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Limits of UK Counterterrorism Policy and its Implications for Islamophobia and Far Right Extremism

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Abstract

The UK Government has recently announced a new *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015* to facilitate tackling the threat of violent extremism. In light of this and previous initiatives, this paper provides a critical assessment of UK counterterrorism policy. This policy has created a notion of 'suspect communities' such that it has alienated young Muslims at the community engagement level, conceivably and empirically, potentially further exacerbating concerns government and communities have over questions of radicalisation, extremism, and the associated political and criminal violence. This paper argues that such policies can lead to the institutionalisation of Islamophobia, acting as an echo chamber for far right extremism to flourish. Significant gaps in government policy in this area can only be addressed by fostering effective relations between communities and policy makers, with enablers such as police officers, youth workers, activists and faith leaders empowered to formulate nuanced approaches in various local area settings. Given the social, cultural and political situation regarding British Muslim youth, including those presently thought to be fighting in parts of Iraq and Syria, as well as ongoing threats on UK soil presented as imminent and dangerous by UK government, there remain acute challenges with limited opportunities.

Keywords

Islamophobia; radicalisation; policing; community engagement policy; identity; globalisation.

Introduction

Since the events of 9/11 in the USA and, four years later in 2005, the London bombings in the UK, known as 7/7, issues relating to terrorism, radicalisation, extremism and its relationship with British Muslim youth have received abundant attention. Recent events in Iraq and Syria have led to a new UK *Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015*. It aims to give the police and the state broader powers to expand its counter-terrorism strategy, including the controversial Prevent (preventing violent extremism) policy. Considerable emphasis is placed upon the notion that counterterrorism measures ought to focus on de-radicalisation, such that the religion of Islam has been seen as the specific problem. Many centre-left groups, scholars,

activists and writers have encouraged consideration of wider issues, but policymakers have discounted the importance of concerns relating to foreign policy, domestic integration issues or structural disadvantage.

These concerns are potentially heightened by the UK Government's new *Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015*, which aims to curtail free speech on university campuses and introduce new legal powers to limit wider freedoms. It could mean nursery school staff and registered child-minders potentially having to report on young children who they regard as being radicalised. Furthermore, such policies will affect Muslims not only at a cultural level but also at societal, institutional, legal and organisational level. It also affects the level of UK government rhetoric and policy. All of these anxieties suggest that significant issues continue unchallenged with few clear directions for empowering British Muslims to become resilient, internally – through what communities must do – and externally – that is, the role of society. Meanwhile, Islamophobia and xenophobia, as a result of government policy, is potentially further intensified (Alibhai 2014). In June 2015, British Prime Minister David Cameron spoke at the Globsec conference in Bratislava. He argued that Muslim communities were not doing enough to combat the Islamic State narrative of extremism. He stated that: 'Too often we hear the argument that radicalisation is the fault of someone else. That blame game is wrong – and it is dangerous. By accepting the finger-pointing – whether it's at agencies or authorities – we are ignoring the fact that the radicalisation starts with the individual' (Wintour 2015). This was the second time he has made a major speech about British Muslims and extremism, on each occasion far from home. By doing so, David Cameron exacerbates the narrative of 'othering' Muslim communities. We argue that this disengages Muslim communities from active political discourse and helps fuel further animosity and radical ideas.

We contend that institutional levels of Islamophobia have come to the fore through policies that have seemingly targeted Muslim communities more so than any other religious group. Though much of the literature surrounding counterterrorism policies discusses flaws with such measures, this paper makes an original contribution by examining how Prevent has inadvertently created a climate of Islamophobia and hate. Further, we emphasise that it is imperative for any new counter-terrorism policy to be measured, balanced and proportionate. Thus, this paper is an attempt to conceptualise the nature of UK counterterrorism policy and its implications for community cohesion, social integration and issues related to multicultural policy and practice. First, the notion of 'suspect communities' is analysed and interpreted in the context of British Muslims. Second, UK counterterrorism policy, in particular Prevent, is examined from a similar perspective. Third, the murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013 is explored with regards to its impact on British Muslim community relations and issues of violent extremism. Fourth, the changing nature of policing as an aspect of counterterrorism policy is contextualised and implications drawn in relation to its methodology and effectiveness. Fifth, the ways in which Prevent can be reconfigured in the light of ongoing issues in relation to extremism is discussed with policy suggestions put forward. In conclusion, we argue that there are severe limitations to UK counterterrorism policy, some of which have the potential to make matters worse due to a focus on religion and culture rather than focusing on social structure or the lack of agency as the main concern (Klausen 2009). Furthermore, there are issues of cultural racism that are seemingly embedded in society as patterns of Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism continue to take hold.

A suspect community

Until the recent acts of terrorism in the USA and across Western Europe, Irish groups were considered a 'suspect' community in the UK (Hillyard 1993). The Birmingham pub bombings of 1974 led to the UK Parliament introducing draconian anti-terrorist legislation with specific powers handed to the police, security and intelligence services, setting it apart from previous anti-terrorist law. Historically, a dual system of justice was engineered where the legislation

created one set of laws for the Irish and another for the rest of society. However, the legislation effectively further radicalised the Irish community, prolonging a political solution to the conflict. Whereas these earlier counter-terrorism laws focused on domestic terrorism, following the rise in threats posed by groups such as Al-Qaida, the new counter-terrorism laws endeavour to tackle the international threat. In similar vein to the Irish circumstances, the British Muslim community today faces a relentless assault from politicians and media actors who concentrate on the seemingly problematic characteristics of Islam and Muslim culture. A growing volume of anecdotal evidence demonstrating that the UK counterterrorism framework, which centres on communities as suspects, is advertently further radicalising young Muslim men. Some of these young men have now found themselves in theatres of war as far away as Iraq and Syria, and there are purportedly radicalised young men engaging in potential plots on UK soil. Localised and national Islamophobia causes radicalisation, which causes further Islamophobia, such that it becomes a vicious circle of agony, intolerance and zealous behaviour (Abbas 2012). It seems that, at the time of writing, the UK government's de-radicalisation strategy has not delivered.

The discourse on matters relating to notions of suspect communities is well-established. But there are anxieties that it is somewhat overstated, lacking empirical base or ideological motivation in relation to British Muslims today (Greer 2010). Nevertheless, in spite of these worries, there are distinct issues that characterise the Muslim experience as one specific to Islamophobia, victimisation, 'otherisation' and discrimination (McGhee 2011). It is persistent and unidirectional and, since the Northern disturbances in England in July 2001, which began as a riot and turned into ethnic-related conflicts, and the events of 9/11 four months later in the USA, Muslims in Britain have been regarded as possessing distinctly cultural problems that separate their lives from the rest of society (Alam and Husband 2013). Furthermore, though extensive evidence suggests that Islamophobic physical and symbolic violence against Muslims is on the rise, Muslim minorities are somewhat reluctant to report incidents to authorities due to questions of trust, both of the authorities they report to and because they think their accounts, as they are Muslims, will not be taken as based on fact (Awan 2012a). These hate-crime incidents are not only physical assaults but also virtual offences in the shape of online attacks against individuals and groups (Awan 2014; Copsey et al. 2013). For the most part, they involve gangs, with racist attacks often occurring in or close to highly concentrated Muslim populated areas. Victims of physical assaults are usually Muslim men, where online anti-hate crimes affect Muslim women more than men. Though most crimes are not specific to a particular far right organisation, there are instances implicating the British National Party or the English Defence League (EDL) (Githens,-Mazer and Lambert 2010).

No universal terminology exists for extremism, which according to the UK Government is the, 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (HM Government 2011: 107). The concept of extremism and its vagueness reconnects to the conceptual foundations of Islamophobia. Unquestionably, 'violent extremism' appears central in constructing a suspect community, or embedding institutional racism or processes of othering, and these arguments have been explored extensively (Kundnani 2014). The definition of extremism also calls for 'the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas' (HM Government 2011: 107). The above interpretation is, however, vague and at best lacks clarity, leading to a perception that government policy is shaped by a more subjective criterion, which may in effect marginalise the Muslim community (Lambert 2011). Davies (2008) argues that the term extremism should cover a wide range of forms and should not be simply viewed as Islamist extremism. The UK Citizenship Survey in 2010, run by a leading market research company IPSOS-MORI on behalf of the Communities Analysis and Migration Division within the UK government's Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (from April 2010 to June 2010) found that most respondents rejected violent extremism (Phillips, Tse, Johnson and IPSOS-MORI 2011). The survey is used as an evidence base for the

work of DCLG, so as to better understand key issues such as community cohesion, civic engagement and matters pertaining to race and faith identity.

The Prevent Agenda and its discontents

Since the introduction of the UK counter-terrorism (Contest) strategy in 2006, the focus of the government has been on countering extremist Islam (Spalek 2010). Undoubtedly, Al-Qaeda-inspired extremism and the current threats posed by groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, demonstrate that ideological fanaticism is problematic and an essential issue to be addressed by the UK government and security services. The narrative used by militant Islamist groups such as Islamic State has created a culture of 'them and us', through which these groups are able to exploit the idea of the 'Islamic state' as a means to whip up fear and create anarchy. As a result, understanding and disengaging people from violent extremism, in whichever form it manifests itself, is crucial. Equally, however, the risks posed by such groups should not mean the UK government remains naïve to the dangers far-right groups also pose. It leads to questions about what violent extremism actually means since the Prevent policy has shifted over time to also include and then expand upon the concept of non-violent extremism. This seems to be present in current government thinking in relation to the UK *Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015*, but with the implications that targeting ideology may lead to casual forms of Islamophobia.

The focus of the Contest strategy is to reduce the risk from international terrorism; it has four key strands, which include Prevent. The others are Pursue, which aims to stop terrorist attacks; Protect, which endeavours to strengthen and to protect the UK from a terrorist attack; and Prepare, which aims to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack (HM Government 2011). Prevent, which is seen as the 'softer' approach in dealing with extremism, has three major themes: integration; 'community cohesion'; and partnership work with local communities. It is important to note that there has been a shift in the way that Prevent is implemented. Prevent was introduced in 2006-2007 as a programme that included these three themes but in 2010-2011, once the Conservative/Liberal Democratic coalition government under Prime Minister David Cameron took office, the remit of the programme changed to include only Channel interventions. The Channel initiative is a process that aims to provide support mechanisms to individuals who may be at risk of being radicalised. Furthermore, it involves a range of partners who work together to help provide those support services, such as the police, local authorities, social services and youth offender management groups. Community cohesion and integration, which were activities of Prevent undertaken by the DCLG, were discontinued because DCLG lost ownership of the strategy when Prevent became a policing strategy and therefore the responsibility of the Home Office, a ministerial department of the UK government responsible for immigration, security, and law and order.

After the 7/7 London bombings in Britain in 2005, the UK government was forced to act in a way that would challenge modern terrorism and its sophisticated local and global profiles, but at the same time was proportionate and fair. However, many British Muslims became the victims of an ostensibly hard-line government policy, and studies over time have continued to show that Muslim communities view Prevent with a sense of suspicion, fear and apprehension (Awan and Blakemore 2013). For example, the Muslim Council of Britain (2010) found that Muslim communities felt they were being victimised by law enforcement agencies and were uneasy about counter-terrorism legislation overall. The Hickman et al. (2011) study showed that Muslim communities were suspicious and in fear of counter-terrorism policies and agencies which had resulted in their feeling stigmatised. Choudhury and Fenwick's (2011) study into counter-terrorism policies also found that Muslim communities felt stigmatised and isolated because of the anti-terror legislation and policies.

The UK government vision for Prevent policy has been based on the desire to create an institution of communities which would contribute to British society in positive ways and at the same time reduce the risk of home-grown extremism. This was a process the previous British Prime Minister, the Labour Party's Gordon Brown, argued would encourage changes in thinking as it was based on the principle of 'winning hearts and minds', a continuation of New Labour rhetoric of the time. In spite of this, one of the major flaws with previous Prevent policy was its lack of critical detail on far right groups and lone wolf extremists. Although the coalition government Prime Minister David Cameron's speech on extremism in Munich in February 2011 was also aimed at addressing this wider threat, it failed to develop any cogent and consistent policy surrounding far right extremist groups.

It is clear that the Prevent policy may have specific shortcomings that are deeply problematic for British Muslim communities, but parts of British society firmly believe that such measures are necessary in order to keep them safe, such has been the political weight and cultural emphasis placed on the topic of British Muslim radicalisation (Vertigans 2010). After the Conservative party returned to power by winning the majority vote in the 2015 General Election, in many senses, the authoritarian stance taken by David Cameron's British government has the same outcomes as the 'clash of civilisations' thesis propounded by various neoconservative thinkers. As the British government attempts to introduce legislation to weed out radicalised Muslim young men from potentially committing acts of terrorism on home soil, it conceivably leads to destruction values of equality, liberty, fraternity and security that have established nations such as modern Britain in the eyes of the many (Moosavi 2013). Moreover, it alienates an already beleaguered population facing a range of internal challenges as well as external limitations, such that '[p]olicies like indefinite and extended pre-charge detention, deportation, weakened standards on torture, new speech offences and ill-treatment have harmed race and community relations and diminished the prospects of Muslims being willing to cooperate with police and security services' (Vertigans 2010: 32).

The British Muslim community is ethnically and culturally diverse, and possesses a range of sectarian points of view. There are also class differences, which are a function of pre-migration factors as well as the nature of the lived experience in various local area contexts (Abbas 2005). Thus, the ways in which different Muslim communities have been affected by a focus on counterterrorism needs to be understood. Many of the British Muslims implicated in terrorism herald from inner-city areas in post-industrial towns and from cities that have experienced severe structural disadvantage and racial discrimination. When asking young people and community elders about significant factors that might cause radicalisation, an overwhelming number of responses identified socio-economic and structural influences in nature and design, and as such the solutions rest at these levels too (Abbas and Siddique 2012). Moreover, by focusing on Muslims, government policy draws attention not to their socio-economic disadvantage but to their cultural and religious norms and values. UK government policy is detrimentally impacting on community relations and negatively affecting the perceptions of British Muslims towards government institutions and foreign policy. Ongoing patterns of victimisation have led to feelings of alienation and isolation among British Muslims, impacting directly on the risks that they experience (Mythen et al. 2009).

The initiation of the Prevent strand of government antiterrorism policy enacted in the wake of the events of 7/7 has resulted in other significant problems faced by the British Muslim community. These relate to ongoing patterns of otherisation and demonisation that marginalise and isolate British Muslims (Bonino 2013). Repeatedly, Muslims are characterised as a single entity, undifferentiated or lacking nuance, where internal challenges within the Muslim community, which shape and pull it in a multitude of directions, and where certain opportunities are realised while others remain contested, go unrecognised (Afshar 2013). This attitude has been reflected in various speeches made by British politicians, particularly during the period 2001 to 2007, following the events of 9/11 and for some time after the events of 7/7.

The use of surveillance cameras in concentrated population areas (Awan 2012b), extra police powers to question persons without charge and detain for extensive periods, and security checks at airports and other places of transfer alienate Muslim groups, disenchanting them from integration in wider society and further intensifying the cycle of Islamophobia and radicalisation (Choudhury and Fenwick 2011). Such broad-brush policy initiatives ignore the sensitive local area dynamics that are often at play within various ethnic and religious minority communities (Isakjee and Allen 2013). They effectively create further problems as the British government seeks to promote the notion of 'moderate' Muslims and 'extremist' Muslims, thus dividing the Muslim community into those who are suspect and those who are thought to be pro-integration, and using the latter group to help justify government policy in this regard. Separating the two enables the state to direct its activity at the extremists. Such categorising enforces divisions; however, the shades of grey between different Muslim sensibilities are not well understood (O'Duffy 2008). These complexities are the reason for many different approaches taken by the UK government, where Sufi, liberal and progressive groups as well as established Doebandi and Jamaaet-e-Islami ones have all had various associations with government, particularly during the New Labour era (1997-2010), but with limited degrees of success (Bowen 2014). Such processes had the effect of immunising certain Muslim groups because of the partnership language used by government policy (Klausen 2009).

A fundamental pillar in this process – trust between the policing services and Muslim communities (Spalek 2010) – is potentially lost, thereby threatening the overall efforts of the counterterrorism policy, both implicitly and explicitly. Moreover, the situation is further problematised if notions of 'values' enter into the discourse because this implies that something is profoundly lacking within certain Muslim communities. This potentially leads to additional stigmatisation (Spalek and McDonald 2010). A normalisation of the 'war on terror' has seeped into the public imagination and popular discourses so much so that it has become embedded in the cultural fabric of society (Kundnani 2014). A particular issue concerns engagement with British Muslim communities, and the significant gap that emerges between approach and outcome, intention and result. Research continues to demonstrate that it is the combination of 'soft' community orientated processes and 'hard' behind-the-scenes intelligence, security and policing measures which seems to produce the most effective results. This multi-method approach also creates the conditions for confidence among those involved in the process (Spalek and Imtoual 2007), bringing to the fore opportunities for professional youth workers whose role is to work with disaffected young Muslim men experiencing challenges to their identities, partly as a result of government policy (McDonald 2011).

Far right extremism and the Woolwich murder

In May 2013, off-duty British soldier Lee Rigby was murdered in an unprovoked attack on the streets of Woolwich in south-east London by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale. The perpetrators told passers-by that they had killed a soldier to avenge the killing of Muslims by the British armed forces. Both men have since been jailed. Adebolajo is serving a minimum life sentence; Adebowale was given a minimum of 45 years in prison.

Prevent aims to promote integration, cohesion and community safety but it has unsuccessfully tackled the wider issue of far right extremism and, instead, paved the way for anti-Islamist groups such as the English Defence League (EDL). The UK Government identifies international terrorism and, in particular, Al-Qaeda-led extremism as a major cause for concern in the UK (HM Government 2011). However, the policy lacks depth and substance regarding the threat from far right extremist ideologies. Clearly, some far right extremist groups will have aims and goals that differ from those of terrorists. For example, groups such as animal rights extremists, anti-capitalist extremisms, anti-abortionists and anti-Semites do not necessarily have the same motives as terrorist groups and as a result have never really been a focus for Prevent (Hadley 2009). Therefore, following the events in Woolwich in 2013, Prevent has the potential to

marginalise a single community, and exacerbate a tone for the EDL rhetoric that 'Islamism' is on the rise in Britain and should be combated unless government policy indicates otherwise (Chakraborti and Garland 2009). The case of Anders Breivik, the Norway bomber, highlights how far right lone wolf extremists sometimes persist under the radar and why counter-extremism policies need to ensure they are modelled in a way that takes into account the serious threats they pose (Bangstad 2014). In Breivik's case, his 1515 page manifesto entitled *A European Declaration of Independence* (2011) explains how the Islamification of Europe and the dangers of Shariah Law and Jihad are a threat to civilisation. Using a variety of references to justify his claims, Breivik's manifesto helps throw light on the radical narrative that helped him gain a self-perpetuated credence that subsequently led him to murder 92 people.

The Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) UK organisation which looks at tackling and reporting anti-Muslim hate crimes illustrated that, from March 2012 to March 2013, 74 per cent of anti-Muslim crimes were recorded online (Tell MAMA 2013a). Other hate incidents included attacks against mosques. Some mosques have had graffiti sprayed across their walls, while others have been petrol-bombed and vandalised. Assailants have ripped off Muslim women's head scarves. Statistics show that online hate crimes against Muslims are on the increase (Awan and Blakemore 2013). For example, before the Woolwich incident there was an average of 28 anti-Muslim hate crimes per month (in April 2013, there were 22 anti-Muslim hate crimes in London alone) but in May, the month Rigby was murdered, that number soared to 109. Between May 2013 and February 2014, there were 734 reported cases of anti-Islamic abuse and of these, 599 were incidents of online abuse and threats, while the others were 'offline' attacks such as violence, threats and assaults (Tell MAMA 2013b). One such incident involved the Al Rahma community centre in Muswell Hill in North London which was burnt down following the Woolwich murder. More recently, a bomb was found outside a mosque in Walsall (a large industrial town in the West Midlands of England) which was at full capacity during Friday prayers (BBC News 2013). It appears far right extremist groups have been able to gain momentum and support relatively quickly. They have done so without attracting much notice, perhaps in part because the mainstream views reported from politicians, the media and law enforcement agencies have tended to focus on Islamist groups as the major threat to national security (Bartlett et al. 2011). Far right groups such as the Progress Party in Norway, the Party for Freedom in Holland led by the Dutch far right politician Geert Wilders, and the Freedom Party in Austria have become powerful political parties in Europe. Moreover, a 2011 report published by the Domestic Intelligence Agency in Germany found that over 767 people had some sort of affiliation with far right extremist groups (German Intelligence Report 2011).

The UK government, however, argues there are only 17 people associated with far right extremism (at the time of writing) who are serving sentences in Britain for terrorist offences. Such far right extremism is regarded as less of a threat than Al-Qaida or similar Islamist terrorist groups. Moreover, the Prevent Agenda argues that people involved in far right extremism do not have the same training as those involved in Islamist extremism. Specifically, the Prevent Agenda (HM Government 2011: 15) states that, 'people involved in extreme right-wing terrorism have not received the same training, guidance or support as many of those who have engaged with Al Qa'ida or Al Qa'ida-influenced organisations'. Another UK government argument for far right extremism being a less significant threat than the Islamist threat is because the policy framework on far right extremist groups is not as well developed into a coherent strategy. The Prevent Agenda (HM Government 2011: 20) argues that, '[g]iven the small number of relevant cases (and the absence here of extreme right-wing terrorist organisations and formal groups) our understanding of how people become involved in extreme right-wing terrorism is inevitably less developed than it is for terrorism associated with Al Qa'ida'. However, the Prevent consultation found that a majority (80%) of respondents believed that Prevent should address the wider problems of far right extremism (HM Government 2011). Certainly, the far right and 'lone wolf' extremist threat has intensified post-Woolwich, as a

number of mosques have been targeted. Furthermore, the case of Mohammed Saleem, a grandfather from Birmingham (UK) murdered by a Ukrainian national staying in Britain in 2013, raised concerns about the potential links between far right extremist groups in Europe (Hall 2013).

The government recognises the threat posed by Islamist terrorist groups and as such has banned certain Islamist organisations which promote violence, but critics argue that far right groups such as the EDL (the main differences between these groups are their ideologies and motives) are still operational. Since its emergence, the EDL has staged a number of controversial demonstrations against Islam and Muslims. They aim to ignite old and new racial stereotypes, and exacerbate the conflict between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Britain. These protests have intensified and increased in number following the Woolwich murder, with slick public relations campaigns aimed at capitalising on this incident. Many of these protests turned violent, with a number of EDL and opposition members arrested for offences relating to the breach of the peace. Although anti-capitalist protests have also occurred and received attention, the EDL marches have targeted mainly Muslim communities, with the express desire of changing the landscape of the immigration debate. Unsurprisingly, the EDL has been quick to hold these protests within Muslim communities as a means to provoke public sentiment. Case study research with young white working-class men involved in the EDL found that socio-structural characteristics such as experiences of inequality and disenchantment generated psychological rationalisations to justify their actions (Treadwell and Garland 2011). In a similar vein, pro-Muslim groups, such as the Muslim Defence League and Muslims against Crusade group, have emerged in the UK. They have both held counter-demonstrations against the EDL. Evidently, counter-terrorism policies in this remit must tackle all forms of threat, and not those simply confined to Islamist-led extremism. Unfortunately, far-right extremists are able to use a 'them versus us' narrative to create a sense of polarisation which feeds further into anti-Muslim hate crime. Therefore, counter-terrorism must help root out violent extremists, but it must not be used as a means of propagating a new type of institutional Islamophobia, where the state and those applying such powers use it to disproportionately target Muslim communities.

Policing Muslim communities

A specific problem with Prevent policy has been how counter-terrorism policing has blurred the lines within community policing models. However, the Prevent Agenda has a different explanation. HM Government (2011: 99) state, 'We have seen no evidence that Prevent work has damaged police and Muslim community relations. We believe the evidence points in the opposite direction'. Although the Prevent Agenda does not acknowledge problems with policing Muslim communities, a case study reveals an alternative perspective. In 2009, West Midlands Police sent counter-terrorism officers to visit a local nursery in the area of Birmingham where it was perceived children were being radicalised (Casciani 2009). It sparked a wide-ranging debate among policymakers about the rationale of Prevent and why and how children were viewed as 'suspects' vulnerable to terrorist indoctrination, recruitment and propaganda (Frankel and Jones 2007). The importance of such a case cannot be downplayed. It reveals how a top-down approach towards extremism can often lead to police officers developing a poor understanding of cultural sensitivities and community police work. What was problematic in this instance was the language used. An email from one of the officers involved stated:

> I am a police officer and therefore it will always be part of my role to gather intelligence and I will report back any information or intelligence which may suggest someone is a terrorist, or is planning to be one or to support others … And I do hope that you will tell me about persons, of whatever age, you think may have been radicalised or be vulnerable to radicalisation. (cited in Casciani 2009)

The vernacular in this email raises severe questions about policing and community relations with regards to tackling extremism. Since the early 1970s and 1980s, policing of minorities has been problematic, with tensions over policing public order (Cain 1973; Gordon 1984). Evidence indicated uncompromising strategies with regards to minority communities were manifest because of extensive police autonomy (Graef 1989; Holdaway 1983). Following the 'war on terror', Muslim communities have been viewed in much the same way as the African-Caribbean and Irish communities were treated previously: that is, as a 'suspect group'. The UK government has enacted considerable counter-terrorism legislation, namely the *Terrorism Act 2000*, the *Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005*, and the *Terrorism Act 2006*, which has given the police wider powers of stop and search, of pre-charge detention, and to curb downloading material deemed to be useful for terrorist purposes. This legislation has been problematic for Muslim communities.

Therefore, any new Prevent Agenda must ensure that Islam and Muslims are not the main focus of Prevent as new policy has the potential to ignite more sympathisers to terrorist aims and goals than to actually deal with the root causes of extremism. For example, as noted above, the emergence of Prevent has caused a wave of controversy and its implementation has been accused by its critics as a form of 'spying' upon the Muslim community. The focus of Prevent must be to engage with communities in the debate about violent extremism, by working with grass roots activists and with those who have direct experiences of radicalisation and extremism, but without seemingly co-opting groups to adhere to government policy rhetoric in relation to integration, cohesion and Britishness. In doing so, Prevent must therefore also examine how far right groups use incidents such as the Woolwich murder to play upon disaffection, anger and animosity. This can be extremely dangerous as evidence suggests there has been a rise in anti-Muslim hate crime in recent periods, and far-right groups across Europe and in the UK have used the incident to gather support and momentum (Thomas 2012). However, Prevent has been tainted by a counter-terrorist narrative which critics argue has abused the trust of some communities. The policy has also been translated into an approach that attempts to enlist Muslim participants as 'agents' for the state, which could possibly mean 'spying' upon their neighbours, family and friends (Kundnani 2009). Recent research on Prevent with participants from the Alum Rock area in Birmingham found that they were distrustful of the police, government and security services with regards to this policy (Awan 2012a).

One of the main priorities for the UK government following the Woolwich murder is the need to re-examine Prevent. Undeniably, one of the main challenges for the new Government Act is how to change the damaged reputation and image of the Prevent Agenda which has been deemed a surveillance mechanism that targets Muslim communities. The previous Prevent policy under Gordon Brown's New Labour government revealed serious issues of poor public management of funding and a sense that Muslim communities were angry that they had not been consulted in the overall Prevent Agenda (Kundnani 2009). Any new policy must comply with basic fundamental human rights, which means all communities, regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion, have a right to freedom of expression and the right to live in peace despite the public outcry that Muslim communities should do more to tackle extremism following the Woolwich murder. Strategies such as Prevent suffer from image crises, but what does more harm is inadvertently exacerbating Muslims' perceptions that they are being unfairly targeted. Prime Minister David Cameron, speaking at a conference in Munich on issues surrounding security and multiculturalism, and how the UK monitors and counters extremism (Cameron 2011), made it clear that Muslim communities needed to do more to tackle extremism. However, a recent Home Affairs Select Committee report examining the root causes of extremism found that the UK government, expanding its Prevent portfolio with more projects aimed at tackling extremism, needed to ensure that Muslims were treated fairly and not seemingly targeted by Prevent policy (Commons Select Committee 2011).

The Woolwich murder has shown that preventing extremism is an increasingly difficult and complex problem that does not have a simple solution. It requires a multi-faceted approach from agencies that take into account the dangers from far right extremism, lone wolfs and Islamist threats. It was hoped that counter-terrorism policies such as Prevent would create a more tolerant and cohesive community in Britain, not only tackling extremism but also promoting inter-faith activity and a shared sense of belonging. Clearly, the 2011 Prevent Strategy is much stronger than previous Prevent initiatives; however, following Woolwich, policymakers have extremely difficult decisions to make. The UK government's counter-terrorism legislation, counter-terrorism policing and subsequent counter-terrorism policies have led to many Muslims feeling a sense of victimisation and as such thinking that they are increasingly viewed as a 'suspect' community. Terrorist attacks are a concern, but an Orwellian society will only lead to further unnecessary powers being given to the police and the state, whose scope is already broad and intrusive. The British government should ensure that the new Prevent Agenda does not imitate the old one in new clothes.

Concluding remarks

The issue of extremism in relation to Muslim minorities are dominant in popular discourses, but it is also quite clear that patterns of racial disadvantage on the basis of colour persist. Islamophobia has become a recognised phenomenon for South Asian Muslim minorities, namely Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, but direct and indirect forms of racism and discrimination have not abated. Material needs and concerns are on top of the list of anxieties that face young British Muslims, but wider questions relating to Britishness, diversity and/or multiculturalism are far removed from the everyday realities facing young people in inner-city areas. It leads to dualism and binary opposites, which in reality are non-existent as there are many shades of grey in determining notions of Britishness, Muslimness and how Islamophobia is articulated in practice (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood 2014).

In many ways, what has been witnessed in this so-called radicalisation of British-born Muslim youth is in fact an aspect of the coming of age in the context of intergenerational change and development. Conflation between structural and cultural issues emerges when exploring the factors that determine radicalisation, and extremism is often thought to lie within the religion and cultural characteristics of the community of interest. However, thinking also suggests that aspirations may exist at a more interpersonal, sociological and psychological level where these young men are in fact reconfiguring notions of what it is to be British rather than rejecting it. It is because of this sense of Britishness that they are regarded as radicals, not because of its rejection altogether (Lynch 2013). As such, these radicals are made in Britain and are a function of the lived experience of the British context, further emphasising a political and sociological understanding of the concept rather than one rooted in religion or forms of cultural behaviour associated with ethnicity (Abbas 2011). Regrettably, the new *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015* is likely to place further restrictions on free speech and reproduce the suspect community climate. British universities, rather than being a hotbed of radicalisation in the negative sense, are a space in which young Muslims find opportunities to reconfigure, reshape and refocus their identity politics in the light of challenges that operate at a wider societal level (Brown and Saeed 2014). There are implications for Muslims on campus should the new measures be introduced.

Undoubtedly, young people desire the need to engage with those regarded as credible, but as government continues to support certain organisations and policies at the expense of others, it has the potential to alienate young Muslims further (cf. Spalek 2011). Moreover, if any new policy is deemed disproportionate, a real risk is that it might give succour to those who regard the Muslim community as legitimate targets. Following the events in Norway and the spate of online hate against Muslims following Woolwich murder there is a danger that far right extremists and groups will fall under the radar and the rise of Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism may continue unchecked.

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