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Thomas, Paul

A 'tainted brand'? Britain's Prevent programme

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# A 'Tainted Brand'?

## Britain's Prevent Programme

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

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# 7/7 and its impacts



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# Starting Questions from Britain's experience



- What are these 'soft' counter-terrorism policies actually about – what is their purpose?
- To what extent can they actually prevent any acts of terrorism – what is the predictive power of models of 'radicalisation'?
- Is the 'resilience' they seek to create just about vulnerable individuals or is it resilience within and between communities?
- Are these policies proportionate and justifiable – do they uphold democratic values?

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# Ground-level research on extremism prevention in practice



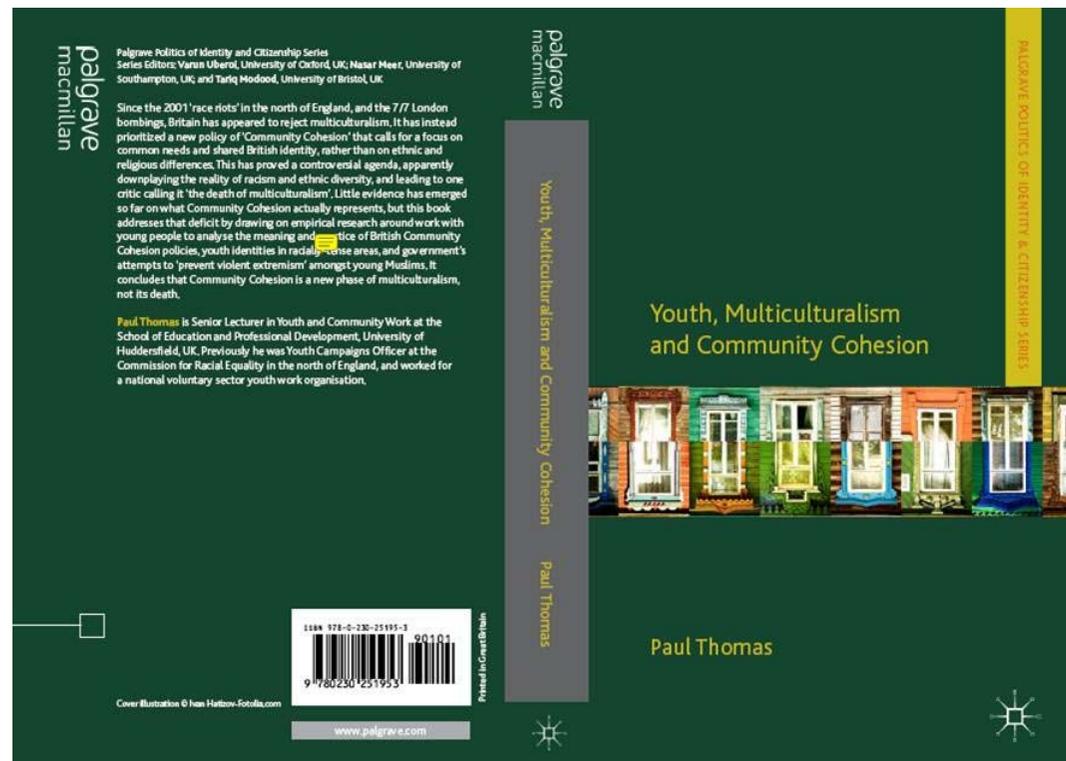
- ‘*Open Talk, Open Minds*’ – anti-racist work with white young people
- Community Cohesion/integration in youth work and community work practice
- Implementing Prevent
- Prevent, extremism and youth identifications
- White community attitudes to integration and to far-right protest groups
- The ‘Think Project’ anti-extremism education

Implementation of British multiculturalist policies has often looked very different at ground level – the importance of local experience

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# Local evidence – British multiculturalism is NOT dead!



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# The evidence on Prevent

- It has changed and adapted significantly since its origins in 2007, both within and between its two distinct phases ('Prevent 1': 2007-2011; 'Prevent 2': 2011 onwards)
- There have been significant tensions over it within the national state and between the national state and local authorities
- The charge that it is simply a 'spying programme' is (was?) too simplistic because of Muslim agency/involvement in it... BUT
- Prevent has very significant flaws which I argue have not been addressed and are actively becoming more problematic
- This leads to genuine debate about whether this Prevent programme is actually counter-productive

# Prevent 1: 2007-2011

- Funding for **all** local authorities with a certain number of Muslim residents – Prevent 1 was explicitly only about Muslims
- A strong focus within this on youth and on building the capacity of local Muslim civic society and representation
- National programmes of different/’moderate’ Muslim voices/leadership (youth/women) and religious practice
- Over 300 dedicated Police posts purely for ‘engagement’(this element continues)

# Prevent 2: 2011 onwards

- Local authority programme is very significantly scaled down and is entirely controlled by London counter-terrorism centre (OSCT) – local government department (DCLG) completely removed from Prevent and now little/no funding for Muslim organisations
- Police programme continues so now Prevent resources are overwhelmingly Police salaries
- Much more emphasis on the ‘Channel’ programme of counter-radicalisation counselling for individuals identified as ‘at risk’, not just of ‘violent extremism’ but ‘extremism’ generally
- Large-scale training of public servants on how to ‘spot’ and refer individuals ‘at risk’ and legal duty imposed on all public bodies to enact this approach

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# Prevent's flaws and problems

- A counter-productive focus on Muslims as an entire community
- A blatant contradiction to policies of Community Cohesion/Integration
- The centrality of the problematic concept of 'radicalisation'
- The securitisation of education and community relations
- The lack of educational approaches that build genuine community resilience and which uphold our democratic

values

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# A counter-productive focus on Muslims as an entire community



- Large-scale funding for Muslim groups in Prevent 1 created 'resource envy' from other communities
- Its scale hardened resentment and fears within Muslim communities over this state scrutiny – disproportionate to the threat and ignoring far-right racism
- Very significant community development work within Muslim communities but from counter-terrorism funding
- Funding caused splits within communities and often went to traditional/conservative 'leaders' in practice

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# A blatant contradiction to policies of Community Cohesion/Integration



- Community Cohesion policy shift from 2001 identified that focus on and support from distinct and separate ethnic 'communities' was now counter-productive.
- Cohesion sees extremism as more able to grow in segregated communities
- Instead, a shift to focus on commonality and contact work between communities – this is/was very strongly supported by local policy-makers and practitioners
- Prevent was a total contradiction to this
- In Prevent 1 there was parallel cohesion funding but Prevent squeezed cohesion work out; in Prevent 2 all national funding and concern for cohesion has disappeared and we now have 'policed multiculturalism' (Raggazi, 2014)

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# The centrality of the problematic concept of 'radicalisation'

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- Problem – we know some individuals are attracted towards violence but the model of 'radicalisation' is highly problematic; its predictive powers are VERY weak
- 'Radicalisation' seems to work on a simplistic binary of radical/moderate but youth 'radicalism' is often fluid, contingent and 'performative'
- Prevent 1 had some focus on 'hearts and minds' and engagement with broader Muslim communities and institutions whilst trying to use the radicalisation model; Prevent 2 is increasingly all about operationalising the radicalisation model
- The results are predictable – clumsy and inappropriate surveillance

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# The securitisation of education and community relations



- The Police/Counter Terrorism Unit cultural power mean that Prevent quickly came to dominate community cohesion nationally and locally
- The Police/CTU also quickly became dominant in local Prevent arrangements
- The Police/CTU role in local Prevent 1 implementation provoked spying allegations and the House of Commons Inquiry that led to the 2011 review and Prevent 2
- The Prevent 2 prioritisation of ‘spotting’ radicalisation has led to very significant Police involvement in schools, colleges and other public spaces, including direct educational delivery – recent controversies over schools are the inevitable result: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/10/schools-trial-anti-radicalisation-software-pupils-internet>

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# The lack of educational approaches

- Prevent 1 'engaged' with lots of Muslim young people but there was little/no evidence of genuine educational processes that confront and build resilience against extremism
- This was because there has been no effort to offer training for educators on how to encourage and facilitate open and robust dialogue that enables students to discuss political issues – without this and without clear political encouragement, educators understandably avoid such issues
- Prevent 2 prioritises 'spotting' radicalisation but this has a tension with open dialogue approaches
- Citizenship teaching has been downgraded in schools and Prevent funding goes to the Police, NOT anti-extremism education projects

# Prevent – productive ways forward?

- The Police/CTU need to step back significantly if this programme is to have any positive impact
- There needs to be much more focus on education:
  - With broader groups of young people to build youth resilience in a non-stigmatising manner and in ways that uphold values of equal, democratic citizenship
  - With targeted groups of young people through specialist anti-extremism educational projects
- We need to trust in education more!

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# Contact details



Paul Thomas

[d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk](mailto:d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk)

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