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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



University of
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Prevent

- 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
- Also on work of colleagues: Lowndes and Thorp(2010); Husband and Alam (2011), Iacopini et al (2011) Vermeulen and Bovenkerk (2012),Lewis and Craig (2013),O’Toole et al (2013) etc.

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 Cattle (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)

Implementing Prevent on the Ground

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 et 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

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