (2009) identified Prevent funding cricket lessons for young Muslims in Wakefield whilst my own evaluation (Thomas, 2008) of early Prevent work in neighbouring Kirklees (home of two of the 7/7 bombers) found good general youth work with young Muslims being enabled by Prevent but no overt or meaningful engagement with issues of extremism. Such work was explicitly criticised by Police agencies during the Select Committee Prevent Inquiry (House of Commons, 2010) as simply being 'cohesion' work but, of course, it wasn't genuine cohesion as it could only involve Muslims.

This led me to suggest previously that Prevent was 'between two stools' (Thomas, 2009), neither cross-community cohesion work nor actual political education work with young Muslims. This was not surprising, as the history of anti-racist work with white young people was that many youth workers avoided doing it because they felt ill-prepared or unsupported for such work. Action research (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002) with such youth workers in West Yorkshire identified 'avoidance' by workers who had received no training in how to effectively facilitate open and robust dialogue around issues of 'race' and racism. Workers were also unclear whether managers were actually supporting them to have such dialogue, when it could well involve the use of racist terminology and the expression of extreme political perspectives within the (publicly funded) educational spaces. The UK Youth Parliament (2009), a national body elected by young people, quickly identified this skills deficit problem for Prevent. They had run their own Prevent-funded initiative, Project Safe Space, which was one of the very few Prevent projects that brought young people of different ethnic backgrounds together to openly discuss contentious political issues such as Britain's involvement in Iraq and the Israel/Palestine

conflict, seeing such debate-based political engagement processes as the embodiment of a democratic youth response to extremism. Their debates were carefully facilitated, leading UKYP to propose a national programme of youth worker training to support political education processes in the name of Prevent. Government rejected this proposal, and any subsequent Prevent training has focused on practitioner 'awareness' of extremist ideologies and 'vulnerabilities', through the so-called WRAP training (Blackwood et al, 2012), not on the skills of facilitating open political dialogue and debate.

What this Prevent engagement with young Muslims has shown is a similar binary approach to that inherent in the 'clumsy' anti-racism identified by the Burnage Report in to the racist murder of a young Asian student at a Manchester High School (Macdonald, 1989). There, White young people who were 'racist' had to be policed and sanctioned in to be 'not racist'; young Muslims now showing signs of becoming 'radical' must similarly be surveilled, policed and guided through their 'vulnerability' (see below) towards returning to 'moderation'. This simplistic and binary understanding of youth racism or extremism (or, at least, utterances and actions that appear to be 'extreme') denies the fluid and contingent nature of much youth racism or extremism, as well as the extent to which such language or apparent attitudes can be a performative (Cockburn, 2007) youth response to youth conflicts or perceptions of authoritarian enforcement (Hewitt, 2005) by teachers and Police officers.

Prevent did briefly suggest that it would develop a genuinely educational dimension, at least in relation to formal schooling. In 2008, a Prevent Schools 'Toolkit' (DCSF, 2008) was launched. Although stronger on broad approaches than on specific, curriculum-related activities, it did suggest the need for open

dialogue with young people on pressing political issues, supported by programmes of teacher training. However, government failed to sustain this focus and no substantial approach of anti-extremism education developed within schools during Prevent 1. Indeed, a national survey of English schools, commissioned by the previous Labour government but published under the new Coalition government, identified that many schools had no identified co-ordinator on Prevent and had no Prevent activity taking place:

‘Schools appear less confident in their understanding of the Prevent strategy than they are about the statutory duty to promote community cohesion...Confidence appears to be linked to the amount of training received (Phillips et al, 2011, p.12).

Here, in two thirds of schools surveyed no-one had received training on combatting extremism, directly contributing to a situation where *‘only half of schools (49%) use the curriculum to build resistance to violent extremism’* (Phillips et al, 2011, p.12). An implication here was that an issue as peripheral as anti-extremism could not be interfering with the focus on core curriculum subject and educational ‘standards’; This was confirmed by the Coalition government, which officially marginalised Citizenship Studies, the most obvious curriculum vehicle for anti-extremism work, in favour of core academic subjects. They also removed community cohesion from the school inspection framework, so the contrasting, clear understanding of and support for community cohesion in schools found during the previous Labour government (Phillips et al, 2011) is highly likely to have since diminished.

This refusal to invest formal education time on anti-extremist educational work partly explains Prevent 1’s prioritisation of engagement with Muslim youth through community-based programmes. This entailed both ethical dilemmas

for such youth and community workers and personal scrutiny of them, particularly those from Muslim backgrounds. Kundnani (2009) identified youth workers in London being pressured by Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU) staff to pass on details of young Muslims' movements and affiliations, leading to the allegations of spying. In Prevent's community-based youth engagement, Muslim professionals were valued for their community knowledge and insights but also felt to be viewed with suspicion in relation to their personal political stances, leading to a pronounced 'chilling effect' (Husband and Alam, 2011) on what these Muslim professionals felt able to do and say.

More generally, this 'engagement' has become progressively securitised (Noxolo and Huysmans, 2009) as Prevent has developed. This has come through the increasing domination of Police/CTU within local Prevent decision-making and even delivery (Thomas, 2014; Bahadur Lamb, 2012). Police/CTU frustration over the aspects of local Prevent funding allocation they didn't yet control was evident in the Select Committee Inquiry process of 2009/10, with the result that the Prevent Review (HMG, 2011) required all local Prevent plans to be approved by OSCT before any funding is agreed.

'Safeguarding' the vulnerable

This lack of genuine pedagogical activity, of any substantial 'educating against extremism' (Davies, 2008) dimensions, within Prevent can be understood in two inter-related ways. Firstly, it reflects the lack of belief in, or understanding of the potential of, preventative anti-extremism education held by the Police/CTU personnel who dominate this securitised programme locally and nationally (Thomas, 2014). That educational potential is discussed later in the article. Secondly, it reflects the dominant understanding Prevent holds of how and why some Muslim youth may be attracted toward extremist ideologies

and this paradigm and its operationalization with Muslim youth is now discussed. This dominant understanding rests on the 'conveyor belt' theory of radicalisation, the belief that if young people are exposed to 'extreme' political or religious perspectives and groups that espouse them, then they run the grave risk of moving further along the conveyor belt towards actual involvement in extremism. Whilst this model of radicalisation is highly controversial (Kundnani, 2012) in its assumptions about individual motivations and pathways, it has always been central to Prevent and has been strengthened by the Prevent Review's overt foregrounding of a sweeping and ill-defined 'extremism' generally, rather than a more specific violent extremism (HMG, 2011; Ratcliffe, 2012).

Here, Prevent has consistently views young Muslims as both 'risky and at risk' (Heath-Kelly, 2013); 'risky' in the sense that any young Muslims are potentially a threat to a wider society because the threat is inherent within their essentialised community, and 'at risk' because they may well be 'vulnerable' to being seduced and 'groomed' by this Muslim extremism. This perspective utilises Serderberg's (2003) analogy of terrorism as 'disease', a virus that any young Muslim could catch if we allow them to be exposed to extreme Islamist ideologies and those that perpetuate them. This conception of a predatory threat to vulnerable young Muslims leads to Prevent expropriating and utilising child protection concepts of 'safe-guarding', 'grooming' and 'vulnerability'.

Here:

'dominant administrative discourses of 'child protection' are securitised and deployed to underpin this interventionist ethos and state surveillance practice to produce the 'young British Muslim' as both 'suspect' and in need of being 'saved' ' (Coppock and McGovern, 2014, p.243).

From this perspective young Muslims are seen to be in need of permanent scrutiny, with a predictably malign impact on the identity management and mental well-being of many young Muslims . Whilst Prevent approaches an entire, essentialised Muslim community as its object of preventative intent, young Muslims are understood as being individually ‘vulnerable’ to the terrorism disease. Here, any ‘radical’ behaviour or verbal expression is seen as evidence of exploited vulnerability, rather than of either political agency (Coppock and McGovern, 2014) or performative response to authoritarian discourse (Cockburn, 2007).

The most tangible evidence of this approach within Prevent has been the ‘Channel’ multi-agency process of identifying individuals vulnerable to extremism and referring them to approved intervention providers. Whilst at least being based on some tangible criteria for referrals, this represents a controversial ‘future crime’ approach that requires individuals to participate although no actual crime has yet taken place. This fact, and the significant number of young people under 16 years old referred via Channel in its early phase (HMG, 2011), means that such an approach would be viewed as unacceptable in many states on civil liberties grounds (Neumann, 2011). Such an interventionist approach with young Muslims was justified to the House of Commons (2010) Inquiry by Sir Norman Bettison, then Chief Constable of West Yorkshire and terrorism spokesperson for the Association of Chief Police Officers, by reference to Hassib Hussain, the youngest of the 7/7 bombers. Hussain, whilst aged 12 at High School, had drawn graffiti on school books glorifying the 9/11 attacks and Usama Bin-Laden. If Hussain had been referred to a Channel process, argued Bettison, his involvement in the attacks could have been prevented. This, of course, assumes direct connection, indeed causation, between unchecked attitudes at that age and his later terror acts. It

fails, however, to consider how many other young Muslims (or even non-Muslims) drew similar graffiti on their books at the same time but went on to live law-abiding lives.

The responsibility of youth and community workers, teachers and other educational personnel to spot signs of 'radicalisation' and report the individual concerned to the Police and Channel (in reality, the same thing) is re-enforced by the requirement to undergo WRAP training, *'which is designed for public sector professionals who have a duty of care (e.g. teachers, youth workers, health workers)'* (Blackwood et al, 2012, p.223). WRAP stands for 'Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent', with sessions focusing on Prevent procedures and the nature of the terror threat, backed up with more specific input on Islamist extremist (and far-right) ideologies. These 'awareness' sessions foreground individual psychological vulnerabilities within attraction towards extremism, alongside characterisation of the key tenets of 'extreme' Islamist ideologies. Here, as with the broader forms of Prevent engagement, the WRAP approach seems to not consider the possible outcomes, for both Muslims and non-Muslims, of such a sustained, large-scale focus on Muslim extremism and how to spot it, and of how:

'Whether the very act of focussing on minority cultural expression as a sign of danger may be one of the things that sours the relationship between minority groups, officialdom, and majority society more generally' (Blackwood et al, 2012, p.225).

These problematic approaches within British education have been hardened and deepened by the so-called 'Trojan Horse' affair (Miah, 2014), focussed on Muslim-dominated state schools in Birmingham, England's second biggest city. Here, an anonymous letter (almost certainly fake) led to multiple investigations

in to a supposed Islamist extremist take-over of a number of local schools. The inherent assumptions of the political response was shown by the local authority appointing the ex-national Prevent director to lead the local Inquiry whilst the Education Secretary Michael Gove (author of a post-7/7 book that was overtly critical of mainstream attitudes within British Muslim communities; Gove, 2006) appointed Peter Clarke, the former national Police anti-terrorism chief to be his 'educational commissioner'. Despite his background, Clarke asserted that:

'I most definitely was not approaching my role from the perspective of looking for evidence of terrorist activity, radicalism, or violent extremism' (Clarke, 2014, p.7).

This therefore does, of course, beg the question of why he was actually appointed to an **educational** inspection role. This question is answered by Clarke himself, with reference to the Prevent 2 focus on 'extremism' in general, a triumph of the 'values-based' (Birt, 2009) approach that conflates terrorism with types of Islamic religious conservatism or certain perspectives on global political issues:

'By reference to the definition of extremism in the Prevent strand of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST, and the spectrum of extremism described by the Prime Minister in his Munich speech in February 2011, I found clear evidence that there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and governing bodies, who espouse, endorse or fail to challenge extremist views' (Clarke, 2014, p.12).

The reports produced by Clarke, the other Inquiry teams and OFSTED all made clear that the real story here was socially-conservative Muslim activists and

parents attempting to raise educational attainment hand-in-hand with the promotion of more Islamically-conservative cultural norms and practices within the schools, the sort of communitarian, faith-based activism that past and present British governments have ironically encouraged . However, this failure to find the promotion/encouragement of violent extremism did not prevent the government making implementation of the Prevent strategy and the teaching of ‘fundamental British values’ a legal duty for all state schools and something to be actively investigated by external school and college inspections by the government body known as ‘OFSTED’. This was couched in the language of safeguarding:

‘The Department for Education should ensure that the governing body of every school extend the responsibilities of the teacher designated Child Protection Officer to include Prevent within his/her role’ (Clarke, 2014, p.38).

This approach and its operationalization through external inspections, which are central to Britain’s marketised state school and college system, means that Prevent is a major priority for all educational institutions, with educationalists busily inviting police officers in to schools and Further Education (FE) colleges and asking for more WRAP training to demonstrate Prevent compliance to the external inspectors. Anecdotal evidence (private correspondence to author) from a recent OFSTED inspection of a major Further Education college in the north of England suggested that Prevent and its implications for the Muslim (but not white) students was the main focus for the inspection of a college that is crucial to the educational and life chance of many thousands of urban young people. For Gus John, leading educational thinker and Britain’s first Black Chief Education Officer for an English local authority:

‘Under the guise of ‘safeguarding’, schools are being required to act as ‘thought police’ in support of a government agenda’ (John, 2014, p.2)

Here, John sees ‘*OFSTED’s undeclared role as foot soldiers for GCHQ*’ (the British government’s electronic surveillance and interception facility) (ibid:7) as significantly damaging the educational prospects of Muslim young people through the downgrading and maligning of their educational institutions in a direct parallel with the way that Black youth and their communities were racially profiled in the ‘mugging’ moral panic of the 1970s (Gilroy, 2002).

In this securitised focus on schools and colleges that is being enforced and policed by OFSTED, we see a deepening of Prevent’s general approach of ‘responsibilisation’ (McGhee, 2010), with the responsibility for counter-terrorism that focussed on Muslim communities themselves in Prevent 1 now increasingly focussed on all state educationalists and other welfare professionals and their institutions in Prevent 2. It also represents a further embedding of permanent surveillance within Britain’s state education system, justified by a never-ending ‘terrorist threat’, with implications:

‘for children’s practitioners expected to operationalise these official frameworks, specifically in facilitating the extension of Foucauldian practices of governance and discipline of young British Muslims – practices that may be seen to reproduce and perpetuate institutional anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia’ (Coppock and McGovern, 2014, p.243).

Educating against extremism

The sections above have illustrated how Britain’s Prevent strategy has focussed almost exclusively on surveillance of young Muslims, so implicating the educational institutions and professionals working with them, rather than on educational processes that genuinely prevent youth attractions towards

extremism and terrorism. In this way, Prevent has failed to learn anything from problematic past attempts in Britain to develop anti-racist education with white young people displaying strong racist feelings. However, examples of how Prevent can and should develop effective anti-extremism education in a non-stigmatising manner also come from past and present approaches to tackling white racism. The Bede House Project (Dadzie, 1996) took a detached youth work approach to overt and often violent youth racism in Bermondsey, south London. Rather than condemn the young people involved, it be-friended them through traditional youth work approaches and then attempted to offer alternative perspectives and experiences through this engagement by their skilled, multi-racial team. The young people involved were not viewed as inherently 'racist' but as troubled young people with the potential for change and development. Similarly, the 'Think Project' (Cifuentes, 2014), a Welsh-based anti-extremist youth project targeted at white young people understood as vulnerable to far-right and extreme racist ideologies takes a positive and inclusive approach to young people that includes open and robust political education discussions.

These examples, and the previously discussed 'Project Safe Space' (UKYP, 2009), help to illustrate what a genuine educational component of the Prevent strategy might look like. For Lynn Davies (2008), such an anti-extremism educational approach would be very different from a form of multiculturalism that simply preaches tolerance between distinct and separate 'communities'. Echoing community cohesion's critique of the pre-2001 British approach to multiculturalist policy, and so directly contradicting Prevent's essentialised view of the 'Muslim community', Davies argue that education:

‘Should enhance the resistance to such simple labels and characterisations and give children status in the uniqueness and multiplicity of their hybrids’ (2008, p.33).

Here, Davies foregrounds the need to develop an emphasis on complexity, the urgent need for youth political education, and for a direct challenge to conspiracy theories of all kinds. In particular, a much more politicised educational approach to debate and engagement in current controversies is advocated, including:

‘Honesty and critical dialogue about belief systems as well as about social and economic inequality between groups’ (2008, p.98).

Clearly, for such an approach to work within youth work settings and within schools and colleges, certain conditions would need to be present. Firstly, the need to critically consider differing life experiences and perspectives so that young people can hear different voices on current political issues, and experience critiques of their own perspective. This understanding stresses that *‘cognitive dissonance is essential in learning, whether about religion or anything else’* (ibid, p.134) and that political/citizenship education has to be genuinely experiential – it needs to involve hearing, analysing and debating genuinely different perspectives –for it to be successful. This approach to ‘educating against extremism’ argues that it is better to enable young people to voice their feelings, even supposedly extremist or racist ones, so that they can be interrogated and considered. For Gus John, education needs to urgently create :

‘A safe environment where young people can openly share their views, however abhorrent, and have their views subjected to rigorous and informed challenge and debate’ (2014, p. 2).

In an era when such views, and much more extreme versions of them, are readily available to anyone with an internet connection, it is vital that young people are enabled to develop the skills of considering the content, sources and trustworthiness of what they read and hear, and how to find alternative information and perspectives. As the very mixed experience of anti-racist education highlighted (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002), the skills and confidence of educational practitioners is crucial to such anti-extremist education:

‘Skills and confidence need to be developed towards teaching controversial issues and analysing discourse’ (Davies, 2008, p.140).

Yet, currently, Prevent is not encouraging or enabling this type of educational process for educational practitioners. One way forward for schools would be an enhanced focus on citizenship education (Osler, 2000). As community cohesion initially developed under the past Labour government, citizenship education was seen as a vital component before being side-lined. Citizenship education within British (or at least English, given Britain’s increasingly complex and devolved national state) education in the modern era is closely connected with the 1998 Report *‘Education for Citizenship and the teaching of Democracy in Schools’* by Sir Bernard Crick. This directly led to the Citizenship component within the national school curriculum. Key for this report was political literacy, gained through experiential pedagogical approaches (Spencer, 2000), amongst young people but, ‘in practice, many schools have avoided political and structural questions when dealing with the here and now’ (Osler and Starkey, 2000, p.12). This ‘participatory model’ at the heart of

Crick's proposals was directly connected to the issue of how shared values and sense of citizenship can be built in a rapidly changing, multicultural society:

'Just as a sense of belonging or identity may promote participation, the experience of participating can enhance a sense of belonging' (Kiwani, 2008, p. x).

This perspective emphasises that citizenship education is not just about 'horizontal' relationships and respect for 'other' communities but is also about 'vertical' relationships between citizen and the state – the sense that the individual young citizen has real rights as well as responsibilities, some influence over and say in the actions of the state, and has a lived experience of legal and political equality (Kiwani, 2008). Here, though, it must be acknowledged that the human rights-focussed approach of citizenship education, the approach advocated by Davies (2008) as the best educational response to extremist threats, is significantly contested. The individualist model of citizenship inherent in human rights-based approaches can arguably marginalise the experiences and perspectives of minority communities. For Kiwani, such approaches '*do not allow for a critical dialogue between the dominant and minority communities*' (2008, p.16) or necessarily enable distinct identities and experiences to be acknowledged and empowered. This echoes Modood's (2013) caution that overly-secular state approaches will inevitably alienate minority communities, especially Muslims, to whom collective religious identification is a priority. Davies (2008), though, argues that her 'educating against extremism' approach means that confronting social injustice, racism and inequality is integral through processes that acknowledge the strength and reality of group identities and experiences. Here, citizenship education works with these identities but also augments them and so implicitly

de-centres them in the same way as the community cohesion youth practice discussed above (Thomas, 2011).

Central to debates around the nature and content of citizenship education in Britain has been the concept of 'shared values', so demonstrating its close connection to debates around community cohesion (Cantle, 2001). In the wake of the 2001 riots and the 7/7 London bombing, there was much talk of 'British values' and this has now been re-energised following the Trojan Horse affair. Now, all state schools are required to promote 'fundamental British values' (Richardson and Bolloren, 2014), but defining what is 'British' about such values is highly problematic, even before Britain's controversial past and present world role is considered. For Davies:

'What is needed is a properly 'ecumenical' and universal value system, and I would argue that the 'best fit' is to be found in human rights' (2008, p.159).

This perspective emphasises that young people have rights **now**, not just when they reach voting age, that they also have responsibilities and that these rights belong to them individually, not to their community 'leaders'. More importantly, human rights is an ethical system, not a belief system, and its use within genuine programmes of overt, anti-extremist education would decisively foreground the rights and responsibilities that all people, no matter what their background, belief system or political persuasion, must abide by in a democratic, diverse society.

Conclusion

The above discussions have attempted to illustrate just how much Britain's Prevent has focussed on young Muslims, yet how little educational content there has been within its programmes. In focussing on Muslims as an

essentialised community, Prevent is clearly contradictory to community cohesion. By focussing on an entire Muslim community, Prevent inherently stigmatises and risks hardening defensive and identifications within Muslim youth, as clumsy anti-racism did with some white communities previously. It also shows no signs of learning the lessons from those previous attempts to develop anti-racist education. Prevent, through its conveyor belt theory of radicalisation, appears to replicate the simplistic binary of racist/not racist that fatally undermined many approaches to anti-racist education. Here, there is no sense of youth (racist/extremist) attitudes being fluid, conditional or even performative (Cockburn, 2007), and no apparent understanding of identifications as multiple and contingent. The characterisation of the scale and urgency of the terrorist threat (itself highly contentious in relation to other social threats that young people face) means that genuine processes of education are seen as a luxury that Prevent cannot afford, whilst the supposed vulnerability to radicalisation is simply portrayed as an individual one from which individual young Muslims must be safe-guarded.

These malign understandings have combined to leave Prevent as being all about securitised surveillance and failing to develop a meaningful component of 'educating against extremism' (Davies, 2008). However, given the ready availability of extremist material via the internet and the chronic reality of the international conflicts and national inequalities driving narratives of community grievance, there has never been a more important time to invest in programmes of political education with youth that not only educate about equal democratic citizenship but which embody its principles, norms and values. Only through such citizenship education, with a human rights framework at its core, will young people be equipped with the individual and peer group resilience to examine and reject ideologies that promote hatred

and violence. The current, counter-productive situation of securitised surveillance being prioritised by Britain's Prevent programme, and the apparent acceptance of this reality by British educationalists, suggests that terrorism may be winning after all.

Paul Thomas is Professor of Youth and Policy at the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield, UK. Over a number of years he has researched how key British multiculturalist policies such as community cohesion and Prevent have been understood and enacted by educationalists and community workers at ground level, leading to articles in leading peer-reviewed journals, and two sole-authored monographs.

Email: d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk

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