



**Issue 4, 2019**  
**Special Issue on Prevent**

Co-edited by Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Rebecca Durand,  
Stephen Cowden

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**Book and Conference Reviews**

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Warwick

**Feminist  
Dissent**



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# Feminist Dissent – Issue 4

## Special Issue on Prevent

Co-edited by Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Rebecca Durand, Stephen Cowden

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*All artworks are by Xenofon Kavvadias.*

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## Editorial: A Polarised Debate

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We are thrilled to present this fourth issue of *Feminist Dissent*.

The focus of this Issue is the UK's counter-radicalisation programme 'Prevent'. As a number of articles in this Issue explain, this policy is part of CONTEST, the UK government's counter-terrorism strategy.

CONTEST is organised around four 'principal strands' of activity:

PURSUE: to stop terrorist attacks

PREVENT: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism

PROTECT: to strengthen our protection against terrorist attack

PREPARE: where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its impact

The 'Prevent' section developed into a policy in its own right and in the context of the emergence of a specific Counter-Extremism Strategy. Prevent is concerned with helping people 'at risk of becoming involved in terrorism', as well as disrupting the activities of those involved in 'radicalising others'. The Prevent Review and Revised Strategy (2011) led by Lord Carlile, reasserted this aim, of seeking to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' (Home Office, 2011:6). However, at its core, the revised strategy proclaims a



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key connection between 'British values', extremism and integration. Thus, extremism was defined as:

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. We also include within our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces. (Home Office, 2011:7)

Many readers may be wondering why we would devote a whole Issue to this particular policy. Prevent is undeniably one of the most contentious public policies of our time and the debates on it embody the tensions between acknowledging resurgent fundamentalism, its ongoing project of establishing hegemony across religious and political fields, diverse understandings of power, differential racism and the exact role of the state in tackling fundamentalist mobilisations.

In this Issue we have sought to create a space to raise concerns that have not figured in the dominant narratives about Prevent, those constructed by its supporters and its critics. The Prevent policy is having a significant impact on a whole range of areas – Further and Higher Education, Probation and Social Work, third sector organisations, women's organisations, Local Authorities, religious institutions and movements, and community based political activism. Yet the polarised nature of the debate around Prevent means that we actually know very little about how the policy is implemented within these areas, including how responses and practices are localised and how they are impacting women and other vulnerable groups. These are significant gaps in the existing literature and they are the concerns we have sought to give voice to in this Issue.

Although Prevent was formulated and activated between the 9/11 attacks in New York and the 7/7 bombings in London, Prevent's critics connect the policy with the growth of a securitised state, with the brutalising and sinister practices of the War on Terror and a growing fear of and hatred towards Muslims. On the other hand, many government partners who applaud Prevent and the government's anti-terrorism work more widely have not been as alert to the threat of a securitised state, its use of repressive immigration controls in tackling Muslim fundamentalism and the differential application of immigration concerns as these are never part of debates about tackling white supremacists or Christian fundamentalism. Many supporters of Prevent who champion its call for greater social integration are silent on the real material causes of social disintegration across a social terrain scarred by inequality in which the social safety net shrinks on a daily basis. They seem unaware of the many ways that fundamentalists are fully integrated into partnerships with the state.

Yet radicalisation is a real and serious issue. Even as victory over ISIS has been declared, Islamist attacks around the world continue, reflected in the chilling suicide bombs in Sri Lanka at packed churches on Easter Sunday which killed over 200 people and injured more than 500. Moreover, the teenage 'jihadi brides' who departed from Tower Hamlets in 2015 are only three of the estimated 850 young people who have travelled to Syria. Some have returned, others died, and others are stranded because the current government has revoked their citizenship. One of the Tower Hamlets girls, Shamima Begum, radicalised in Britain and online, has been found but the media spectacle around her has been inhumane and incredibly disturbing. The Home Secretary's decision to revoke Begum's British citizenship and leave her as a stateless young woman in a refugee camp in Syria is a shocking and sinister reminder of the 'conditional citizenship' that British minorities are subjected to as well as the incredible difficulty of pushing for a state response to

fundamentalism in a context where government reverts to punitive measures and immigration controls as its main response to social issues.

Though it's unclear at this stage, what, if any, crimes Begum has been involved in, we do believe that anyone that has committed violations and abuses of human rights has to be held responsible, legally and ethically, for their actions. We are equally alert to the appeal by Yezidi women that 'jihadi brides' were involved in preparing them for rape and sexual assault and the information that is emerging about their role in policing other women. Having said that, the pitiful situation of Shamima Begum – who at 19 years of age has seen the deaths of all of her three children - is a salutary reminder of the gender dimensions of Muslim fundamentalist mobilisations and a racialised British state. We believe the British state has a responsibility to uphold human rights no matter how abhorrent the ideologies to which its citizens subscribe. More than this, the British state has responsibility for British fundamentalists abroad and, as Kurdish fighters against ISIS forces have made clear, they are not welcome in camps where the victim-survivors of those same fundamentalist forces reside.

Moreover, we would argue the growth in despair and isolation which has developed as a consequence of a retracting welfare state is itself propitious for the growth of both religious fundamentalists *and* neo-Nazi white nationalist groups. Recent events and referral statistics would suggest that white supremacist mobilisations (commonly known as the Far Right) have gained increasing attention by Prevent teams and Channel Panels (BBC 13/12/2018). In fact, the reliance of the Prevent agenda on this notion of 'British values' needs to be further questioned in a context where the Far Right is gaining political mileage through anti-Muslim and anti-minority integration discourses and an aggressive patriotism. Moreover, the Far Right pose a significant challenge to the terms of the Prevent agenda because their politics is ultra-

patriotic and the violence they inflict on Muslims and minorities is connected with their claim that these particular groups constitute a threat to 'British values'.

Having pushed our Call for Papers in many circles for about two years and urged specific writers to contribute a piece on the Far Right, it is with deep regret that we were not able to find even a single author to write such a piece for this Special Issue. Yet there has been a step change in statutory responses that has yet to be captured as Prevent is increasingly concerned with neo-Nazi groups. After a long period on the margins of politics, these groups have returned to the streets across Europe, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. The mass murder of 49 Muslim worshippers at mosques in Christchurch New Zealand in March 2019 shows more than ever the reach and violence of highly organised networks of white supremacists, the central role of social media in communicating their 'white genocide' conspiracy theories<sup>i</sup> and the way that anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim media, news and government policy discourses have created a conducive context and provided legitimacy for their Far Right vitriol.

The range of problems with Prevent have led many within academia, within human rights groups and progressive, left and anti-racist circles to adopt the view that Prevent is nothing more than a repressive form of state surveillance over Britain's Muslims driven by state racism and that Muslim fundamentalism is mainly a response to this and to British foreign policy. As is clear from the above, we are in no doubt about the differential treatment of Muslims and their subjection to 'conditional citizenship'. The state is entirely capable of racist abuses of human rights. However, we reject the simplistic narrative of opposition between a repressive surveillance state on the one hand and a demonised, misrepresented and monolithic community on the other. One of the central issues that is pursued throughout this Issue is the way this binary

construction of power closes down discussion of resurgent religious fundamentalism, particularly Muslim fundamentalism, the risks these ideologies pose and the harms they cause. Moreover, it locates power entirely in the nation-state and overlooks power relations within communities where women and girls are subjected to the hard end of fundamentalist forces and ignores the global resources and networks of power that fundamentalists wield.

We live in a time in which violent attacks on people in public spaces by fundamentalists are now a fact of life and, in this context, we thoroughly reject the idea that a concern with radicalisation is simply feeding a 'moral panic' and that the expectation of a role for the state is fanning the flames of racism and fascism. We are clear in arguing that the state has a role to play in protecting the public and this includes the protection of young people in a safeguarding context who are drawn into fundamentalism; this is discussed by a number of contributors to this issue. Moreover, in recognition that the state is not a unitary body but comprises bodies with contradictory views and practices and that government is itself spurred by contradictory tendencies, in this Issue we have tried to capture these tensions.

Many on the Left have argued that the simple solution to radicalisation is to tackle the unjust economic and military policies of Western governments. There is no question that the chaos, brutality and human rights violations which characterise Western military interventions around the world have created a fertile environment for Islamist groups to recruit and thrive. However, fundamentalism is not simply a reaction to the West; these forces are political and ideological entities with their own momentum and objectives. *Feminist Dissent* has argued from its inception that the growth of fundamentalist movements, which we see as taking place across all religions, cannot be explained simply as reactions to other forces and have insisted that

the specific will to power which fundamentalism represents be analysed on its own terms. The idea that growth of Islamism is simply a consequence of the 'oppression of Muslims' is wrong on many counts. At the very least, it is entirely unable to account for the way Islamist violence is directed first and foremost at other Muslims, particularly those who challenge or resist the brutality and abuse which utterly characterises the praxis of those movements.

It is on this tense and contradictory terrain, and precisely because the debate on how we address these issues continues to be so polarised, that we see this Issue of *Feminist Dissent* as an important way to open out the debate. This Special Issue therefore moves away from either/or arguments about Prevent. A number of the contributions do this by looking concretely at the impact this is having in different settings.

We begin with **Sukhwant Dhaliwal's** framing piece, which emphasises the need for a human rights approach to recognising and tackling fundamentalism. Drawing on Karima Bennoune's (2008) critical articulation of the connections between Terror and Torture and her insistence on both ensuring and respecting rights, Dhaliwal discusses the five terrorist attacks that took place in England in 2017 (a scale of violence not seen in the UK since the introduction of the Prevent programme in 2005). She argues for the need to make a clear distinction between a human rights approach and responses led by nationalist and neo-liberal concerns. Since gender became such a significant feature of the discussion of the 2017 attacks, the final third of Dhaliwal's article elicits the differences between ensuring and respecting women's human rights to security and bodily autonomy on the one hand and the instrumentalization of gender for securitisation agendas or as part of individualised vulnerability and risk assessments on the other.

Although all of the concerns raised within this Special Issue are pertinent to feminist struggles, Dhaliwal's contribution is the first of five specific feminist engagements with the Prevent agenda, each highlighting the many ways that Prevent-related antagonisms are gendered and cross cut by patriarchy.

**Pragna Patel's** article highlights a number of points about state and civil society responses to fundamentalism by reflecting on four Southall Black Sisters cases. The first shows that the state allows other concerns to trump the safeguarding of women and girls. The second and third cases suggest that government and civil society policies have contributed to the embedding of religious identities and shines a light on the simple fact that some jihadis (women in these cases) do not want to be supported through the legal process or by a secular women's group because they object to 'man made law' (as opposed to 'God's law') and they are opposed to secularism. The ways that Prevent has also become part of the racialised and gendered relations between minorities and the British state is reflected in the final case example that suggests Prevent is being used by religious leaders in the same way that multiculturalist policy was used in the past - as a way to circumvent state or any external scrutiny into their institutions by utilising discourses of surveillance and religious sensitivity to sidestep concerns about women's and girls' safety and security. Within all of these cases, women's and girls' rights are subsumed under and trumped by other state and civil society concerns. Patel notes the difficult challenge of navigating 'a course that opposes both the state's violations of civil liberties carried out in the name of counter-terrorism (and anti-immigration to which it is increasingly linked) whilst at the same time raising the real dilemmas and concerns we have about safeguarding'.

Though recognising that globally it is women that are on the frontline of challenging fundamentalism, **Yasmin Rehman** considers the impact of the Prevent agenda on the women's voluntary sector in the UK, particularly that

the state has historically denied the work of women's organisations such as *Women Against Fundamentalism* and *Women Living Under Muslim Laws* in challenging fundamentalism and yet is using Prevent funding to re-shape the character and identity of women's organisations by encouraging them to re-organise their specialist services along religious, particularly Muslim, lines. As she points out, the focus of the government's Counter Extremism Strategy has been on Muslim women and has not engaged in the same way with white women on challenging the Far Right or with Sikh or Hindu women to challenge other forms of fundamentalism within these communities. Conversely, Rehman also highlights the criticisms that women's organisations have been subjected to - of fuelling anti-Muslim racism and accusations of securitisation - if they are seen to be engaging with Prevent work let alone taking Prevent funding, even if recourse to this funding has been a consequence of their significantly reduced funding avenues in a context of austerity. Rehman concludes that Prevent policy in practice has hastened the decimation of secular spaces and enabled the state and religious organisations to infringe on spaces that were previously outside of their control.

Rehman's research demonstrates the extent of mistrust between the state and women's groups in the UK who have faced over a decade of severe funding cuts to their generic support work but with Prevent arriving have suddenly been offered additional funding for counter-radicalisation work with women. Moreover, Rehman raises an important and urgent contradiction: that this de-secularisation of provision for women actually reduces the capacity for countering fundamentalist and extremist ideologies and diminishes the ability of those groups that are actually protecting women, children and other minorities to continue doing this work.

This presents us with an important question: can working within the structure of Prevent challenge the resurgence of fundamentalism in the UK? The articles



by **Tehmina Kazi** and **Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal** make this case without being apologists or supporters of the present government. They show that Prevent funded initiatives can act as a place in which human rights and women's and children's rights are defended against fundamentalist violence. Prevent is often described as a policy which targets Muslims. Kazi and Haroon-Iqbal help us move away from monolithic understandings of Muslim communities to see different power relations within them.

**Tehmina Kazi** highlights the importance of critical thinking skills for feminist empowerment strategies to challenging fundamentalist recruitment. She also underlines the safeguarding duties in relation to 'jihadi brides' but when looking closer at their possible 'vulnerabilities' she questions the sense that these are poor uneducated girls. As she notes, they were high academic achievers and yet lacked critical personal development skills that would have encouraged them to doubt and dissent. These highly educated women had bought into an 'us vs them narrative' of supremacist ideologies, narratives that dehumanise certain people and groups. From Kazi's perspective, Prevent and Channel represent an opportunity for critical interventions with young women that are being exposed to these fundamentalist ideologies. She highlights the Making a Stand roadshow led by the women's organisation *Inspire*, which encouraged young women to recognise and say no to bigotry and hatred and provided opportunities for women to be exposed to other interpretations of Islam. In some ways Kazi's piece speaks back to Rehman's article that decries the way that the decimation of a secular Black and minority ethnic women's sector has undermined the women's voluntary sector's ability to do exactly this kind of work.

The fifth feminist engagement comes from **Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal**, the Prevent lead for education in her local area. This is an auto-biographical piece that allows us to see her journey in to Prevent work and its significance for her as a

vehicle to challenging fundamentalism and racism. Her personal story is intertwined with the stories of other Muslim women to demonstrate the ways that women are targeted by conservative and fundamentalist forces and by racists alike. She surmises, '(t)he biggest victims of terrorism across the world are women. And the greatest threats and abuse are targeted towards those women who are trying to prevent radicalisation and terrorism.' As with Kazi and Rehman, she notes that women are a force for change, but she also points out that the phenomenon of 'jihadi brides' shows women can be perpetrators as well as victims of fundamentalism. She points to the role that women have played in recruiting jihadi brides and in perpetuating particular authoritarian versions of Islam. She is aggrieved to see Muslim women buying into ideologies that reduce the rights they currently have within the UK and subscribe to ideologies that demote them to the status of second-class citizens.

Both Pragna Patel and Tehmina Kazi point to the harms of fundamentalism and racism to women and children and emphasise that the state does have a duty to safeguard women and children from this. These safeguarding dimensions, and particularly the 2015 Prevent Duty and the role of social workers are the specific focus for **Stephen Cowden and Jonathan Picken's** article. They provide a detailed analysis of Salafi-Jihadism and its specific harms to children and young people. Cowden and Picken problematise the characterisation of Social Work's involvement in Prevent and Channel as a form of 'surveillance' of Muslim families and communities, pointing particularly to evidence of the extent of concern about these issues within Muslim communities. Their argument is particularly illustrated by their analysis of a Serious Case Review concerning two radicalised teenagers which they argue demonstrates the need for much greater critical understanding, particularly among social workers, of the politics and ideology of violent fundamentalism.

As with Hifsa-Haroon and Tehmina Kazi, there is considerable anecdotal information to suggest that the implementation of Prevent and Channel is hugely varied within local areas. Within this Issue, the article by **David Parker, David Chapot and Jonathan Davis**, who write here in a personal capacity, is an example of how local interpretations and implementation of Prevent is very different to its characterisation as contributing to the ‘securitisation of Muslim communities’. Like Kazi and Hifsa-Haroon, they argue that Prevent funding presents an opportunity to do social welfare and support work within local communities.

However, Kazi, Hifsa-Haroon, Parker, Chapot and Davis, stand in contrast to the experiences of James Alexander and Alia Malak whose articles raise important concerns about the use and abuse of counter-terrorism powers in the application of Prevent. **Alia Malak** evidences the way that University Administrations have used Prevent as a lever to quash and silence Palestinian activism within University spaces while at the same time turning a blind eye to platforms for the Israeli Defence Force. Malak raises fundamental questions about the use of Prevent to silence dissenting voices and squeeze spaces of political dissent. If one is to resist both violent fundamentalism and neo-Nazism, spaces of dissent are crucial resources. **James Alexander** discusses case examples and anecdotal evidence from youth workers as part of his account of the way that Prevent incites heavy handed responses to young people whose needs (material, support and belonging) are completely subordinated to policing and counter-terrorism.

A number of our contributors have worked in educational settings and this material points to the centrality of pedagogical issues around Prevent. **Joan McLaughlin’s** piece about her experiences of the Prevent policy in a northern English FE College demonstrate not just the utter inadequacy of training which so many front-line staff receive around Prevent but also the failure of this to

address the real situation of students and young people in these settings. She describes the way her Pakistani Muslim female students feel trapped between their horror at fundamentalist violence and the way they are regularly racially abused as ‘terrorists’ in their local community, hardly propitious circumstances for engaging with the Prevent policy in class.

The contribution from the **London ESOL teacher** expresses a similar frustration with the pedagogy around Prevent but her criticisms are addressed more to the left wing and anti-racist activists she works with, many of whom fail to challenge and even repeat the widely circulating conspiracy theories around Prevent, in the process denying and evading the concerns being raised by ESOL students themselves about fundamentalist mobilisations and the harms to their families including their children. This demonstrates again the inadequacy of the Left’s investment in a narrative of state repression versus a victimised Muslim community. Not only does this see ‘the Muslim community’ as an entirely monolithic entity but it also risks colluding with the view that Muslims cannot live in the West, a view shared by racists and Islamists. She argues that ESOL teachers, who do so much to impart a sense of belonging to migrant students should do more to confront these conspiratorial claims and take seriously concerns raised about fundamentalist mobilisations.

The theme of Prevent’s relationship with pedagogy continues in **Kay Sidebottom’s** article which considers a case study based on a ‘community philosophy enquiry’ into Prevent and ‘Fundamental British Values’ involving trainee teachers in the North of England. She argues that the inclusion of such ‘pro-social pedagogies’ in teacher training programmes can equip teachers with tools to facilitate dialogue and use the Prevent Duty to create reflective spaces.

We also have great pleasure in introducing our readers to the poetry of **Dean Atta** and the artwork of **Xenofon Kavadias**. We are proud to be including three of Dean's poems in this Issue (one with an embedded performance piece) and an interview highlighting the way his poetry acts as a vehicle for discussing complex processes of belonging and layers of discrimination. Xenofon's work also has a deep affinity with the issues raised in the articles in this Special Issue because the featured art work is concerned with the limits and boundaries of acceptability when one is trying to provoke thought and debate about violent terrorism and counter-terrorism. His work is discussed in our artists feature by **Shakila Mann**.

We hope you realise on looking at this range of contributions that there is not one view of Prevent which emerges from these pages. We believe that the articles included in this Special Issue have posed different questions and offer fresh insights on what is fast becoming a tired and predictable debate.

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<sup>i</sup> For a disturbing account of how far right networks orchestrated and actively 'participated' in the Christchurch Mosque massacre see Evans, R. (2019) Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch Mosque Massacre, *Bellingcat*, 15<sup>th</sup> March. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2019/03/15/shitposting-inspirational-terrorism-and-the-christchurch-mosque-massacre/>



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# Respecting and Ensuring Rights: Feminist Ethics for a State Response to Fundamentalism

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## Abstract

*This article revisits the multiple terrorist attacks that took place in England in 2017 and, through a closer examination of the narratives of the eight male perpetrators of these attacks, it draws the readers' attention to the flaws in state and non-state responses to fundamentalist mobilisations. The article works with Karima Bennoune's (2008) radical universalist approach to highlight the importance of a human rights framework for tackling fundamentalism. This is positioned against a neo-liberal and nationalist state response and a reactive left/anti-racist response in order to make visible the connections between terror and torture and also the myopia of a response that emphasises an obligation to either respect or ensure rights rather than both simultaneously. This is particularly underlined within the final section where a discussion of gender perspectives on tackling fundamentalism distinguishes between the human right to security, an important concern for feminists involved in ending violence against women and girls, and the government's protection of its own interests through securitisation. In keeping with the conjoined objectives of the piece, the final section offers a simultaneous critique of non-state actors for whom every state intervention on fundamentalism, and every feminist engagement with the state, is sullied by the accusation of 'securitisation'.*

Keywords: Prevent, Human Rights, Terrorism, Gender, Security

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**Peer review:** This article has been subject to a double blind peer review process.



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## **Introduction**

After a ten year hiatus, in 2017 Islamist terrorism once again made its presence felt on the streets of the UK. The year began with news of the suicide bombing by Jamil al Harith, a prominent Manchester based ISIS operative and a former Guantanamo detainee. Then, alongside images of British nationals, including young female ‘jihadi brides’, leaving the UK to fight for the so called Islamic State, five terrorist attacks in the space of five months - Westminster (22/03/2017), Manchester (22/05/2017), London Bridge (3/06/2017), Finsbury Park (19/06/2017), and Putney Green (19/09/2017) – became a stark reminder of the ongoing recruitment of British nationals to a violent Salafi-Jihadist ideological world view and the co-terminus rise and rise of racism. The personal-political narratives of eight men set the mood music for discussions on pathways into and the prevention of terrorism. Their stories provide key insights into the array of issues and tactics with which counter-terrorism measures now need to contend but also highlight the immense flaws and inconsistencies in the British state’s counter-terrorism work.

Gender was right at the heart of these discussions. The Manchester bomber, Salman Abedi, specifically targetted the concert of a young female singer with a largely female fan base; the majority of those killed on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2017 were women and girls condemned by Abedi for their ‘immoral western’ lifestyles. Following the Manchester attack, the former Chief Prosecutor, Nazir Afzal, who had previously used the term ‘gender terrorism’ to talk about child sexual exploitation and honour based violence, began applying this term to Muslim fundamentalism. Nimco Ali, the feminist campaigner against female genital mutilation, connected the dots across white supremacist and Islamist<sup>1</sup> attacks by diagnosing these as a problem of ‘toxic masculinity’ while the feminist journalist Joan Smith used the term ‘misogyny’ to connect a range of male perpetrated mass killings (in the UK and in the USA) with the perpetrators’ individual histories of intimate partner

violence. Moreover, women and girls were implicated in these supremacist gender orders. Questions were posed about complicity as we got to know more about Jamil al Harith through interviews with his wife. We heard of the death of one of three 'jihadi brides' who had travelled from the London borough of Tower Hamlets to Syria and public attention once again turned to female recruiters and female recruits. On the other hand, Islamists and left leaning academics attacked Muslim women who decided to work with government, through the Prevent agenda, to tackle fundamentalism within their own communities.

...

This article is informed by Karima Bennoune's (2008) radical universalist approach to tackling both terror and torture but also borne of the legacy of Women Against Fundamentalism's writing and activism. I attempt to push the reader to think simultaneously from an anti-racist, anti-fundamentalist, feminist position within the context of a highly polarised debate. In doing so, I critically engage with the landscape on which Prevent is rhetorically advocated and implemented, by acknowledging the importance of challenging fundamentalism in all religions, without conceding to either civil society denial or state over reach, and with the objective of holding both state and non-state actors to account.

The article begins with an introduction to Karima Bennoune's (2008) important reminder of the bi-focal obligation of human rights – to ensure rights and respect rights – and the many ways that this dual duty is compromised within the circle of indignity that connects terror and torture. I position this commitment to a human rights approach as in conflict with nationalist and neo-liberal responses to terrorism. In the first section, I voice antipathy for the displacement of an important emergent 1980s debate about 'fundamentalism' with a far less coherent conceptualisation of 'extremism', particularly the way it is bound to patriotism, integration, and

individualised risk assessments. If this first section is a focus on problems with the state's framing of the issues, the following section highlights the myopia of non-state actors that focus on state over reach and push against any serious consideration of the threat posed by non-state actors engaged in terror and torture. This part of the argument highlights the importance of a feminist ethics that can distinguish between supremacist, authoritarian projects and liberatory ones. The final section focuses on gender in order to draw out the tensions in getting both state and non-state actors to value and defend security as a human right. On the one hand, civil society actors accuse the state (and whoever engages with government) of 'securitisation' whenever government takes up its responsibility to tackle fundamentalism. On the other hand, the British state rescinds its duty to protect all its citizens and frequently falls back on securitisation, particularly the use of immigration controls, to ultimately protect the interests of the nation-state over and above the rights of its citizens.

### **Radical universalism vs nationalism and neo liberal governance**

In 2008, in the wake of academic and activist campaigning around Guantanamo and refashioned arguments about the manipulation of women's and LGBT rights in the service of imperial power, Karima Bennouna – then a Rutgers Law Professor and now the UN Special Rapporteur for Cultural Rights – developed a bold and brave new critique of state and NGO responses to fundamentalism. In her paper 'Terror/Torture', Bennouna (2008) argued that both fundamentalist terrorism and the state's response to this are bound together by the same philosophical tenets, both are an incursion on people's human rights and they often involve the same acts. These acts are intended to cause 'severe and deliberate human suffering', they dehumanise their victims, they both 'represent a spectrum of brutalising practices often justified in the name of a greater good or higher purpose' (Bennouna, 2008: 17). Moreover, they violate the right to bodily autonomy, to freedom of conscience and expression and they both sever 'all bonds of human

sympathy' between those engaged in torture or terror and those being tortured or terrorised (Bennoune, 2008: 7, footnote 21). Although state and non-state actors portray terror and torture as dichotomous categories, they are in fact 'points on the circumference of the same circle: terror/torture, terror/counter-terror, security/human rights, state action/non-state action' - as one side brutalises, the other side rescinds the rule of law which in turn leads to a violation of rights, and so on and so forth (Bennoune, 2008: 9).

Bennoune argues that to counter this circle of dehumanisation, all state and non-state bodies need to focus on creating a 'circle of decency' and indeed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) obliges states to both *ensure* rights and *respect* rights. However, she explains that:

In our time of terror, security experts usually emphasize the aspect of ensuring rights (though not often using such language) while human rights advocates largely focus on respecting rights (though they usually at least acknowledge, en passant, that governments must protect their populations). The trick, which neither side in the debate has adequately referenced, is that states have to do both - respect rights and ensure rights - and at the same time.

[Bennoune, 2008: 10]

In ensuring rights, the British state has a duty to protect its population from 'violent attack by non-state armed groups' but, at the same time, it 'must not itself contravene the rights guaranteed in the ICCPR' (Bennoune, 2008: 10). Unfortunately, campaigns against state injustices powerfully illustrate the British government's failure to respect rights while it claims to undertake activities to ensure rights. Sadly, there are more examples than space permits within this article, but touchstones include the British government's involvement in extraordinary rendition, deaths in police custody, the use of control orders to curtail freedom of movement, the use of immigration controls to deport jihadists (including to countries where they face

persecution) and the use of immigration controls to stop young people who travelled to Syria and Iraq from returning to the UK.

Moreover, Amnesty International UK's (2016) submission to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review lists the current government's 'hostile environment' and immigration detention practices as one of the key human rights issues in the UK. The same report raises concerns about the ways that new security measures – such as the Investigatory Powers Act – infringe on the right to privacy and freedom of expression. At the time of writing, there is a groundswell of support for the Stansted 15 who were convicted under the Aviation and Maritime Security Act 1990 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 for using non-violent protest methods to stop a charter flight being used to deport asylum claimants to Nigeria and Ghana.<sup>ii</sup> This case is a clear illustration of the way that the state uses security claims and security legislation to enable deportation and suppress anti-deportation / human rights activism.

As Chetan Bhatt (2012) has pointed out, these developments are taking place within a techno-geo-political context where state over reach is now characterised by drone strikes and multi-layered insidious intrusions into governance structures, or shells of structures, within other countries (justified on the grounds that they are 'failed' or 'fragile' states), while jihadists scatter their attacks across a range of geographical territories utilising a wide range of tactics and tools. The rules of war have changed as both state and opponent claim that everywhere is a battlefield (Reiner, 2018). Consequently, it has become usual for western states to claim that the use of extra-judicial measures is a necessary act for protecting the security of their populations - the assassinations of prominent Al Qaeda leaders Osama Bin Laden and Anwar Al Awlaki, were defended with recourse to the language of war and a claim to *ensuring rights* while at the same time completely

obliterating out of any recognition the simultaneous obligation on states to *respect rights*.

On the other hand, human rights, anti-racist and left activist circles have largely glossed over the terrorist supremacist ideologies and networks of former Guantanamo prisoners and other Islamist activists and instead depicted them as virtuous victims harassed by the insidious practices of security services (Bhatt, 2017). When faced with the struggle between global fundamentalist forces and western imperial powers, these groups and movements make ethical choices to present 'salafi-jihadis and their supporters as bewildered victims unburdened with ideology, volition or agency... (for instance) in the case of Aafia Siddiqui<sup>iii</sup>, it is not simply that human rights organisations focused on 'torture', but that they actively worked to make 'terror' disappear, remade its ideologues into virtuous figures' (Bhatt, 2017: 7). Such a perspective sees power only in relation to western states and the progressive struggle only in relation to fighting imperialism (ibid).

Karima Bennoune similarly argued that this is typical of a human rights discourse that 'minimises discussion of ensuring rights to protection from terrorist violence by the enforcement of international law' (2008: 10) and is largely focused on campaigns directed at nation states and their obligation to respect rights.

Some would argue that international human rights are now a central part of globalised governance and there are similarities between the fundamentalist recourse to human rights as legal innocence and the neo-liberal instrumentalization of a human rights language as both have been emptied of any 'progressive visionary content' (Bhatt 2017: 18). Nonetheless, in this article, I draw a clear distinction between a radical universalist rights-based response to fundamentalist mobilisations and a response that is mired by

nationalism and the managerial tools of neo-liberal governance, which have in turn relied on communal forces.

In the context of a globalised world, the nation-state is impacted by (and impacts) international governance structures which have become increasingly dominated by the drive to instil neo-liberal political economy (Sassen, 1996) in a context where the power of capital is intensified (Hall, 2011). The privileging of neo-liberal economic interests over social welfare and social democracy has seeped into the very fabric of our culture, our language, ethics and daily practices (Hall, 2011) while western governments develop management tools akin to insurance firms to ameliorate the risks of global traffic, both material and virtual (Rose, 1999).

In the face of global transformations, the nation state retains its autonomy, authority and legitimacy by strengthening its executive over judicial and legislative wings (Sassen, 2004) but when people resist the growing power of the executive, government relies on nationalist fervour to get through these crises of governmentality and governability (Yuval-Davis, 2012). These trends are really evident right now with a Conservative government pushing against international human rights conventions, relying on a crude recourse to immigration controls and nationalist scripts (the 'hostile environment' and 'British values'), and an over reliance on punitive measures for tackling social problems so that it can continue to squeeze the life out of the welfare state. Moreover, these tendencies are particularly clear in the British Prevent agenda.

### **Nationalism, neo-liberalism and Prevent**

Since its birth in 2005 to the events of 2017, the Prevent agenda was much less a political argument against right wing formations and much more a combination of patriotic expectation and neo-liberal managerialism. In Opposition, the Conservative Party election campaign oriented around three key distinctions from New Labour: to stop state funding of Islamist groups

(there has never been a statement about other religious fundamentalists); to ensure that Prevent money is used for focused counter-terror work rather than generic cohesion / social development activities; and tackle the ideological shifts that enable fundamentalist activity by looking at 'extremism' and not just 'violent extremism'.

However, there have been several continuities between the New Labour and Conservative Party approach to fundamentalism in the way that it has been defined more by the interests of the nation-state (nationalism) and the power of capital (neo-liberalism) than by a commitment to respecting and ensuring rights. Firstly, although the current definition of extremism appears to be located within human rights and anti-discrimination commitments, it continues to emphasise loyalty to the British state and does so in a context where the current PM Theresa May is issuing conflicting messages about the government's commitment to human rights – on the one hand she is advocating a Domestic Abuse Bill that will ratify the Istanbul Convention, on the other she has been a vociferous opponent of the Human Rights Act and is complicit in the decimation of resources (e.g. legal aid) and support services to assist people to activate those rights.

Throughout the New Labour years, Prevent was wedded to the Community Cohesion and Integration agenda. The potential for a human rights framework was jettisoned in favour of chauvinistic 'British' pride. As the SBS/WAF (2007) submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion spelt out then and is still relevant now, government discourse assumed that 'there are a set of fixed and given (unchanging) 'British' values that are superior and to which all those who enter the country must subscribe' (p.2). The absence of any acknowledgement of the contribution of minorities, including Muslim activists, to the development of human rights and equality principles 'reinforces the distorted and dangerous view peddled by many in



the media and western governments and mirrored by fundamentalists, that the battle lines are between the West and Islam' (SBS/WAF, 2007: 4).

This recourse to 'British values' involved a renewed pressure on minorities to 'integrate' and to demonstrate their loyalty to the British state (see Tony Blair's speech 8/12/2006 'The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values'). At the time, Sivanandan (2006) astutely observed that the war on asylum had merged with the war on terror – 'race riots' and religious violence became part of the projection of second or third generation ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims, as immigrants in need of integration rather than as established British citizens that had contributed to the struggle for human rights and equality. The state's response to fundamentalist recruitment completely sidestepped discussions on racism, poverty, class inequality, and foreign policy in favour of cultural and behavioural arguments placing the onus on minorities to 'integrate'.

This emphasis on British values and integration has continued under the Conservative Party; the revised Prevent Strategy (2011) defined extremism as follows:

'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. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas'.

[HM Government, 2011: 107]

BME feminists are caught between a rock and a hard place as Theresa May has opened up space for conversations about gender and fundamentalism that simply didn't exist under New Labour, particularly by establishing a Commission on Countering Extremism steered by the BME feminist Sara Khan and a group of academics and activists with strong track records of defending

human rights, equalities and civil liberties. However, the Conservative Party's interest in gender inequality is tarnished by its destabilisation of citizenship - British minorities continue to be treated as immigrants sandwiched between a 'hostile environment' and a 'culture clash'.

Integration (or lack of) continues as a feature of mainstream assumptions about extremism in the UK and as an element of the current Conservative government's Prevent agenda. Louise Casey's (2016) report on opportunity and integration reflects many of these assumptions – she leans towards assimilationism by focusing primarily on ethnic minorities while simultaneously ignoring the rising tide of white fascist extremism, which is pinned to the same claims of authentic British identity and values. She also advocates the teaching of 'British values, laws and history' without cognisance of the spoils of colonialism.

Recent campaigns against gender segregation have been important for highlighting separatist tendencies among fundamentalists and the ways that they enforce unequal gender roles, cloister and control women and girls within minority communities (see Patel, 2018). However, the presumption by government and others that extremists are in part defined by their inability / unwillingness to integrate conceals many truths about the British state *and* about fundamentalist activity. Under New Labour, Islamists were notoriously given Prevent funding for anti-radicalisation work and consulted by police forces in England (see Maher and Frampton, 2009) but they were not the only ones. The New Labour government claimed as 'moderate' those fundamentalist organisations (such as the Muslim Council of Britain, Hindu Forum and the Sikh Federation) who appeared to be 'integrated' because of their engagement with democratic lobbying tactics and electoral politics and their use of human rights language. As Sahgal (2016) highlighted more recently, this relationship with fundamentalist forces continued under the last two Conservative governments. Moreover, fundamentalist groups have

long since been able to mainstream their religious interpretations and practices by being 'integrated' into local multi-faith forums and Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACREs).<sup>iv</sup> As is obvious from the examples discussed in the next two sections, fundamentalists strive to impose ideological projects of separatism and superiority but they do this through full engagement with social and political institutions in the public realm.

The British state continues to engage with fundamentalist groups across shared interests (see, for example, Sahgal, 2016; but also unintentionally highlighted by O' Toole et al. (2015) in their review of state-Muslim governance). In most part, this alignment of interests concerns a moralistic pre-occupation with policing women, young people, minority communities, illegality and criminality (see Dhaliwal, 2011 and Dhaliwal, forthcoming). Drawing on Naomi Goldenberg's (2013) theory of religions as vestigial states, I have argued that government happily overlooks 'extremism' so long as its fundamentalist partners do not pose a threat to its monopoly on violence (ibid).<sup>v</sup> As I've explained elsewhere (see Dhaliwal, 2011, 2017 and forthcoming), the continuities between New Labour and the Conservative Party can also be seen in their mobilisation of communal identities and fundamentalist formulations wherever communitarianism can assist the project of the neo-liberal shrinking of the welfare state. In short, these features of contemporary governance mean that a claim to tackling extremism is compounded by contrary interests (nationalist and neo-liberal not to mention long standing local networks) that have come to depend on extremist formations.

Moreover, an agenda that shifts attention from human rights to the pathologising discourses of integration fits neatly with risk assessment tools that emphasise individual behaviour and rectitude without contending with the structures and contexts that, although not the cause of fundamentalist

activism, have nonetheless enabled right wing formations and agendas to flourish.

The Prevent programme is delivered as a package. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 introduced a legal duty on public sector bodies to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' during the exercise of their functions (HM Government, 2015a). Due regard means that 'the authorities should place an appropriate amount of weight on the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism when they consider all the other factors relevant to how they carry out their usual functions' (HM Government, 2015a: 5). To fulfil this Duty they are expected to perform a risk assessment, produce an action plan, train staff and collaborate with other areas. Contrary to popular beliefs, this is not a duty on individual employees but on organisations and local authorities as a whole.

Connected to this new statutory Prevent Duty is the Conservative government's updated Channel programme guidance (HM Government, 2015b). The Channel programme was first piloted in 2007 by New Labour. It was rolled out by the Coalition government in 2012. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 set out 'the duty of local authorities and partners of local panels to provide support for people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism' (HM Government, 2015b: 2). Channel panels are expected to be part of multi-agency responses by: 'a. identifying individuals at risk; b. assessing the nature and extent of that risk; and c. developing the most appropriate support plan for the individuals concerned' (HM Government, 2015b: 5). This support plan can range from mentoring, life skills coaching, anger management sessions, cognitive behavioural work, something referred to as 'constructive pursuits' which includes leisure activities, education training and careers guidance, family support work including parenting programmes, health awareness training, housing support, and drugs and alcohol awareness training. The guidance also states that 'where an individual has a need for theological / ideological support, Home Office

approved intervention providers must be commissioned to mentor them. The mentoring aims to increase theological understanding and challenge extremist ideas where they are used to legitimise terrorism' (HM Government, 2015b: 17).

There are several contributions within this Special Issue (such as Parker, Chapot and Davis), which demonstrate that Prevent funded initiatives and Channel Panel interventions comprise fairly innocuous educational, developmental and youth work. Moreover, Cowden and Picken (also in this Issue) emphasise the numbers of children and young people that have been averted from fundamentalist activism because of Channel panel interventions.

While Channel guidance accepts that there is no single factor that makes someone vulnerable to radicalisation, it does provide a Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) that is built around three criteria – engagement with a group, cause or ideology; intent to cause harm; capability to cause harm. From my perspective, the second two points are key for a human rights approach to tackling fundamentalism. However, matters are confused when the VAF is supported by as many as 22 factors (known as the ERG 22+) and professionals are asked to consider the following in making a referral for a Channel intervention: 'feelings of grievance and injustice; feeling under threat; a need for identity, meaning and belonging; a desire for status; a desire for excitement and adventure; a need to dominate and control others; susceptibility to indoctrination; a desire for political or moral change; opportunistic involvement; family or friends involvement in extremism; being at a transitional time of life; being influenced or controlled by a group; relevant mental health issues; over-identification with a group or ideology; 'Them and Us' thinking; dehumanisation of the enemy; attitudes that justify offending; harmful means to an end; harmful objectives; individual knowledge, skills and competencies; access to networks, funding or equipment; criminal capability' (HM Government, 2015b: 28). Other than

‘criminal capability’, these indicators are wide ranging and many could apply to most young people in their formative years.

It’s important to bring a critical lens to this process but a feminist critique needs to be clearly distinguished from that led by Cage (2016) in their report, *The Science of Pre-Crime*. As a fundamentalist organisation (see Tax, 2013 and Bhatt, 2017 for further details) their objectives are entirely different. Sadly, they have managed to harness the integrity of academic critique<sup>vi</sup> in order to try and undermine necessary discussions of a role for the state in tackling fundamentalism. They seem to have convinced a huge range of academics that there is no Islamist recruitment taking place in the UK in spite of the shocking reality of terrorist attacks and of British nationals travelling abroad to join ISIS. This wide ranging support for the Cage position assumes that ISIS recruits are responding entirely to British foreign policy and/or imperialism rather than the fact that people are effectively targeted by ISIS recruiters and that those recruited subscribe to an authoritarian ideology.

Instead, I take my lead from a number of feminist academics whose work to end violence against women has pointed to the ways that risk assessments (whose formula has been devised by the police) are flawed for the simple fact that risk is never static, it is dynamic, and therefore can not be subjected to a tick list approach, no matter how detailed (Coy and Kelly, 2011). Moreover, within contexts of dwindling public resources, there is considerable pressure to find ways to distinguish between high and low risk cases i.e. those that require an urgent response and those that can be de-prioritised, even though an incident classed as low risk may well be an indication of something more serious (Stark, 2009). In fact this is perfectly illustrated by the stories of the eight men responsible for the attacks in 2017 but also by the Deghayes brothers whose referral to Channel did not prevent their radicalisation (see Connett, 2017) because it did not address the multi-faceted problems confronting them - bullying and racism at school, poverty, domestic violence at home, an uncle that had been in Guantanamo and was released to an

address near them that led to them being subjected to racist abuse but also exposed to Salafi-Jihadi ideology, their involvement in gangs, and their political views. An approach that encourages independent youth projects that are focused on advocating for universal human rights (against the racist and fundamentalist assault on rights) at the same time that welfare needs are being met by the state, might be a better step in the right direction.

### **In denial of Terror and Torture**

2017 began with the news that Jamil al Harith, a 50 year old British convert to Islam, was the suicide bomber at the centre of an explosion near the Iraqi city of Mosul (Rawlinson, 2017). He was known to ISIS as Abu Zakariya al-Britaini. He was known to his natal family as Ronald Fiddler. The plot thickened as press attention switched to the £1 million compensation awarded to Harith in 2010 (while Theresa May was Home Secretary) for false imprisonment and torture at Guantanamo Bay (MacAskill et al., 2017). Harith had been detained without charge at Guantanamo for over two years. During this time, he had been subjected to beatings, sleep deprivation, food and water deprivation, religious abuse, and daily humiliation during which he was forced to kneel in front of US officials. He was kept in a cage and shackled into a painful position for hours at a time. This treatment needs to be condemned. Whatever his crimes, Harith deserved to be treated as a human being with the right to food, shelter, accommodation and the right not to be tortured.

There is another side to his story. Harith had converted to Islam back in 1994, while he was in his twenties. Six years later, he travelled to Pakistan and claims to have been arrested by the Taliban as he was passing through Afghanistan on his way to Iran. Along with several other British nationals, he was picked up by US Army officials at an ex-Taliban prison in Kandahar in 2001 (ibid). He claimed that while he was waiting for Red Cross officials to organise his return to the UK, US officials decided they didn't believe his story, detained him as a 'suspected enemy combatant' and moved him to

Guantanamo. A series of media outlets tracked Harith's journey since his release from Guantanamo. He was one of 17 British nationals (including Moazzam Begg, the Tipton Three, Mohammed Emwazi - later known as Jihadi John - and Omar Deghayes) whose release from Guantanamo was negotiated by a New Labour government in 2004 (Quinn and Weaver, 2017). The then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, asserted that he was confident that none of these men posed a security threat (Blunkett, 2017). Jamil al Harith was also one of four British plaintiffs represented by the Centre for Constitutional Rights (CCR) in New York in a bid to sue Donald Rumsfeld (the then US Secretary of State) for false imprisonment and torture at Guantanamo. The case was dismissed in 2009 but is linked to Meredith Tax (2013) and Karima Bennouné's (2010) argument that, in representing jihadists as victims of state torture, CCR chose to overlook their participation in acts of terror.

According to Harith's sister, when he returned from Guantanamo in 2004, he struggled to find work. At some point he met and married Shukee Begum. She claimed that Harith was radicalised in 2013 after being affected by the plight of Syrians (McKee, 2017). That would be almost ten years after his return to the UK. From 2013 onwards, he was ensconced in a network of Manchester-based jihadists through his contact with a key ISIS recruiter at the centre of that network, Raphael Hostey, known to ISIS as Abu Qaqa Al-Britaini. By 2014, just one year later, Harith had moved to ISIS controlled territory. A Channel 4 interview with Shukee Begum revealed that Harith had travelled to Gaza and was 'stopped and questioned by UK authorities for six hours' when he tried to re-enter the country. She had thought he was 'involved in the distribution of aid in al-Bab on the Iraq/Syria border and was ideologically opposed to suicide attacks' but when he moved to ISIS territory she followed him (with her five children!) to try to convince him to return to the UK (ibid).



The circle of Terror/Torture was quickly reproduced as civil society actors avoided any concrete discussion of the heinous ideology to which Harith had subscribed while government compensated for its own oversight by curtailing civil liberties. Theresa May re-introduced the same control orders that David Cameron had scrapped as part of Coalition brokering with the Liberal Democrats and moved quickly to a conversation about strengthening immigration laws to enable the deportation of jihadists – Theresa May’s pet project as then Home Secretary - and rescinding citizenship to British nationals in Syria and Iraq to prevent them from returning to the UK, even where they felt remorse and disillusion with joining ISIS, and irrespective of whether they had committed any crimes.<sup>vii</sup>

Harith’s personal-political journey and the noise around it, raises a number of issues that are pertinent to an understanding of the current Prevent landscape. This was a man at the apex of both torture and terror. His story is a stark reminder of the globalised enmeshing of local, national, international, real, lived and virtual worlds through intense time-space compression, that in turn pose significant challenges to the purview of British state powers. The daily experience of humiliation, violence and abuse that he incurred at Guantanamo, his insights into US and UK security services, army and police officers *must* have impacted his world view.<sup>viii</sup> However, while his family stated that he was forever changed by his experience at Guantanamo and his wife claimed that he was radicalised by the injustices of the Syrian conflict in 2013, alternative accounts suggest a radicalisation narrative that spanned thirty years.

The reasons why Harith was ever in Afghanistan back in 2001 remain unclear. This is not dissimilar to the cases of other British men that were initially deemed ‘enemy combatants’ and later freed from Guantanamo (such as Moazzam Begg) who anti-racist, left and human rights groups portrayed as

'perfect victims' (Sahgal, 2010) of western imperial powers until Gita Sahgal (2010), Karima Bennoune (2010), Meredith Tax (2013), Chetan Bhatt (2017), and members of Women Against Fundamentalism pointed to the many ways in which they had been, and continue to be, involved in Islamist networks. This was reflected, for instance, in their trips to countries that map directly on to the Islamist geo-political narrative (Bhatt, 1997) calling on true Muslims to engage in 'defensive jihad' (Bhatt, 2017). Harith allegedly accompanied Abu Bakr (a key Al Qaeda operative) to Sudan as far back as 1994! He then claims to have been 'picked up' by the Taliban in 2001 for trying to cross from a 'religious retreat' in Pakistan through a post 9/11 war-torn Afghanistan to reach Iran! (see Rawlinson, 2017). At some point in the mid 2000s, he was stopped by intelligence officers on his way back from Gaza.

There is also another twist to the story: a suggestion that Harith was detained by the US because he could offer insider information on the Taliban. These are *Homeland*-esque machinations that are compounded by Lord Carlile's (the man responsible for reviewing terrorism legislation) assertions that the compensation awarded to Harith in 2010 was an attempt to hold onto national security data and there was likely always an understanding that Harith was a jihadist. Pragna Patel's (2019) article in this Special Issue points to similar machinations that enable the kinds of narrative lapses and contradictions that exacerbate rather than chip away at the Terror/Torture circle of abuse and indignity. The only un-established fact is whether Harith became entrapped by jihadists or whether he pro-actively aligned himself with fundamentalists in spite of his experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Media and right wing outrage focused on the compensation Harith was awarded and this undermined his very real experience of torture. On the other hand, Jamil al Harith's activities are a mirror on left/anti-racist critiques of Prevent and radicalisation theses. In a process not dissimilar to the anti-

racist defence of Moazzam Begg and absolute resistance to the exposition of Birmingham-based jihadist networks nurtured and cemented over two decades (see Tax, 2013; Bhatt, 2017), a Letter to *The Guardian*<sup>ix</sup> accused the newspaper of racial profiling and pathologisation after one of its journalists (an Asian/Muslim woman from the north of England) produced an investigative piece detailing Islamist networks in South Manchester (see Parveen, 2017). She identified 16 ISIS recruits from within 2.5 miles of Harith's home, including the notorious ISIS enlister Raphael Hostey, who was killed by a drone attack in Syria in 2016. Hostey and Harith were good friends. Hostey was also friends with Salman Abedi, the suicide bomber who killed 22 people at Manchester Arena just weeks after Harith's suicide mission in Mosul. Harith and Hostey were also acquaintances of Salma and Zahra Halane, twin sisters that travelled to Syria to become 'jihadi brides'. The report suggests that histories of belonging previously associated with gangs have given way to networks organised around particular ISIS recruiters.

Despite all this, the letter<sup>x</sup> from two academics and a youth worker, received wide circulation among anti-racist academics and activists on social media. The authors of the letter state:

The government's misunderstanding has been to claim that radicalisation is the main cause of terrorist violence. Often known as the "conveyor belt theory", it states that extreme interpretations of belief systems offer the best explanations for why people commit acts of violence. This has been largely discredited by most mainstream academics (with a link to Arun Kundnani's Claystone Report) as it ignores the role of structural violence: racism, poverty, vulnerability, foreign interventions etc. – often the products of state policy.

This Letter is an archetypal underscoring of respecting rights and the total side lining of the duty to ensure rights. In my view it is also emblematic of the way that a range of academics round on anyone that meets with government

to discuss responses to fundamentalism. In fact, by completely ignoring the reality of fundamentalist mobilisations in Manchester, the authors are not respecting the rights of those millions of people, mostly Muslims, that feel the full force of fundamentalist violence on a daily basis.

Moreover, the point about 'mainstream academics' links to a report by Arun Kundnani (2015). Obviously this statement shifts the onus from fundamentalist activism to state policy. The same circles are silent on the 16 ISIS recruits and Islamist networks that must have developed in the area and gone unchallenged for decades. Other than an essay on South Manchester by Kenan Malik (2017), there were no left or anti-racist letters of opprobrium and concern about the extent and embeddedness of fundamentalist activity in minority neighbourhoods.

At this point, one does have to ask - why isn't the recruitment of men and women to terrorist networks, and the impact on universal human rights, a cause for concern for these anti-racist activists and academics? Moreover, as Gita Sahgal asked of me recently, why is it that anti-racists work with network analyses of fascist activists but proclaim state conspiracy and underscore infringements of civil liberties when others urge us to look closely at jihadist networks?

In a twisted push back against all radicalisation theses, Arun Kundnani would have us believe that it is the British state rather than fundamentalist activism that is responsible for perfectly 'nice' young men and women becoming terrorists.<sup>xi</sup> In fact Kundnani never describes jihadists as terrorists but frequently speaks of state terrorism. If the cause is state policies, it follows that for Kundnani (and the many left/anti-racists that follow his line of argument) the way to tackle fundamentalism is to focus on rectifying state policies, particularly British foreign policy.

There is little space to get into the dominant radicalisation theses here but, as noted above, there are flaws with the VAF approach, it's myopic focus on individual psychology and behaviour when a leading expert on radicalisation, Peter Neumann, has identified over 200 personal and political conditions that could potentially push people towards fundamentalist formations (Brown, 2017). It feels to me that the VAF pales into insignificance when one looks at the personal-political journey of Jamil al Harith. Conversely, a rights based approach would actively challenge all mobilisations that seek to dismantle others' rights and it would support projects that are engaged with fighting for universal human rights, whether this is local women's organisations or secular anti-racist projects.

In the context of Manchester, Kenan Malik (2017) provides an important personal insight - his political trajectory was vastly different to Jamil al Harith, he argues, because of the anti-racist and class based progressive social movements that marked his youth, a context that has been in sharp decline for some years. Given this, is it not equally possible that the decline of secular anti-racist or trade union activism and/or complicity in strengthening the hand of religious identity politics and communal projects, is also part of the problem?

Moreover, as Karima Bennoune (2008) points out, the term 'terrorism' remains controversial among left, anti-racist and civil liberties activists even though there are clear definitions of both terror and torture within international law and it is not accurate to claim, as some human rights organisations have done, that 'the term terrorism is without legal significance'. Bennoune cites the 2004 definition established by the UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Changes as:

Any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and

Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act...

[as cited in Bennoune, 2008: 20]

While Bennoune contends with the shortcomings of this definition, including 'the exclusion of state conduct from the scope of the definition' (2008:21), she maintains that it is not correct for international human rights organisations and left activists to claim that there is no agreement on how to define 'terrorism'. She notes that, at least until the date of her article, Amnesty International were writing the word terrorism in quotation marks in order to emphasise the lack of international agreement on the use of the term. This was underscored by their adoption of the line that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'. While there are clear examples of the ways that states use the phrase 'terrorism' to pathologise and root out opposition<sup>xii</sup>, there has been a long period of international human rights organisations refusing to, categorically, denounce the actions of Muslim fundamentalist groups.

Moreover, this is not the case for the British government's list of proscribed terrorist organisations – whatever you may think of the word 'terrorist' and in lieu of an urgent debate about proscription, most of the organisations on the government's list (as of September 2018), are supremacist groups intent on embedding fear and terrorising civilians. If anything, the list does not go far enough in terms of the full range of fundamentalist organisations operating within the UK that present themselves as respectful ('integrated' into civic, political and electoral systems) while they fund, support, advocate and their members and leaders engage with acts of violence across the globe.

However, the state does not make any distinctions between forms of non-state political violence and this is where we need to foreground and develop our own feminist ethics. For the British state, Britons recruited to fight ISIS by organisations outside of the British army are placed on the same terrorism-radicalisation footing as those that join ISIS. So in the British government's view, Anna Campbell's<sup>xiii</sup> armed resistance alongside the progressive YPJ (the Kurdish Women's Protection Units) in Rojava would be subject to the same terms of reference as Jamil al Harith's suicide bomb for ISIS. Clearly there is an ethical problem with this and we need to find ways of distinguishing between violence perpetrated in the name of authoritarian supremacist projects and that perpetrated to resist such projects. Feminist ethics needs to help us cut through the claim that Muslim fundamentalists are the same as Irish nationalists fighting British colonialism or South Africans fighting apartheid (see Tax, 2013 for more on the many ways that fundamentalists are not anti-imperialists).

### **Security vs securitisation**

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017, 52 year old Khalid Masood rented a large car and drove it at high speed at pedestrians walking on the pavement of Westminster Bridge killing four people and injuring another 32 (Anderson, 2017). Masood dumped his car then ran across the road to New Palace Yard where he stabbed an unarmed officer. Masood was shot dead by another police officer just inside the gates of the Palace of Westminster. Born Adrian Russell Elms, he had converted to Islam while he was in prison. He was known to MI5 as a 'peripheral figure' in a plot to bomb the base of the territorial army in Luton in 2010 but the police claim that he was not considered a threat and he had not been charged with any terrorist offences. Between 2010 and 2012 he worked for a language school in Luton where the manager claimed he came across as apolitical ('integrated'?) and rarely expressed anger but he did feature as part of police intelligence on Al Mouhajiroun networks. Although the Islamic State were quick to claim the attack, there was little evidence to

suggest any direct links between Masood and ISIS. For all intents and purposes this was a man that acted alone out of a strident belief in a particular ideology, using as ammunition items that are readily available to adults in the UK.

Exactly two months later, Salman Abedi walked into the foyer of Manchester Arena, towards the end of a concert by Ariana Grande. He was carrying a rucksack containing a home made bomb filled with shrapnel. He positioned himself by parents and family members who were waiting to collect children and young people at the concert. He detonated the bomb as hundreds of people poured out of the concert. The blast itself killed the people in his immediate vicinity but the shrapnel enabled him to injure people as far as 80 metres from where he was standing. Abedi killed 22 people. Another 116 people required hospital treatment (Anderson, 2017). Half of those killed were under 20 years of age, the youngest was just 8 years old. The majority were girls and young women, representative of Grande's white western female teen following. By targeting a concert by this specific artist, Abedi was making an ideological statement about pop culture and expressions of female sexuality. Since he did not leave a definitive statement about his actions it is difficult to know his intention, but his target and his timing appeared to fit clearly with the ISIS call for Muslims around the world to use the month of Ramadan to demonstrate their opposition to western values.

Just two weeks later, on a warm Saturday evening (3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017), still in the period of Ramadan, another three men, Khuram Bhatt (aged 27), Rachid Redouane (aged 30), and Youseff Zaghba (age 22) drove a hired white van into groups of people on London Bridge. The van was loaded with home-made Molotov cocktails. After driving into pedestrians on London Bridge, the three jumped out and, armed with large knives, they set upon people in nearby Borough Market. They killed 8 people and injured 45 (Anderson, 2017) before being shot dead by police officers. Here the focus was not



specifically on a group of women, but it was clearly a response to ISIS calls to use the Ramadan period to show contempt for 'western' values, which they actioned by targetting bars and nightlife.

At the height of attention to Islamist attacks, a 47 year old white man, Darren Osborne, went to Wales and hired a van which he drove back over night. He headed straight to the Finsbury Park Islamic Centre where large numbers of Muslims had gathered to break their fast. Osborne drove his van into a pedestrian, killing him at the scene. He injured 10 others. He was remanded by other worshippers and handed over to the police.

All four of the above events were classed as acts of terrorism.

Despite the continued denial and displacement by many non-state actors, terrorism involves a series of violations of human rights. As Bennoune (2008) makes clear, terrorism has the potential to:

(V)iolate human rights across all categories: civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, as well as individual and group rights, women's rights and children's rights. Those rights most often affected include the rights to life and to security of person, the rights to be free from torture and ill-treatment and arbitrary detention, the right to humane treatment, the right to be free from discrimination, the rights to be free from violence against women and to free consent in marriage, the rights to freedoms of opinion and expression and assembly and conscience and religion and belief and movement, the rights to take part in public affairs and to vote, the right to health, the right to education, the right to work, the right to take part in cultural life, the right to protection of the family, the right to development, and the right to peace (2008:41).

Moreover, a human rights perspective ‘can illuminate aspects not highlighted in governmental security discourses’ such as the imposition of dress codes and marriage codes (Bennoune, 2008:40). Bennoune and members of Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) have fought over many years for public recognition of the specific gender dimensions to fundamentalist, racist and communal attacks.

In the wake of the 2017 attacks and also because of the attention to ‘jihadi brides’ and the sexual violence perpetrated by ISIS, the gender dimensions of ‘extremism’ began to be foregrounded. However, these discussions have been far from clear and there’s still a lot of thinking to be done on this. Unfortunately, there is little space to get into detail but I want to end this paper by making three key points on gender that speak to the need for a clear feminist distinction between security and securitisation.

Firstly, there has been a move to diagnose the problem of fundamentalism as one of patriarchal power relations. References to ‘toxic masculinity’<sup>xiv</sup>, ‘misogyny’<sup>xv</sup> and ‘gender terrorism’<sup>xvi</sup> in relation to the events of 2017 and the eight men involved in perpetrating those events are clearly a means for highlighting the connections between their personal histories of violence against women, their affiliation with fundamentalist and racist political views and the specific targeting of women and girls. Indeed Bennoune (2008) also used the phrase ‘gender-based terrorism’ to refer to the specific forms – like attacks on reproductive rights and on sexual health clinics – that are clearly targeting women’s rights. This connects with aspects of the term ‘sexual terrorism’ coined by Carole Sheffield (1995) around three decades back in order to expand the notion of terrorism so that it takes account of rape culture and sexual harassment and the way that fear and threats to personal security and bodily autonomy are a key mechanism for enabling male control over women.

To think of security in relation to the right to be free from this threat of and actual harm, is an important invocation of human rights values, particularly the notion of security as a human right. As an extension of this, Bennoune's (2008) calls for security proponents 'to expand their notion of safety to include fundamental aspects of human rights, including the right to be free from torture' (page 9). In practice this means we work with expanded notions of security that cover the torture inflicted by non-state actors and push against attempts to inflict torture or compromise rights (freedom of movement, bodily autonomy, the right to life) in the name of fighting terrorism. To sustain the universality of human rights requires a deep commitment to human dignity (Bennoune, 2008: 9).

Having said that, the current discussion in the UK of patriarchy and fundamentalism feels reductive. We can easily lose sight of a radical universalist approach to Terror/Torture by reducing everything to patriarchy. For instance, male dissidents are targeted by fundamentalists – how does patriarchy help us to understand that and to respect/ensure their rights? Moreover, not all men exposed to violence and abuse, or all misogynists, or indeed all male perpetrators of domestic abuse, then go on to subscribe to fundamentalist ideologies let alone commit acts of mass violence. Perhaps what we could argue is that the bodily autonomy and security of women and girls is indicative of conducive contexts for fundamentalist and other right-wing mobilisations?

Secondly, as WAF and others in the UK have maintained, women and girls are at the forefront of tackling fundamentalism. Yet when women and girls sit down at the table with government to talk about tackling fundamentalism they are accused of being co-opted by a surveillance state, of giving way to state over reach and of fuelling anti-Muslim racism (see Haroon-Iqbal and

Rehman articles in this Issue), even now when the government's counter-extremism agenda is so obviously fixed on white supremacist groups. As WAF has known since its birth in 1989, women speaking out on Muslim fundamentalism in particular are de-legitimised by minority communities. For instance, Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal and Yasmin Rehman (in this Issue) point to the way that they are accused of not being Muslim enough to speak on the issue. The fact is that women that engage with the state to underline its role in ensuring the rights of its citizens, including the human right to security, bodily autonomy and freedom of expression, are accused of supporting a post 9/11 'securitisation' agenda (see Fekete, 2006).

Having said that, my final point brings us to the murkiest part of the discussions on Prevent. By speaking of 'gender terrorism' in relation to child sexual exploitation, honour based violence and Muslim fundamentalism and not other forms of violence, it is being applied to acts of violence perpetrated by BME men. It is in this way that the phrase runs the risk of sitting more closely to securitisation (as protection of the nation-state, its monocultural characteristics and its monopoly on violence) than to security as a human rights value.

Moreover, it is difficult to dismiss concerns about securitisation when David Cameron (2011) ushered the Conservatives back in to power by presenting a critique of multiculturalism at an international security conference and calling it 'muscular liberalism', when counter-terrorism money is used to fund CCTV cameras in majority BME areas in Birmingham, when 'security services overlap with community engagement teams' so much so that a counter terrorism police officer is seconded into the council's Equalities Division (O' Toole, et al., 2015), when conversations about immigration are not too far from conversations about tackling extremism, and when there is a constant lobby to extend police powers – the fact that Khalid Masood sent a

WhatsApp message before he murdered people on Westminster Bridge led to a renewed pitch to extend police powers so that they can access all private WhatsApp messages, a clear infringement on the right to privacy and freedom of expression and thought.

The police role has been the single most problematic and misunderstood issue in relation to the polarisation of debate on Prevent. The anti-Prevent lobby may rely on the misrepresentation of Pursue cases as Prevent cases and the mass reproduction of these myths (see Parker et al; London ESOL teacher, in this Issue) but this much is true, the 2015 guidance makes clear that the police are at the centre of Channel's work – the Channel Police Practitioner (CPP) or dedicated police Channel co-ordinator is tasked with co-ordinating activity 'by requesting relevant information from panel partners about a referred individual' and responsible for making the initial assessment based on a Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF). Once compiled, this information is passed to a Channel Panel that is chaired by the relevant local authority and tasked with drawing up a tailored support plan for Channel cases whose progress is then reviewed on a three month basis. As Rahila Gupta (2015) has pointed out, statutory workers sit on 'Channel panels, a multi-agency forum heavily populated by crime enforcement agencies: police, immigration officials, border force, prison officers, youth offending services'.

However, when critics of the central place of the police are asked *what* the role of policing should be in relation to *preventing* terrorism, there is a deafening silence. Several people I have spoken with have tentatively suggested, as has the youth and community studies expert Paul Thomas (2012), that there should be an 'intelligence - led' approach to tackling terrorism. Yet this still leaves undetermined the precise distinction between intelligence gathering and surveillance. To come full circle and revert back to

Bennoune for guidance, surely the key distinction is between policing in the interests of preventing violations of rights and policing with an interest to safeguard 'statist concerns' and/or the power of capital.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have adopted Karima Bennoune's radical universalist approach to argue against a nationalist and a neo-liberal governance response to fundamentalism in favour of a coherent human rights approach that requires us all, state and non-state actors, to recognise the human rights violations of both terror and torture. I have pointed to the many ways that the state response falls short – privileging loyalty to the state, working in partnership with some fundamentalists while condemning others, using anti-terror powers against protestors of all hues, and mobilising gender and equalities in nefarious ways. I have also pointed to the many ways that non-state actors – civil society organisations, human rights, civil liberties, left and anti racist groups – also fall short primarily by refusing to see and to challenge the human rights violations being committed by fundamentalists, primarily against minorities be they dissidents or women or children. The final section works through a discussion on women/girls to bring together the tensions between state over reach and civil society conspiracy theories. There are many unanswered questions, but to raise questions is itself an important starting point for debate.

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- i In this article I have used the terms Muslim fundamentalism, Islamist, and Islamism interchangeably to refer to the same right wing religious-political movements and organisations that work through state and civil society structures in order to impose their particular version of Islam as the only correct version and that quell dissenting voices and practices either with the threat of violence or the actual use of force.
  - ii See The Letters page in *The Independent* following the conviction, particularly ‘The UK’s approach to the Stansted protestors has been shameful – it should inspire us all to action’, dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 2018 and available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/letters-stansted-protests-15-protestors-uk-human-rights-immigration-brexit-christmas-a8689056.html>
  - iii In Chetan Bhatt’s words, Aafia Siddiqui is ‘a Pakistani citizen currently incarcerated in Texas, having been found guilty of attempted murder and armed assault on US soldiers while she was in US custody in Afghanistan. The details of why she was in military custody in July 2008, why she was flown to the US, and other issues surrounding her movements are strongly disputed... For her supporters in Pakistan, and for much of the human rights movement internationally, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Aafia Siddiqui symbolised powerfully the atrocities and injustices of the ‘global war on terror’ and US imperialism... She is frequently characterised as an innocent neuroscientist who worked tirelessly for the welfare of others, a loving mother who suffered horrifying atrocities for years at the hands of the US military, including physical and mental torture, rape, solitary confinement, sustained degradation, and enforced separation from her children and family... Siddiqui’s past work for charities, including ones known to be Al Qaeda fronts, is glossed in the representation of her as ‘a savior of humanity.’ [2017: 6].
  - iv Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education or SACREs usually comprise dominant religious organisations within local areas. Their main function is to advise on religious education and collective worship in schools within their area. While it is also a mechanism for schools with diverse populations to gain an exemption from Christian worship, it also gives particular religious groups the power to establish normative understandings and determine interpretations and practices of their specific religion. For examples see Chapters 4 & 11 of Dhaliwal, S. (2011) *Religion, Moral Hegemony and Local Cartographies of Power: Feminist Reflections on Religion in Local Politics*, PhD thesis submitted to Goldsmiths, University of London. Available at: <http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/7802/>

- v A similar argument was made by Gita Sahgal in respect of the government's willingness to cut deals with both Muslim and Christian fundamentalists as she and other feminists campaigned for de-recognition of Sharia law in the UK. See Sahgal, G. (2016) 'Sharia, security and the church: dangers of the British Home Office inquiry' published by *openDemocracy* online on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2016. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/gita-sahgal/sharia-security-and-church-in-uk-dangers-of-home-office-inquiry-into-sharia> [Last accessed 3/02/2019].
- vi For instance see Letters (2016) 'Anti-radicalisation strategy lacks evidence base in science' published in *The Guardian* on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/29/anti-radicalisation-strategy-lacks-evidence-base-in-science>
- vii For further information see this BBC News coverage 'Theresa May pledges new measures to tackle British jihadis' dated 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2014 and available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-28905776> [Last accessed 4/02/2019].
- viii For a full account of the torture that Jamil al Harith endured, see his full statement to the Council of Europe meeting, reproduced here: <http://humanrights.ucdavis.edu/projects/the-guantanamo-testimonials-project/testimonies/prisoner-testimonies/statement-of-jamal-al-harith-former-detainee-at-guantanamo-bay> [Last accessed 4/02/2019]. With such intense and shocking testimony it is no wonder that stories post 9/11 have continued to impact other young men and women disparaged by the US power across the globe, the lack of accountability and the level of impunity.
- ix See: 'Unfair criminalisation of Moss Side residents' in the Letters section of *The Guardian*, published on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/27/unfair-criminalisation-of-moss-side-residents> [Last accessed 4/02/2019].
- x See: 'Unfair criminalisation of Moss Side residents' in the Letters section of *The Guardian*, published on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/27/unfair-criminalisation-of-moss-side-residents> [Last accessed 4/02/2019].
- xi Asim Qureshi of Cage notoriously referred to Mohammed Emwazi – also known as Jihadi John – as a 'beautiful' and 'kind' man not long after Emwazi was seen beheading people in ISIS films.
- xii A prime example of this is Narendra Modi's use of 'UrbanNaxal' to criminalise human rights and left critiques of his government in India.
- xiii Anna Campbell was a 26 year old feminist from Lewes in East Sussex who travelled to northern Syria in May 2017 and was killed by a Turkish missile in March 2018 while she was trying to help evacuate people from Afrin. See further details in Vardy, E. (2018) 'Britain Anna Campbell killed fighting with Kurdish YPJ unit', BBC News online, posted on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43453292> [Last accessed 4/02/2019].
- xiv See this interview with Nimco Ali on Channel 4 news: <https://www.channel4.com/news/extremism-debate>
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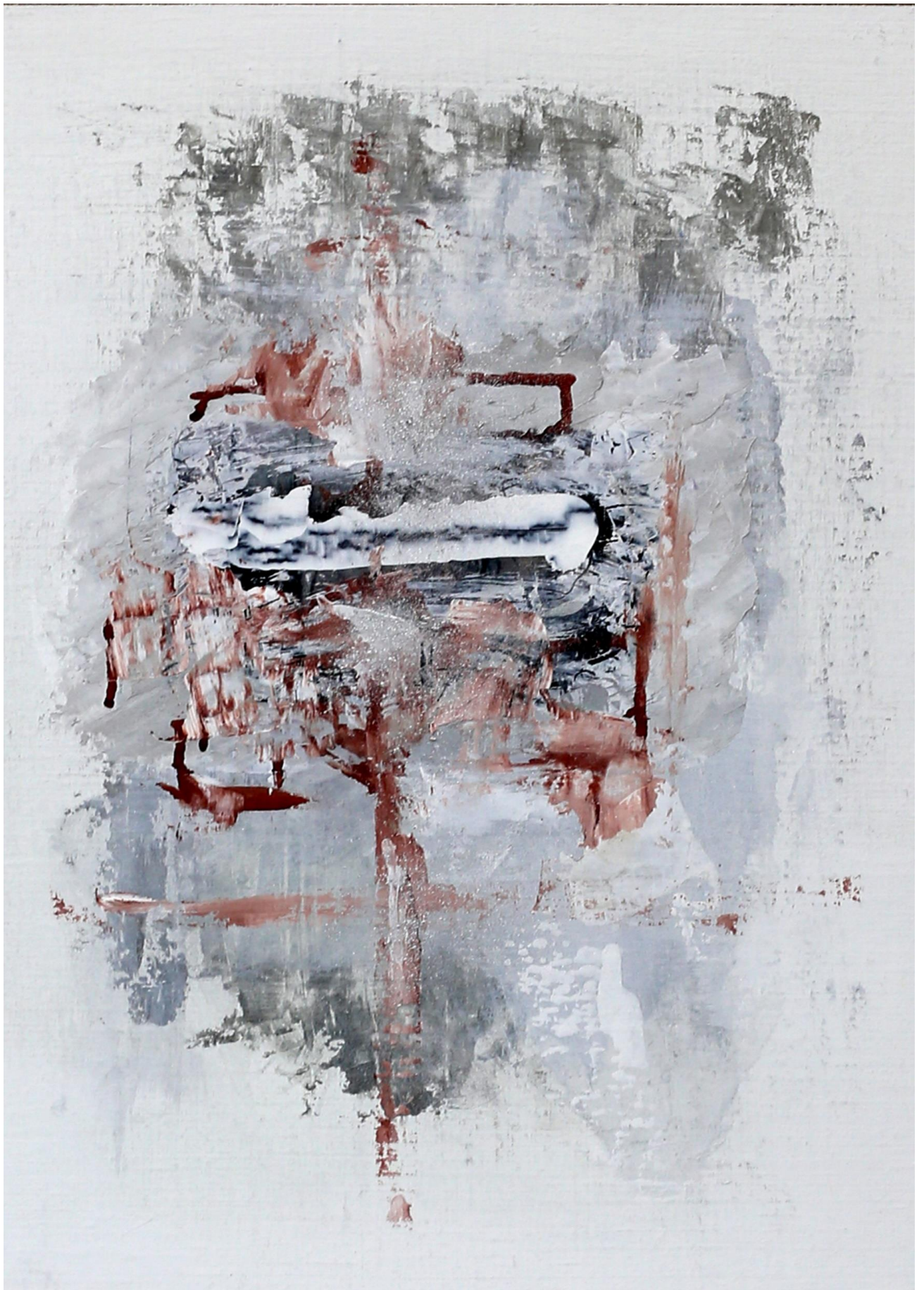


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# Prevent: Safeguarding and the Gender Dimension

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Much has been said and written about the UK's counter-terrorism programme of which the Prevent programme is a key part. Both the state's Cohesion and Prevent strategies have been heavily criticised for creating 'suspect' communities and for placing responsibility for cohesion and integration solely on minorities, especially Muslims who are perceived to have failed to subscribe to so-called British values and to live parallel lives. We at Southall Black Sisters (SBS) share the broad thrust of these criticisms.

At the same time, we are wary of how the debate on Prevent has become so fraught and polarised that it has left little scope for drilling into the ways in which the most vulnerable in minority communities are impacted. What makes me particularly uncomfortable about the dominant critique on Prevent is the assumption that there is a repressive state apparatus on the one hand and a victim community on the other that is perpetually homogenised and perpetually demonised. This simplistic binary framework for discussing Prevent leaves no room to explore the rise of fundamentalist and extremists ideologies connected to radicalisation and terrorism that also need to be challenged, since they pose a serious threat to the rights of the most vulnerable within our communities, especially women and girls. We only need to look at the phenomenon of the 'jihadi brides' - the school girls from Tower Hamlets for instance - to see just how



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serious these threats are. One of the brides has since died and we do not know what has happened to the others: they have simply disappeared.

### **Misconceptions and misunderstandings**

Part of the problem with the opposition rhetoric on Prevent is that much of it is given to exaggeration, misunderstandings, and misconceptions that cloud our understanding and therefore responses to Prevent. It has been pointed out that Prevent is not just about tackling terrorism (which is a criminal matter that requires specific legal measures), but also about challenging the growth of fundamentalist and extremist ideologies (of the far and religious right) which spread hatred and bigotry, and pose a significant threat to society and to the values of freedom, rights, and democracy.

Rashad Ali, from the Institute of Strategic Dialogue and a director of the counter-extremism consultancy CENTRI, says that:

The broader Prevent policy is still widely misunderstood as an exercise in intelligence gathering and criminalising Islam, which it isn't: it works in the non-criminal sphere, for a start, and tries to support vulnerable individuals at risk of radicalization...

He adds that:

Extremism as a social and ideological phenomenon is much broader. And whilst aspects may well and do fall under preventing terrorism by preventing individuals being radicalised, extremism is much more a social cohesion problem: the spread of anti-democratic ideas; the spread of anti-Semitic tropes by groups such as MEND while they promote political participation; the promotion of bigotry against

minority groups, or even anti-western sentiments, which create more issues for us as a society than just terrorism. (Ali: 2015)

To this list, I would also add the need to urgently challenge the ways in which religious fundamentalism also radiates misogyny and violent forms of masculinity. Fundamentalism creates a climate that is conducive to the perpetuation of gender-based violence and inequality, posing a serious threat to minority sub-groups and women and girls in particular.

In reality, because of the misinformation and misunderstandings surrounding Prevent, we know very little about how key issues such as safeguarding are being addressed and whether Prevent is working or not. Researchers have noted that there are large areas of real uncertainty in terms of how it is being interpreted and implemented in different spaces and localities, and its impacts on different sections of our communities.

### **The other Prevent story**

At SBS, we have found it challenging to navigate a course that opposes both the state's violations of civil liberties carried out in the name of counter-terrorism (and anti-immigration to which it is increasingly linked), whilst at the same time raising the real dilemmas and concerns we have about safeguarding. We see on a daily basis how vulnerable women and girls are impacted directly and indirectly by the risks posed by radicalisation and fundamentalism. Their experiences are not, however, reflected in the debates on Prevent, except in instrumentalised ways by both the state and the critics of Prevent.

There is a gendered dimension to the discussion on Prevent which cannot (and must not) be reduced to just talking about women through the prism

of race or religion only - as if their experiences only count if they tend to support the 'suspect' communities analysis of Prevent. Gender- based inequality, discrimination, and violence in the context of radicalisation, violent extremism, and fundamentalism in our communities are integral to the Prevent discussion, but they are matters on which the anti- Prevent lobby, led increasingly by fundamentalists and authoritarian religious groups, tends to remain silent.

Let me give some examples of the kind of concerns and dilemmas that are thrown up in our day-to-day work:

**Angelina**

Angelina, a Nigerian, single parent of Christian background was referred to SBS in 2015 regarding the disappearance and possible death of her severely disabled daughter - Blessing (who was 15 at the time). Angelina was and still is a vulnerable woman who has suffered a series of multiple difficulties throughout her life, including significant domestic violence from her ex-husband, ongoing and complex mental, health, and financial difficulties, and the serious and sudden onset of her daughter's mental illness and her eventual disappearance and presumed death in April 2014.

On 24 April 2014, Blessing was abducted by her brother, Joseph, to Egypt. He had converted to Islam whilst at university in the UK and was deeply involved in a very fundamentalist practice of Islam. He had also tried to convert Blessing to Islam, even though this went against Angelina's wishes and Blessing herself lacked any real capacity to understand what was happening to her or make informed decisions. We think that Joseph believed that he could cure Blessing's mental illness by performing religious (Islamic) rituals and took Blessing to Egypt for this purpose. We believe that she died during a failed attempt at exorcism, though there is

no independent or forensic evidence of her death - her body has not been found. Due to Angelina's bravery and persistent efforts to find out what happened to her daughter, the police eventually found Joseph and he was brought back to the UK and charged with child abduction. He has just finished serving a sentence of over 3 years and 4 months (having pleaded guilty). So far, he has refused to disclose the whereabouts of Blessing to his mother or to anyone else.

Angelina remains traumatised, not only by her son's behaviour and complete lack of empathy for her predicament, but also by the many questions that are left unanswered by Blessing's disappearance, including the considerable involvement of social services and the police with both her children prior to the fateful trip to Egypt. Above all, there is a serious question to be asked as to whether or not their lack of action to safeguard Blessing contributed to Blessing's disappearance and possible death.

Angelina believes that her son was monitored by the police for a few years before his trip to Egypt in 2014. Evidence shows that her son underwent a de-radicalisation programme via the Prevent and Channel programs whilst at university, although the outcome is not clear. Angelina was not told, although she had repeatedly tried to alert the authorities to her concerns about her son's radicalisation and had made desperate attempts to stop him from going abroad. In fact, due to her efforts, he was not allowed to disembark when he sought to go to Yemen prior to his trip to Egypt.

In 2016, an internal police review and a serious case review into the matter concluded that the disappearance of Blessing and her probable death was not preventable. Although the review does point to the complete lack of multi-agency work on the part of all the services, there appears to be no

adequate consideration of Joseph's radicalisation and the risks that this posed to his disabled sister.

In both the reports, there is a complete lack of transparency in respect of the involvement of Prevent and Channel and how they linked or failed to link in with social services in safeguarding Blessing who was known to all of them. More specifically, we are concerned that:

- Angelina was never informed by any agency that consideration was given to refer Blessing to the Prevent and Channel programme in 2013, and that Joseph had actually been referred much earlier. No family member was interviewed as part of the radicalisation risk assessment that Joseph underwent, so there was no assessment of the risks that he posed to other siblings and family members, especially someone as vulnerable as Blessing;
- No links appear to have been made between concerns raised about Joseph's radicalisation at university, his influence on Blessing, his subsequent referral to the Prevent and Channel process, and the police investigation into her disappearance in April 2014;
- There was no investigation of how and why agencies 'allowed' Joseph to assume parental responsibility for Blessing at various points in her life which constantly undermined Angelina's authority. Indeed, various agencies allowed him to make decisions about Blessing. He often turned up at her school insisting that she be covered up and demanding that she be taught by female teachers only. (I have found this to be a common occurrence. The assumption that male siblings have authority over female siblings in respect of minority families is particularly disturbing.)
- Angelina has not been given a clear answer as to why, when she first reported Blessing missing, the police failed to treat the matter as a major child protection incident involving a disabled child and link it to what they knew about Joseph;

- There is nothing in either the police or social services reports that tell us what happened when Joseph underwent the Prevent and Channel programme: why he was deemed no longer to be at risk; what if any plans were put in place if he was deemed to be of risk, and perhaps most importantly, what lessons, if any, have been learnt about the way in which he was assessed. One interpretation for this failure is that state agencies were only interested in whether or not he was about to commit an imminent terror attack than assess the dangers and risks that he posed to his vulnerable sister because of his fundamentalist ideology.
- The internal review conducted by the police was only concerned with their actions following Blessing's disappearance, but makes no reference whatsoever to Joseph's background, his history of radicalisation or his referral to the Prevent and Channel programme. I find this strange, given that this was a significant feature of the case and would have had a bearing on how the police conducted their investigation into Blessing's disappearance.

The case raises profound questions of what the agencies knew and did not know, and why they failed to act to safeguard a highly vulnerable disabled girl child.

The case also highlights how, contrary to the myths surrounding Prevent, according to many Prevent leads, many of the referrals to Prevent are made not by the authorities but by ordinary families, and who are concerned about the impact of radicalisation on their children. Our experience is also echoed by a colleague who is an ESOL teacher, who has seen how the Prevent agenda is playing out in her classes. She told me that, despite the securitisation agenda of which she and her fellow teachers do not want to be a part, any more than they want to be immigration enforcement officers, nevertheless, they find themselves confronting the need to deal with safeguarding issues. She has been asked

for help by the adult women she teaches who are fearful about their children's safety and internet use, especially following the stories of the jihadi brides.

### **Radicalisation and Safeguarding issues for women**

There are other examples I can give of our attempt to tackle safeguarding issues for women who have been caught up in violent extremism and radicalisation.

A few years ago, the probation services in London (before it was privatised) asked us to assist with its work with women who had been charged and convicted of various terrorism-related offences. We were asked to undertake support work with the women either in prison or at the point of release; to enable them to rehabilitate and to lower their risk of re-offending, and/or to undertake de-radicalisation work and tackle the wider fundamentalist ideologies that they adhered to. The first case was that of the teenager, Roshonara Choudhry, who was charged and convicted with the attempted murder of her MP, Stephen Timms, in what was seen as an extremist plot. We were asked to visit her in prison and undertake support work with the aim of long term rehabilitation. However, despite our efforts, she refused to engage with us or with the probation services. She did not recognise the British legal system and therefore refused to co-operate. This case did not therefore achieve any successful outcomes for us.

In another case, a woman had served a sentence for assisting in carrying out extremist-related activities, and probation services asked us to get involved again with the aim of long-term rehabilitation. Prior to her release, we visited her in prison and then continued to support her on

release. She was eager to engage with us as she had only been peripherally caught up in extremist-related activities, mainly because of duress from her abusive husband. She was extremely remorseful and worried for the future of her young children and herself.

What strikes me about these referrals is that the probation officers envisaged BME groups like us playing a key role in supporting such women; work which they were, at that time, also willing to fund. However, this work has depended very much on individual probation officers who have seen the need to involve women's human rights groups rather than faith-based groups which is where most Prevent funding is targeted, even though many do nothing to challenge the fundamentalist ideologies that create the conditions conducive to radicalisation and extremism in the first place. I am not entirely sure, but I believe that the lack of clear strategies and, of course, proper funding for the probation services to develop long-term working partnerships with secular BME organisations like ours may be responsible for only intermittent referrals to our services. As a result, we have lost crucial opportunities to develop this area of work properly with the probation services.

We have also seen how Prevent funding is targeted at so-called faith-based services without an examination of whether or not they have a track record in promoting human rights and, especially, gender equality. At the same time, austerity and commissioning structures have squeezed out funding for secular BME women's rights organisations that have worked tirelessly to challenge hatred and bigotry within and outside our communities and done so in ways that enhance respect for the human rights of the most vulnerable.



### **Homicide Review**

We also find ourselves grappling with the indirect consequences of radicalisation and the safeguarding dilemmas that this throws up, again to which those who oppose Prevent have remained ignorant or silent.

Our experience shows that Prevent is also becoming a means by which fundamentalists and ultra-conservatives in minority communities seek to evade responsibility and accountability for violence against women and girls, thereby contributing to a culture of impunity for the perpetrators.

Recently, I was involved in a local homicide review concerning a highly disabled Pakistani woman, Afsana, a mother of two young children, who had been subject to years of domestic violence from her husband who eventually killed her by decapitating her. Afsana's history of violence and abuse was well known to the local mosque that she and her husband attended.

As part of the homicide review, the Chair and I persisted in obtaining a meeting with the leaders of the local mosque that was implicated in the homicide. The mosque remained cagey throughout our meeting as they tried to evade questions about their own role in failing to protect Afsana or the absence of effective policies on safeguarding vulnerable children or adults known to the mosque.

What really struck me, however, was not their lack of concern about violence against women and girls - this is an all-too-familiar response within many religious institutions in our communities - but the readiness with which they were prepared to use Prevent as an excuse to evade

institutional accountability. They stated at the outset that they did not want to engage with the review if it was part of the Prevent programme. This was their overriding concern, not the need for the protection of women and girls and the prevention of gender-based homicide or violence in the community.

In another example from elsewhere, mosque leaders refused to allow sermons purporting to address violence against women to be recorded or televised, on the grounds that Prevent surveillance was preventing them from raising awareness of gender-based violence!

Prevent has therefore added yet another layer to the difficulties that the most vulnerable women face in obtaining justice and accountability from the very organisations that are increasingly taking control over their lives as well as increasingly leading the opposition to Prevent.

I find it hugely ironic that, whilst ‘surveillance and control’ in respect of minority communities are buzzwords in the dominant critique of Prevent, the pernicious processes of internal surveillance and control, especially of women and girls or other dissenters, are swept under the carpet. Prevent has become a convenient means for such evasion.

### **Women in the forefront**

The wider irony is this: the British State has woken up to the fact that women are key to counter-terrorism measures, but the measures adopted to recruit Muslim women in spotting and reporting potential terrorists are counter-productive. Counter-radicalisation and terrorism strategies must be located within programmes on violence against women, human rights,

and safeguarding issues if they are to be meaningful. This is not what is happening. As my colleague, Yasmin Rehman, has pointed out, the British government has given importance to the 'role of the family' and its influence in deterring crime and radicalization; at the same time, it has enacted contradictory policies that have taken away women's rights and exit options. The State has in effect negotiated away women's freedoms when faced with violence and intimidation from the very people who control and police them (Rehman: 2014).

The key question then is: how does the safeguarding framework pick up the harms to children and other-sub-groups like women and girls in particular who are also the targets of fundamentalist activity? Perhaps we could start by analysing the links between fundamentalist ideology and patriarchal control, including gender-based violence, that has an adverse impact on women and children, and other vulnerable sub-groups both directly and indirectly. As has been noted, critiques of Prevent always speak of the hurt of minority groups, but there is at the same time an almost complete silence on the serious harm to the vulnerable within the group. The cases highlighted above illustrate this failing powerfully. To take another example, I have heard anecdotally from legal circles that when suspected terrorists have been picked up by the security services or police, many have also been found to be in possession of child pornography, which is often not made public, let alone addressed. One reason could be that it is used as a bargaining chip for obtaining further information by counter-terrorist officers. The consequence of this is that the protection of children is sacrificed in pursuit of other objectives.

Secondly, we could also interrogate the way professional multi-agency partnerships within the safeguarding frameworks are formed, often involving the very fundamentalist and ultra-conservative forces that

generate harm and risk towards the more vulnerable. The inter-faith approach to social issues is particularly problematic in this respect.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would make a plea to resist rehashing the orthodoxies of the Prevent discourse. We should be concerned not only with tackling all and every kind of state assault on civil liberties, but also with countering fundamentalist and extremist ideologies that create risks for vulnerable women and children, and other minorities.

As an anti-racist, anti-fundamentalist, and feminist organisation, we have tried to grapple with these issues without falling into the trap of ‘you are either with us or against us’. We are trying to navigate a course that simultaneously challenges racism, the far right, and state repression at the same time as challenging regressive forces of fundamentalism and patriarchy from within.

If we truly believe in the values of human rights as universal (not British or Western) - which I do - we cannot afford to be selective as to which rights we wish to uphold and which kinds of wrongdoing we are willing to expose. Silence is complicity in the myriad of human rights violations that occur and so we have to speak up about all of them wherever they occur.

**Pragna Patel** is Director of Southall Black Sisters, one of the UK’s leading anti-racist and feminist organisations. She is a trained lawyer and has been in the forefront of key cases and campaigning milestones in the history of SBS. She is also a founding member of Women Against Fundamentalism and an Editorial Collective member of *Feminist Dissent*. She has written

extensively on race, gender and religion. Her publications include 'Citizenship: Whose Rights?' in *Women and Citizenship in Europe: Borders, Rights and Duties*, ed. A. Ward et al. (Trentham Books), the 'The Time Has Come... Asian Women in Struggle' in *Black British Feminism - A Reader*, ed. H. S. Mirza (Taylor & Francis) and she did a TEDXtalk on *Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere*.

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# Walking the Line: Prevent and the Women's Voluntary Sector in a Time of Austerity

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Women have a role to play in all areas of life – public and private. This includes being and building bridges to communities, in attempts to tackle radicalisation and extremism. International bodies such as the United Nations recognise the crucial role that women play at local, regional, and international levels in conflict prevention and peace processes across the world. This includes work to tackle religious extremists in their communities. The UK Government, like many others, recognises the role that women can play as bridges to their communities and has worked hard to engage Muslim women in the work of its Counter Extremism Strategies.



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However, in this article, I want to express a concern with the way this engagement has ignored the valuable work undertaken by women, over many years, highlighting their concerns about the spread and impact of fundamentalist forces from across faiths and in different parts of the world. These women include those of faith and none who have shared their expertise and knowledge through platforms such as Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and Women Against Fundamentalism (see Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Dhaliwal and Yuval-Davis, 2014) who were addressing their concerns long before the events of 9/11 and the War on Terror. Indeed, many of the women involved in *Feminist Dissent* have

been warning of the dangers of fundamentalist forces operating within the UK. Sadly, many of these contributions have at best been relegated to history or at worst dismissed by State institutions and some community-based groups as anti-faith and anti-Muslim.

### **Called to the frontline**

In recent years, there has been a concerted effort by the police and Government to engage Muslim women in tackling extremism in Britain's Muslim communities. This targeting of Muslim women is nothing new (Rehman, 2014). Since the days of New Labour, the UK Government has recognised that Muslim women are a significant resource in their attempts to tackle radicalisation and extremism in Muslim communities. Muslim women have had an increasingly high profile when it comes to tackling radicalisation, perhaps none more so than Sara Khan, former Director of Inspire, who was recently appointed Counter Extremism Commissioner. 'Inspire' is a non-governmental organisation aiming to address gender inequality and Islamist extremism. It is worth noting that whilst the Government's Counter Extremism Strategy states its aims as tackling all forms of extremism, including Islamist and Far-Right extremism, white women and women from other communities where fundamentalists and extremists are known to be active, such as Hindu, Sikh, and Christian fundamentalists, have not been targeted or seen as a resource for the police and others in the same way as their Muslim sisters. I have written about the focus of the Counter Extremism Strategy on Muslim women and the need to include ALL women if the Government is truly committed to a whole society approach (Rehman, 2014), as called for by the former national police lead for counter-extremism and terrorism, Commissioner Mark Rowley (Rowley, 2018).

### **Prevent, Women and Women's Organisations**



When I first began writing and researching this article, I wanted to find out if women's organisations, particularly those working on violence against women and girls (VAWG), were being engaged to work on counter-extremism initiatives and how this may be impacting on services. I contacted a number of VAWG organisations, including some that provide specialist services to BME women in December 2017 and January 2018. I wanted to find out about their experiences of Prevent and counter-extremism strategies. I contacted some organisations directly and others made contact, following a request placed in a sector newsletter for information.

Fifteen women's organisations responded to my call for information and a number of women working in the women's sector were willing to talk to me directly. However, they all insisted they would only speak to me if I guaranteed their names and locations remained confidential in this article. This view was expressed irrespective of whether or not the organisations or individuals were/are in receipt of funds from, or engaged in, counter-extremism work. I spoke to Muslim women and women's organisations, BME women's groups, and others in the women's sector. Prior to making contact with these organisations, I had heard anecdotally that there were different and conflicting views of the Government's Counter Extremism Strategy, with some in favour and others against. I had heard how some organisations felt they were expected to become 'arms of the State' as a result of counter-extremism processes but also, as they all said, 'a tool for immigration control'. However, a very different discussion emerged from my engagement with the women and women's organisations prepared to share information with me. These discussions focused on the shrinking of the BME women's specialist sector as a result of changes in commissioning regimes, the loss of secular spaces, but perhaps most concerning, the way the language around 'BME Women' has now been replaced by a focus on 'Muslim

Women'. Not only is a real narrowing of categorisation taking place here, but this new focus on a religious definition raises a whole set of new concerns about who falls within and without this grouping and, indeed, who is considered a 'Muslim woman'.

### **Prevent, Islam and Gender**

There were a number of key issues that emerged from my research. Common across all the conversations was suspicion about Prevent and a lack of confidence in the Government's counter-extremism strategies. As one woman said: 'it's just about targeting the community and putting us all under surveillance'. Another added:

A funder asked us to complete monitoring about how many Muslim converts came to our services, how many Muslim women used our services, and did their husbands go to the mosques. We tried to ignore it at first and then decided we had to respond. We don't collect that data and why would they need it anyway?

All of the organisations stated that their concerns about Prevent could not be divorced from the debates surrounding immigration, but anger was expressed about the increasing anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim rhetoric that was dominating political and public discourses and more so following the Brexit referendum. A number of respondents stated they believed counter-terrorist measures and immigration control were connected, but this was not supported by evidence in the interviews. One woman, who had been an advisor to the Government and later resigned, stated to me:

Just look at the news or what politicians say. They don't want immigrants here and they sure as hell don't want Muslims. We're the bad immigrants and they want rid of us. Prevent is being used as an excuse to get rid of Muslims.

It's important to note that many of those interviewed, like the woman I spoke to above, didn't distinguish between anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric, and so didn't make specific reference to non-Muslims who are also subject to increasingly stringent immigration control as part of the Government's 'hostile environment' policy. Many of my respondents also criticised what they saw as the prejudiced and over-simplified portrayal of those of Muslim background in the media. Many of those I spoke to expressed dismay at the lack of discussion about the gendered nature of anti-Muslim racism and/or the misogyny within and across fundamentalist movements. One respondent stated that:

There isn't a space to discuss things easily. Muslim men and religious groups are at all the meetings and it's hard to speak up about the issues affecting women. When I say about Muslim women experiencing high volumes of Islamophobia attack, it's because they are so visible and clearly identifiable by the way they dress. It's different for the men. But no one listens.

There was no discussion of the racialised nature of anti-Muslim prejudice by the women I spoke to. One respondent stated that she felt strongly that the state is undermining the safety of women, particularly Muslim women, in the name of 'protecting the safety of the state':

They want us to report to them about our husbands and sons if we think they're radicalised. Sometimes we just want some advice and help. Not a bloody police raid.

Another woman stated that the police 'never think about what might happen to us [i.e. as women]'. Many of the women I spoke to felt that Muslim women were being held accountable for the actions of men within their communities. As one said:

Why is no one making the connection that the terrorists are men? They are the ones radicalising our children and attacking people. It's the same for the far-right - just look!

Even when asked about women who are engaged in terrorist activities within fundamentalist movements, such as 'jihadi brides' and women involved in recruiting other women to join or support violent Islamist groups, many of the women remained clear that the overall power in these movements lies with men at all levels.

There was some support for work to tackle radicalisation and extremism within communities, but concerns about how this work was being done. One respondent informed me that:

I'd say that there is a genuine problem with people being recruited to violent, politicised organisations or actions in the name of Islam, just as is the case in the name of other ideologies and cults and politicised groups. And I can understand the desire to find interventions that may prevent these from materialising. I would say that it seems to me that any extremist organisation, whether it's BNP, weird cults or supposedly in the name of Islam are usually able to recruit followers around some key elements – some of which may be exacerbated by poverty and marginalisation ... This being the case, there is room for interventions which can disrupt or redirect such feelings and actions, irrespective of whether the organisation is 'Islamist' or anything else, into something positive but I think it would need some investment in healing divided, racist, polarised, unequal societies. If Prevent were doing that from that perspective, then it might not have become so toxic. But because it is coming across as a top-down, state-enforcement activity directed only at BME people of Muslim heritage and because it is so rooted in public services putting enforcement over service, and because it looks like it is being applied indiscriminately like a hammer to a nut with no nuance or understanding and to little beneficial effect – therefore for all these reasons, it's poisonous, mistrusted, and toxic.

A statement like this demonstrates the way that many of the women I spoke to agreed that there is a real problem with radicalisation and the dangers of extremist ideologies, but that they also felt that implementation of the Government's counter-extremism strategy had generated distrust, which has in turn, undermined the effectiveness of the very policies designed to address the problem.

Another respondent, who had worked closely with the government developing work to tackle extremism in Muslim communities, stated:

I was initially supportive of Prevent work as it seemed like it was community wide and there was enhanced capacity for funding for women's organisations. But the boundaries between counter-terror and community cohesion are blurring. There is also this emphasis on Muslim women as being able to prevent radicalisation and become the eyes of the state. I'm tired of this post-colonial attitude of Muslim women being 'othered' and instrumentalised in this way.

She told me of her experience of working with political leaders to develop counter-terror work. Initially invited to be part of consultations with community members, she stated that her concerns grew with each iteration of the Contest strategy 'as there were more and more fixed ideas about what is acceptable and I was worried about the impact on civil liberties'.

### **Prevent funding in a time of Austerity**

There are many women's organisations who felt that the problems with Prevent were such that they felt they could not be involved with it, and this included accessing funding. These organisations stated that they had spent many years engaging and working with local communities. They feared that being part of Prevent would have a negative impact on

relationships built up over many years and may also deter women from coming forward and seeking help. As one woman stated:

We've spent years working in the communities and it's not been easy. If the community thinks you're working with Prevent or there's something in the press about it – well, it just destroys your credibility.

Another was more direct and said: 'Look at Sara Khan – no one in the community will work with her cos she works for the government.' It was accepted that not engaging with Prevent could have a negative impact on how the organisation was viewed by others, including commissioning authorities and, given the difficult financial climate, made the survival of the organisation itself even more tenuous. One BME organisation had lost its funding from the Local Authority and expressed anger and upset that the funding cuts had resulted in the specialist work they were delivering in communities now being delivered by a 'generic women's organisation'. They told me of an encounter with a community engagement officer who, during the course of a meeting, disclosed that he had been funded by the counter-extremism unit to develop work with Muslim women:

It felt like a slap in the face. First our work was given to a generic women's organisation and then the money that would have funded the work we were doing on the ground is now being used by the counter-extremism unit to do the work we've been doing for years, without any other reason than to help women. They don't have the experience, expertise ... it took years to build those relationships and make women feel safe coming to us.

This illustrates one of the issues I referred to earlier, which points to the way the availability of Prevent-related funding in the context of the slashing of funding for women's organisations across the board has distorted the shape of the women's sector, but also contributed to the

distrust around the Prevent agenda more generally, even by people who can clearly see the problems it is trying to address.

This atmosphere of distrust has had a negative impact across the women's sector and those organisations that were in receipt of funding for counter-extremism work were very nervous about this being widely known. They expressed concern that women may be deterred from seeking help if they knew this, but they were also afraid of how male community leaders, who had not supported their work, would use this against them. As one woman said:

better to be part of the work 'cos at least then you know what's happening and what's wanted ... if the men knew they'd have a field day. They already blame us for women leaving their families. If they knew where some of the money comes from I dread to think ...

I was told by several respondents that women were worried about seeking help about violence and abuse because they feared that this may place their children at risk of 'surveillance'. This further demonstrates this atmosphere of distrust around Prevent.

In the past three decades, it has been secular BME women's groups who have led the way in tackling violence against women and girls in minority communities and compelling the government and statutory bodies to develop responses to violence against women and girls. This has resulted in changes in legislation and policies.

Other organisations often accessed Prevent-related funds as a means of sustaining the organisation in an increasingly challenging fiscal climate. As the Government proposes new legislation to tackle domestic violence and abuse, hails convictions in two forced marriage cases, and champions

efforts to eradicate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, the violence against women and girls sector continues to face unprecedented cuts to its funding. Women's organisations, like others in the voluntary and community sectors, have voiced their concerns about the devastating impact of the closure of vital services as a result of austerity measures, the Localism agenda, and commissioning arrangements. Imkaan (2016) reported on the disproportionate impact of funding cuts on BME women's services.

The funding landscape and the challenges faced by women's organisations dominated the responses I received. Two organisations revealed that, in response to extreme financial challenges, they had been forced to change the identity of the organisation. The Director of one service told me that it was with a heavy heart that she and the board decided, during the course of a review and restructure, to shift the identity of the organisation from BME women to Muslim women in order to access funding from counter-extremism funds and from other funding sources. As one of the Directors said: 'Everywhere we looked for funding, it was all pitched at "Muslim women" only. We felt like we had no other choice.' The other Director stated: 'After all, most of the women are Muslim anyway and there is lots of money for engagement with Muslim women. It was a case of survival for us, but also kept the services there for the women.'

When I asked what had happened to women from non-Muslim communities, I was assured that they were still in receipt of support: 'We're still helping them. We have to - we just don't tell the funders.' Whilst somewhat reassured by this statement, I remain concerned that this will not remain the case in the future. Non-Muslim women may not wish to engage with the service and the question remains: where will



they go, given the ongoing cuts to BME services? But further to this, I also wonder about the choices Muslim women wishing to access specialist services will have and how these services will operate in the future. What about Muslim women who wish to access secular, specialist BME services and are not faith-based? What about Muslim women who wish to leave their faith, do not practice, how are issues of sexual identity addressed and women supported, what about sectarian differences e.g. Ahmadiyya are not considered Muslims by other Muslim sects – how is this addressed by Muslim women’s organisations?

There are also the questions about the organisations themselves and their relationships with others in the women’s voluntary sector. Will the women’s organisations in receipt of monies from counter-extremism funds compromise their independence and autonomy? Shaista Gohir, Chair of the Muslim Women’s Network, pointed to ‘the divisive nature of Prevent funding’. She feels that other faith and secular women’s groups are hostile towards Muslim women’s groups as a result of the Prevent funding being targeted towards them (Gupta, 2010), however, this was not a view reflected in any of the views from my respondents.

I would argue that the cuts to services will have ongoing consequences, not least for BME women – limiting the choices available to them, reducing their identities to faith alone, and thereby denying the diversity and richness of Muslim communities from different ethnic and national backgrounds, as faith identity trumps all others. It also flies in the face of government rhetoric on integration. Specialist BME women’s services have developed innovative and creative ways of bringing women from diverse national, ethnic, and faith backgrounds together through various activities and promoted integration. It is really imperative that more

detailed research is carried out along these lines so that the impact these different changes are having can be understood and addressed.

The re-branding of these organisations from 'BME' to 'Muslim women' has not only helped ensure the future sustainability of the organisation but has also had other impacts. As one of the Directors stated:

We're now invited to so many more meetings and included in so much more work. We've always worked with Muslim women but now it's like the Council and police have just worked this out. We get to know about lots of other bits of work, bits of funding, suddenly everyone likes us. We're still the same people doing the same work with women but somehow we're seen differently. I don't understand what's changed.

### **Prevent and the funding of faith based groups**

Those groups that did not identify by faith and/or were clear about a secular identity stated they had expressed concern that their work was no longer recognised and that they were excluded from meetings about radicalisation despite having worked in communities, including Muslim communities, for many years. One woman who spoke to me said: 'It's like we're all being divided up again. They [the Government] ... don't want us to get along or to be together.' The entrenchment of faith-based identity politics was a significant concern for all the women and women's organisations that responded to my call for information. Many were concerned at the framing of Muslim women. At a time when Muslim women in Iran and Saudi Arabia are protesting for the right to remove their veils, one woman said: 'The hijab-wearing Muslim woman is now the only image of Muslim women you ever see here so if you don't you're not a proper Muslim.' Another woman stated:

You have to be the right kind of Muslim to be listened to ... It's not about wearing the hijab, it's just you have to talk about being Muslim in everything you do.

Other felt those wearing the hijab or dressing traditionally were considered 'authentic Muslims'. Yakin Erturk, former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls has warned that 'the reassertion of culture and religion as core aspects of identity runs the danger of essentialising and fixing the cultures of others, naturalizing inequality' (in Kelly, 2016:6). Concerns were expressed by many of the women and women's organisations at the way debates and tensions along these lines are playing out in the women's sector through the issue of faith. Pragna Patel has noted that:

Pursuit of the faith based agenda is partly to do with a perceived need to appease conservative religious leaderships within those communities, and partly in the belief that the right to manifest religion signifies equal treatment of minorities – a belief shared by many in the equality and human rights institutions across Europe and amongst considerable sections of the so called progressive left movements ... Our concern ... is that in the process, the State is unable to distinguish between valid or legitimate demands for equality and those that simply mask inequality, promote other forms of inequality and uniformity of religious identity (2013:44-5)

This point chimes with the concerns of many of the women's organisations I spoke to. These groups expressed anger at the lack of space to discuss how faith has and continues to be a mechanism through which women and children are controlled. This control is exerted through promotion of traditional, conservative values regarding gender roles, the family, sexuality, and sexual freedom. There was also huge concern about the lack of space to discuss increasing evidence of faith being used as a mechanism through which women and children are abused e.g. abuse in religious institutions and by religious leaders, ritual and faith-based

abuses such as witchcraft and spirit possession, and intimidation of women outside sexual health and abortion clinics by right-wing, fundamentalist faith groups. Whilst faith is a comfort to many, we cannot afford to ignore how it is instrumentalised to oppress and subjugate women, children, and minorities too.

This article would be incomplete without some discussion of the concept of intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 2008; Hill Collins, P. and Bilge, S. 2016). An intersectional approach emphasises that women's particular experiences of violence and discrimination are the result of multiple oppressions – and that these oppressions are structural rather than individual. A recent Good Practice Briefing for the pan-London VAWG Consortium, Imkaan, states that:

An intersectional analysis has been fundamental in our work to end violence against Black and 'minority ethnic' women and girls. Intersectionality has provided the most useful framework for 'capturing' and understanding our individual and collective experiences. It has also been an important mechanism to ensure that our activities are always located in a broader struggle for social justice. For example, our commitment to 'by and for' dedicated, specialist Black and 'minority ethnic' women's organisations is rooted in an understanding that as minoritised women and girls experiencing multiple, intersecting inequalities, we have the right to organise and resist in ways that are defined by us, for us and with us (Imkaan, 2017).

However, the way in which Muslim women are being viewed and constructed is reducing who they are to a single identity – faith identity – and their oppression to be the result of anti-Muslim prejudice, discrimination or Muslim community structures. This approach denies the multiple and intersecting oppressions suffered by minority women

who come from Muslim backgrounds. It also limits the way in which anti-Muslim prejudice is linked to racism and how gender inequality is experienced by minority women both in and outside of their communities. This not to deny their faith identity but to acknowledge the multiple ways in which oppression works and results in injustice. Discussions about intersectionality, I would argue, have failed to take into account the rise of religious identity politics and the construction by the state and fundamentalist religious forces of 'Muslim women'. The Coalition of African Lesbians recently set out the reasons for why intersectionality is important when they argued that this approach 'rejects any hierarchy of one categorical determination over others and brings us to the conclusion that no form of oppression or subordination ever stands alone' (Coalition of African Lesbians, 2018). However, as the evidence in this article shows, Prevent and its implementation reinforces a hierarchy of identity by foregrounding religious identity but, in the case of Prevent, this is done with a particular focus on Muslim women and their role *both in perpetrating but also in preventing* Islamist terrorism.

This article has been based on work I have undertaken speaking to 15 women's organisations who responded to my invitation to speak about the impact of Prevent and the Counter Terrorism agenda on their services. This is limited evidence and represents work I would like to take forward as part of a more extensive and developed project. In spite of the limitations of the work presented here, a number of key themes do stand out. Firstly, in a context of austerity and cuts, the availability of funding related to counter-terrorism is reducing the capacity of the BME women's sector to respond to the needs of BME across the board and distorting the focus of the sector. Secondly, allied with this is the problem identified by many respondents concerned with mistrust about the Prevent agenda. This is something that must be dealt with as these concerns are coming from organisations which entirely see the problem

with the 'radicalisation' of women as an issue that affects them. Thirdly, secular inclusive services for BME women are being re-constructed around a focus on 'Muslim women' which is not only divisive, but also places in jeopardy the secular spaces which BME women, in particular, have created away from male religious control.

It is in this way that the Government's counter-terrorism agenda is continuing the ongoing shift from 'multi-culturalism to multi-faithism'. As Pragna Patel has noted:

the pressure to characterise communities primarily through the prism of religion has compounded a problematic assumption at the heart of multi-faithism: that minorities are both easily defined and homogenous. Characterising minorities (and, indeed, the majority) according to 'faith', confines identity ... Multi-faithism has led to the emergence of the most reactionary, patriarchal and conservative, if not fundamentalist religious identity politics and has entrenched the power of so called religious leaders, who seek to monopolise local resources and constituents (2016: 41-2).

This approach will continue to have negative consequences for women and women's organisations struggling under the weight of austerity to keep women and children safe from violence and abuse, but also undermines the hope for integrated and cohesive communities, something which the Government claims to want to support. The evidence from women's organisations highlight the critical need for further discussion of the gendered and racialised nature of counter-terrorism approaches. Muslim women deserve more than being the 'pawns' in police attempts at counter radicalisation. Whole community approaches are needed that involve extensive, wide ranging partnerships across sectors and across all communities. If a truly equal world is the objective, then, we must be prepared to challenge not simply those in

power but our norms, behaviours, and crucially our beliefs – including religious belief. This is not to deny believers their right to freedom of religion, but to ensure that religion can no longer be politicised and instrumentalised as a weapon of control.

**Yasmin Rehman** is a feminist, human rights activist, and researcher. She is currently working as a freelance consultant and her recent commissions have included survivor consultations for regional government and national governments, work with a number of women's organisations providing project and policy support, capacity building, training on equalities, diversity, and inclusion for higher education institutions, and as an independent panel member reviewing past Serious Case Reviews. Yasmin has also acted as an expert witness in legal cases providing expert reports on faith-based abuse and Polygamy. Yasmin is undertaking research examining threats to secular and women human rights defenders in the UK and has submitted evidence to several Government committees. Yasmin has worked for more than 30 years predominantly on violence against women, race, faith and gender, and human rights. She co-edited a book *Moving in the Shadows* (2013), which examines violence experienced by minority women and girls in the UK. She is presently working on a second book looking at polygamous and temporary marriage, and its links to violence and abuse of women and girls. Yasmin is currently a Board member of the Centre for Women's Justice, a member of the One Law for All Coalition, a Fellow of the Muslim Institute, and member of the Cross-Government Working Group on Hate Crimes. She is a former Board member of EVAW (End Violence against Women Coalition). Yasmin was awarded the Irwin Prize for Secularist of the Year 2017.

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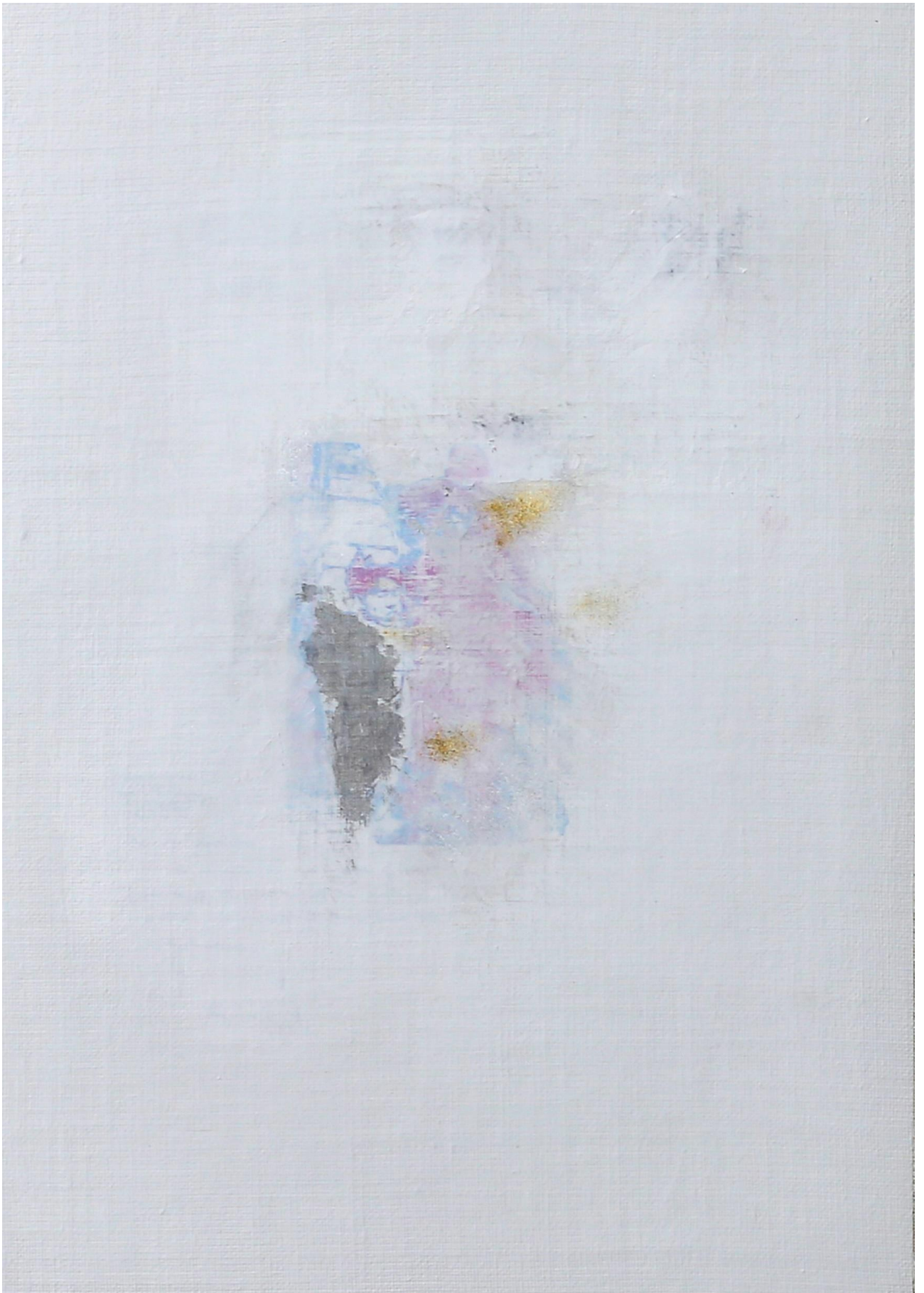


Image 6: *On War Primer, detail Epigram 10* © 2014 Xenofon Kavadias. All Rights Reserved

# The Black Flamingo

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**The Black Flamingo** by Dean Atta | Directed by Lisa Cazzato Vieyra, uploaded 1 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UdejBoQ1v8>

1.

April Evening in Cyprus

Your grandfather draws  
your attention to the news;  
the story, a black flamingo  
has landed on the island.

An expert on screen  
explaining it is the opposite  
of an albino. *Too much  
melanin*, he says. Camera pans

the salt lake full of pink



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but the eye is drawn  
to that one black body  
in the flamboyance.

2.

I Want to Be a Pink Flamingo

Pink. Definitely pink.

I want my feathers to match the hue you imagine.

I want to blend in.

Nothing but flamingoness.

David Attenborough would say,

Here we see the most typical flamingo.

Though I don't want to be the most, just typical.

A wrapping paper pattern.

I don't want to stand apart.

Nothing different about my parts.

My beak just a beak, my head just a head.

My neck, body, wings. Simply fit for purpose.

Standing on one leg, just like the rest.

Pink. Definitely pink.

3.

Another April Evening in Cyprus

Your beach towel and shorts are dry now.

Couples on mopeds ride past the house.  
The dogs walk their humans before dinner.

Your grandfather coughs violently  
And then lights another cigarette.  
Your grandmother calls you both in to eat.

The black flamingo is on the news again.  
You pick the dining chair facing the TV.  
Grandfather asks, *Why does it matter if he's black?*

Adding, *The other flamingos don't care.*  
And you are certain what he's saying is, *I love you.*

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Image 7: *Holocauston, detail* © 2011 Xenofon Kavvadias. All Rights Reserved

# Safeguarding or Surveillance?

## Social Work, Prevent and Fundamentalist Violence<sup>i</sup>

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Address

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### Abstract

*This paper seeks to critically explore the construction of the Prevent counter-terrorism initiative within Social Work in the UK, and to consider the implications this has for Social Work. We begin by discussing the conceptualisation of 'radicalisation' in the work of Arun Kundnani, one of the leading critics of Prevent, pointing to the limitations of this as a means of grasping the nature of Salafi-jihadi groupings. We then move to a discussion of the development of counter-terrorism policy in the UK, looking at the way the 2015 legislative guidance has re-situated radicalisation from a 'security' issue to a 'safeguarding' issue. We see this as significant for the way it has facilitated Social Work being directly drawn into the orbit of Prevent, with radicalisation being re-constructed as part of Social Work's concern with the vulnerability of children and young people involved in wider forms of exploitation, including Child Sexual Exploitation. We consider the reception of this shift within Social Work as well as look at evidence into how this is working in practice. We then consider challenges to this 'safeguarding' paradigm, which argue that this has involved Social Work being drawn into the ideological monitoring of Muslim communities: a 'surveillance' paradigm. We conclude by arguing for a critical defence of a safeguarding approach based on the harms which fundamentalist violence clearly represents to children and young people.*

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Keywords: Safeguarding, Surveillance, Social Work, Counter-terrorism, Salafi-Jihadism

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*'The ummah is watching while Iraq is being devoured. It's not going to stop there, because it's going to spill over into Syria and Allah knows where. In your own city, and in this country, many people have been arrested. You know if you talk about Guantánamo Bay and all this — there's a Guantánamo Bay in this country. It's an insult to Islam. Allah will revenge for himself, but the thing is, we cannot allow such things to happen and just watch.'* Anwar al-Awlaki - 2003 speech at the East London Mosque (New York Times, 2010)

## **Introduction**

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 2010, Roshonara Choudhry, a 21-year-old student who had recently dropped out of her English and Communications degree programme at the prestigious King's College in London, attempted to murder the Labour MP Stephen Timms with a knife at his constituency office in east London. Timms was very seriously wounded and Roshonara Choudhry was subsequently arrested, tried, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Justice Cooke stated the conclusion of her trial, 'You are an intelligent young lady who has absorbed immoral ideas and wrong patterns of thinking and attitudes.' (*The Guardian*, 2010a) Roshonara Choudhry claimed during the trial she had attacked Stephen Timms as a consequence of his role in voting for and supporting the 2003 Iraq war, but in police interviews undertaken after her arrest, she further explained her actions, stating:

Choudhry: I wanted to be a martyr.

Police Interviewers: Why's that then?



Choudhry: 'Cos, erm, that's the best way to die.

Police Interviewers: Who told you that?

Choudhry: It's an Islamic teaching.

When police asked her how she had come to adopt this understanding of Islam, she explained that it was through watching YouTube videos of Al-Qaeda's leading imams Sheikh Abdullah Azzam and Anwar al-Awlaki. She went on to explain to the police that:

...when a Muslim land is attacked it becomes obligatory on every man, woman and child and even slave to go out and fight and defend the land and the Muslims and if they can't handle like the forces they are facing, then it becomes obligatory on the people who live in ... closest to that country and if those people refuse to fulfil their duty then it, then it becomes to the next closest people and the next closest until it goes all the way round the whole world and it's obligatory on everyone to defend that land (Dodd and Topping, 2010).

How did this young woman who, despite her poor background had a promising future ahead of her, become inspired toward the adoption of these fundamentalist views? Could her adoption of these views have been stopped through particular sorts of state and social welfare interventions? What are the implications of seeking to influence the way young Muslims think about their faith, especially in the context of increasing hostility toward Muslims in the West? The 'radicalisation' of Roshonara Choudhry took place almost a decade ago, but since her imprisonment, terrorist attacks and the recruitment of young people to join violent Salafi-jihadist groups such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and their affiliates has become a fact of life in the UK, as have the counter-terrorist measures undertaken to combat these. Both raise many questions about politics, ethics, and effectiveness.

Contest, the UK's overarching counter-terrorism strategy, was initially established in 2003, with the 2011 revisions to this legislation developing the Prevent anti-radicalisation arm of the policy. Further changes in 2015 were significant for the way they have drawn Social Work practice into the remit of this work and the focus of this paper is on the construction of Prevent within Social Work. Critics of these policies have characterised them as fanning the flames of anti-Muslim racism and 'Islamaphobia', cheered on by a right-wing press and new forms of anti-Muslim politics asserting their far-right agenda as an expression of 'patriotism' (Booth, 2017). Cowden and Singh note that state policy toward Muslim communities itself seems to give very mixed messages:

There is...a curious double movement where on one hand faith is held up by politicians, policy makers and religious leaders themselves as a great and positive force in the promotion of social cohesion. But as ongoing revelations of 'jihadi brides' and Asian youth travelling to Syria to join ISIS continue to hit the headlines, the prominence of Islam comes to be seen as evidence of how these communities are insufficiently 'British' and thus a source of social in-cohesion. In public life, Muslims now have to justify themselves, and it is this that results in what has been described as... 'conditional or earned citizenship'.  
(Cowden & Singh, 2016: 4)

Across Europe, neo-fascist groupings have returned to the streets in larger numbers than for several decades, re-animated with slogans about the 'Islamification' of their respective countries (see Chakelian, 2017). This is the context in which fundamentalist violence explodes into public consciousness, with images of beheadings, bombings of trains and buses and cars driven headlong toward pedestrians, entirely reinforcing this perception.

It is in this 'bleak dynamic environment' (Bhatt, 2017: 2) that counter-terrorist strategies and policies like Prevent are situated. While this policy has raised justified concerns about the curtailment of civil liberties, the development of exclusionary conceptions of citizenship, and police surveillance of Muslim communities, a central issue we want to raise here is the silence amongst progressive left and human rights focused opinion about fundamentalist Islam and, particularly in the context of this article, Salafi-jihadism as both a political movement and a political ideology. Indeed, many of the left have sought to make common cause with Islamist groupings, such as CAGE, not least on the basis of their opposition to Prevent (see Cowden, 2016 and Bhatt, 2017)<sup>ii</sup>. This creates a situation where the most likely place to find serious critical scrutiny of Islamist groups – their funding, influence, and political links – is in the right-wing and xenophobic pages of newspapers like the *Sunday Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*. For progressives, it is as though to speak of these issues would be to give succour to anti-Muslim racism. But can't the regressive nature of the fundamentalist agenda be challenged from an anti-racist perspective? Why is the recruitment of young people like Roshonara Choudhry into the way of thinking that led her to act as she did, not equally condemned by those on the Left? This leads us to the question which is the focus of this discussion – what is the place of Social Work, a profession which claims concerns about equality and human rights, within this debate? Our argument is that it is crucial to mark out a space in which it is possible to talk about issues of racism and be alert to civil liberties concerns and, at the same time, to talk about the real political significance and the real danger represented by Salafi-jihadism. This is important because the ideology and tactics of these groups need to be taken seriously – both as phenomena in their own right, but also for the harms these clearly represent. We see this as representing a major challenge for Social Work.

Within this article, we want to focus on a particular form of fundamentalist Islam known as Salafi-jihadism. There are two components to this term, important as Salafi-jihadism itself is a development within Salafism. Salafism is a Sunni Islamic revival movement whose adherents 'claim to emulate "the pious predecessors" (the first three generations of Muslims from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century) as closely and in as many spheres of life as possible' (Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion, n.d.). There are many contributors to this school of thought. A key figure is Muhammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792), a classically trained Arabian Sunni scholar. Wahhabi doctrine gained huge traction through political alliances between his clerical followers and the ruling royal House of Al-Saud and, when the modern state of Saudi Arabia formed in 1932, these ideas became central to the constitution of Saudi society. The vast petro-dollar wealth of the Saudi government has allowed this deeply conservative conception of Islam to be propagated throughout the world. Thomas Hegghammer has noted that, while there are diverse tendencies within Salafism, what generally defines this is a highly 'literalist and more puritan approach to Islamic doctrine and practice' (Hegghammer, 2009: 249). Even though the term has become associated with terrorism in the public mind, it is important to note that, while Salafism as a whole is highly dogmatic and sectarian, most Salafists are non-violent. Salafi-jihadists have separated themselves from the main body of Salafism in order to make the argument that the only way to realise God's sovereignty on earth is to violently overturn the contemporary global political order.<sup>iii</sup> Nothing expresses this argument more clearly than the statement in Al Qaeda's 2003 Manifesto: 'We believe that the ruler who does not rule in accordance with God's revelation, as well as his supporters, are infidel apostates... Armed and violent rebellion against them is an individual duty on every Muslim' (Maher, 2017: 11).

Central to the argument presented here is that it is crucial to distinguish between the multiple forms of Islam practised in the UK today and the specific nature of Salafi-jihadist fundamentalism. Once we can grasp this, it becomes possible to understand the opposition to Salafi-jihadism from within Islam. The Iranian Quranic scholar and writer Navid Kermani has spoken out against Saudi sponsorship of Salafism as a travesty of the 'multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural Orient':

Sponsored with billions from the oil industry [this is] a school of thought that has been promoted for decades in mosques, in books and on television that declares all people from all other religions heretics, and reviles, terrorises, disparages and insults them...That such a religious fascism even became conceivable, that IS finds so many fighters and even more sympathisers... - that is not the beginning, but rather the end point of a long decline...of religious thought (2015: 80-81).

The work of Karima Bennoune has powerfully documented resistance to fundamentalist violence from Muslims across the world in her book 'Your Fatwa Does Not Apply Here' (2013). As she notes, 'Many people of Muslim heritage are staunch opponents of fundamentalism and terrorism, for good reason... they are much more likely to be the targets. Only 15% of Al Qaeda's victims in 2004-08 were westerners' (Bennoune, 2014). In the UK, Sara Khan, who now leads the new government Commission for Countering Extremism, has described the work of anti-fundamentalist campaign 'Making A Stand' which, with funding from Prevent, has:

visited hundreds of Muslim women in 9 cities across the UK and which taught mothers theological counter-narratives to extremist ideology and how they can safeguard their children against radicalisation...We delivered this campaign because of the high demand; these same women did not feel that 'representative' Muslim organisations or mosques were providing them with such support (Khan, 2016)

Understanding the significance of these arguments does not mean approaching Prevent uncritically, but it could shift the way we understand Social Work's involvement in Prevent.

We begin our discussion with one of the most widely cited critics of Prevent, Arun Kundnani, who situates this as a policy seeking to enforce a pro-Western ideological conformity among British Muslims. We then move to a discussion of Prevent and its 2015 revision, which drew the profession of Social Work into this area of work. We characterise the debate within Social Work in terms of two paradigms – 'Safeguarding' versus 'Surveillance'. We look firstly at the 'Safeguarding' approach, which situates concern around the contested concept of 'radicalisation' through a focus on the vulnerability of young people recruited into fundamentalist violence and the harms done to them as a consequence. We then consider two important critiques of this within the Social Work literature, firstly, from Jo Finch and David McKendrick (2017) and secondly, from Surinder Guru and Tony Stanley (2015). This work argues that, rather than a legitimate extension of Social Work's focus on 'risk', Prevent represents the recruitment of Social Work into a strategy of state surveillance. We conclude by critically evaluating this debate and setting out a third position which argues for a critical defence of a safeguarding approach based on the harms which fundamentalist violence represents to children and young people. However, we reject the idea that this is a question of 'British values'. Rather, we argue that the position is based on the understanding that Salafi-jihadism is a political movement of the extreme right, akin to white supremacist neo-fascist groupings which are increasingly also the object of Prevent. We conceptualise the growth of both of these sorts of violent fascistic politics within the context of the ongoing crisis of neoliberal capitalism and welfare retrenchment; not reducible to it, but part of the conditions which frame the 'vulnerability' of people drawn into these forms of political agency. We conclude by outlining some alternative

policy directions which concern the need to develop a wider and more politically formed analysis of fundamentalist violence, and the need to combat this through a positive, political project of a democratisation and social rights, including particularly the rights of women, as the basis of this.

### **Counter-terrorism: a new Cold War?**

How was the young Roshonara Choudhry drawn into the world of Salafijihadism? Questions like this have emerged as a central theme in the attempt by state agencies wanting to do more than simply respond to violent attacks on public space, but are also trying to prevent people being recruited into the networks which are supportive of this violence. This has led to the creation of 'Radicalisation Studies', a new body of knowledge created through the work of think tanks, university research departments, and counter-terrorist agencies. Arun Kundnani notes that:

In the context of the evolving 'war on terror', this new discussion of radicalisation could present itself as the wider, more liberal alternative to the simple accounts of terrorism offered immediately after 9/11. It acknowledged that terrorism was a problem which could be investigated, analysed and subjected to policy solutions beyond the use of physical force. In actuality, however, the radicalisation discourse was, from the beginning, circumscribed by the demands of the counter-terrorist policy-makers rather than an attempt to study objectively how terrorism comes into being... constraining the intellectual process to the needs of government security establishments (2012: 5)

In his 2012 article 'Radicalisation: the journey of a concept', subsequently incorporated in his 2014 book *The Muslims Are Coming*, Kundnani sets out the failures of the way Radicalisation Studies has conceptualised the reasons for why individuals are drawn to violent forms of Islamic fundamentalism. His central argument is that their work represents a profound misdiagnosis of the problem, as the answers they have come up

with 'exclude ascribing any causative role to the actions of western governments or their allies in other parts of the world' (Kundnani, 2012: 5). Hence, the modelling of 'the process by which an individual was thought to become a supporter of the extremist ideologies thought to lie behind terrorist violence' (Kundnani, 2012: 6) is constructed by removing from consideration what he argues to be the central motivational factor. As a result, what emerges are anti-radicalisation strategies in which:

Muslims are to be won over to a pro-western 'narrative' using the same ideological approach that has been favoured in the early cold war. An ideological battle against radical Islamism thus becomes the new anti-communism, with 'moderate Muslims' the new non-communist Left whom the CIA had sought to recruit against Moscow in the 1950s (Kundnani, 2012: 16)

Prevent, according to Kundnani, is thus part of a new Cold War in which the spectre of Communism has been replaced by a spectre of Radical Islam. And because initiatives such as Prevent are founded on this flawed understanding of the problem, they have come to treat entire Muslim communities as 'suspect communities', resulting in policies which have caused 'discrimination and unwarranted restrictions in civil liberties' (Kundnani, 2012: 8). In a more recent interview in which he develops his analysis of the politics and ideology of Salafi-jihadist groups, Kundnani argues:

What draws recruits to ISIS is not so much religious ideology as an image of war between the west and Islam. This is a narrative of two fixed identities engaged in a global battle: truth and justice on one side; lies, depravity and corruption on the other. These recruits are not corrupted by ideology but by the end of ideology: they have grown up in the era of Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history', of no alternatives to capitalist globalisation. They have known no critique, only conspiracy theory, and are drawn to apocalyptic rather than popular struggle. Nevertheless, for all its lack of actual political content, the narrative of



global war against the west feels to its adherents like an answer to the violence of racism, poverty and empire (2015).

### **Fundamentalist Violence**

Kundnani's work has been significant because he was both an early critic of the programme but also one who has had a real influence outside academia, particularly within anti-racist activism, where his characterisation of Prevent as a form of anti-Muslim state racism is influential. While there is certainly truth in Kundnani's claim that much of the research into radicalisation is funded by agencies which are close to the US and Israeli governments, we would argue that Kundnani is too cavalier in his dismissal of this material.<sup>iv</sup> There is within this body of work material which is itself critical of the reductionist accounts of radicalisation which Kundnani is criticising (see for example Silke, 2008; Schmid, 2013; Rausch, 2015; and Rahimi & Graumans, 2015)<sup>v</sup>. However, our fundamental disagreement with Kundnani is his claim that radicalisation is essentially and primarily driven by opposition to the actions of Western governments. Across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, thousands of people are involved in Salafi-jihadist groups – is all of this simply a reaction to Western governments? Is there not a problem with an 'anti-imperialist' analysis which argues, as Chetan Bhatt notes, that 'there is no authentic non-Western political agency unless it is as a reaction to the West's cultural or military aggression?' (2017: 12). While Kundnani is clearly critical of the 'conspiracy theories' upon which he sees Salafi-jihadist movements as based, he implicitly endorses the 'anti-imperialist' nature of their politics, as though they are right but for the wrong reasons. However, as Bhatt has argued, such a view is only possible if one completely disregards 'the massive opposition to salafi-jihadis in the Middle East, north Africa and south Asia' formed as a consequence of the extreme violence toward civilian populations in those countries (2014: 26). Similarly, if we consider the case of Roshonara Choudhry, it was clear that al-Awlaki's arguments

against the Iraq war were important, but how does this explain her desire to die as ‘a martyr’? If her concern was simply with the Iraq War, Choudhry could have visited Timms at his office and argued with him, or demonstrated against the war outside his surgery<sup>vi</sup>. In fact, her motivation as she described it to the police was entirely consistent with Salafi-jihadist thinking, in which ‘visceral violence’ and death by martyrdom are expressions of virtue (Bhatt, 2014: 26). The Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq Abu Al-Zaqawi emphasised this centrality of ideology in their project when he stated that:

‘They [the American Armed Forces] think that we fight for money and prestige – what they do not understand is that our arteries are filled with the ideology of jihad.’ (Maher, 2017: 21)

In other words, by characterising radicalisation primarily as a reaction to social and economic factors, Kundnani entirely fails to grasp the way Salafi-jihadism is ‘not only a system of ideas but an aesthetic and cultural universe of meaning’ (Bhatt, 2014: 27). Adherents like Roshonara Choudhry earnestly and consciously adopted this, and it is significant in her case, as with others, that this had no basis in concerns around ‘racism, poverty and Empire’.

While these movements gain support and recruits by interpolating economic, political, and social crises, they do so through a specifically religious language of salvation and virtue, in which acts of violence are justified in very specifically theological terms. The quote from Anwar al-Awlaki at the beginning of this piece is noteworthy for the way it characterises the Iraq invasion, not through the Left’s language of ‘anti-imperialism’ but as an ‘insult to Islam’. The issue for Salafi-jihadist thinkers is actually not the racism or imperialism of the West – these are, rather, seen as symptoms of a much deeper problem concerned with the ‘godless nature of modernity’ that animates religious fundamentalist thinking

across all faith traditions (Armstrong, 2000; Cowden & Sahgal, 2017). Maher has noted that Salafi-jihadists justify their violence not as opposition to an invading colonial power, but rather because the 'entire notion of the modern nation-state is a heterodox insult to Islam where temporal legislation usurps God's sovereignty' (2017: 11). As the 2003 Al-Qaeda's Manifesto cited earlier noted, the fact that these rulers are 'infidel apostates' makes 'armed and violent rebellion' not just desirable, but 'an individual duty on every Muslim' (in Maher, 2017: 11). Running throughout this entire body of theological argument is an obsessively Manichean discourse about who is and is not a 'true' Muslim, and it is through this that they violently impose their version of Islam as the only pure and authentic one. Like all forms of religious fundamentalism which justify themselves in terms of being a 'return to the past', they are very much products of the present. While the notion of the global Islamic 'ummah' has been around for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has received a massive boost through recent technological developments like the internet.<sup>vii</sup> Salafi-jihadist ideological development has also taken place very recently – as Hegghammer notes, this form of thinking only began to be distinguished from other forms of political Islamism in the early 1990s (2009: 246). These movements are anything but 'medieval', as they are often mistakenly characterised by liberal critics (Armstrong, 2000; Cowden & Sahgal, 2017). It is important to understand that, while Salafi-jihadist groups arise out of Islam, the version of Islam they offer is distinct from and deliberately destructive to both mainstream and heterodox historic forms of Muslim religious practice and belief. Nothing demonstrates the almost absurdly violent sectarianism of their project so clearly as Anwar al-Awlaki's statement that 'If a Muslim kills each and every civilian disbeliever on the face of the earth he is still a Muslim and we cannot side with the disbelievers against him' (Bennoune, 2010). It is in the name of such a project that these groups seek to 'purify' Islam, which they achieve through disciplining, repudiating, expelling, and murdering those who believe in a more tolerant, pluralist, and hybrid conception of Islam.

Directly related to the way Arun Kundnani, and much progressive opinion with him, have conceptualised radicalisation through the lens of their own critique of the racism and imperialism of Western governments, is the failure to name the politics of Salafi-jihadism as a politics of the extreme right. Bhatt has noted that while ‘the Western far- and neo-Nazi right may view Salafi-Jihadis and political Islamists as mortal enemies, they are all political tendencies of the far right, whatever their atavistic claims about each other’ (2017: 3). The Algerian sociologist Marième Helie-Lucas has argued similarly that these groups are ‘political movements of the extreme right, which, in a context of globalization, e.g. forceful international economic exploitation and free-for-all capitalism, manipulate religion, culture, or ethnicity, in order to achieve their political aims’ (Helie-Lucas, 2004). Helie-Lucas notes the way these groups often gain influence is by taking over the process of offering social support to working class and poor communities, precisely in the context of neoliberal state withdrawal from social provision. She has described the rise of Islamist politics in the neglected and impoverished suburbs of French cities, noting that:

the big strength of the fundamentalist far-right is that they understood very early that the state abandonment of its duties towards specific categories of citizens, and the decline of the old Communist Parties’ social activities in working-class areas of big cities, created a space for them, whether in [North Africa] or in Europe. ‘Political Islam’ is a popular, and populist, movement. This...has been the fertile ground on which young men, and now young women too, become ‘radicalised’, thanks to the social work done by the Muslim far-right: the youth camps and sports clubs; the after-school tutoring; the sermons; the free distribution of clothing (including, of course, distributing so-called ‘Islamic dress’ in the process); and books (including, of course, fundamentalist literature); the material help brought to homes where the bread winner just died; etc. (Helie-Lucas, 2015)

This points to another central issue, which is the way Salafi-jihadist thinkers are – in common with forms of fundamentalism in all religions –

intensely concerned with controlling women's bodies and sexuality within a divinely sanctioned patriarchal family order. Patricia Madigan's work on both Christian and Islamic fundamentalism argues that while these are generally understood as 'reactive movements against the forces of modernity', few have recognised their 'essentially patriarchal character' and that the process of 'selectively retrieving doctrines, beliefs and practices' from the past is driven by the desire 'to shape a religious identity that will then become the basis of a recreated neo-patriarchal order' (Madigan, 2011: 2). When Al Awlaki states that 'We are very conservative when it comes to family values. We are against the moral decay that we see in the society' (*New York Times*, 2010), it is crucial to note within this framework that it is the sexualised female body that essentially demonstrates the moral decay and godlessness of the West.<sup>viii</sup> Naje Ali has argued that Salafi-jihadist doctrine cannot be understood without understanding how central the control of women through violence is, and the way this plays out at many different levels – the home, the public space, and the battlefield where 'the control of women's bodies, their mobility, their sexuality, is a key strategy to demarcate boundaries between us versus them' (Leimbach, 2017). The mass rapes which ISIS carried out towards Yazidi women in 2016 is an example of the way brutal misogyny converges with the Manichean us/them ideology that runs through the Salafi-jihadist project; hence, the horrific levels of violence enacted on non-Salafi women becomes an expression of Salafi-jihadist conceptions of salvation and virtue, but also of state-building<sup>ix</sup>. This points to the real problem with the kind of analysis which Kundnani's work typifies – where the cause of radicalisation is framed as a response to the racism and imperialism of Western governments – which is that it has virtually nothing to say about this defining dimension of the Salafi-jihadist project.

#### **Social Work and Prevent**

The UK government's counter-terrorist policy Contest was developed initially in 2003 with significant revisions in 2006, 2011, and 2015 (Home Office 2015a, Home Office 2015b). This strategy is all part of the process by which British counter-terrorist policy was shifted from Northern Ireland-related terrorism, and in the wake of the 9/11 and then the 7/7 bombings, to focus on the forms of terrorism concerned with 'radicalised individuals seen to be using a distorted and unrepresentative version of the Islamic faith to justify violence' (Home Office, 2006: 1). The strategy was organised around four 'principal strands' of activity:

PURSUE: to stop terrorist attacks

PREVENT: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism

PROTECT: to strengthen our protection against terrorist attack

PREPARE: where an attack cannot be stopped, to mitigate its' impact

Prevent was developed as a strand of Contest but has developed as a policy in its own right, concerned with establishing arrangements which seeks to help people 'at risk of becoming involved in terrorism', as well as disrupting the activities of those involved in 'radicalising others'. The Prevent Review and Revised Strategy 2011 (Home Office, 2011b) undertaken by the Cross-Bench Peer Lord Carlile introduced greater levels of multi-agency collaboration and reasserted the earlier aim of seeking to 'stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism' (Home Office, 2011b: 6). Most significantly, this Review elaborated the concept of 'Fundamental British values', with 'extremism' defined within policy as:

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. We also include within our

definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces. (Home Office, 2011b: 7).

This characterisation of ‘fundamental British values’ has been a major focus for criticism of Prevent from progressives, but this characterisation of fundamentalist violence as primarily ‘un-British’ offers a deeply reductionist understanding of Salafi-jihadist ideology, indeed, one that mirrors the reductionism that animates the views of those who are most critical of Prevent.

The ‘multi-agency’ focus of the 2011 shifts in policy also laid the basis of further criticisms concerning the implementation of Prevent which, having begun as a counter-terrorist strategy, began to morph into areas such as community development and youth work, but with the police still in a leading role. This led to widespread criticism of Prevent that it was ‘blurring professional roles and boundaries’ (Thomas, 2010: 449) and that ‘the implication of teachers and youth, community and cultural workers in information-sharing undercuts professional norms of confidentiality’ (Kundnani 2014: 28). The most recent policy revision is *Prevent Duty Guidance of 2015* (Home Office, 2015c) and the significance of this lies in the way it has re-focussed the entire problem of ‘radicalisation’, addressing at least some of these problems. Moving still further away from the securitised focus of earlier policy, radicalisation has now become a ‘safeguarding’ issue, with Local Authorities given a statutory duty to have ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ (Home Office, 2015c). The Department for Education now requires Local Safeguarding Children Boards to consider radicalisation within the context of the 2015 *Statutory Guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children* (DfE, 2015), and it is in this way that Social Work has been directly drawn into the orbit of the Prevent and Channel policy (Home Office, 2015d). In relation to the points made above, Prevent and Channel panels do not involve counter-terrorism police being embedded

with social workers, rather, social workers work alongside the police and partner agencies, as they do in safeguarding work already.

These changes represent a significant re-focussing both of safeguarding and of counter-terrorism, and therefore the question of how this has been viewed within Social Work is an important part of this discussion. At a packed Community Care Live event on November 2015, social workers heard Alamgir Sheriyar, active referral coordinator for Kent Police, argue that:

When we talk about radicalisation, child sexual exploitation, and issues with gangs, it is exactly the same process...What we're talking about is vulnerable young people...who are being targeted not because they are bad people or want to get involved in criminal activity, [but] because they are vulnerable and they need a sense of belonging, and through that grooming process they are given that.

At that same event, Social Work academic Jo Finch challenged this point, asking whether Social Work was 'getting into dangerous ideological grounds...Is this our role? Should it be our role? (Community Care, 2015) – points which are elaborated further in her critique of Prevent below. A more recent discussion forum run by *The Guardian* in March 2016 offered unanimous support for the principle of seeing radicalisation as a safeguarding issue analogous to child sexual exploitation (CSE), as these responses demonstrate:

Paul Rigby, lecturer in social work, University of Stirling: 'I would consider all these to be inter-related in so much as they are all likely to constitute child protection concerns, with children presenting with an array of risk and needs. The complexities of exploitation often indicate crossovers between what we may initially consider to be separate issues.' (Hardy, 2016)



Carly Adams, specialist in child sexual exploitation and youth at risk at the Children's Society: 'There are definitely lots of common themes between them – in terms of the level of power and control used, the impact of trauma, the need for a child protection response.' (Hardy, 2016)

Nazir Afzal, the former Chief Prosecutor who secured convictions in the Rochdale grooming trial, has also argued for the recognition of the striking similarities in the way young people are groomed for sex and for acts of terrorism:

In the first stage, the child is manipulated...A young person feels unwanted, unloved, misunderstood and somebody comes along, either some charismatic person or online, and says 'I want you', 'I understand you.' The person thinks somebody is finally listening to them. Generally, these people know what buttons to press. Having manipulated them, the next stage is distancing, where the young person is told not to trust anybody else – don't trust your family, don't trust your friends. The third stage is sexual grooming or with radicalisation, it's taking them away. The process is the same. (Scotsman, 2016)

In 2017, the Department for Education carried out an evaluation of this work, published as the report *Safeguarding and Radicalisation*. This report offers important evidence as to how people involved in undertaking this work are perceiving and experiencing this. The report evaluates ten Local Authorities across the UK, in areas defined as 'high,' 'middle', and 'low prevalence' areas (defined through the number of referrals they receive). While there is mixed evidence about how this is working, one of the most significant findings is that those doing this work perceive that it is working most effectively in areas of high prevalence. These are most likely to be urban inner-city areas with significant Muslim populations. Social workers working in this area clearly support the contention that radicalisation falls within the remit of safeguarding. This report noted that there was in some

of the Local Authorities ‘no internal consensus within an authority on how the threat of radicalisation should be responded to’ (2017: 5) and this resulted in confusion for staff and families referred to the Prevent and Channel programmes. This was much more of a problem in ‘low prevalence’ areas. By contrast, ‘where staff are confident in how they should handle radicalisation cases, they were also better able to engage effectively with families and children who are at risk’ (2017: 6). This is significant for the way it shows that Social Workers doing this work clearly feel they are – when they have the support of their managers and agencies – effectively safeguarding young people from harm in this work.

While there was initially considerable suspicion about Prevent amongst individuals and families referred to the programme in areas with high Muslim populations, the report evidences that this was usually able to be overcome with explanations which addressed people’s fears about the intention of the programme. The report cites one incident of a father whose son was referred to the programme being initially overtly hostile to the programme, but as he came to see how it worked, completely reversed his view and went on to volunteer locally for it (2017: 25-26). Another significant conclusion is that those most overtly hostile to it are precisely those about whom one would have an entirely justified concern about their involvement with Salafi-jihadist networks.

Concern was expressed by social workers about the treatment of those families whose children were not found to have legitimate concerns, with it being felt that these people were being left without appropriate support or adequate explanation. A related concern for practitioners were ‘overzealous’ referrals (2017: 6) often from Schools and Health Authorities.

The conclusions from the Report focussed on measures concerned with clarifying responsibilities, streamlining referrals, and building and sharing an evidence base to learn from previous practice, as well as ‘engaging with communities to build awareness and understanding’ (2017: 6-7). While the 2017 DfE Report evidences genuine concerns around implementation, this work is part of an emerging evidence base concerning the appropriateness of social work’s involvement in work around radicalisation as part of the safeguarding process.

One of the most important implications for Social Work that comes from this evaluation is that where social workers feel well supported by their agencies, they can work effectively with presenting concerns in a safeguarding role. By the same token, this becomes very difficult when practitioners are working in agencies which had not developed an understanding of these issues. What we would see as crucial is that the safeguarding role is combined with a contextualised political understanding of Salafi-jihadism as a political movement and an ideology. This is even more acutely important when working with families with important connections to the Middle East and North Africa, where these groups are most active.

We would argue that it was just this political understanding that was lacking in the Serious Case Review (SCR) undertaken into the deaths of ‘W’ and ‘X’, two teenage brothers from the Brighton and Hove area who travelled to Syria in 2014 where they joined the Al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda affiliate (Brighton & Hove LSCB, 2017). Tragically, both siblings were killed while in Syria. The SCR was set up to investigate the fact that, despite extensive involvement with Children’s Services over several years, practitioners failed to anticipate the possibility of the children being recruited into Salafi-jihadist networks. The background to this case is

complex. The family, which comprised the parents and five siblings, had fled to the UK from Libya in the late 1980s to early 1990s where they had previously been part of that country's educated social elite. The family left Libya as a consequence of persecution by the Libyan regime which developed from the regime's perception that some members of the families were Islamists (2017: 13). In a related development, an uncle of the family had been imprisoned in Guantánamo Bay, though he was subsequently released without charge. However, once the latter information became public knowledge, the family were directly targeted by neo-Nazis in Brighton, which included demonstrations outside their house and graffiti in the area in which they lived, stating 'Behead All Muslims' (2017: 12). The contact between Children's Services and the family came about through evidence of the children's early trauma associated with their exposure to domestic violence against their mother from their father, and services appeared to have struggled to provide an appropriate response to this. In 2010, 'W' and a younger brother 'Q' disclosed at a youth club that they had experienced physical abuse from their father in relation to their lack of observance of their religion. All five brothers were placed on child protection plans and their mother moved to alternative accommodation, but the Crown Prosecution Service took no further action against the father following retraction of the statements by the siblings.

A key issue that comes up throughout the SCR was the way services failed to engage with the *political significance* of Salafi-jihadism within the family, particularly given the information that was before them, and this contributed directly to the two young brothers' later disappearance to Syria. For example, services were aware that an older brother of 'W' and 'X' had travelled to Syria, but had accepted entirely at face value the claim that this role was purely related to 'supporting aid work'. Finding 6 of the SCR notes the need to:

provide children and young people with information and evidence to counter the propaganda that they may be accessing on the internet and the impact of peer pressure via social networking: to be effective this will need to address the appeal of belonging to particular groups, who provide a strong identity, promise the resolution of the world's problems and social injustices (2017: 45)

While this is undoubtedly correct, the problem seems to us lie more in the way services working with the family struggled to conceptualise the issues that were presenting in the family in a holistic way. This involves grasping the way the family were both victims of racist persecution as well being part of violent Salafi-jihadist networks, not to mention all the other family issues that services were dealing with. The key to this in our view is having a political understanding of what Salafi-jihadism represents, both in understanding the extent to which it diverges from mainstream forms of Islam, as well as considering the possibility of connections between this ideology and the violence toward female family members and toward the children for 'lack of religious observance'. This political understanding can be crucial in allowing practitioners to make the connections between Salafi-jihadism as a world-view and the statements and actions of family members. For example, when sibling 'X' was arrested in 2012 for anti-social behaviour, he shouted at the police that 'they would die as they did not follow Allah, that they would burn in hell on judgement day and that the day was coming very soon' (2017: 50) – a statement which clearly reflects Salafi-jihadist themes, but which fail to occasion any specific recognition as such. Another sibling, 'Q', returned from a trip to Libya making strong outbursts against 'Americans' (2017: 51) which were perceived as understandable in the context of the fighting which was taking place in Libya at this time, but were not explored any further by practitioners. It is always important for practitioners to understand and be curious about the communities in the areas they work, including issues of culture, identity, and religion. But rather than reaching too readily for the

culturally relativist argument, we would argue that practitioners need to be aware of what the people we are working with are telling us about how they see the world, and to be aware of the implications this may have. Ideologies and identities are never innocent – they are always situated in a social and political context, and as practitioners, we need to know about this. In relation to our earlier arguments about the (often violent) control exerted towards women within Salafi-jihadism, we would add that this is another crucial indicator where practitioners could have put different pieces of the situation facing this family together. In terms of future learning, we would argue it also raises the importance of agencies developing resources and strategies to engage women who are at risk, but who might resist becoming involved with services for fear of wider family/community rejection.

### **Prevent as Surveillance**

We now want to turn to those arguments mounted by a range of Social Work academics who have expressed concerns that Prevent represents a form of ideological policing, stifling children and young people's entirely legitimate interest in political causes and in being critical of the government. It should be noted at the outset that there is nothing new about the argument that social workers are involved in 'policing' families, the working class, minority communities, and/or women, and these arguments have been made of Social Work for several decades (see for example Donzelot, 1997; Jones, 1983; and Smart, 1992). The analysis offered by Finch and McKendrick in their 2017 *British Journal of Social Work* piece "Under Heavy Manners" could be seen as drawing on this work. With regard to Prevent, their key argument is that, in a context where state policy is seeking to institutionalise new forms of social inequality, the social work role is becoming 'securitised' (2017: 315). Prevent, they argue, targets families who are economically deprived and 'discriminated against due to racism and Islamophobia' (2017: 313):

The suggestion that social workers should infiltrate families in this way is a deliberate ideological attempt to remake social work and to diminish trust-based relationships. In this new incarnation, social work is fundamentally judgemental and exists as an agent of social control in terms of targeting service users with values, cultural practices or ideological beliefs that do not accord with Western neo-liberal ones (2017: 318).

The claim that Muslim families experience Prevent as 'infiltration' is offered without specific evidence, and this is a feature of many critics of the policy. We would argue that, while there is undoubtedly mistrust between Muslim communities and state agencies like social work in the present context, it is important of the extent to which there are divergent views towards Prevent within Muslim communities. Alongside those sceptical of the intent of this policy are those who have serious concern that it is their children who are most heavily targeted by Salafi-jihadists, and who are seeking support from state agencies like social workers to deal with this. The DfE report cited above (2017) also demonstrates that social workers involved in safeguarding work in this context have been able to build trust-based relationships with Muslim families, and this points to the way practitioners and families are able to work around the specific threat to children and young people posed by Salafi-jihadist radicalisation. It is for this reason that we would question Finch and McKendrick's claim that Prevent is essentially concerned with the policing of cultural practices not in accordance with 'Western neo-liberal beliefs', but we would also point out that the authors' objection to these beliefs is of an entirely different order to the objections of Salafi-jihadists. In other words, like many critics of Prevent, Finch and McKendrick fail to critically interrogate what Salafi-jihadists and their sympathisers *actually stand for*. Indeed, groups such as CAGE, which have showed consistent support for Salafi-jihadist ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki (Bhatt 2017: 13), have

popularised just these sorts of arguments by presenting measures which are taken against violent fundamentalists as attacks on 'all Muslims'<sup>x</sup>.

Tony Stanley and Surinder Guru offer a still stronger critique of involvement with Prevent, arguing that through this, 'social workers might find themselves pawns in an ideologically driven moral panic' (2015: 354). The central issue they challenge with the shift toward safeguarding is that it denies 'the political nature of terrorism', offering instead 'pathologising discourses' which position social workers as 'akin to 'thought police' (2015: 357):

By emphasising the 'vulnerability' of individuals, these processes of risk assessment and prevention give primacy to a 'deficit thinking' risk model that the population in question is deficient and in need of improvement/treatment. This emphasis on normative systems and networks gives primacy to positivist, psychologising discourses which deny individuals agency and the political nature of their experiences and social problems. The focus on individuals and families isolates them from being seen in their holistic socio-economic, political context and their resistance to oppression and injustice is seen as an aberration, a problem, a state of mind which can be changed, treated and normalised by the introduction of alternative activities, relationships and networks. For this reason, amongst many Muslim communities, Prevent and Channel are primarily seen as tools for surveillance of Muslim children, justified by particular ideological constructions about the processes causing radicalisation (2015: 358-9).

As with both Kundnani and Finch and McKendrick, Stanley and Guru present a picture of widespread opposition to Prevent from 'many Muslim communities' which we would argue falsely homogenises the range of views around Prevent amongst Muslims. More problematic still is their claim that the adoption of Salafi-jihadist views represents 'resistance to



oppression'. While they are right to point to the way an entirely pathological discourse about radicalisation denies the extent to which it is 'political' – and one of the key arguments we have made here is that it is most definitely political – Stanley and Guru ignore the fact that even an elementary consideration of the content of this shows it to be politics replete with the most hateful sectarianism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and homophobia. One wonders if Stanley and Guru would argue that young men who join white nationalist groups like the English Defence League are equally demonstrating 'resistance to oppression' in attributing their poverty and joblessness to Muslims and immigrants? This article concludes with the statement that:

The call to arms across the Muslim countries resonates with Muslims across the globe, a process facilitated by the concept of 'Ummah' or unity amongst Muslims which has intensified after 9/11. This can be seen as a product of political awareness, borne out of the exploitation and oppression by the West and the alienation it has generated (2015: 361).

There is something deeply problematic about the way this statement lends legitimacy to the language and approach of Salafi-jihadist groups – what we are talking about here are groups whose politics were manifested through the Charlie Hebdo murders in Paris, the mass rapes of Yazidi women carried out by ISIS, and the indoctrination of 10-year-olds into acting as suicide bombers in Syria and Afghanistan (Bloom 2017, Bloom and Horgan, 2015). Stanley and Guru's characterisation of Salafi-jihadist groups as analogous to anti-imperial freedom fighters sits utterly incongruously with the evidence of how these groups have horrifically violated the human rights of women, children, and civilian populations in general with barbaric cruelty. The way these authors can overlook the latter and, at the same time, call for a 'rights based approach' in Social Work practice (2015: 362) really bespeaks the extent of confusion amongst progressive opinion with regard to what Salafi-jihadists actually represent.

While it is crucial for Social Workers to understand the pathways that can lead to such fundamentalist violence – and one would say the exact same thing about white neo-fascists – what is completely missing from this account is any sense of the need to challenge these, both at the level of Social Work values, as well as the need to safeguard children and young people from associated harm. Reading this material, one is left asking how it is that critical and intelligent Social Work academics and practitioners such as they are prepared to grant credibility to political ideologies that are utterly opposed to the values of human rights and equality to which they are clearly committed.

### **Conclusion – Some Future Policy Directions**

Throughout this piece, we have argued that it is crucial that those who take questions of human rights seriously engage with the substantive agenda of Salafi-jihadists. This involves understanding the way this represents a significant development within non-violent conservative and puritanical versions of Islam into the violently Manichean political movements we now see wreaking havoc across the world. In such a context, it is crucial for left and progressive thinking to move beyond confusing their own opposition to the ‘war on terror’ based on the violation of human rights with the reactionary and brutal violence of the Salafi-jihadists. The need to better understand this political agenda is crucial both for Social Work education and practice. One of the issues which stands out for us from the Brighton and Hove SCR is that, in order to protect children and young people from the harms which stem from radicalisation, practitioners need to have a much better informed sense of the attitudes and character which those who are grooming these young people are seeking to nurture. Being curious about this can make a crucial difference to the safeguarding role, and we need to be completely clear that this is not the same as acting as ‘thought police’. Social work’s concern is not in any way preventing critical thinking – indeed, it is more important

than ever that we encourage this. But we are concerned with preventing young people being drawn into Salafi-jihadist networks where they may be killed or raped, be required to carry out murders and rapes, and if they are caught, spend their lives in prison as Roshonara Choudhry is currently doing. It is in the light of this understanding that we would mount a critical defence of the safeguarding focus within Prevent and Channel, and we would additionally argue that this is entirely congruent with the Social Work focus on harm from the abuse and exploitation these clearly represent to children and young people. We would argue, however, that taking this position does not mean that there are not problems with the Prevent policy as it is currently constituted. As far back as 2009, Yahya Birt noted that the central problem with the policy has been its 'overemphasis upon counter-terrorism without engaging Muslims as citizens rather than an "at risk" set communities' (Birt, 2009: 54). This is crucial not just from a civil liberties perspective, but also because it acknowledges the extent of opposition to Salafi-jihadism amongst Muslims. It is in this sense that we would argue for the removal of Lord Carlile's definition of extremism as opposition to 'fundamental British values'. While democracy, the rule of law, and tolerance are undoubtedly important, it is not clear how these are specifically 'British'; they could be considered as universal democratic norms. Equally problematically, the focus on 'British values' constructs Salafi-jihadist violence as a problem of Muslims who are insufficiently integrated or loyal to the British nation. As we have argued, Salafi-jihadism is a transnational politics akin to white supremacist neo-fascism, and it is both myopic as well as simply incorrect to characterise its violence as 'un-British', not least because the vast majority of its victims are Muslim, and additionally because so much of its violence is specifically directed against women. We also argue that neo-liberal austerity and welfare retrenchment policies as they have been implemented for the last decade continue to create the conditions for radicalisation, both in producing those forms of individual despair and isolation which make Manichean solutions attractive, as well as reducing the capacity for social workers,

youth workers, and third sector agencies to provide more hopeful and creative alternatives for our young people. The Prevent policy we would like to see developed is one which would base itself on explicit political arguments for a reconstructed democratic and rights-based social welfarist politics. While the extent to which Salafi-jihadism represents a very specific violation of women's rights has been something we have only touched on in this article, we also believe that the future development of preventative strategies must involve support for those women and men who are working toward gender-based equality, which must itself be seen as a central component of a more just and equal future for society as a whole.

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<sup>ii</sup> The group CAGE, formerly 'Cageprisoners' were founded in 2003. The group's outreach director is Moazzam Begg, a former Guantánamo Bay detainee who was released without charge in 2005. The group describe themselves on their website as 'an independent grassroots organisation striving for a world free of injustice and oppression. We campaign against discriminatory state policies and advocate for due process and the rule of law' (<https://www.cage.ngo/about-us>). This is a description accepted at face value by many, while others would argue that these claims are rendered at the very least problematic by the way they have persistently sought to lend legitimacy to the work of violent salafi-jihadist spokespeople. For example the Al Qaeda leader Anwar Al-Awlaki, who inspired the Newham student Roshonara Choudhury discussed in this article, was live streamed into their conference from Yemen at the Wandsworth Civic Centre in London in 2008, a time at which there was evidence of his involvement in murders, kidnappings as well being wanted for possible involvement in the 9/11 bombings. (<https://web.archive.org/web/20100105040107/http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/6924653/Detroit-bombers-mentor-continues-to-influence-British-mosques-and-universities.html>)

<sup>iii</sup> Hegghammer characterises the most politically substantial characteristics of salafi-jihadists as being that they are 'more extremist and intransigent than other [Salafist] groups', and that while all Salafists draw on the Salafi or Wahhabi religious tradition, salafi-jihadists 'are more internationalist and anti-Western than other groups.' (2009, pp.253-254)

<sup>iv</sup> Shiraz Maher, who is Deputy Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at John Hopkins University in the US, is the sort of individual Kundnani is criticising. However, Maher's work on salafi-jihadism (Maher, 2018) does offer insightful analysis of the politics of salafi-jihadism which should not be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, as Maher has made clear, his interest in these groups stems from his own involvement with Islamist groups. As a young man, Maher was a member of the Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir but after the 2005 London bombings he left the organisation and became dedicated to opposing violent political Islamism, a journey he described on a BBC Panorama programme in 2007 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/7016299.stm>). While the rejection of Islamist movements by former members does allow the nature of these groups to be exposed, what seems most problematic to us is the way Maher has travelled from Islamist to uncritical supporter of the US and Israel (see Cronin, 2013). One might speculate as to whether this reveals something of the 'all-or-nothing' mentality which draws individuals toward fundamentalist explanations in the first place.

<sup>v</sup> Rahimi and Graumans make the point that much of the radicalisation literature understands this process in a highly decontextualised way: 'Radicalisation...always needs to be contextualised, understood, measured in relation to the cultural, social and political context in which it is studied' (2015, p.47). This point is not dissimilar to Kundnani's critique but this point is made without the dismissal of this entire body of work.

<sup>vi</sup> Within Roshonara Choudhury's transcript of interview after the attempted murder of Stephen Timms she described an earlier visit to the UK Parliament in which a classmate

did explicitly criticise MPs over the Iraq War. Rather than being supportive of these actions, Choudhury describes her reaction as one of embarrassment, wishing the classmate would stop (McDonald, 2013:158). This points to the way - contra Kundnani – that rather than expressing social concerns about ‘racism, poverty and Empire’, radicalisation is as Khosrokhavar argues, highly narcissistic in that it is the ‘martyr’ themselves, rather than social struggles, that occupy centre stage (cited in McDonald, 2013:183).

<sup>vii</sup> Rahimi and Graumans argue that ‘In Muslim contexts, online communities take on special significance as they relate to the central Islamic notion of ‘ummah’, which denotes an abstract, transnational “community” of all Muslims around the globe...With new developments in technologies of information and communication ‘ummah’ has assumed brand new significance (e.g. Roy, 2010, 2014). In Spalek and Imtoul’s (2007) words, ‘[Islamic] militants now join an “imagined community” that works through minds attitudes and discourses rather than geographic locales or through social and family ties” (p.194). This increasingly important “community’ born of an exceptional convergence between traditional ideology and postmodern technology, however, has rarely been the topic of research’ (2015, p.43)

<sup>viii</sup> In relation to this it is revealing to note the results of FBI surveillance of the US born Al-Awlaki during the years when they were closely monitoring his movements, which revealed that he frequently visited prostitutes and that the FBI were seriously considering a criminal prosecution of him on this basis (New York Times, 27/8/2015).

<sup>ix</sup> The Centre of Feminist Foreign Policy has reinforced this with regard to the politics of ISIS specifically: ‘Daesh differs from its jihadist predecessors in its intent to establish a caliphate. As such, Daesh has made the recruitment of women a priority, essential to its long-term state-building goals. After all, states not only need men to fight and establish a caliphate but also need women to sustain it and raise the next generation. Thus, women are needed as wives and mothers who will form the foundation of a stable society. These women are not simply short-term homemakers; they are long-term state builders. Fertility, then, is of prime importance to the group, and to this end, the protection of women is paramount. The fertility of a population is dependent on its number of women, not men. Thus, men are more expendable than women. Excluding women from participating in direct combat roles ensures their physical security, furthering the long-term capacity of the caliphate. In the aim of establishing a state, Daesh must distinguish between in-group women, who are needed to preserve the state, and out-group women, who symbolize the same long-term capability of the enemy. Scholars have theorized that the widespread use of rape in times of conflict is a tactic used to traumatize and destabilize one’s enemy at the community and familial level. Targeting enemy women and sanctioning systematic rape and enslavement not only devastates enemy populations, but also serves to attract and maintain male Daesh fighters with promises of “spoils of war.” <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/journal/2017/1/17/women-as-victims-and-perpetrators-of-daesh-violence>

<sup>x</sup> A recent example which CAGE have placed on the internet refers to social work very specifically. In this video, we see a woman ‘Sister Maryam’ who alleges that in 2016 ‘Prevent’ brought about the removal of her children – and alleges that there was no reason for the removal of these children other than that fact that ‘we are Muslims’ (<https://www.facebook.com/CageUK/videos/1691457434201090/>). Not only is it illegal for the police or social workers to remove children purely on the basis that the families are Muslims, but neither is Prevent part of the legal framework which relates to the removal of children. It may be that there was a specific safeguarding concern here, but one will not discover that from watching this video. This form of deliberately misleading material continues to be highly influential on the internet and is often shared and supported by people on the Left.



Image 8: *On War Primer, detail Epigram 21* © 2014 Xenofon Kavvadias. All Rights Reserved



# Jihadi Brides, Prevent and the Importance of Critical Thinking Skills

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In this essay, I am not going to discuss the so-called Islamic State's (I.S.) raping, pillaging, beheading, regular kidnapping of hostages who happen to be journalists and aid workers, or predilection for throwing gay people off tall buildings. I'm not going to write about the ancient artefacts turned to dust, the historical civilisations destroyed in minutes. Many people are already well-informed about all of this. I will instead discuss a more fundamental and insidious part of I.S.'s strategy and how it is attempting to establish a foothold in Western countries, taking a not-insignificant number of British Muslims (a higher number than those who have joined the British Army) with it.

The philosopher Bertrand Russell once said:

In every walk of life, independence of mind is punished by failure, more and more as economic organisations grow larger and more rigid. Is it surprising that men become increasingly docile, increasingly ready to submit to dictation and forgo the right of thinking for themselves?

[Russell, 1917: 8]

His quote is particularly relevant to the situation of young men and women in Britain who are either radicalised or assessed as particularly vulnerable to being radicalised. In their book *Engineers of Jihad: The Curious Connection Between Violent Extremism and Education*, Diego



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Gambetta and Stefan Hertog argue, in the words of Martin Rose, that it is:

the absence of critical intellectual tools, the inability to creatively cope with ambiguity, the predisposition to seek black and white answers, that sculpt the cast of uncritical binary thinking that, at its more extreme, is open to influence by malign binary ideologies.

[Rose, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017]

This dilemma – and how it plays out with women, specifically radicalised women in their late teens and early twenties – was given a comprehensive examination in *Jihadi Brides*, the BBC 2 This World documentary, which aired on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2015. It focused on the stories of Glasgow-born Aqsa Mahmood, Mancunian twins Salma and Zahra Halane, and Londoners Khadijah Dare, Amira Abase, Kadiza Sultana and Shamima Begum – just a few of the women who have flown out to join I.S., married I.S fighters, and who are responsible for glorifying some of the most brutal acts of terror we see today. In this documentary, Dr Katherine Brown, Lecturer in Defence Studies at King’s College London, talked about her research. She examined the Twitter feeds of these and other young I.S. brides, and found cute kittens juxtaposed with the glorification of 9/11 (usually in a form of text-speak). It was particularly jarring for me to listen to the strong Glaswegian vowels of the actress playing Aqsa Mahmood; I spent part of my childhood in Glasgow and used to speak with a similar accent. Privately-educated Aqsa had every benefit a young British girl could ask for, yet still trod a path of subservience, dehumanisation, and collusion with barbarism. This was partly explained in the BBC 2 documentary through her fixation with a hard-line Internet preacher. Her lawyer, Aamer Anwar, also claimed that she was a victim of grooming (see Whitaker, 2016).

## **Deconstructing the ‘us vs. them’ narrative**

While I absolutely don't doubt that the grooming explanation is true, it ignores the earliest stage of radicalisation: widespread propagation of the ‘us vs. them’ narrative, by some individuals and organisations who promote a version of Islam they have described as ‘normative Islam’. This phenomenon was superbly explained by my associate Manwar Ali: a former radical himself, he now teaches the importance of pluralism and non-partisanship at Ipswich-based charity JIMAS.<sup>1</sup> Not only does the ‘us vs. them’ mentality emphasise the ‘otherness’ of non-Muslims, but it also demeans and castigates people from Muslim backgrounds who happen to be different e.g. Shia, Ahmadi, feminist, LGBT, liberal or ex-Muslims. This narrative makes it much easier for young Muslims to be radicalised in the first place. It even dehumanises the individuals who violent extremists claim to be acting on behalf of. As Shiraz Maher, a counter-extremism expert at King's College London, wrote in the *New Statesman* in 2014: ‘A callousness towards the concerns of ordinary Syrians had also crept into the attitude of these fighters – the constituency in whose defence they once claimed to be acting.’ When asked what he thought of those Syrians who opposed I.S., one fighter conceded: ‘There are a number of them that dislike us. However, the lands belong to Allah's [sic] not them. Also, I [came] here to please my creator and not them’ (as quoted in Maher, 2014). This is a chilling snapshot of how barbarous ideological movements can use the Godhead – and the capricious, megalomaniac, and often cruel motives attributed to it – to manipulate their followers. It is also, of course, an ugly reflection on the people who can so easily attribute these qualities to their conception of God and actually go on to take up arms in its name. Other British fighters have displayed a similar attitude. One of them tweeted a picture of three captured Syrians with the caption: ‘Got these criminals today. *Inshallah* [God willing] will be killed tomorrow. Can't wait for that feeling when u just killed some1 [sic]’ (as quoted in Maher, 2014).

As someone with a background in equality and human rights who was a practising Muslim for 12 years, it makes me sick to the pit of my stomach to see members of the new generation signing up to a version of Islam that is so anti-human, un-egalitarian, and brimming with hate – and this is before they even fall into the clutches of I.S. itself.

As Dr Brown confirmed in the *Jihadi Brides* documentary, many of these girls are clearly intelligent: the Halane twins had 28 GCSEs between them and Aqsa Mahmood wanted to become a doctor. However, academic achievement ALONE is no substitute for becoming a well-rounded individual with highly developed critical thinking skills. Too often, especially in minority communities, education is just seen as a means to an end – with the end in question relating to professional milestones rather than personal fulfilment. Young British Muslims are caught at the crossroads between their parents' identity (which they don't fully relate to, as second and third-generation minorities), a wider society whose values are ostensibly different from the ones they grew up with, and a dominant interpretation of Islam (usually transmitted online) that does not conform to modern equality and human rights standards.

In order to make sense of these confusing (and often competing) facets of reality, young people must be trained in logic, argument, reason, and the ability to weigh up different truth claims. They also need to feel empowered by strong female leadership in Muslim communities, both in civic terms and religious terms.

An example of the former is the civil society organisation Inspire, who completed a series of roadshows across the UK in 2015 entitled 'Making a Stand'. They equipped Muslim women with the skills to just say 'No' to

extremism, bigotry, and patriarchy in all its forms. An example of the latter is where individuals like Dr Amina Wadud – a Muslim convert and American professor who specialises in Islam and gender – come in. In 2015, Wadud stated:

This is a powerful wake-up call: just because people say they are doing something in the name of Islam does not mean you have to agree with them. And as soon as you have the freedom not to agree with an interpretation of Islam, then the question of interpretation comes up and that's my life right there – talking about how Islam has always been filtered through the interpretation of people who have the power.

[as quoted in Khaleeli, *The Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015]

### **The role of the Prevent programme**

Back in 2010, I spoke at the *Beyond Prevent: Achieving Security and Challenging Extremism* conference in the House of Commons. I was critical of many of the surveillance aspects of the previous Government's Prevent strategy such as Project Champion, which placed security cameras in majority-Muslim parts of Birmingham (see Lewis, 2010). However, in the last seven years, initiatives like these have been scrapped, as the Government has made strong efforts to listen to practitioner feedback. The entire Prevent strategy has undergone significant reform. As of Summer 2015, it is now a statutory duty for schools, prisons, local authorities, and NHS trusts to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism'.

The strategy also includes non-violent extremism, which has been defined as 'opposition to fundamental British values', including 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and

tolerance of different faiths and beliefs'. It is critical to actively uphold British values, use them to present a robust counter-narrative to extremist voices, and highlight the commonalities between British values and Islamic ones. A strong example of the latter point was the Islam and Citizenship Education Project, a curriculum for madrassahs and Muslim-majority schools. This project emphasised shared values in areas as diverse as volunteering, women's engagement in society, and the importance of being a good neighbour.<sup>ii</sup>

Behind the spectre of non-violent extremism lurks religious fundamentalism, which has been defined by Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF) as 'modern political movements that use religion to gain or consolidate power, whether working within – or in opposition to – the state'.<sup>iii</sup> In other words, there are movements embedded in the social fabric of Britain that are actively hostile to British values and systemically work to undermine them. This is why OFSTED, the schools' inspectorate, is absolutely correct to prioritise the spread of shared values next year, as well as to seek new powers to close illegal faith schools.

What do we mean by hostility to British values? As my associate Kalsoom Bashir, formerly with Inspire, said in an interview for *The Guardian* in 2015:

When you have ideologies out there – that homosexuals are going to be condemned to hellfire, that you mustn't talk to [gay people], or that if this was a Muslim state they wouldn't be allowed – I do have a problem with that. I'm proud that the interpretation of Islam I adhere to is inclusive; it does not promote hatred or violence, or sow the seeds of division or suspicion. There are other [interpretations] that

sit across the spectrum ... and I don't want my children to go down those paths.

[as quoted in Khaleeli, *The Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015]

Bashir is responsible for delivering Prevent training to police officers and teachers in Avon and Somerset, with the aim of making sure that children are kept safely in their families and are getting the best out of their educational experiences. Rather than asking professionals to 'spy on' their charges, or single out particular incidents, the aim of the strategy is to get them to look out for a whole range of concerning behaviours. It is part of the pastoral care that all good teachers take seriously, and makes sense because pupils spend more of their waking hours with teachers than with their parents. Children who are deemed to be vulnerable to radicalisation are sometimes referred to the Government's anti-radicalisation Channel programme, which has seen more than 4,000 referrals between 2012 and 2016 (see Halliday, 2016).

Furthermore, there are many examples of Prevent successfully turning young women (and men) away from a path of extremism and disillusionment with mainstream education. The article by Khaleeli (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2015) details the story of a young woman in Bristol, who started wearing a headscarf in sixth-form, then disengaged from lessons and distanced herself from friends. Any one of these changes taken in isolation may not have been a concern, but when seen as part of a whole – along with the underlying reasons for the changes – they presented a worrying picture. Her teachers spoke to her friends, who conveyed that she had described them as 'not good Muslims anymore'. The young woman said she just wanted to 'focus on Islam' and thought that voting made one complicit in a 'kuffar' system. Once she was referred to Channel, a female theologian spoke to her about faith and identity in a nuanced way, which did not treat the young woman's British identity as

being in conflict with her religion. The young woman had never been exposed to this kind of interpretation of Islam, either in her family or elsewhere. Eventually, she returned to the sixth-form and ended up completing her A-Levels.

A second example is of the Muslim boy at Parkfield Community School in Birmingham who not only demanded a prayer room on a field trip, but expressed what teachers euphemistically described as an ‘alternative’ view on the Charlie Hebdo attack, and insisted that female Muslim pupils needed to cover their faces with a headscarf (see *The Telegraph*, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2015). One of these incidents on their own might not have been a concern, but when taken as a whole – coupled with the fact that the boy was behaving differently on his field trip than in the classroom – it warranted a referral to the council’s Prevent Support Team. According to the news report, a roundtable discussion took place with the pupil’s parents, who were very supportive and understood the teachers’ concerns. The school was then able to move forward with the parents and the pupil, in terms of encouraging critical and caring thinking on these hot-button issues.

A third story related to the 15-year-old, Yusra Hussein, who went missing from Bristol and ended up in Syria (see Sanghani, 2014). Other girls in the vicinity ended up sympathising with her, after being dumped by Muslim men who they’d had unmarried sexual relations with (*ibid*). This ties in nicely with the academic Mia Bloom’s research on redemption, and the fact that some people view membership of an extremist group as providing a means of redemption for committing so-called ‘sins’. Bloom’s research on the motivations of female terrorists focuses on the four ‘R’s: revenge, redemption, respect, and relationship. On the redemption point, Bloom notes that whatever a woman has done in her life, the



‘slate can be wiped clean’ in some communities through the commission of terrorist acts, particularly suicide bombing. This is because she can reinvent herself as a martyr and gain the third ‘R’: respect from her community (see Fillion, 2011).

On the sex and relationships point, Kalsoom Bashir led a workshop with Year 10 and Year 12 students on relationships between men and women in a faith context. This took place in April 2016 at the North Bristol Post-16 Centre, with the poet and activist Shagufta Iqbal. In the workshop, Bashir said it was natural to be physically attracted to people, but that the young women shouldn’t feel pressured into doing anything they don’t want to do. The Year 12 students acted as mentors to the younger ones, who worked through misconceptions about their expected roles as Muslim women in British society.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Critical thinking skills in the classroom**

Far from shutting down debates on controversial issues, this is an example where Prevent created a space for hot-button issues to be discussed in a safe and secure environment. The facilitator was careful to foster both critical and caring thinking, as in how we relate to others around us, which fits in with OFSTED good practice guidelines as well. This approach has benefits that extend beyond the classroom: students gain confidence and tolerance when they are able to ask their own questions and listen to perspectives that differ from their own. They are also better able to deal with disagreements and conflict, which in turn leads to a reduction in bullying.

The need to tackle the rhetoric of Islamist groups (including their interpretations of Islam, and how these manifest) is more pressing than

ever. This must happen in a variety of fora, from university Islamic societies to some madrassahs and Muslim-majority schools, as well as in traditional media outlets and social media. Legal challenges are also hugely important. In a case brought by OFSTED in October 2017, a significant Court of Appeal judgement ruled that the Al-Hijrah School in Birmingham had caused unlawful discrimination by separating girls and boys in a co-educational school. Lady Justice Gloster's dissenting judgement went a step further: she argued that the school's segregation posed a greater practical impediment for girls than for boys: 'What possible justification could there be for always requiring girls to wait for their mid-morning snack until such time as the boys had finished theirs?' she opined (see Adams, 2017). Any school which expresses such viewpoints on the differing status of girls and boys, and goes on to treat girls – and it is usually girls – less favourably as a result, must be reprimanded with the full force of equality law.

The most important thing is to enable young Muslim women to reconcile their identities as female, British, and Muslim. I am confident that the Prevent programme has advanced enough to make way for these exchanges. Unfortunately, both state institutions that deliver and work on Prevent, as well as Muslim civil society practitioners who do Prevent work, receive opprobrium for this in Muslim communities. Examples include OFSTED winning the Islamic Human Rights Commission's 'Islamophobe of the Year' award in 2017, and Naz Shah MP describing Inspire as 'one of the most loathed organisations in Muslim communities' and implying, during a Home Affairs Select Committee session in November 2015, that their work had Prevent-preferred status from the Government (Shah, 2015).

Contrary to what these groups and individuals claim, major conflict between civil society groups and the Government is not inevitable in counter-extremism work. While we should not hesitate to correct state institutions when they make mistakes, we should not automatically see them as the enemy, when they are our partners in safeguarding.

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<sup>i</sup> JIMAS is the full name of an Ipswich-based educational charity which aims to teach Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam, and does bridge-building work with both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Suffolk. Manwar Ali is the Director of JIMAS.

<sup>ii</sup> For further information see the Islam and Citizenship Education website: <http://www.theiceproject.com/index.php> [Last accessed 22/06/2018].

<sup>iii</sup> To read more about Women Against Fundamentalism see [http://womenagainstofundamentalism.org/?page\\_id=4](http://womenagainstofundamentalism.org/?page_id=4) [Last accessed 22/06/2018].

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# Victims, Perpetrators or Protectors: The Role of Women in Countering Terrorism

Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal

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I remember seeing a film as a child called *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* and falling in love with Ingrid Bergman's character – a strong, independent woman by the name of Gladys Aylwood. Gladys took no prisoners. She was a force to be reckoned with, coming from a society in which women were regarded as second-class citizens – to be seen and not heard – to another society, millions of miles away from her creature comforts. She was a woman with a mission, a woman of extraordinary strength and abilities. She became my first female hero – a woman who shepherded 100 children to safety before the Japanese invasion, despite all the obstacles placed in front of her. She was a remarkable woman and I wanted to be her. A few years later, my next female 'obsession' became Emmeline Pankhurst – political activist, leader of the Suffragette movement who, despite all the barriers placed in front of her and the Suffragettes, achieved the vote for women. The first major step in women being recognised as 'equal citizens' in Britain, a mere one hundred years ago this year. Okay, they might have been a bit militant, but had it not been for their bravery, their sheer guts, who knows how long it would have been before women were recognised as being equal partners in society in every walk of life. I suppose seeing women such as Gladys and Emmeline as role models might explain to some extent why I've always been a bit of a rebel, doing what I felt was justified, regardless of how 'the community' might view things. Many years later, I was told by a woman that her husband had told her I was responsible for 'ruining' the Muslim women in our community!



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I grew up in a typical Muslim household, with parents who were first generation immigrants and five older siblings. As the youngest in the family, I was (and to some extent, despite being 50+ still am!) regarded as the family baby. Like most first-generation families, my parents had the same worries and fears for their children moving to Britain in the late sixties as everyone else. A fear of us becoming too westernised, losing our religion, our cultural norms or connection with our motherlands. My parents saw England as a short-term 'stop over', allowing the children to get an English education before going 'back home'. When I was in my early twenties, I remember asking my father why we had never returned to Pakistan. He replied that he wanted his daughters to be afforded the same opportunities that his sons had been given. The chance of a good education and job prospects. He was a strict man, but as my sisters to this day remind me: 'I could get away with murder'. I wore jeans, went to town on my own, learned to drive and had my own car (before I was married), which gave me freedoms many young Asian women of my generation didn't have. Many of my peers were married at 16, as soon as they finished their 'O' levels. Many were married off to men they'd never even met. When my husband asked me to marry him, my father made it crystal clear that as long as he lived, no one would ever force me to marry against my will. He completely supported my ambitions when I joined a political party, became a shop steward for my union, and became politically active (much to the annoyance of one of my brothers who ended up ferrying me around, as I hadn't passed my driving test at this point). I have been active since. For over 30 years, I have been involved in a wide range of causes locally, regionally, and nationally, designed to improve the quality of life for vulnerable groups and individuals, and to build bridges between communities. I have been involved in supporting prisoners, cancer patients, patients with genetic disorders, women in refuge hostels, refugee settlement programmes, hate crime partnerships, children and families with poor social support

networks, and minority ethnic groups. Whether that has been through supporting women's activism in the community, inter-faith dialogue, anti-racism engagement, or raising funds for charity. Moving into the arena of challenging radicalisation was actually not something I had ever considered as a career move. I was familiar with the Prevent strategy when it was first introduced by the Labour government in 2003, but it was not something I had considered being involved in at the time as I was in the process of completing my Masters in Philosophy. It was, however, something I became more familiar with over the next few years.

My first active involvement with Prevent goes back to 2007, when I was encouraged to apply for and was appointed to the Staffordshire Police Authority as an Independent Member. Prior to 2013 and the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners, Police Authorities were the public body that oversaw the work of the local police forces. These bodies were made up of representatives from the local authority and independent members who would sit on the various strategic oversight boards. As a member of the strategic Counter Terrorism Board, I gained a valuable insight into the government's Counter Terrorism strategy, called CONTEST. At the time, I was also working within higher education and was very familiar with the fervent opinions expressed within the sector about Prevent. Newspaper headlines of universities being 'hotbeds of radicalisation' went some way towards positioning a barrier between the sector and community engagement. It was felt that the strategy was seen as targeting Muslim students and staff on campus, that there was an expectation that if anyone saw or heard anything untoward or suspicious around Muslims, they would inform the security services. It became very much seen as the tool for spying on and criminalising Muslims, and many institutions refused to engage with the strategy. What didn't help matters was that at the time, engagement was only through Prevent police officers and Special Branch. As a Muslim, I didn't work in Prevent

at the time, as I believed that Prevent was heavily focusing on Muslim communities and the funding that was being made available for 'community engagement' was purely a way to sugarcoat the bitter pill Muslim communities had to swallow. It was only after I became entangled in the arrest of four Muslim students that I experienced personally the effect the counter-terrorism world was having, not just on Muslims but on wider society, as people were becoming suspicious of the very same people who had for many years been their friends, neighbours, and colleagues.

I started working on Prevent in 2013, two years after the coalition government conducted a review that recognised that the Prevent strategy needed to address all forms of violent extremism and terrorism. A much-needed shift, considering that the country had faced (and still faces) a threat from the IRA, issues around animal rights extremism, and a growing tide of far-right extremism. National Action became the first neo-Nazi group to be proscribed under terror laws by the Home Secretary in December 2016 (Home Office, 2016) and in September 2017 two further groups, Scottish Dawn and NS131 (National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action) were also banned (Home Office, 2017). This was a very welcome decision by Amber Rudd, the then Home Secretary, who described National Action as being 'a vile racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic group which glorifies violence and stirs up hatred while promoting their poisonous ideology' (ibid). She made it very clear that any group who spread a nasty malicious ideology, that spread division, threatened the safety of citizens would not be tolerated. Making it clear that the counter-terrorism strategy was about all forms of terrorism, not just that related to Islamist groups.

However, despite this shift, a minority of Muslim groups and individuals, albeit very vocal ones, continue to propagate a false interpretation of Prevent as only targeting Muslims. This vocal ensemble has manufactured a situation in which those Muslims who are involved in any counter-terrorism work are maligned, criticised and abused, verbally and physically, in person and in the virtual world. This has become the norm. And the largest group under fire are the women activists. Not only are they targeted because they are female but because of a 'triple-jeopardy'; they are female, Muslim, and working in counter-terrorism. If perchance they do not wear the head covering, additional abuse comes their way for not being 'proper' Muslims. Sadly, most of this viciousness comes from within Muslim communities, from those men who should be advocates not critics. Therefore, instead of focusing on how we counter narratives of extremism and terrorism, or how we can protect young people from the threat of radicalisation, the debate has been shifted to discussions about Muslim 'government stooges', 'sell-outs', 'house Muslims', 'native informants', and 'boot-lickers'.

The biggest victims of terrorism across the world are women. And the greatest threats and abuse are targeted towards those women who are trying to prevent radicalisation and terrorism.

However, there is also evidence to suggest that women are just as likely to support terrorism or even commit a terrorist offence. Since 2014, of 109 people convicted of terrorist offences, 18 (16%) were women and girls (Swann, 2017). For example, Aqsa Mahmood from Glasgow fled to Syria to join Da'esh<sup>1</sup> in 2013 (Fantz and Shubert, 2015). Zahra and Salma Halane, twin sisters from Manchester, in 2014 left the comfort of their home to join Da'esh, just as their brother had previously done (*Newsbeat*, 2015). The same year, Amal El-Wahabi, a mother of two from

north London and wife of a Da'esh fighter, became the first Briton to be convicted under terror laws of funding jihadi fighters in Syria (Casciani, 2014). In 2015, three friends from Bethnal Green fled to Syria and, that same year, three sisters from Bradford took their nine children to Syria, following in their brothers' footsteps (Shackle, 2015). More recently, Madidah Taheer, 21, was convicted of preparing an act of terrorism, 19-year-old Amber Rafiq was sentenced to 18 months in prison for disseminating terrorist publications online, and a mother and her two daughters who were part of the UK's first all-female terror cell have been found guilty of planning acts of terrorism (*Press Association*, 2017). These are just some of the women convicted in the last three years. We must not be under the illusion that this affects only men and boys. The narrative used is sadly just as attractive to women and girls.

The threat of radicalisation affects men and women. But I am particularly troubled by young women who have been (and have the potential to be) radicalised because of the way this is done. The lack of theological knowledge among young women in relation to the role of women has been manipulated, to the extent that they have been led to believe that they are second-class citizens with rights and responsibilities that are dependent on subservience to men – first, their fathers, and then, their husband.

The role and status of Muslim women is a major misrepresentation of Islam. This portrayal cannot necessarily be apportioned to the religious text, but to the way religion has for many years been taught by men – in homes, in mosques, and most recently, through virtual means via the internet. Certainly for me and for many women of South Asian backgrounds who grew up in this country, religion was taught not

through books but through word of mouth, from their mothers and grandmothers. Because of high levels of illiteracy, most women would have received their religious instruction at their mother's knee, being taught the do's and don'ts of being a good Muslim girl, daughter or wife. They will have been taught not to question the religious edicts, as to question would be to question God himself. Religion became a set of rules to be obeyed without any understanding of whether these rules were religious or cultural. The women and girls who went out to Syria in a similar way had their religious ignorance exploited and were sold a utopian image of life in an 'Islamic State' by charismatic speakers who would attract large crowds at events, have thousands of 'hits' on their YouTube videos and followers on social media. A role that would see them fulfilling their religious obligation in establishing the only true 'Islamic State' in the world, as wives of the jihadi warriors and mothers of the new generation of true Muslims. The glorified prostitution that awaited many young women was designed for nothing other than to satisfy the carnal desires of recruiters and terrorists. Their lack of scriptural understanding in relation to the role of women within Islam was manipulated to the extent that their lives and the lives of their families were destroyed by their actions. Regrettably, women such as Aqsa Mahmood from Glasgow were just as guilty of influencing and ultimately radicalising these young girls as those Islamist hate preachers.

While the situation in Syria has changed with Da'esh and its influence there diminishing, the threat of young people being radicalised remains. Women, and mothers in particular, play a vital role in safeguarding their children from all sorts of dangers in the world. From a very early age, we begin to teach our children about 'stranger danger', we teach them to never allow anyone to touch them in ways they find uncomfortable, and we teach them to scream out if they are scared. Protecting our children and preventing them from being harmed is a built-in mechanism that

comes as part of the package labelled 'motherhood'. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a world of technological advancements that most of us would never even have imagined twenty-five years ago, the dangers we need to recognise and understand have changed. Women are a key component in tackling radicalisation of young people and we must never make light of their role or the dangers. Mothers are often in the best position to notice changes in their children and are not afraid to challenge them. They can build their child's resilience around cultural and religious issues, reducing the need for them to seek answers elsewhere. Mothers have a key role to play in preventing the radicalisation of their children, but in order to do this, they too need to understand the risks and the reality of their children growing up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The development of technology enables us to within seconds find out what's happening on the other side of the world. It enables us to make connections with strangers, develop secret relationships, and formulate views without ever physically speaking to another human being. It also allows us to live in a clandestine world. Mothers must, from a very early age, communicate with their children and understand their lives. We must not underestimate or disparage the importance of this role and how much could be achieved, if mothers received adequate support and were recognised as a vanguard in preventing radicalisation.

Sadly, as women, we are also the biggest victims of terrorism. Look at the world around us past and present. From the Syrian conflict, the Rohingya in Burma, the Bosnian genocide, and Rwanda. Look at the horrors inflicted on the Yazidi women and the kidnapping of nearly 300 young girls in Nigeria by Al-Shabaab. Women are seen as easy targets. In the west, we are viewed through a prism of victimhood, oppressed by our own and mocked by those outside. The majority of those killed and injured in the terrorist attack in Manchester at the Ariane Grande concert were young women and girls. In their annual report last year, Tell MAMA,

an organisation that monitors anti-Muslim attacks, stated that in 2016, 56% of the attacks targeting 765 victims were directed at women, women that were seen to be visibly Muslim (Tell MAMA Annual Report, 2017). Street level attacks rose by 47% that year, with the situation worsening following terrorist attacks and the Brexit referendum (*ibid*). The horrors inflicted on women tend to be brutal, intimate, and very personal. Yet despite all this, as women we are courageous, resilient, and determined. In the words of Elizabeth Cady Stanton: ‘the best protection any woman can have is courage’.

**Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal** is the West Midlands Regional Prevent Lead for Further & Higher Education. Hifsa has had a career that has spanned a number of disciplines, including health, research and education. In 2012, she was appointed a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire and received an MBE for Services to Community Cohesion. Hifsa is a founding member of the Armed Forces Muslim Forum for the UK Ministry of Defense and a Director of the Association of British Muslims. She actively promotes a positive image of Islam, which is consistent with British values and is an outspoken advocate for British Muslims. Hifsa is regularly called to give interviews on regional and national media and has written for a number of mainstream newspapers. She has also written a number of academic articles and published papers on palliative care for minority groups and nursing assessment processes. She has been active at grassroots social engagement and supporting vulnerable groups for several decades. She has spoken at many regional and national conferences on inter faith related topics, Islam and Women, Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations and radicalisation and counter terrorism. She is currently delivering the Government’s Prevent strategy in colleges and universities across the West Midlands region and is a Trustee of The Johnathan Ball and Tim Parry Foundation for Peace and Nisa-Nashim, a Muslim and Jewish women’s charity that aims to bring



communities together and promote a deeper understanding of the commonalities between the faiths.

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<sup>i</sup> I have used the word Da'esh throughout as opposed to 'Islamic State' simply because in my opinion, whilst they called themselves an Islamic State, they were neither. The term Da'esh challenges their legitimacy and is one disliked by the group, as it sounds like an Arabic term meaning to trample or crush.



Image 10: *On War Primer*, detail Epigram 21 © 2014 Xenofon Kavvadias. All Rights Reserved

# I come from

Dean Atta\*

\*Correspondence: infodeanatta@gmail.com

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I come from shepherd's pie and Sunday roast,  
jerk chicken and stuffed vine leaves.

I come from travelling through my taste buds but loving where I live.

I come from a home that some would call broken.

I come from D.I.Y. that never got done.

I come from waiting by the phone for him to call.

I come from waving the white flag to loneliness.

I come from the rainbow flag and the union jack.

I come from a British passport and an ever-ready suitcase.

I come from jet fuel and fresh coconut water.

I come from crossing oceans to find myself.

I come from deep issues and shallow solutions.

I come from a limited vocabulary but an unrestricted imagination.

I come from a decent education and a marvellous mother.

I come from being given permission to dream but choosing to wake up  
instead.

I come from wherever I lay my head.

I come from unanswered questions and unread books,  
unnoticed effort and undelivered apologies and thanks.

I come from who I trust and who I have left.

I come from last year and last year and I don't notice how I've changed.



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not used for commercial  
purposes and that any  
derivative works are made  
available under the same  
license terms.

I come from looking in the mirror and looking online to find myself.

I come from stories, myths, legends and folk tales.

I come from lullabies and pop songs, Hip Hop and poetry.

I come from griots, grandmothers and her-story tellers.

I come from published words and strangers' smiles.

I come from my own pen but I see people torn apart like paper,  
each a story or poem that never made it into a book.

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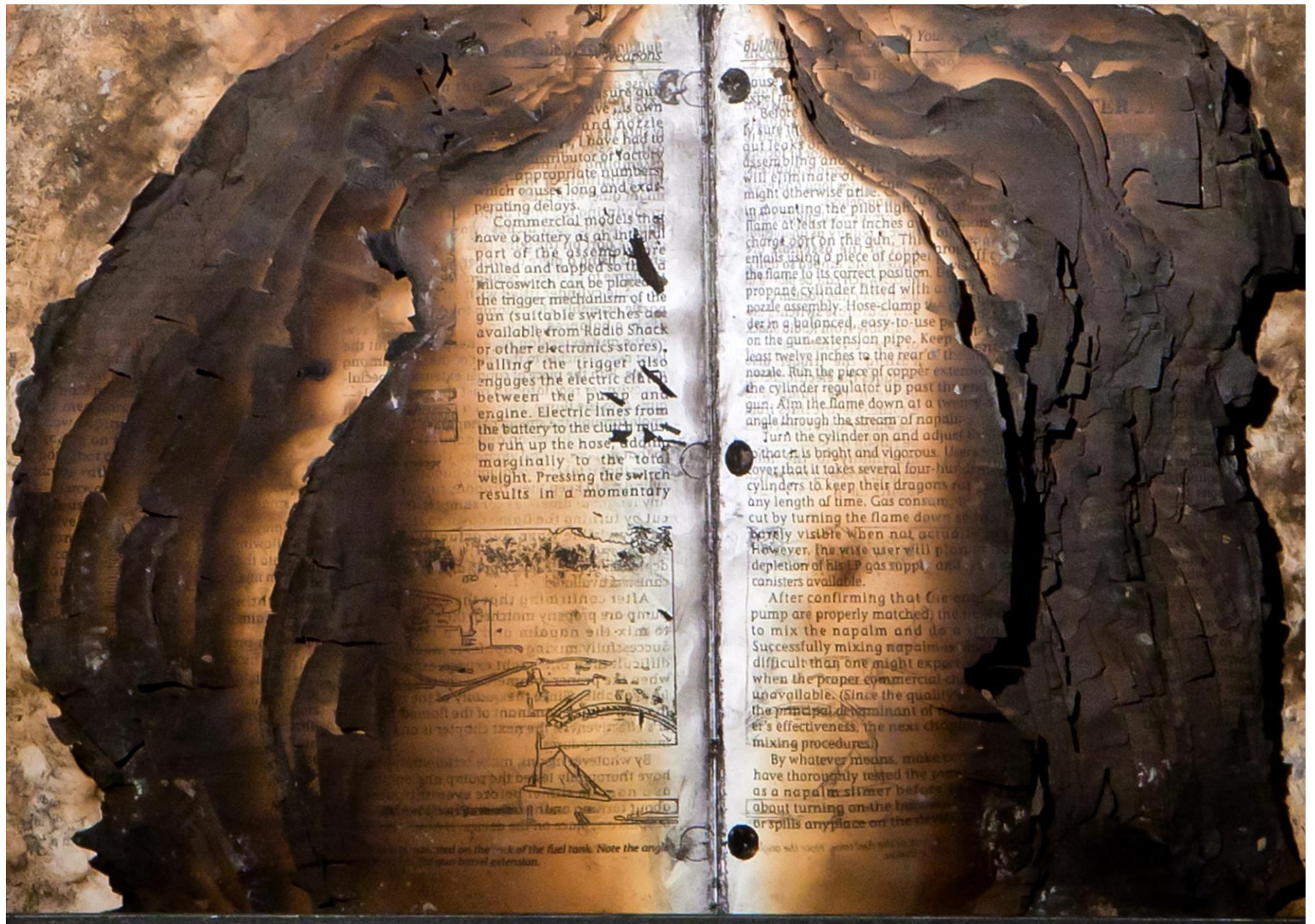


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# The Prevent strategy's impact on social relations: a report on work in two local authorities

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**Abstract** *The Prevent Strategy is often accused of being detrimental to social relations in the UK. Criticisms include the securitisation of engagement with Muslim communities, conflation of counter-terrorism and community cohesion, repression of public debate, and the undermining of free speech in schools and universities. This article does not suggest that all criticisms are necessarily invalid or that Prevent, like most strategies addressing complex social issues, is without flaws. However, through analysis of original primary data collected from five years of Prevent delivery in two west London boroughs, the authors find that many criticisms of Prevent neglect to address the diversity and nuance of impact across the UK as well as the many positive impacts Prevent has on social relations. Criticisms seem partly a consequence of the scarcity of data available to researchers. To address this, the article presents new data to demonstrate a wider range of social impacts, with reference to specific experiences in two Local Authorities.*

Keywords: Prevent, Islam, Counter-Terrorism, Community Cohesion

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## **Introduction**

In early 2016, UK tabloid media (Shammas 2016), broadsheet newspapers (*The Guardian* 2016), and mainstream news channels (*BBC* 2016b) reported a story of a 10-year-old schoolboy being questioned by police based on a spelling mistake – he had written that he lived in a ‘terrorist house’ (rather than a ‘terraced house’). The case, which was reported in reference to the Prevent Duty, was picked up by international media and reported across the globe in countries as diverse as Russia (*RT* 2016), Israel (*Ghert-Zand* 2016) and New Zealand (*news.com.au* 2016). The reports influenced UK civil groups in their assessments of the social impact of the Prevent Strategy. For instance, following this case, the Muslim Council of Britain suggested that Prevent views young people through ‘the lens of security and [they] are being seen as potential terrorists rather than students’ (*BBC* 2016b). This example is illustrative of much of the reporting and negative perceptions of the Prevent Strategy, despite Lancashire Police clarifying that the visit to the child’s house was a joint one made between the local police and social services, which took place because of a wider range of safeguarding concerns, and was not investigated as a terror incident (Barrett & Jamieson 2016; *BBC* 2016b).

In the same period, a referral was received by the Prevent Team in the London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (henceforth referred to as the Kensington team) regarding an isolated teenager, where concerns were raised regarding proximity to far right extremism. Practitioners had noted several worrying comments denigrating Muslims, including suggesting that ‘all Muslims are terrorists’. The teenager had also made some comments regarding purchasing weapons and viewed online videos about explosives. To address these concerns, support around critical thinking

was provided to the relevant teaching staff and advice around e-safety and general safety was provided to the family. An intervention provider engaged with the teenager to unpick and critically discuss some of the messaging the individual had encountered online. This intervention, typical of Prevent's focus on safeguarding, was not published in a single media, government or civil outlet. These two examples illustrate the nature of much of the analysis carried out in relation to the Prevent Strategy: i) legitimate challenges to the conceptual underpinnings of Prevent and its practical implementation are often intertwined with misreporting and misunderstanding, ii) analysts and reporters have little sight of Prevent's successes and, iii) individual incidents are taken as reflective of national delivery, with analysis frequently failing to reflect the nuances and variations within local work.

These issues, while more prominent amongst activists and popular media, are also apparent in much of the academic response to the Prevent Strategy, with researchers relying on often partial, or in some cases inaccurate, information. Unsurprisingly, framings of the Prevent Strategy as damaging to social relations in the UK are common. While some criticisms may have validity, discussions to date have often been one-sided and based on anecdotal information or single-case studies, in part because of the scarcity of primary data available to researchers. This article seeks to address this by contributing original primary data to provide an empirically rich analysis of the impact of the Prevent Strategy on social relations, with reference to women and girls where possible. The paper will summarise academic literature addressing the social impact of Prevent, highlighting two of the most consistent and prominent criticisms, and assess some of the assumptions they are based on. The article does not seek to suggest all criticism is invalid – like many strategies designed to address complex, social issues, Prevent is not flawless. The article is not a dogmatic defence of Prevent (although the

authors accept that their perceptions are likely to be partly shaped by their roles), nor does it reject the potential for negative or unintended consequences to result from poorly designed or delivered efforts to prevent terrorism (Schmid 2013: 48; Sageman: 2016). However, the authors aim to demonstrate that criticisms of Prevent are often oversimplified, neglecting to address the diversity of impact across the UK as well as the many positive impacts on social relations. As such, its intention is to add to and inform the debate about the social impacts of the Prevent Strategy.

## **Methodology**

A search of multiple academic databases, including Scopus and Web of Science, was conducted across February to April 2017 to identify English-language peer-reviewed journal articles and books focused on the social impact of the Prevent Strategy. A small number of documents produced by independent think-tanks were also included, where they focused directly on the topic. A review of the documents allowed the authors to collate a catalogue of the primary criticisms and to draw out two of the most prominent to form the focus of this article. To ensure policy relevance, the article focuses on post-2011 criticisms, following the review and update of the Prevent Strategy that year (Henry 2016). English and international media sources were used to illustrate the reach and frequency of these criticisms, but these sources did not influence the selection of the key critiques. To address the two primary criticisms of the Prevent Strategy's impact on social relations, with reference to women and girls, the authors drew on primary data collected by the Kensington team over the past five years of local authority Prevent delivery. The data includes information from the delivery of Prevent projects, safeguarding activities (e.g. Channel), and conversations with representatives of the community and wider public sector partners. The

approach employed in the two boroughs towards Prevent delivery is known as the 'Kensington Model' (Parker & Davis 2017). While there are several criticisms that the article could have focused on, it is limited to two in order to allow space for in-depth analysis and presentation of new data – areas where many studies of Prevent are lacking.

Through the literature review and access to primary data, the authors identify instances where the criticisms are either factually incorrect, excessively sweeping through their neglect of local variances, or ignore (or, more likely, were unaware of) the positive social impacts of the strategy. The Kensington team aspires to be as transparent as possible (Patel 2016; Parker & Davis 2017) but the importance of preserving the right to anonymity of individuals involved in Prevent projects and safeguarding means that information provided by the Kensington team is not referenced, other than to explain here that it is drawn from secure, local authority information that is overseen by a robust management and governance structure. The data presented is the limit of what can be shared within the confines of the Data Protection Act 1998 and no further information will be shared on individual cases referred to in this paper.

The authors recognise that several of the terms used throughout the article are debated both theoretically and politically in relation to counter-terrorism, particularly 'radicalisation', 'extremism', and 'vulnerable'. For instance, there are a range of scholarly models used to explain or analyse radicalisation (King & Taylor 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko 2008; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010), debates about the most appropriate level of analysis (Sageman 2004), a wide range of proposed definitions (Schmid 2013), and competing positions over whether the focus should be on cognitive or behavioural aspects (Neumann 2013).

Some scholars even contest the utility of the term, arguing that its (usually) cognitive focus often has little connection to actual terrorism (Borum 2011) or is used instrumentally by governments or the media (Hoskins & O’Loughlin 2009). However, to ensure consistency within this special edition, this article accepts the definitions of these three terms as provided by the Prevent Strategy (HM Government 2011).

## **Literature Review**

As Henry (2016) notes, academic critiques of the Prevent Strategy have evolved over time. Distinctions vary most significantly before and after the review of the Prevent Strategy in 2011. Pre-2011 assessments of social impacts focused on issues that included framing Muslim communities as ‘suspect’, creating resource envy amongst non-Muslim organisations, and conflating counter-terrorism and community cohesion (Henry 2016; Mythen et al. 2016: 195; Thomas 2014; Briggs 2010; Stevens 2009). While some criticisms remained consistent following the review, the more focused project work, the stated distinction between counter-terrorism and community cohesion, and the removal of National Indicator 35 (Understandings of local Muslim communities) meant that the focus of critiques changed in some respects. This was particularly so following the 2015 Prevent Duty, which introduced a legal requirement for a range of public sector organisations and professionals, including teachers and healthcare staff, to pay ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ (HM Government 2015b: 2).

Prevent’s statutory footing and tighter focus on security has meant that more recent analysis has had a strong focus on the perceived erosion of civil liberties and human rights, with authors identifying various issues within this theme. For instance, Kundnani suggests that a state narrative which assigns extremist speech and beliefs as the most significant factors

in causing terrorism ‘legitimizes the erosion of civil rights and fosters social divisions’ (Kundnani, 2015: 8). Stanford and Ahmed (2016: 42) suggest that restriction of free speech could leave families reluctant to discuss issues at home which would impinge upon their right to respect for family life, while monitoring of students’ online use would undermine privacy rights. As will be outlined below, this theme extends to reviews of the strategy’s impact on freedom of debate and dissent across a range of groups in society (Ramsay 2017) and broader social impacts, such as the potential for the strategy to undermine freedom of expression within academia (Durodie 2016; O’Donnell 2016) and to ‘go against the essential nature of higher education’ (Kyriacou et al. 2017). This attention on the implications of Prevent to public sector professionals is increasingly prominent, focusing not only on schools and universities, but also on the potential impacts on social workers and health professionals, with concerns around the securitisation of their work and undermining issues of confidentiality, trust, and care (Summerfield, 2016; McKendrick & Finch, 2017).

As will be detailed, emphasis on the securitisation of Muslim communities is the primary criticism that has remained prominent across assessments of both versions of the Prevent Strategy, with some scholars arguing that, despite a more theoretical distinction, the strategy has been impossible to disaggregate in this way in practical delivery, thus creating Muslims as an ‘other’ and undermining cohesion work (Thomas, 2014; Awan, 2012). Other works expand on this theme with Thomas (2015), for instance, arguing that resources put towards a ‘securitised’ Prevent policy could have been more productively spent on non-securitised efforts to promote good community cohesion. Perhaps the most critical line of assessment found amongst both pre and post-2011 articles is that activities delivered under the Prevent Strategy are counter-productive and could fuel, rather than prevent, extremism

(Stevens, 2009; Kundnani, 2015). The following sections will address the two most prominent and pervasive criticisms in the academic literature, seeking to add nuance to their framings and to introduce wider understanding of Prevent's social impact, including positive impacts.

### **Critique 1: Securitisation of Muslim Communities**

One of the most common critiques of Prevent is that the strategy securitises Muslim communities, suggesting that it targets Muslims, rendering Muslim communities a suspect 'other' (Awan 2016: 1166). This argument is common in mainstream media and some educational unions. Dr Fahid Qurashi goes as far as to argue that Prevent 'gives people permission to hate Muslims' (Qurashi, 2016) and a National Union of Teachers motion posited that Prevent 'risks being used to target young Muslim people' (Harris 2016). Critiques are also common in the academic community. For example, Heath-Kelly argues that Prevent views Muslims as either 'at risk' or 'risky' (2016: 10), while others have raised concerns about 'surveillant aspects of the strategy [...] directed squarely at the Muslim communities' (Mythen, Walklate & Peatfield 2017: 183) and the 'securitising approach that affects the lives of young British Muslims' (Coppock and McGovern 2014: 242). These criticisms not only fail to fully account for efforts to counter the risk of far-right extremism in the UK; they also paint the work Prevent does in partnership with Muslim communities as potentially Islamophobic. Overall, this securitisation argument fits into two broad strands. The first is that Prevent is focused on Islam and Muslims. The second is the notion that Prevent's engagement with Muslim communities reflects the government's belief that Muslims are a threat. Despite this critique being objectionable in itself, the consequence may also fuel grievances within Muslim communities.

## **Prevent is focused on Muslims/Islam**

The first component of the securitisation critique is that Prevent is focused exclusively or primarily on Islam and Muslims. Employing Hillyard's theory of 'suspect communities' (1993), Awan argues that elements of the Prevent Strategy 'alienate[s] sections of the Muslim community' and ultimately 'target[s] a certain faith (Islam)' (Awan 2012: 1168 & 1170). Ragazzi adds nuance to the idea of a 'suspect community', contending that Prevent contributes to 'policed multiculturalism', whereby some community members are considered to be 'risky' (Ragazzi 2016: 14). Elshimi (2017) similarly argues that Prevent has entrenched the notion of a problematic Muslim identity, while Ramsay posits that Prevent 'is in practice targeting coercion at Muslim students' (2017: 1762). Other assessments argue that Prevent's consideration of far right extremism is not given appropriate levels of focus (Bentley 2015), or that Prevent's focus is narrowly targeting Daesh/al Qaeda-inspired extremism (Powell, 2016).

These assessments do not always consider the strategy's stated goal to 'address all forms of extremism' (HM Government 2011: 6), which is regularly reflected in the Kensington Prevent team's experience. The Kensington team have been approached with concerns relating to violent anarchism, animal rights extremism, the expressed desire to kill members of the armed forces, and far right extremism. In responding to varied local risks and vulnerabilities, the Kensington team liaises and works with a wide range of third sector groups, such as charities, women's organisations, and religious institutions. This approach to delivering Prevent is recognition that vulnerabilities to radicalisation are not limited to one religious or social group (*The Telegraph* 2015; *BBC* 2013; Sageman 2011: 74). For example, in the 2016/17 financial year, the Kensington team provided training designed to help attendees understand



radicalisation and recognise vulnerabilities to over 3,600 staff in schools, community based organisations, and the local authority. This training addressed the risks posed by far right extremism and Daesh/al Qaeda-inspired extremism equally, with case studies from both ideologies. The sessions also explored broader vulnerabilities that could be relevant to radicalisation, irrespective of religion or social background.

The Kensington team also offers schools activities to support students through commissioned third-party organisations and its Prevent Education Officer. Engagements can be delivered to whole assemblies, specific year groups or single classes. The approach is broader than discussing issues relating to extremism alone, particularly with younger audiences, and instead seeks to foster greater resilience among students. In the 2016/17 financial year, the Prevent Education Officer and third-party organisations engaged over 4,800 students in classroom workshops or assemblies. These sessions worked with students on issues including identity, stereotyping, propaganda, and the importance of critical thinking.

As noted, the Kensington team's training to local authority and school staff handles the issue of far right extremism and Daesh/al Qaeda-inspired extremism equally. As illustrated by the actions of Thomas Mair and Pavlo Lapshyn, and the increase in the number of terror arrests linked to far right extremism, this approach reflects the diverse threat picture which the UK faces (Farmer 2017). To address this risk, a variety of projects and engagements nationally are tailored to meet the threat of far right extremism. One example is 'No Love For Hate' project, which runs between two colleges in Luton and explores a range of issues, including tolerance, radicalisation, and far right extremism (Bedfordshire on Sunday 2017). As such, Prevent's local and national approach to

extremism is a response to a threat-picture that varies significantly across boroughs and regions, is liable to change, and does not focus exclusively on one ideology or social group. Indeed, national figures show that almost one-in-three Prevent referrals now relate to far right extremism (Pasha-Robinson 2017).

Nonetheless, while Prevent addresses a breadth of ideologies and engages individuals from a range of communities, the argument that Prevent targets Islam and Muslims overlooks a crucial counterpoint: Daesh, and attacks inspired by the group, pose what then-Prime Minister David Cameron described as a 'greater and deeper threat to our security than we have known before' (Cameron 2014). In a 2015 press release, MI5 reported that 'the UK is facing an unprecedented level of threat with Syria and Iraq increasingly at the forefront of MI5's work' (MI5 2015), indicating that the threat posed by Daesh and al Qaeda is a high priority for the intelligence services. This national picture is mirrored in the two boroughs. Of the individuals who were referred to the team in the 2016/2017 financial year and subsequently discussed at the Channel Panel during the 2016/17 financial year, just under 70% of individuals were considered, in view of concerns relating to vulnerabilities to Islamist-inspired extremism.

While Muslim scholars have widely denounced al Qaeda and Daesh's acts as being un-Islamic (Markoe, 2014), these extremist groups nonetheless target men and women of the Muslim faith with highly sophisticated propaganda, posing a serious safeguarding risk. This propaganda also targets women (Ingram 2016), as demonstrated by Daesh appointing a female spokesperson, 'reflecting the key roles of women in communication, propaganda and recruitment' (Gaub & Lisiecka 2016: 2). Consequently, part of Prevent's role is to challenge Daesh narratives and

provide safeguarding support to Muslim individuals identified as vulnerable, in view of concerning behaviours identified on an individual basis. This is a proportionate response for a Prevent team working in an area where individuals from the Muslim and black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BME) communities have travelled to Daesh-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq (Booth et al. 2016). While the Kensington team's Prevent delivery reflects the varied risks present across the two local authorities, engagement with Muslim communities is an important response to Daesh's and al Qaeda's sophisticated propaganda, which has targeted Muslim communities (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr & Moreng, 2016). Working with the principle that support should be prioritised in keeping with evidence based risk or vulnerability, the Kensington team have also developed support options specifically for women, in response to the demonstrated risk of young women supporting extremist groups or travelling to Daesh-controlled areas of Syria and Iraq (Evans 2016).

### **Engagement with Muslims shows that Prevent views Muslims as risks/threats and fuels grievance**

Some assessments view Prevent practitioners' efforts to engage with Muslim communities as a reflection that the government views Muslims broadly as a risk. Heath-Kelly argues that Prevent has resulted in Muslims being viewed as risky by identifying risk factors and linking them to a single community, ultimately making terrorism pre-emptively 'governable' (2013: 395). Ali (2015) similarly criticises Prevent for seeking to govern Muslim conduct. O'Toole suggests that this approach has led to 'a series of wide-ranging interventions in Muslim religious, social and civil structures, with the aim of reforming, managing, regulating and "disciplining" Muslim conduct' (O'Toole et al. 2016: 164). These critiques posit that Prevent creates a framework for risk through which the government can exert control (Heath-Kelly 2012; Mythen et al. 2017;

Ragazzi 2016). Some commentators have suggested that this approach to Prevent is a significant source of grievance for Muslim communities. Indeed, David Anderson QC, former Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, argued that:

It is perverse that Prevent has become a more significant source of grievance in affected communities than the police and ministerial powers [...] that are exercised under the Pursue strand of the CONTEST strategy. (Anderson 2016: 3)

The authors agree that engagement activity that treats a group, whether a Muslim community or another, homogeneously and through the prism of risk is flawed and counter-productive. However, framing all engagement with Muslim groups through this lens fails to recognise the range of positive engagements conducted through Prevent and undermines successful partnership working that produces positive social impacts. The Kensington team engages Muslim community groups based on the premise they are one of many actors that can help to keep vulnerable people safe (notably considering the theological elements of much of Daesh's propaganda), not because they are a risk.

One example is the Prevent Advisory Group (PAG), which was established in 2011. Although initially met with suspicion by some community groups (Patel 2016), after regular meetings consisting of frank and open conversations, PAG now has a regular membership of 24 faith, community, and youth organisations. The monthly meeting between the Kensington team and local community groups, including women's groups, is a vital element of the Kensington Model (Parker & Davis, 2017). PAG is an opportunity for local groups to make suggestions for local Prevent delivery and to receive updates from the Kensington team. The meetings reflect the importance placed on being embedded in local

communities, being aware of concerns, and working together. One PAG member from a local mosque commented that:

We believe the PAG partnership is extremely useful and helpful as seen at times of great emergencies as well as for promoting common understanding on issues of common concern. (West London mosque representative, 2017)

Indeed, the relationship has developed to the point where some of the safeguarding support that can be offered is delivered with local community and faith groups. One example of this is through work with women and girls. It is apparent that groups, including Daesh, have targeted women using social media campaigns to encourage them to play an active role (Gaub & Lisiecka 2017; Pues 2016): recent arrests in London (Harley 2017) and a precedent of young women travelling from London to Syria (BBC 2016a) indicates such tactics may be working. The Kensington team's work with PAG has enabled a range of support options to be made available to women, including a 20-week Supporting Vulnerable Women (SVW) project and the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) programme.

The SVW project was co-designed with a community organisation during the 2013/2014 financial year. These workshops were run for women – where concerns had been raised regarding isolation, troubled upbringings, lack of interaction with British society, and holding conspiratorial views – to promote discussion and awareness of several topics, including participation in British society and how to challenge extremist narratives. The SVW project had a positive social impact on many of the women who took part in the workshops. For example, when asked 'do you feel more confident about engaging in wider society?' upon completion of the programme, 85% of those vulnerable women felt 'more confident' or 'much more confident' about engaging with wider

society. These support options contrast with Thomas' critique that Prevent has a 'clear reluctance to support empowerment work with Muslim women' (Thomas 2014: 33) and highlights the positive social impacts that can result from working and engaging with Muslim groups.

Another support option provided by community groups working with the Kensington team is SFSC, a parenting class. In the 2016/17 financial year, six parenting programmes were delivered to 84 parents, comprising 14 three-hour sessions. This project has been particularly well attended by mothers who accounted for just over 80% of attendees during the 2016/2017 financial year. Local community organisations delivered these parenting programmes with qualified facilitators and sought to raise parents' awareness of the risks their children may face, including substance abuse, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, and learning how these risks could be mitigated or countered. Over 500 participants across the two boroughs have completed the programme since it began in 2011, showing the benefits of partnering with local community groups in tackling radicalisation and other safeguarding concerns. The team received positive feedback from attendees regarding the ability to protect and support their children. One mother from a 2014/15 class said:

[I have] established '15 minutes' with each child. I have learnt so much about my child. Now my child will talk and discuss issues with me whereas before I never knew what was going on in their head.  
(Project Participant, 2014/15)

Similarly, one mother from the 2014/2015 financial year cohort said the 'course has filled a big gap' and a mother from the same cohort said:

The course has given me confidence not only to speak to my children about sensitive issues like extremism, but also has given me

confidence to speak to teachers and to ask for help if I need it.  
(Project Participant, 2014/15)

One of the community groups we worked with engaged significantly with female community members and worked in partnership with the Kensington team to deliver the SFSC programme. That organisation shared the below feedback:

Both community groups have benefited from the awareness raised of issues around radicalisation which was done through the projects with parents. That is why I am happy to be a part of all the meetings and discussions [that] took place during the past 18 months. (Local community group representative 2017)

This feedback suggests that, through meetings such as PAG, community groups can influence and guide local delivery of Prevent projects. In some cases, the groups can co-deliver projects to ensure that the Kensington team's outputs are impactful and reflect the needs of local communities, as opposed to fuelling community grievance. Engagement with Muslim communities enables groups to influence local delivery as partners, not as perceived risks, resulting in better social impacts for communities, including women.

## **Critique 2: Repression of Debate and Dissent**

A second prominent criticism is that the Prevent Strategy impacts on free speech by repressing debate and dissent. This criticism can be subdivided into two separate concerns. The first is that Prevent is - at least partially - responsible for the creation of an environment in which people are afraid to discuss certain topics. Several dynamics are often identified as contributing to this. Firstly, individuals may exercise self-censorship (Wolton 2017: 7; Ramsay, 2017) in a context where practitioners, who are unclear as to how the strategy relates to them, may consider

expressions of religious or political interest to be concerning and undertake well-intentioned but misguided referrals (Ragazzi 2016: 728). Additionally, concerns have been raised that, by distinguishing between a 'trusted' or 'moderate' group of Muslims and other Muslims, the strategy is silencing or 'regulating' the latter (Ragazzi 2016: 737-738; Aly 2013: 11). Secondly, some researchers have argued that Prevent has pushed discussion of sensitive topics away from safe spaces. For example, it has been argued that Prevent undermines universities' ability to encourage robust challenge of unpalatable ideas (Durodie 2016; O'Donnell 2016: 62). This has led critics to argue that Prevent has been counter-productive by creating an environment in which individuals 'feel angry, or have a sense of injustice but nowhere to engage in a democratic process and in a peaceful way' (Wolton 2017: 7).

It is important to clarify the scope of these criticisms. Firstly, engagement with Prevent support is voluntary. Any engagement offered by Prevent can be refused, meaning that Prevent's ability to prohibit comments is non-existent. For example, while making extremist comments may lead to an offer of support by Prevent, this support would be voluntary. As such, while it may be argued that Prevent may hamper free speech by creating conditions in which an action may result from the expression of certain ideas – what Ramsay calls the 'threat of regulatory action' (2017) – Prevent cannot prohibit behaviour. Some researchers also overstate Prevent's focus on ideas. While ideological considerations are relevant and considered by Prevent, much safeguarding support and many projects seek to address broader vulnerabilities. The Channel Duty Guidance highlights the relevance of several factors when assessing an individual's vulnerabilities to radicalisation. These factors span across engagement, intention, and capability, and include non-ideological considerations, like having a history of violence (HM Government 2015a: 11-12). Locally, guidance and advice was provided to the carers and/or



practitioners of just under 65% of the residents who received some safeguarding support in 2016/2017.

### **Individuals are Afraid to Talk**

Recognising that this study focuses only on two boroughs while some of the concerns raised may be national, locally there is nonetheless limited evidence of individuals being afraid to talk because of the work undertaken by the Kensington team. While there have been occasional instances in which concerns around individuals feeling afraid to talk have been noted by members of the team (including an instance documented in the media where a staff member was asked to close his laptop should it be acting as a recording device) (Patel, 2016), this is not in keeping with the team's overall experience of community engagement. This is notably true of the claim that, by engaging with a certain section of the Muslim community, Prevent may be silencing other views. The aforementioned monthly PAG meetings constitute an example of Prevent engaging with community groups, including Muslim organisations, which may be critical of the strategy (Patel 2016). Indeed, the Terms of Reference document of the PAG explicitly stresses the responsibility of members to 'provide constructive criticism or analysis of Prevent that can be fed up to government.' One PAG member, who had made the aforementioned request for a laptop to be closed, commented that:

Having been a vocally critical member within PAG from the outset, [PAG meetings] convinced me it was best for Muslim groups to engage...Prevent has evolved, learned lessons, and achieved significant strides during the last five years. (PAG member and Governor of an Outstanding School 2016)

Another example is the Community Questions project, in which the Kensington team supports local community groups in running public discussions around key issues and themes that have been highlighted by

communities as being important. These discussions typically cover controversial, contentious or current topics and bring together experts and interested community members. Attended by an estimated 450 individuals over the four events held during the 2016/17 financial year and covering topics including Islam and women and Prevent itself, these events offer a platform where views are discussed openly and freely. Working in partnership with a local youth organisation and PAG member, the Kensington team attracted panellists including a Member of Parliament, independent scholars, and community members to discuss these topics. One such event was held at a mosque and provided an opportunity to discuss Prevent delivery in West London. An Imam, a Prevent Safeguarding Officer and two local community group members sat on the panel with an estimated 120 people in attendance. Following brief presentations, panellists responded to any questions and criticisms from the audience, including queries which were particularly critical of the government and of Prevent. Feedback from the event was broadly positive, with 90% of evaluation respondents feeling 'very confident' or 'confident' with safeguarding efforts, including Prevent, after the event, as compared to 30% before. Furthermore, feedback included positive comments such as 'Very interesting, great to hear from the professionals on the panel' and 'Excellent event. I would like to attend more events like this'.

Although there is no means of definitively knowing that the implementation of the Prevent Strategy has not led to any self-censorship, the experience of the Kensington team has found little evidence of this occurring in community settings. This also seems to be the case in schools. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that sensitive and controversial topics are still being discussed in local schools. Indeed, there have been several instances where primary and secondary schools have approached the local authority Prevent team for support in

view of such topics being discussed, should the team be able to provide specialist content to regarding these topics. For example, schools reached out to the team for support after the attack in Westminster in March 2017 and as a consequence of discussions around sectarian conflict among students. This reveals that sensitive topics are still being discussed within school settings and that certain schools view the local authority Prevent team as a valuable partner able to support schools when engaging with this.

Having reviewed the Kensington team's experience of open discussion with community members and anecdotal examples of ongoing discussion of sensitive topics within school settings, it is also relevant to consider whether the training delivered may be contributing to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to such self-censorship. Indeed, concerns have been raised that uncertainty and poor training delivered to practitioners may foster an environment in which the risk of misguided referrals may, in turn, lead to self-censorship. A national executive member of the National Union of Teachers (NUT), for example, is quoted in a report as raising some concerns about the quality of some of the Prevent training delivered, explaining that 'it's very varied in content and very varied in quality – that is exacerbating the confusion [around Prevent]' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016: 44). This same report notes that such concerns have been raised by a 'significant number of health and education professionals' who 'said that the Prevent training they received was wholly unsatisfactory and, in some instances, counterproductive' (Open Society Justice Initiative 2016: 44). Locally, however, feedback from school staff trained during the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 financial years, alongside the first quarter of the 2017/2018 financial year, indicates that the percentage of practitioners who felt that their understanding of Prevent was 'Very Good' and 'Good' went from 15.6% before the training to 89.8% after the training. Additionally, 95.9%

of school staff stated after the training that they understood ‘the purpose of Channel and its role in safeguarding vulnerable individuals’. A similar trend can be identified regarding local authority staff trained. During the first quarter of the 2017/2018 financial year, the percentage of attendees who rated their understanding of Prevent to be ‘Good’ and ‘Very Good’ went from 21.5% before the training to 89% after the training. Feedback provided by local authority and education staff who received the training notably includes the following:

Very good presentation and clarification on the subject. Overall - more confident. (Education staff trained in 2016)

Excellent, informative & now have a much better understanding about 'Prevent'. (Education staff trained in 2016)

Very clearly and confidently presented. Good to respect and reinforce different kinds of extremism across cultures and religions. Thank you.

(Local Authority staff trained in 2016)

Looking at a national level, a 2017 report also found that school staff ‘expressed fairly high levels of confidence with regards to implementing the Prevent duty’ which is noted as being the result of a combination of factors including, amongst others, ‘effective training’ (Busher et al. 2017: 6). While acknowledging anxieties with regards to the aforementioned concerns, the report also notes that it ‘found relatively little support among respondents for the idea that the duty has led to a “chilling effect” on conversations with students in the classroom and beyond’ (Busher et al. 2017: 6) and that the ‘largest proportion of respondents (56%) expressed the view that the Prevent duty had not resulted in any change in the levels of trust between students and staff’ (Busher et al. 2017: 50).

## **Pushing Debate Outside of Safe Spaces**

The evidence drawn from the Kensington team also provides us with an insight regarding whether Prevent is pushing debate outside of safe spaces (O'Donnell 2016: 62). For example, the Kensington team encourages discussion of sensitive topics within schools. Over the course of the 2015/2017 financial years, the Kensington team has facilitated eight events about the Israel-Palestine conflict in schools, reaching approximately 1,010 students. These sessions, in which a former British Ambassador provides an overview of the conflict and of his experiences, are then followed by a debate. A community organisation has also run four sessions over the course of the 2015/2017 financial years reaching at least 600 students to discuss potentially conflicting identities. Muslim members of the armed forces ran eleven discussions to a total of 1,734 students discussing a range of topics, including the perception that the military is preoccupied with killing (as opposed to its humanitarian function) and the view, sometimes espoused by the far right, that no British Muslims serve in the military. The 'Syria/Iraq Tabletop', in which Prevent staff provide students with an overview of the conflict in Syria/Iraq prior to discussing the risks originating from this conflict, was delivered to 209 students over the course of nine sessions during the 2015/2016 financial year. Where possible, these sessions are tailored to audiences. For example, 'Syria/Iraq Tabletop' sessions delivered in girls' schools discussed the experiences of female foreign fighters and the treatment of women by Daesh. Lesson plans have also been produced around several topics, ranging from far right extremism to fake news, and represent another means by which Prevent supports debate in safe spaces. With regards to Prevent's impact on social relations, far from the concerns that Prevent is pushing debate outside of safe spaces, the Kensington team's experience is one in which Prevent has encouraged debate and discussion within safe spaces.

Beyond educational settings, the Kensington team also support open debate in local community settings. The workshops delivered as part of the SVW project enabled in-depth discussion of sensitive issues over 20 weeks, covering issues such as British identity, isolation, and extremism. Quotes from participants prior to the start of project illustrate the isolated and sceptical nature of some attendees:

I am an alien in my home country and when I come to Britain I am again an alien, nobody wants Muslim people in [their] country because they think we are all terrorist. (Project Participant 2013-2014)

I don't feel like the British people want me or my kind in this country anymore (Project Participant 2013-2014)

Far from the claims that Prevent pushes debate outside of safe spaces thereby increasing risk, feedback from participants at the end of the project highlights how well the workshops were received and their positive effects.

I am really pleased with myself for finishing the course, I learned a lot about myself, I didn't understand why my identity was questioned, until I realise how I was confused and did feel disconnected but was unaware of it. (Project Participant 2013-2014)

I don't feel angry anymore, you made me realise that I should always have open mind and I feel more positive in this country. (Project Participant 2013-2014)

We have argued in this section that, while the scope of this inquiry is limited, at the very least, the experiences here demonstrate that the delivery of Prevent by the Kensington team offers a different experience from the concerns raised by researchers who have stressed Prevent's impact on the repression of debate and dissent. Specifically, the Kensington team has found little evidence of Prevent stifling discussion

and, on the contrary, has substantial quantitative and anecdotal evidence of individuals speaking freely and critically, and of Prevent actively encouraging the discussion of sensitive topics in safe spaces.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, whilst not seeking to suggest that Prevent is a flawless strategy, this article has outlined that its social impacts are more diverse than often reported. It has provided examples of positive social impacts, including in relation to work with women and girls, that add nuance to some of the main critiques of Prevent. This is particularly so in relation to assessments of the Prevent Strategy as securitising Muslim communities and stifling debate and dissent, with new primary data illustrating deep community support for local approaches in areas of West London and Prevent serving to facilitate and foster public discussion of sensitive and complicated issues in schools and community venues. Future research into the impacts of the Prevent Strategy would benefit from considering in greater detail local variances in delivery and community reception, as well as considering the views of a wider range of smaller, local community, and faiths groups.

**The views expressed in this article are the authors' own and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations that they represent.**

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# Prevent: Silencing Palestine on Campus

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## Introduction

I recently had a conversation that I'll never forget with some university student activists in London. The students had gathered to talk about their role in building the movement for solidarity with Palestinians on their campuses. As the National Coordinator for War on Want's Student Palestine Solidarity Project, I am used to working on different issues with students organising on campus and I came ready to help them brainstorm creative actions and tactics to get out their message about equality, justice, and human rights. But before we could get to that exciting work, the students had something else they wanted to strategise about. 'We're not even allowed to have a stall on campus without it being a fight', said one student. Others mentioned a disturbing series of restrictions and 'checks' they had been subjected to, without any clear reason as to how or why they were being scrutinised. I asked them if the university had cited some specific code or reason? One student shrugged: 'That's how Prevent works. It literally prevents you from doing anything, no matter what it is, and without any reason why.'

As students learn about the systematic human rights abuses Palestinians are subjected to, it's only natural for those with progressive politics to want to get involved in the inspiring activism that is calling out university complicity in Israel's oppressive regime. But time and time again, students are faced with a brick wall from their university administrations, and left with a strong feeling that using words like 'justice' and 'human rights' will get them put on a watch list. This is the devastating effect of



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the Prevent agenda and how it is being used on campus to silence progressive voices and debate.

### **Preventing critiques of Israel**

The UK government originally developed the Prevent programme in 2003. It is one of the Contest counter-terrorism strategy's four workstreams, the others being Pursue (to stop terrorist attacks), Protect (to strengthen protection against a terrorist attack) and Prepare (to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack). While the three other workstreams focus on tangible events and quantifiable outcomes, Prevent places a legal duty on public bodies such as universities to identify the early warning signs of terrorist sympathies in individuals and to report them.

The guidance relies on a Vulnerability Assessment Framework that is based on a single study of a small number of people imprisoned for terrorism offences. As such, it lacks a thorough list of possible indicators. The partial list in the official guidance includes feelings and experiences that many people will identify with: Identity crisis (distance from cultural/religious heritage and uncomfortable with their place in the society around them), Personal crisis (family tensions, sense of isolation, adolescence), Personal circumstances (migration, local community tensions, events affecting country or region of origin, alienation from UK values, having a sense of grievance that is triggered by personal experience of racism, discrimination, or aspects of government policy), Unmet aspirations (perceptions of injustice, feeling of failure, rejection of civic life) and Criminality (experiences of imprisonment, poor resettlement/reintegration, previous involvement with criminal groups). The guidance makes clear that this list is not to be considered exhaustive.

The 'Personal Circumstances' section of the guidance considers individuals with grievances triggered by aspects of government policy as being vulnerable to extremism. This is where much of the application of Prevent applies to Palestine solidarity activists. Critiques of the Israeli state are considered one such grievance within this framework, even though this ignores the fact that Israel, with the complicity of the British government, systematically violates the human rights of Palestinians on a daily basis. Even the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) admits that Israel regularly breaches international law in its violations of Palestinian rights (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2017, p.40). Yet, when student activists organise events analysing or even just describing these violations, Prevent may be triggered.

The logic linking support for Palestinian rights to extremism is deeply flawed: within this framework, Baroness Warsi, a former cabinet minister and co-Chair of the Conservative Party who resigned in 2014 in protest over the government's failure to condemn Israel's attack on Gaza, is vulnerable to extremism and a potential terrorist. And the over 100 MPs that have spoken out against Israel's practice of taking Palestinian children as political prisoners may be 'at risk of radicalisation'.

### **Silencing debate in higher education**

The Prevent agenda has increasingly alienated university students, particularly those engaged with Friends of Palestine societies. Prevent encourages institutional surveillance of these groups; in a HEFCE-backed Prevent training presentation, there is a slide entitled 'Palestine: Extreme, but Legal?' (see Nabulsi, 2017). This approach has resulted in the profiling of students and academic staff of a certain background as

people who are more likely to have ‘grievances’ on the issue of Palestine and Britain’s complicity in the continuation of the illegal occupation. An example of this profiling took place at Cambridge University in November 2017, when university officials contacted the Palestine Society hours before a planned public meeting titled ‘BDS and the globalised struggle for Palestinian rights’. They demanded that the Director of Communications, Paul Mylrea, be installed as Chair of the event, replacing SOAS academic Ruba Salih. University officials claimed that the change was necessary ‘to ensure open, robust and lawful debate’. This was a way for the University hierarchy to take control and restrict the autonomy of academics and left, anti-racist organisations to hold speaker events. It is not coincidental that the proposed Chair representing the University’s senior management was a white man, and the usurped academic was a woman of colour, a highly respected postcolonial academic with research focusing on Palestinian refugees. Following a review of this procedure, Cambridge University released a statement on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2018, stating that the wrong decision was taken and publicly apologising to Salih (see Bradbury, 2018). Nevertheless, this incident is an example of how the logic of Prevent is often used without the formal process being triggered – it simply creates an opening for events and people to be considered ‘risky’.

The vague nature of Prevent guidance accompanied by the insinuation that Palestine solidarity activism is a precursor to violent extremist activities has allowed the Prevent Duty to be invoked by right-wing groups hostile to the politics of Palestine solidarity. This can most clearly be seen in the events of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2016, when University College London Union (UCLU) Friends of Israel hosted Hen Mazzig, a former Israeli military soldier and professional propagandist for the Israeli state, to speak on campus. The UCLU Friends of Palestine Society arranged a demonstration to counter the event. Pro-Israel groups and individuals

came to oppose the students, resulting in a confrontation. There is video footage<sup>i</sup> of a pro-Israel protestor verbally attacking a Black student wearing a Palestine T-shirt, shouting 'The Home Office should follow you up. You are at risk of radicalisation'. University College London (UCL) took disciplinary action against five students associated with the Friends of Palestine Society – all of whom were students of colour and some of whom were Muslim. In the aftermath, the university administration made a recommendation that the Prevent Duty be fully integrated into the Students Union's speaker approval system. The Student Union sabbatical officers voted down the recommendation.

There have been more calculated attempts by pro-Israel organisations to use the Prevent Duty to suppress Palestine solidarity activism in universities. The group UK Lawyers for Israel has a section on its website outlining how the Prevent Duty can be used to launch complaints in order to oppose the Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions movement (BDS)<sup>ii</sup> or what it refers to as 'anti-Israel events' on campus. The advice includes using Prevent to demand the university administration heavily scrutinise speakers to unearth any 'extreme' views they may hold and to insist that opposing views be presented at the same event. In my experience, universities are all too willing to impose these restrictions on Palestine Society events in the name of 'balance' and 'debate' – however, this enthusiasm for neutrality dissipates when representatives of the Israeli state are given a platform on campus.

## **Conclusion**

Despite a lack of comprehensive indicators that an individual is vulnerable to extremism, the Prevent agenda is rooted in the belief that 'non-violent extremism' leads to 'violent extremism', which means that individuals are targeted for what are essentially thought crimes. This

thought policing has, unsurprisingly, created a climate of fear around political organising in society. After a visit to the UK, Maina Kiai, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, commented that he was concerned about ‘the lack of definitional clarity [in Prevent guidelines], combined with the encouragement of people to report suspicious activity have created an unease and uncertainty around what can be discussed in public’<sup>iii</sup>. The natural result of this unease and uncertainty is the shrinking of spaces in which politics can be openly discussed – particularly on university campuses, traditionally hotbeds of political organising. Many students (particularly those identifying as Muslim or BME) feel uncomfortable discussing their politics publicly and engage in self-censorship, policing themselves so that the university doesn’t have to.

In 2009, when Prevent was in its infancy, the Institute of Race Relations published a study on the strategy (Kudnani, 2009). It found that Prevent decision-making lacks transparency and accountability, and that the atmosphere promoted by Prevent is one in which to make radical criticisms of the government and its policies is to risk losing funding and facing isolation as an ‘extremist’, whilst institutions which support the government are rewarded. These observations remain just as pertinent today, almost ten years after the study was published and seven years since the Prevent agenda’s remit was expanded by David Cameron’s Conservative government.

University administrations have used the stifling atmosphere created by Prevent to not only justify targeting Palestine solidarity and other forms of progressive activism on campuses, but also to avoid being held accountable by their student body. When SOAS and Manchester University hosted Israeli Ambassador Mark Regev (in April 2017 and



November 2017, respectively), the administrations were actively ignoring democratic votes from the student body endorsing BDS, which included boycotting representatives of the Israeli state. Prevent offers the neoliberal university a convenient way to become less democratic and less culpable for its actions – an erosion of institutional transparency which should concern people both inside and outside of academia.

Staff and student alliances are key to challenging the repressive nature of Prevent within universities: at both SOAS and Manchester, staff and students came together to organise sizeable demonstrations against Regev's presence. Cambridge University's move to force a 'neutral chair' onto a Palestine Society event received a huge public pushback from staff. These partnerships within a university environment bolster resistance and campus communities should be striving to create them where they do not already exist. Forging these relationships, as well as continuing to campaign for Palestine and other progressive causes on campus, are the best challenge to the depoliticising nature of Prevent, and a reassertion that universities will remain the space of political organising which they have always been.

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<sup>i</sup> Video footage can be viewed here:

<https://www.facebook.com/UCLPiMedia/videos/1107862479332204/>

<sup>ii</sup> For further information see the website of Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement:

<https://bdsmovement.net/>

<sup>iii</sup> The statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association at the conclusion of his visit to the United Kingdom can be read here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19854&LangID=E>



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## Prevent: Accounts from the Frontline

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This reflection presents a cautious look at Prevent from a youth worker's point of view. It has been written with reference to firsthand experience and conversations with fellow youth workers and attempts to shed some light on why many in the youth and community sector may be reluctant to engage with the UK Government's Prevent Strategy. Although the ideas presented in this article have been developed through personal experience, they also constitute the basis of planned future research on the way Prevent is being received within the youth sector.

As such, the paper will first set a policy context for the strategy outlining how community safety and crime prevention initiatives, which once relied on voluntary involvement, are now increasingly being reinforced by a legal duty on particular professional groups of people to participate. I then look at the focus on the concern around the potential radicalisation of young people, considering why they feature so significantly within the UK Government's counter terrorism strategy. This viewpoint will be assessed against terrorism-related conviction statistics and data on Prevent referrals and interventions, both of which suggest that the counter-terrorist focus on youth radicalisation could be misguided. The article will close with some reflections on experiences gained as a youth worker regarding the realities of what can happen when youth organisations engage with Prevent, as well as present an example of the pressure felt when organisations actively state that they have nothing to offer in terms of information on potential radicals.



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## **The context of the Prevent Duty and young people**

There is nothing new in the method of relying on the public for intelligence in the fight against crime. From neighbourhood watch initiatives to anti-terror announcements on public transport, everyday people, with seemingly little to do with the criminal justice system, are being called upon to be the first line of defence against crime and disorder. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a legal duty on ‘specified authorities’, including schools, colleges, and organisations providing particular support to young people, such as those working with young people on a school exclusion, to share any concerns relating to the potential radicalisation of a young person with the authorities along with any information. As such, like many other community safety initiatives, Prevent’s strength and weakness lie in its reliance on non-law enforcement agents, such as schools and colleges, to initiate action by reporting their suspicions.

However, there is something increasingly sinister about the coercive pressure placed on members of the public to participate in such law enforcement processes. Immigration controls, for example, are no longer simply the responsibility of border control agents and the police, but bank staff, landlords, business owners alike – all forced, through fear of fines and imprisonment, into doing the government’s bidding by checking the immigration status of potential staff members or customers. Whether you agree with the government’s stance or not, everyday people are being increasingly expected to enforce government policies, even when they are not best equipped to do so.

The Prevent Duty Guidelines (HM Government 2015) seem to go one step further. Although the wording in Section 26 of the Terrorism and Counter Terrorism Act 2015 is one of protecting vulnerable people from potential harm, the duty isn't asking people to check particular legalities, but to help assess potential criminality. Mythen and Walklate (2016) comment that such pre-emptive measures often lead to an 'us and them' mentality with people, differentiating those who deserve protection from those who are a potential threat. Seen in this way, the Prevent Duty may well be compelling teachers, health care professionals, social workers, and others with a duty of care to, in effect, treat with suspicion those they are supporting. Like other crime prevention initiatives that rely on 'community' involvement and support, Prevent is a pre-emptive bottom-up tool that works by the government outlining groups they believe could be of particular concern and then 'responsibilising' identified individuals and institutions, by expecting them to identify individuals who pose a potential risk and report their suspicions to the authorities (Hardy, 2015; Innes, 2006; McCulloch and Pickering, 2009; Mythen and Walklate, 2016; Zedner, 2008).

As with any other community safety programme, Prevent seeks to target those most at risk of posing the greatest threat. Due to the concern with Islamic radicalisation, there has been a much publicised and criticised attempt to engage the 'Muslim Community' (Lynch, 2013). Many feel this has had more of a destructive than constructive influence on community relations, through the demonising of particular groups of people by associating them with potential risk (Heath-Kelly, 2013; Kundnani, 2009).

However, young people are possibly of equal focus within government policy. The official viewpoint is that young people are more impressionable to fundamentalist messaging and therefore are at greater

risk of becoming radicalised, with the Prevent Strategy 2011 stating that ‘the percentage of people who are prepared to support violent extremism in this country is very small. It is significantly greater amongst young people’ (HM Government 2011:6). In such instances, Prevent may represent an early intervention tool that is halting potential terror threats before they ever materialise.

However, the data on those who are referred to Channel and those who are considered in need of support suggests that there is a disproportionate emphasis on young people. The Government’s belief in the susceptibility of young people from largely disadvantaged backgrounds to radicalisation lacks the type of empirical research needed to really understand the issue (Breen, 2007; Mythen, et al., 2017). Mythen et al. (2017) explain that the government’s position comes largely from responses to two questions in the 2010 Citizenship Survey that asked about the use of violence to protest or achieve a goal. This, along with concerns that young people are more likely to be searching for meaning and identity, and willing to join social networks – all of which have been identified as building blocks for radicalisation (Murshed and Pavan, 2011; Zech and Gabbay, 2016) – suggests they are the perfect target for fundamentalists. This combination has led the government to conclude that particular young people are at risk of and pose a particular threat to national security. However, the relatively small percentage of young people who are deemed in need of support after being referred for being at risk from fundamentalism suggests that a better, more informed approach is needed.

The government’s statistics on terrorism arrests would suggest that under 21s are less likely to be involved in terrorist activities compared to the adult population. Between September 2001 and December 2017, 483

young people were arrested on a terrorism charge leading to 108 convictions (terror and non-terror related) (HM Government, 2018b). This compares to 3,357 arrests and 608 convictions for the adult population (*ibid*). Despite the fact that young people are less likely to be perpetrators of terrorist acts in the UK than other demographics, young people – young men in particular – seem to be of particular focus within the 2015 Prevent Duty guidelines and represent over half of all Prevent referrals. Government data on Prevent show that of 6,093 people referred in the year ending March 2017, 57% (3,487) were under 21 and the vast majority male, with 80% of referrals and 85% of those supported being men (HM Government, 2018a). When put into context of actual arrest and conviction data for terrorist offences that shows those who carry out the attacks are generally males over the age of 30, the focus on young men may well be misplaced. This is not to say that there should not be a concern around the vulnerability of young people, however, the arrest and conviction data clearly suggests that other age groups are susceptible to fundamentalist messages and need protection also.

As it stands, schools and post-16 educational institutions are the main referrers of young people to Prevent with educators referring 50% of the under 21s referred to the programme in 2016/17 followed by the police (23%) and local authorities (15%) (HM Government, 2017). In contrast, youth and community organisations only made 2.2% of Prevent's youth referrals (*ibid*). Despite the numbers of referrals, only 226 (6.5%) young people were considered in need of any intervention (*ibid*).

Given the numbers of young people involved in the education system, it is no wonder referrals from this sector outstripped any other referral source. However, only 7% of the education sector's youth referrals were



of any interest (ibid), suggesting that the way the Prevent Duty is being operationalised is causing teachers to view young people with too much suspicion and to see signs of radicalisation that are not there.

Although the numbers of referrals from other sectors are lower, for the reasons stated above, the conversion rate from referral to intervention recipient doesn't fare that much better. 93-95% of referrals from Police, Local Authority, Health, and the secure estate (prisons, detention centres, youth offending institutions, and the like) were considered of no interest when reviewed by the authorities (HM Government, 2018a). Despite being the lowest source of referrals, a higher percentage of those who were referred by the youth and community organisations (13%) (ibid) were judged to need Channel support than other sources. From an information point of view, this would suggest that youth and community organisations are more effective at assessing the needs of young people than other institutions, although far more needs to be done to engage the sector effectively.

However, this is where my personal concerns with Prevent lie. In my research into young people involved in street violence, when specialist interventions were called upon to deal with group or individual behaviour, those offering more relational support seemed to step back. Either they thought it best or were told to leave it to the trained professionals. This resulted in young people feeling alone and often their behaviour got worse. If this is replicated in the support offered through Channel, the young people most at risk could find themselves further isolated and further at risk.

Young people do need support to help safeguard themselves against fundamentalism. However, there is the obvious conflict generated by asking youth workers and teachers to refer to the authorities those whom they are meant to be building a trusted relationship with.

### **A view from the sector<sup>i</sup>**

Many in the youth sector are in a slightly different position than staff from schools and colleges in that they do not have a statutory duty to report concerns. Without this legal requirement, there seems to be a reluctance to support the programme. Concern remains that, if the sector caves in to pressure and strong-arm tactics from the authorities, we may betray the young people we work with, through viewing them with increasing suspicion and subject more innocent young people to scrutiny.

My first real experience with Prevent, besides the rumours and murmurings that existed within the sector, was as the head of a youth construction training programme. Most of the young participants had their troubled back stories – offending, exclusion, substance misuse, and the like – and the project offered young people the chance to learn employment skills by renovating social housing. The idea was to give them the chance to learn practical skills while providing a supportive space to help the participants flourish. Young people would usually be on the programme for three months, working with tradesmen and youth workers three days a week in a semi-formal environment, before being supported to find employment or further training.

Whilst the programme was valuable, the reality was that many of the young people needed longer on the programme to achieve what we in

the business call 'a positive outcome', and many just disappeared before they got to this point. The reasons for the dropouts varied, but for Daniel, a young person with a particularly difficult past, Prevent clearly played its part.

The youth sector was starting to try and understand the ramifications of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and it was still unclear of roles and responsibilities under the Prevent Duty. Our Head of Safeguarding had attended the Prevent training and reported back to staff that they needed to be 'more aware of the threat that radicalisation poses to young people'. It was also explained that if staff had any concerns about a young person that we should let her know. She would then report our concerns to the relevant Local Authority who, in turn, would ensure the young person obtained the support they needed.

Daniel came onto the construction programme after a staff member from a local social services department found him sleeping rough behind their office. After securing a place in a hostel for Daniel, he was introduced to us as something to get involved that would support Daniel while he figured out what next he wanted to do with his life. The hope was to support Daniel to get some structure in his life and eventually support him into an apprenticeship or college course, whilst helping him develop his interpersonal skills along the way. It was clear Daniel needed support – during his time on the programme, he hardly said a word and preferred to work on his own. After a few weeks, Daniel started isolating himself during break times so that he could pray. The project staff were a little concerned at this point, not so much with the praying, but with the fact that he seemed to have no real interest in socialising with others on the project during downtime or breaks. As the weeks went by, Daniel

seemed to become increasingly interested in Islam and was watching preaching on his phone while others sat around conversing.

On one such occasion, a staff member glanced at his phone and thought he may have seen an ISIS flag on the screen. During the staff debrief at the end of the day, the issue was raised and the organisation's Head of Safeguarding was informed of the incident. She stated that she would have to report the incident. As Daniel hadn't really connected with any of the staff, it was thought that we should simply inform the social worker who referred Daniel on to the programme as she may have a better relationship with Daniel than we did.

That was the last we saw of Daniel – his social worker fulfilled their Prevent Duty by alerting the authorities of our concerns, which had been interpreted as suspicions. The weekend before Daniel was due to be back in, the police had broken down his hostel door and arrested him. A few days later, we got a call from a very irate Daniel, after he had been released without charge and with no indication that he had been watching radicalising material. He vented his anger at being betrayed by the one organisation that he felt cared and had been willing to help him. This may not be the way that referrals to Prevent are meant to be dealt with, however, it does indicate that with such a sensitive issue, mistakes can be made on many levels and these mistakes can have serious impacts on young people. Those involved in decision making processes, whether it be the youth workers who did not feel able to address the issue with Daniel, the social worker who informed the police, and the police themselves, all could have dealt with Daniel differently.

We too felt let down – although we were not convinced that the local authority was going to provide much useful support, we did not think our conversation with Daniel’s social worker would end up in his arrest.

I wish I could say that this heavy-handed approach to tackling radicalisation was a rarity within the youth sector, however, discussions with others in the youth sector makes me not so certain. In my position as both a frontline worker and a trustee of a local youth organisation in London, I often have the privileged but sometimes concerning position of being able to get an overview of what organisations face when working with young people who meet the government’s criteria of suspicion. The reality is of all the committees and staff groups from the organisation that I sit on, none have ever discussed concerns regarding the radicalisation of young people. When the umbrella organisation that we belong to attempted to start a professional network focused on the issue of radicalisation, there was not enough interest to get it off the ground. Despite this lack of interest, the Government’s focus on addressing the radicalisation of young people has led to the police wanting to engage with organisations who see little connection between their work and Prevent. The reluctance of organisations with no statutory duty to engage has caused the police to resort to applying pressure on organisations to supply them with information on potential radicals. An informal catch-up with Lee, a Director of a South London-based youth organisation, sheds some light on the type of tactics that are being used.

‘It was right here, that he started to question me,’ Lee commented, sipping on his coffee at Costa. ‘I got a phone call from someone in the council working on Prevent and ended up feeling that I had to meet them. I couldn’t understand why they wanted to meet with me really, when I got the call, I said that we don’t see any extremism. I mean, we

are a sports project, but they insisted.’ Lee explains, ‘I mean, what do they think, we do have some Muslim boys, but they’ve often turned out to be the good ones.’ Despite Lee’s assertions that there was no sign of radicalisation in any of the 150+ young people he and the other workers support each week, the representative from Prevent insisted on meeting.

A few days later, Lee met with the council official and a police officer who tried to convince him that his involvement in the programme was vital. ‘It was as if they were not listening,’ explained Lee. ‘I rolled off a list of our Muslim boys, showing that they are often the ones we need to worry about the least. I mean, look at Abdul, his Mosque supported him to travel and train to be a leader. I bet he fits their criteria, but he is the least radical person you are likely to meet round here. And what about Luke, he converted to Islam at 18 and it was the thing that turned his life around. I mean, coming from the background he does, with a mother who just lives to drink and a father who is useless, Islam was the best thing that could ever have happened to him. But they weren’t interested in this; they seemed certain I had some information to offer.’

What struck me about Lee’s retelling of the encounter was the assumption that he would have something to share and that he would be willing to or could be coerced into participating in a system of suspicion and spying. He took the involvement of the police officer as a strong-arm tactic to ensure he took the request for his involvement seriously. When Lee commented that he didn’t feel that the programme had anything to do with him or the young people he worked with, he was pressured into admitting some of the young people may be a risk and that he should accept his role as an informant. Such is the concern about the pressure Lee felt that, during this informal chat, he was worried to even talk about it for fear of what may happen.

## **Closing remarks**

Considering the place of community involvement within the Prevent strategy, the clumsy nature of the examples given here suggests there is a need for further exploration into youth organisations' experiences of Prevent. The anecdotal evidence above indicates that those closest to the frontline don't share the government's concern about the risk young people pose and that on the rare occasion suspicions are raised, information is handled in such a forceful way as to damage the little trust youth organisations have built with young people. At this point, further research is needed to understand whether what I have experienced and been privy to as a youth worker is an exception or part of a wider pattern.

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<sup>i</sup> Pseudonyms are used here and throughout this article.



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# Revolution

Dean Atta\*

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There is a revolution awaiting warriors  
I recognise many righteous soldiers

I will fight with you or alone  
Like the king I am reclaim my throne

Me nah wait for your recognition  
Me jus fire upon you with verbal ammunition

Me, One, I speak for myself  
And nobody else

Every one of you has a voice  
To speak or not, it is your choice

But silence is not golden  
Silence is the truth stolen

And stealing of the truth  
Is exactly what dem do to the youts

Miseducation relative deprivation  
Mislead young minds' motivation

Dealers, hustlers living bullet time  
Their lives could end in the space of a rhyme



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They get all the attention  
While the good them get no mention

Young boys growing up with no direction  
No protection on his erection

Sowing his seeds  
But not fulfilling their needs

Young girls left to raise children alone  
No job and kicked out of home

On the benefit system  
Where you fill in forms and no one listens

Please listen up when I speak  
How many homeless you seen this week?

Begging for change  
I said begging for change

Don't just be a sympathiser  
See through the mist, be a realiser

See what has been done  
To brother, sister, daughter, son

The revolution a go come  
The revolution begins with one

But one is much stronger  
If he listens to those who've lived longer

Listen to the wisdom of the elders  
Dem want fi tell you if you want to know

When's the last time you saw your grandma or grandfather  
It's time to go

With an open mind and loving soul  
As a community, as a whole

There's so much to be told  
You think dem lost it cos dem got old

No, dem just stopped sharing  
Cos you done stopped caring

If you are now prepared to hear  
Revolution may begin this year

Go forth with what you have been told  
Tell young girl she's worth more than gold

Tell young boy what a man's about  
The truth nah whisper, the truth does shout

We are the revolution  
We are the solution

We hold the key  
And it begins with you and me

We are the revolution

We are the solution

We hold the key

And it begins with unity.

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## Some Dilemmas of Prevent

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Adult ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) provision is often understood to be more than language teaching, though the UK government and ESOL teachers often have different understandings of what that means. The government has seen ESOL provision as carrying a shifting package of agendas including citizenship, integration, employability, community cohesion and perhaps, counter-terrorism. ESOL teachers also know that our classrooms are more than places for learning English, often seeing our classroom praxis as encouraging confidence, resilience, social mixing, sense of belonging, friendships, empowerment, and resistance.

In January 2016, David Cameron gave a surprise speech in which he linked lack of English both to the oppression of Muslim women and to the radicalisation of young people (see Staufenberg, 2016). This speech and his promise of £20 million to help fund language classes for Muslim women was tremendously frustrating to ESOL teachers who have spent years fighting savage government cuts to provision - estimated at 55% since 2009 (Refugee Action, 2017). Since then, there have been further vague links asserted between learning English language and fighting radicalisation, for example in the Casey Report (Casey, 2016) and the Integrated Communities Strategies Green Paper (HM Government, 2018).

Teachers tend to be suspicious of new government agendas influencing our work and Prevent is predictably controversial amongst teachers,



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especially in the Further Education sector where staff have a statutory duty to promote ‘fundamental British values’ (HM Government, 2016).

The case against Prevent is being put forward elsewhere, for example by my union University and College Union (University and College Union, 2015) whose Congress voted for a boycott, though this was found to be unlawful (see Greer, 2016). I think it is a reasonable case, for these and other reasons: the danger of creating a suspect community and targeting individuals who are doing no harm; the outsourcing of the state’s security role across civil society; the lack of definitions of – and confusion between – conservatism, ‘non-violent extremism’, and violence; the possibility of the closing down of debate, when what is needed is critical thinking and discussion; the threat to workers who are legally bound to comply and to deliver the nebulous ‘British values’; the threat to civil liberties, especially as posed by attempts to ban ‘extremist’ material and speakers. However, the dilemma for me is that the campaign against Prevent has peddled misinformation, engaged in fear mongering, and promoted dubious alliances. At a recent ESOL conference I attended, many teachers were preoccupied with what they believed to be the draconian effect of Prevent in our workplaces, some arguing it was the most important issue facing us as practitioners, even though most of these were themselves working for third-sector organisations that are not bound by the Prevent Duty. I’m concerned about the way much anti-racist activism in this area is being framed.

### **Terminology**

‘Extremism’, ‘violent and non-violent extremism’, ‘radicalism’, ‘radicalisation’: these are not neutral terms. Many who oppose capitalism do not think that there is in fact a ‘centre’ that we all agree on, and that to stray from that is to be ‘extreme’. Further, many are used to thinking of ourselves as radicals and recall the experiences which ‘radicalised’ us in an entirely different framework than the current meaning of involvement

with Islamist or far-right terrorism. I have had many conversations with people that did not get beyond complaints about this terminology.

However, part of the reason we are stuck without better language with which to discuss the current situation might be the failure of the left to engage with the issues. The left (or at least, not the activist left) has not adequately analysed either jihadism, the violent expression of Islamist movements, or religious fundamentalism, which refers to modern religious-political movements (from all the major religions) which seek to impose a single interpretation of religious texts on society (Dhaliwal and Yuval Davis, 2014). This contributes to the poor quality of debate and encourages a simplistic understanding of complex issues.

### **Myths of Prevent**

Some activist teachers believe that Prevent is not really part of a counter-terrorism policy, rather, that it is a conspiracy to demonise Muslims and to create an enemy 'other' so as to distract people from austerity. This is now a commonly held view on the left, but one for which there is little evidence. My scepticism is not intended to be a defence of the state. The British state is perfectly capable of gross violations of human rights, especially against migrants. The ever-increasing brutality of immigration controls and the equally violent 'everyday bordering' (see Wemyss, Cassidy and Yuval Davis 2017) that we are all now complicit in is very real. But some of the claims about Prevent are myths and they do need to be debunked.

These are some of the things that I have heard anti-Prevent speakers saying at public meetings: Prevent criminalises Islam; it targets people for wearing hijab or praying five times a day; it will target people who attend Friday prayers; Prevent officers can take children away from Muslim parents. None of these are actually true. I have heard teachers say these

things to a room full of young people, which is incredibly irresponsible. Exaggerating the extent of police and Prevent involvement in referrals is common. For example, in the well-publicised ‘Terrorist House’ case, the ‘Eco Terrorist’ case, and the ‘Palestine badge’ case, the schools involved all denied that these were straightforward Prevent referrals as widely reported by the media and activist circles (see *BBC News*, 2016; Independent Press Complaints Organisation, 2016; Parris-Long, 2016). Yet these cases continue to be touted as examples of gross abuses, for example on the *Prevent Watch* website, even after they have been debunked.

Increasing numbers of Prevent referrals relate to expressions of white supremacist or racist far-right sentiments. Yet colleagues tell me that, although Prevent training often emphasises white nationalist extremism, it is not ‘really’ about that, and that this is just a fig leaf put there to hide the real purpose which, according to them, is to demonise Muslims. They point to the large number of referrals of Muslims relative to the population to insist that this is proof of anti-Muslim bias. However, 850 British people have travelled to Syria or Iraq to fight with IS (Guardian 2018). There have been dozens of attempted terrorism plots. It's striking that in my left circles, this simple fact is rarely mentioned or discussed. There has been nothing comparable on the white nationalist far right, though this situation is worsening dramatically.

### **Conspiracy Theories**

Some people think that perhaps the Government is lying about the number of terrorist plots, inventing them to try to create an atmosphere of fear and hatred in the population. This is bizarre. The state cannot orchestrate grand global conspiracies involving tens of thousands of police, lawyers, judges, families, and defendants.

Conspiracy theories have also been voiced in my classrooms. From the belief that 4,000 Jews were instructed to stay home on 9/11, to the recent suggestion that the three Bethnal Green girls did not really travel to Syria, these dangerous conspiracies are heard from time to time. Teachers should be confronting these claims, ideally by creating spaces where they can be challenged by other students, rather than by using the teacher's authority to silence them. They should not be reinforcing them by encouraging students to think that Islamophobic governments are inventing plots to discredit Muslims. It would be a real shame if ESOL teachers, who do so much to impart a sense of belonging to our migrant students, began to echo the voices that say Muslims cannot live in the West.

The many thousands of people, mostly Muslim, who are under threat of jihadist violence around the world are also not well served by such nonsense, nor are the British Muslim families who suffer the very real – and devastating – consequences of having family members caught up in the war on terror. Deflection and denial of the violence committed by jihadist groups are not helping Muslims or fighting anti Muslim bigotry; they are making it worse.

### **Othering**

Many of us teachers are very worried by the rise both of state targeting of migrants and of racist violence against migrants and Muslims on the streets. Some are concerned that Prevent targets Muslim students and involves us in 'othering' them.

Maybe. But there are other issues here. First, let's not forget that IS and al Qaeda do their own 'othering'. The hundreds of people who have travelled from Britain to Syria were not for the most part involved in fighting the butcher Assad. They were there committing mass murder, torture, rape

and sexual slavery, colonisation and ethnic cleansing. Just because Britain exports most of its jihadis and we do not see on our streets the damage they do, does not mean it is not a problem for the left.

Is it odd to suggest that it is not counter-terrorism but the terrorism itself, carried out in the name of Islam, which has done more to tarnish the image of Muslims and Islam? The gulf between my Muslim ESOL students and the jihadists engaged in slaughtering civilians is enormous. So far as I know, none of my ESOL students have supported the ideology of Salafi-Jihadism. Yet the jihadists claim to act on behalf of Muslims. This is what makes me scared for my students. In the West, the very aim of jihadist attacks is to drive a wedge between Muslims and non-Muslims, to provoke both anti-Muslim bigotry and state clampdown. They aim to create the conditions for attacks on Muslims and bring about the state of irreducible conflict that they seek. This strategy has been quite successful.

It is also really important to remember that our students are more diverse than we think. They have commonality as migrants and minorities, but not always everything else. My ESOL students are mostly Muslim or Muslim-heritage women, but these simple labels do not express the diversity that exists within what is often simplistically referred to as the Muslim community.

In 2016, there were two brutal hate crimes – both were murders of Muslims by other Muslims. Asad Shah, from the minority Ahmadiyya community, was killed for blasphemy in Glasgow (Carell, 2016). Jalal Uddin, a Rochdale Imam, was killed for practicing a traditional, syncretic form of Islam such as is practiced by many of the ESOL students in my classes (Pilling, 2016). Intolerance of pluralism, diversity, and of different interpretations of religious texts is one of the hallmarks of fundamentalism. The state has no monopoly on ‘othering’.

## **Excuses**

There are those who don't deny the reality but make excuses for jihadism. Some left parties and campaign groups commonly share social media posts or give platforms to speakers from CAGE, a group which makes no secret of its support for the Taliban and Al Qaeda (Bhatt, 2017). In their arguments, Muslims are driven to violence by the Islamophobia inherent in western society or foreign policy or poverty and deprivation (see Ali, 2016). This insults the vast majority of Muslims and, indeed, other oppressed people, who do not engage in indiscriminate violence. It also displays a Eurocentric ignorance of the global reach of Islamist violence and erases the existence of those Muslims on the frontline fighting fundamentalism and Islamist violence (Bennoune and Kandiyoti, 2015).

Racism, foreign policy, deprivation, alienation, identity, mental health, and criminality may all be factors in radicalisation. There is no single cause and this is in fact recognised by the Prevent strategy. There are no easy answers, but the habit of making excuses for people committing atrocities shames the Left and will not fight anti-Muslim racism. These excuses are not generally made by the Left for far-right nationalism and racist violence.

## **Safeguarding and Securitisation**

ESOL teachers are not counter-terrorism officers and never should be. We do not want to be part of the security services, any more than we want to be immigration officers. But we may encounter safeguarding issues. I was asked for help by some of the adult women I teach, following the news of local 'jihadi brides'. Some learners told me they were not able to do what they knew was important, such as monitor their children's internet use. One told me, 'We cannot keep our children safe.' These students may not be typical and for most others, it may not be a pressing issue. But the need for safeguarding is not a myth. I have been told by someone doing Prevent work in schools that he has rarely had objections to their work from

Muslim parents. This may come as a surprise to many of the white activists who want to fight Islamophobia by opposing Prevent, but then, it is unlikely to be their children who attempt to travel abroad to join a Salafi-Jihadist group.

Would Prevent help my students? In my local authority, I know that at least some of the safeguarding officers are skilled, thoughtful people with a background in community work and a commitment to supporting, not criminalising, vulnerable people. If they were another type of Prevent officer – a private contractor with minimal training and in it for the money – perhaps they would not be. The questionable quality of much Prevent training and delivery is a different issue.

### **Strange Bedfellows**

Apart from the misinformation and hyperbole spread by the campaign, there is a big problem of alliances. In 2015, over 200 academics signed a letter against Prevent alongside CAGE, a group that manipulates the language of human rights in relation to Salafi-Jihadist prisoners, but say nothing of the gross human rights violations those individuals commit (Tax 2013, Gupta, 2017). The NUS 'Students not Suspects' campaign has amplified the voices of reactionary groups and individuals, including CAGE. An NUS President who objected to this alliance was accused of Islamophobia in another letter signed by over 100 NUS officers and activists (Students not Suspects, 2015).

Other organisations involved in anti-Prevent campaigning include 5Pillars – a website and Facebook page which rails against secularists and carries sexist, homophobic, and sectarian content. The editor, Dilly Hussain, peddles conspiracies about the government, 'zionists', and Muslim minorities as well as attacks secular Muslim women (see 5Pillars, 2013; Sergeant 2014) while trying to associate his organisation with the student

campaigns against Prevent. Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), a conservative group which targets secular Muslim women for their activism (Rehman 2017), has been welcomed by Students not Suspects. A group actually banned by NUS for its anti-Semitism, MPACUK, was nevertheless able to use its association with campaigns opposing Prevent to rehabilitate its image in liberal/left circles to a certain extent (see Whitton 2015).

A crude anti-imperialism has led many to believe that those who are victims of racism or have been targeted (and in many cases abused) by the US must inevitably be sound advocates for progressive values and human rights (Tax 2013). There might be a case sharing platforms and forming strategic alliances if the politics of the Islamic Right groups and individuals opposing Prevent were ever challenged by students activists, but they tend not to be. Instead, they are given a completely free pass by young people whose instincts towards anti-racism and anti-imperialism lead them to be exploited by groups keen to increase their legitimacy and authority.

Groups such as CAGE claim to speak for Muslims and, more recently, have tried to position themselves as part of radical grassroots anti-racist movements (Qureshi 2017). They tend to paint Prevent as just the latest example of the State's endless persecution of Muslims. As an aside, this completely misrepresents the nature of the British State's relationship with Islamism, which at times it has cultivated and funded. But worse, it is defining Muslims as reactionaries, just as Trump and the EDL do. Some white leftists are now even repeating the Islamist line that the Prevent strategy is really about attacking politically active Muslims, as if all of the latter were Islamists (Cowden, 2016). My Muslim ESOL students hold a variety of political positions across the spectrum, like everybody else. In the lively discussions we have in class, on all manner of political topics, there is rarely consensus and never a 'Muslim' position. In fact, it is my



experience in ESOL that has taught me that 'Muslim' is only one aspect of my students' identity and should not be privileged over everything else. The imposition of a monolithic identity for Muslims is to be resisted, whether it is constructed by the state, Islamist groups, the right, or the left.

And at the same time that reactionary voices are being amplified, secular ones are being silenced. At the moment, everyone has to line up for or against Prevent. People who raise concerns like those referred to in this article will be called Islamophobic and part of the Government's anti-Muslim drive. There is little room for discussion. This is smearing the name of many anti-racist groups and individuals, including Black feminist activists and secular Muslims. The spectacle of white leftists berating secular Muslims for their 'Islamophobia' is something I have seen too many times. The erasure from anti-Prevent discourse of secular and anti-fundamentalist ESOL learners, as well as learners from minority Muslim communities and those practising diverse forms of Islam, is also a worry.

## **Conclusions**

This article has attempted to raise some issues for ESOL activists who are seeking involvement in the campaign against Prevent. The misrepresentation of referrals and fear mongering about Prevent powers is encouraging an environment of hysteria, not critical debate. The denial of the reality of jihadi violence, and making excuses for it in a way that would never be attempted for the white far right, does not 'fight Islamophobia'. It may create the conditions for more prejudice against Muslims in the wider population. The willingness to form uncritical alliances with fundamentalists and supporters of Salafi-Jihadism amplifies reactionary voices and silences the voices of those Muslims actually fighting fundamentalism and violence carried out in the name of Islam.

Taking these into consideration, an ESOL activist position on Prevent could point its critique in two directions: against the surveillance state and its targeting of minorities, and against far right political mobilisations of the white nationalist or Islamist variety. I have no answers as to the practical way forward, but I hope that the rich traditions of radical pedagogy in ESOL classrooms and our ESOL activism alongside our migrant students will help with these dilemmas.

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## Prevent in a Northern Town

Joan McLaughlin interviewed by Stephen Cowden

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**Joan McLaughlin** is an FE teacher at a Further Education College in a multicultural area in the north of England. She was interviewed by **Stephen Cowden**, one of the editors of this issue, to discuss her experience of teaching around many of the issues associated with Prevent.

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**Stephen:** To start with, Joan, we're going to be talking about the work you do at your College. Could you start by telling us what kind of institution it is, what kind of students do you work with, what kind of area the college is located in?

**Joan:** I am a course leader. Typically I work with Pakistani women, who are the majority of my students. I am a course leader on the BTEC Level 1, 2, and 3 Health and Social Care. I work with students of various ages and abilities, from school leavers at 16 to mature learners – for example, I have some students who are 46 years of age. I'm teaching mums, kids straight from school, so quite a variety of students.

The area I work in is quite unique; it's got its own personality and demographic. It's a working class area and a medium-size town. It's an area that suffers from quite a lot of economic and social deprivation, so the area gets quite a lot of bad press – a lot of different things have gone on there. It has a large Asian population, so large amounts of students at the college are from a Pakistani background; these are the majority of



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the students on my course. The college also has a lot of men on other courses, such as engineering and construction.

**Stephen:** You teach on a BTEC Health and Social Care programme?

**Joan:** Yes, and within that programme there are group tutorials with a set agenda of topics that we have to teach for all students under 19. The Set Topics are subjects like child exploitation, forced marriage, female genital mutilation – and the ‘British values’ and the Prevent strategy are also covered here. All of these are incredibly sensitive issues.

**Stephen:** OK, let’s talk a little bit about the way you are asked to incorporate material from the counter-terrorism policy Prevent into your teaching. How did you find it, trying to introduce this material?

**Joan:** Initially we’d been given a very skeletal training, just an outline, really – maybe half a day’s training in all. This was undertaken by a local police officer.

**Stephen:** How did you find the training?

**Joan:** It was just really a PowerPoint discussion, not a lot of discussion: highlighting why Prevent is important, what to look out for, things like lots of interest in religion, lots of praying, people being withdrawn, unusual behaviour, maybe aggression, extreme behaviour ... but to be honest, the students that we teach, in my college, that behaviour wouldn’t be a rare thing anyway because a lot of kids suffer from loads and loads of personal and social issues, so just because somebody becomes aggressive or withdrawn, that wouldn’t make you say ‘aha here comes the Prevent policy’.

**Stephen:** So you’re saying the training wasn’t that helpful?

**Joan:** Not really. And anyway, this was a while ago. We haven’t had any real training other than some resources we were given. We look through the resources we’ve been given and then we tailor them to how we

teach, or we just use them if you don't feel confident enough to change things.

**Stephen:** So it sounds like the training you received didn't really offer you or the staff you work with much guidance?

**Joan:** No, it was almost like inducing some kind of hysteria, to be honest. People getting really afraid, lacking in confidence to deal with the issues, people really worried that if they missed something would they be held culpable for it ...

**Stephen:** So the training tended to raise staff anxiety ...?

**Joan:** Staff don't feel confident in dealing with these topics. But it's mandatory, especially for the 'British Values'<sup>i</sup> material - it's something that Ofsted<sup>ii</sup> are very, very keen on so obviously, as a college, you want to meet the requirements.

**Stephen:** So it's an Ofsted requirement?

**Joan:** The 'British values' component is, definitely.

**Stephen:** So tell me, Joan, how did the students respond when you tried to incorporate this material as you were required to?

**Joan:** Initially, the students didn't know what 'Prevent' was which was quite interesting, and I think the name in itself doesn't reflect the enormity of the issue. So I would say, 'What do you think Prevent is?' and the student would say, 'Is it something to do with preventing bullying or something like that?' So I had to introduce the topic with them, which was surprising, as they didn't really get what I was about. Because it was very key in college. Then I have to explain what it was about and I could see immediately the shutdown from the students – they felt judged, especially from a white woman stood in front of a class full of Asian girls. They'd think I was making a judgement about them. Because it does seem that when we do teach about Prevent, it's all about ISIS. So, I make sure I bring up things like the EDL and right-wing groups first of all.

**Stephen:** You make sure you introduce the far right, which is also part of Prevent?

**Joan:** Yes but it seems that the things we are given are all about ISIS.

**Stephen:** And Islamist extremism?

**Joan:** Yes. So I make sure that I don't bring that up first, but as soon as I bring up the word I can see the students are thinking, 'Oh God, here we go.' Shut down, they feel really defensive, they aren't interested. Discussion is very minimal. They feel fearful, if they say something they might be exposing themselves in some way. They would probably be afraid to show if they've got any political affiliation to any sort of group. So it's just like me preaching from the front of the class.

**Stephen:** The context you're describing is one where it's really difficult to raise what is, in actual fact, a really important issue.

**Joan:** Yes. I think some of them get it if I talk about the right-wing stuff and the IRA, and I do sometimes bring in my own family's experience - my mum came from Northern Ireland and she experienced lots of terror in her lifetime from both the IRA and the Protestant extremist groups. So I talk about that to make they feel they feel they are in some sort of safe zone, that I'm not judging them, that I have some sort of understanding. But whether that gets through ....

**Stephen:** So these are your own personal strategies you've developed?

**Joan:** Yes - and I'm actually not sure whether I should be doing that, but anyway I do. Because it makes them feel less judged and hopefully less defensive.

**Stephen:** What you're describing here is a mostly young, British Asian population that really should be one of the groups that the Prevent policy is most trying to reach and address the concerns of, and yet the framing of the policy, not to mention the lack of training people in your position have received, means that this group end up experiencing the discussion

of that as something that is judging them – they are feeling defensive, judged, they are nervous about talking in class, because they fear that anything they say might be used against them. That suggests to me that this is basically a really bad way of getting through to them – that’s what coming through from what you’ve said. It’s also worth noting that the way that you’ve been able to overcome some of those problems and try to forge a connection is a strategy that you have developed entirely yourself, and which didn’t come any of the formal training you were offered.

**Joan:** I feel it’s just a tick box. Have we talked about Prevent? *Tick*. Have we talk about ‘British Values’? *Tick*. Regardless of the impact it has on the students. And I don’t feel comfortable as a teacher discussing things like that, because I don’t feel I’ve had enough training.

**Stephen:** Talking about the ‘British Values’ material, you mention that this is part of your Ofsted inspection as it would be for all Further Education colleges. How do you feel about the term ‘British Values’ and how do your students respond to this?

**Joan:** Well, initially, I didn’t like the words ‘British Values’. I used to talk about ‘Human Values’ when I delivered it, but then we were told by our managements that we have to use the term ‘British Values’. We have had some interesting training for that and there was some recognition about how uncomfortable the staff were with that.

**Stephen:** What was that about?

**Joan:** Teaching staff were saying we felt uncomfortable because it’s not just ‘British Values’- we felt it was much better to talk about ‘human values’. So what was agreed was that we would focus these sessions on ‘what sort of values do you think you need to have in order to go forward and be successful in British society’ – which I thought was a much better way of delivering it. So I thought, this was much better, and I got the

students to do some poster work and we talked about democracy, law, tolerance, and things like that.

**Stephen:** And how did the students feel about that?

**Joan:** Better. Better, because they could relate to what was being said rather than this generic term 'British Values'. It's about what values did they need to have to succeed.

**Stephen:** And when you reframed it like that, students could relate to it?

**Joan:** Yes, because we talked about what kind of things could you do which is a democratic activity in college. So, for example, we had an opportunity to vote in the student election. So they could actually relate to what these values were. We talked about Anti-bullying, things like that, respecting class boundaries. So they could relate to it a bit more. We related it to employability, going forward in the society – stuff like that.

**Stephen:** So the way you adapted this, was this just something you did yourself?

**Joan:** No, it was from the training – we had a staff training. Every week we have a training – different topics, different guest speakers. It was from that.

**Stephen:** So there was some training you had that was useful?

**Joan:** Yes, definitely.

**Stephen:** So you've talked about how you've tried to address students' defensiveness regarding this question of 'Prevent', and how you developed your own strategies, still noting that the students showed a lot of defensiveness. You also have described a situation where, following the Manchester Arena bombing (22 May 2017), many of your Asian students came in and you described them as 'quite sheepish'.

**Joan:** Yes, following this event, the way it affected the students was that they thought they were being judged by any white member of the college. Their classmates, for example. They were afraid that they were being judged, and they would be called names, made a scapegoat of. They were quiet, and then it's difficult to talk about a current issue in class. They may have thought people were forming an opinion on 'their culture'.

**Stephen:** There's a desperate need to open up a space to talk about these issues in a situation like that, but what you are saying is how difficult that was to do.

**Joan:** Yes, especially when I would never have that kind of opinion. For somebody like me, for the students [to] think I would – I find that in itself really difficult.

**Stephen:** So there's a whole level of polarisation that you're just working with all the time.

**Joan:** Especially if you don't know your students, if it's early on. With the second years it's easier, we get to know each other.

**Stephen:** Have you found it any easier to generate discussion with these students who you've developed more of a relationship with? What kind of things would come out of discussions?

**Joan:** They would know I'm not judging them. They would be more open to talking about what's going in the news. They talk about how they've been called names in the town centre, how other people have judged them, how they feel terrible about what's going on. If they say how badly they're feeling, people smirk and laugh at them.

**Stephen:** The sense that they are, as Muslims, disgusted by the actions of ISIS, but that is a view that's very hard for them to express in the wider society.

**Joan:** Yes, unless they're in the trusting zone. In the first year, you're finding your way.

**Stephen:** Ok, you've given a sense of what it's like in a sort of multicultural, working class community where you work. Have there been any other things relevant to this discussion that have happened at your college?

**Joan:** One other thing that I would really like to mention was a talk we had from an outside speaker, Mike Haines. He was brought in as part of a Student Enrichment Programme where we have guest speakers that come in and talk about a variety of topics – like drink driving, mental health, bullying of 'emos' which resulted in a girl being murdered. Attendance is voluntary for these events, but I stressed to my students that it was important to go to. Mike Haines was the brother of David Haines who was murdered by ISIS in Syria. He was a humanitarian worker who went over to Syria, ironically enough. So I presented this to the class. I explained what it was about. It was presented to me as part of the Prevent strategy. As soon as I said the words Prevent I had 'Oh God, do we have this again, why do we have to go, we hate this stuff, people are looking at us, why do we have to go.' I said, listen, let's just go and see what it's about. It looks really interesting and it might be a different slant on what we're usually talking about. And when we went, the fellow delivered his story in such a powerful way, they just completely embraced what Prevent was about. It was like, 'God, if we'd had this in the beginning, it might have been a lot easier.'

**Stephen:** So tell me, what did Mike Haines do that had such a profound impact?

**Joan:** I think, the fact that he talked about terrorism not from just one culture's point of view. He gave a complete overriding picture of what terror was, how it affects people from all cultures. He picked people out from the audience, asked them where they came from and how they felt

their culture was represented and how they felt about it. He wasn't just talking to one group; he was talking to the whole college audience. And I think, the fact that he talked about how he doesn't see ISIS as part of the student's Muslim culture. It's a separate thing, completely separate, and he made it so separate. He presented information about how he made great friends with Imams, and he just came across as someone with a really wide knowledge of the world.

**Stephen:** So Mike was not in Syria with his brother, but he travelled over there subsequent to the killing of his brother by ISIS?

**Joan:** That's right. His focus now is doing work to stop hate between cultures. He talks about the way ISIS and any other terrorist group does not fit in to what religion is, even though they are using this as their platform.

**Stephen:** And so it was through those kind of strategies, that kind of direct personal experience of the issues, that he was able to get through to the students and overcome their defensiveness?

**Joan:** You could almost hear a collective sigh of relief that they weren't being judged by this man who had had his brother killed by a Muslim group. So they could see that they weren't being judged, that he had no hatred. It was all about coming together as one to stop this. And kind of explaining the culture of creating fear and hatred between groups and how that needs to be stopped, and that's what Prevent is about.

**Stephen:** So his work was part of Prevent?

**Joan:** It was about how do we stop this, it wasn't just report, report, report and be like a big brother eye on everybody; it was more about restorative work. Get people understanding why terror groups want to polarise people and create hate.

**Stephen:** And those were the words he used?



**Joan:** Yes. There was one moment where somebody asked him why he didn't hate the people who killed his brother. He said, 'If I hate them, they've won. And it's not about that – it's about understanding each other and building bridges.'

**Stephen:** So, in the sense, what you've described are very different experiences which have taken place under the auspices of Prevent. On the one hand, you thought the training you received from the local police was very inadequate and really not helpful to the kind of work you're doing.

**Joan:** More scaremongering.

**Stephen:** Then you described a really positive work by Mike Haines, also undertaken under the auspices of Prevent, where some really effective work was being done, and where this was linked into creating a really powerful anti-hate message.

**Joan:** Students were crying. They were really touched and emotional about it. One of my students wanted to email him to talk about the impact he'd had on her. The feedback he gets across communities is really positive.

## **References:**

More information about the Mike Haines work can be found at

<https://mikehaines.globalactsofunity.com/>

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<sup>i</sup> The terminology reflects the UK government's definition of extremism within the Prevent Duty as: "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."

(<https://preventforfeandtraining.org.uk/home/support-staff/what-do-i-need-to-know/>)

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# From 'Prevent' to 'Enable' – reclaiming radical thinking spaces through democratic education

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## Abstract

*Given the increasing pressures on teachers in Further and Adult Education across a range of economic, political, and managerial factors, this article argues that inquiry-based approaches to education can open up much-needed transformative learning spaces to the benefit of tutors, students, and wider communities.*

*Through the presentation of a case study, this article suggests that the inclusion of such 'pro-social pedagogies' in teacher training programmes will both equip teachers with tools to facilitate dialogue and provide reflective spaces in which they can consider their own positions regarding challenging education policy.*

*The case study, a 'community philosophy enquiry' into Prevent and Fundamental British Values involving trainee teachers in the North of England, is outlined and the ethical challenges considered.*

*The approach taken is based on a post-human 'ethics of affirmation' (Braidotti, 2012) and a nomadic ontology which facilitates change through*

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*the joining together of agents for transformation, across a series of on- and off-line rhizomatic assemblages. The article concludes with recommendations for the further implementation of democratic educational practices such as community philosophy, which allow space and time for discussion and dissent.*

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## **Introduction**

‘Becoming post-human is regulated by an ethics of joy and affirmation that functions through the transformation of negative into positive passions’ (Braidotti, 2013:194).

For teachers who see themselves as democratic educators and agents of change, the Prevent agenda presents a paradox; namely, how can we truly create spaces of safety and trust whilst at the same time being bound by a legal duty to report our students when they are deemed at risk of becoming radicalised? For Sukarieh and Tannock (2015:1), the Prevent policies ‘constitute a direct attack on the core elements that make up the centuries old radical education tradition’. This article aims to explore how pro-social teaching approaches can allow educators to reclaim the notion of radicalism, using issues such as Prevent not as barriers, but as levers to open up discussion. In the process of educators working creatively and rhizomatically together, it suggests that change and action can occur through a spirit of positivity that Braidotti (2013) refers to as an ‘ethics of affirmation’.

## **Background context**

Since Prevent (formally Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015) was first launched in 2003, it has moved through different

phases in response to subsequent acts of terror both in England and across Europe. The over-arching aim of the duty is to ‘stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism’ (HM Government, 2011). In 2014, Prevent was enshrined in Ofsted’s guidance, which places emphasis on the promotion of ‘Fundamental British Values’ (FBV) through education. British values are defined in the Duty as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs (Department for Education, 2015).

Extremism is defined as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values’ (HM Government, 2011) and it is interesting to note here that whilst Prevent and FBV are often separated in practice (Prevent as the ‘safeguarding’/reporting duty, and FBV as the promotion of British values through teaching), the Government’s definition of extremism provides an indisputable link between the two. All educational institutions must have in place an anti-radicalisation policy, generally communicated to teachers via WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) training, in which teachers are given indicators on how to spot signs of individual radicalisation, identify vulnerable adults, and understand the reporting processes.

Although 84 per cent of Higher Education providers have responded appropriately to Prevent guidance (HEFCE, 2017), with FE equally compliant on paper (ETF, 2017) (via the three factors of ‘managing external speakers and events, establishing clear processes for dealing with safeguarding concerns, and delivering training for staff’), on the ground teachers are uncertain of how to deliver the agenda in practice (Lambert, 2016). Three sectors, until recently separated into different Government departments, are uniting around the fear of mis-reporting, lack of knowledge around threats such as ISIS and the rise of the far-right, and

what constitutes 'genuine concern', as school teachers described in a news media investigation (*Guardian*, 2015): 'We need more help and understanding from the Department for Education. These are new kinds of conversations that we're not used to having.'

Lambert (2016:5) calls for 'teachers to be given the tools to deliver sensitive, well-prepared and thoughtful citizenship-type lessons' rather than outsourced training which focuses on the transmission of information, assessed via multiple choice questioning. Such an approach ensures maximum notional compliance for minimum resource implication, but does not allow spaces for debate and exploration. E-learning courses in particular come nowhere near addressing the concerns, fears, and prejudices of educators, who can be left either further confused and bewildered, or hardened in pejorative assumptions. The requirement to 'actively promote British Values' (Department of Education, 2014) has also been interpreted in a variety of ways, resulting in a piecemeal approach to their integration. The ubiquitous use of posters and images displayed in classrooms is often more about perceived 'Britishness', not 'British values'. These displays lack 'creativity and individual interpretation' (Wild, 2016) and are often reduced to memes showing motifs such as tea, the Queen, pubs, and the Union flag.

The instrumental nature of the training and ensuing narrow implementation of the policy reflects the current state of English education. Ever-increasing workloads, interventionist education policy, intrusive performance monitoring and observations mean that for many, the addition of another Ofsted 'box to tick' is limiting and demoralising (Groves, 2015). The introduction of a policy like Prevent into a sector already driven by neo-liberalist practice, where inherent tensions and barriers enmesh education with other social and political factors, was

always likely to be seen as a threat rather than an opportunity to promote democracy. As Reay (2012) states: 'a neo-liberal socially-just education system is a contradiction in terms'.

### **Problematizing Prevent**

Critiques of Prevent and the FBV agenda are easy to find. The policy has been described as being underpinned by 'the most Orwellian anti-terrorist agenda in Europe' (Amnesty International, 2017), as a 'securitisation of British society' (Thomas, 2016) and more strongly still, as an 'instrument of social control' (Sabir, 2017). Sabir goes on to describe Prevent as 'an extension of social welfare policies that aim to reform lawbreakers, insurgents and terrorists into positive and productive members of society' rather than emphasising social inclusion: 'It [Prevent] leads to a sense of exclusion and isolation; not a sense of inclusivity and belonging.' Prevent doctrine is seen as a "continuation of colonial warfare on the home-front" (Sabir, 2017:4) – primarily about discipline and control. And the proportion of Muslim referrals is high 'with around 70% of the 3,000 plus referrals [to the reporting mechanism, Channel] being associated with signs of 'Islamic extremism'" (Mythen et al, 2016:5). Even when referrals from educational establishments have been found to be erroneous and have not met the Channel threshold, there is no doubt that trust relationships between students and teachers can be significantly damaged where the policy is misunderstood.

Of course, there are also advocates of the policy. Prevent Co-ordinator Hifsa Haroon-Iqbal, writing in *The Telegraph* (2017), suggests that Prevent has been misrepresented and that it is a vital means to 'protect and safeguard our young people'. The emphasis placed on 'safety', 'wellbeing', and 'safeguarding' here seem justifiable, yet the agenda (as demonstrated in Haroon-Iqbal's article) continues to focus primarily on cases related to



Islamic threat. Stories of far-right referrals and interventions are rare, despite almost 300 people under 18 being flagged up in 2016 because of concerns about the far right (Gadher, 2016) and evidence of significant localised issues: 'In some areas of the country, Far Right referrals outnumber those about the other parts we are worried about' (Ben Wallace, MP, cited in HC Deb, 2016). Such cases are less commonly referred to or discussed during Prevent training, just as wider issues of fundamentalist resurgence are often overlooked.

Regardless of counter-narratives concerning the Prevent agenda, there is no doubt that the Prevent 'duty to report' places limitations on what can be said in the classroom and can place both adults and children in vulnerable positions. Walker (2017) suggests that Muslim students in particular are fearful of engaging in debate about controversial issues.

### **The Case for Democratic Education**

This case study is based on the experiences of in-service teacher trainees studying for the Certificate in Education (Cert Ed)/Professional and the Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at colleges in the North of England – one the provider of traditional vocational further education, and the other an adult residential institution. The sector context is, therefore, the under-researched 'HE in FE', a traditional site for widening participation in post-compulsory learning (Feather, 2012). Both teacher training programmes are founded on notions of democratic, values-based 'social purpose' education (Mycroft and Weatherby, 2015) and are underpinned by a commitment to social justice, brought to life through a series of critical pedagogical approaches. They are based on principles of co-production and rhizomatic working (Braidotti, 2013); social media is used to open up thinking spaces which join teachers together beyond the walls of the classroom and the limitations of fixed teaching cohorts. So 'we

teach to change the world' as Brookfield (1995:1) suggested, yet, as stated previously, the challenge of Prevent, alongside the other increasing number of duties placed on teachers (Maxted, 2015) is limiting space and opportunity for transformational teaching linked to action. Natasha Devon – the government's former mental health 'tsar' who was controversially sacked in 2016 – suggests in *The Guardian* (2016) that teachers are increasingly shouldering social responsibilities previously undertaken by the police and National Health Service, particularly in relation to vulnerable students experiencing mental health issues (Coppack and McGovern, 2014). Funding issues mean that support previously provided by other internal providers (such as pastoral care or academic tutoring) is increasingly incorporated into teaching roles.

For trainee teachers, there is little space to explore these challenges in a meaningful way and to consider their own identities, authenticity, and subjectivities. Their views are marginalised and their perspectives often ignored if they are perceived as being 'other' to the dominant theoretical canon (Santoro, 2014). However, as Freire (1997:55) states: 'an educator that says one thing and does another is irresponsible, and not only ineffective, but also harmful'. Are we, in his words, currently training learners to 'adapt without protest'? How can we create authentic, liberating spaces to truly explore the issues whilst being cognizant of the impact of legislative constraints on our practice? As Sen (1999:287) suggests: 'The role of public discussion to debate conventional wisdom on both practicalities and valuations can be central to the acknowledgment of injustice.' As social purpose educators, we are perhaps duty-bound to explore and evaluate such means of achieving effective discourse for social change.

One important aspect of our exploration relates to the etymology of Prevent. The words used freely throughout the Prevent policies assume received and common interpretations. However, the meaning of words such as ‘radical’ has shifted considerably from the following definition: ‘characterised by departure from tradition; innovative or progressive’ or ‘a person who advocates thorough or complete political or social reform; a member of a political party or part of a party pursuing such aims’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017). ‘Radical’ in the Prevent sense now refers to the process of people joining extremist groups that are violently opposed to the general way of life in Britain. Wild (2016) suggests that terms like ‘extremism’ and ‘radicalism’ are being ‘made strange’ by constant repetition. Yet for teachers, who are required to carry out the Prevent legal duty, where is the space to examine or critically discuss this etymological shift? Furthermore, what does the change in definition mean for teachers who consider themselves to be ‘radicals’ in terms of their approaches to education?

When looking for reasons for involvement in extremism, the government focuses on common factors that individuals have, in order to identify potential risk. This is a much-criticised approach which focuses on binary approaches to identity and buys into identity politics which can be limiting and divisive (Sen, 2007). As Mythen et al (2016) suggest, ‘the strategy seeks to map out both the ‘drivers’ of radicalisation and the means of combating violent extremism’, whilst basing this ideology on the notion of a ‘flawed individual’ as opposed to ‘shining a light on iniquitous institutional structures and poorly judged security policies’.

The Prevent strategy suggests that radicalisation can occur when individuals are searching for a sense of identity, meaning, and community (HM Government, 2011:17). It goes on to suggest that ‘some second and

third generation Muslims in Europe ... can find in terrorism a value system, a community and apparent just cause'. However as Thomas (2016) suggests, by conflating religious identity with other aspects of personal and cultural identity '[the Duty] has approached British Muslims as a single, essentialized community'. This implication that religious or cultural beliefs are drivers for behaviour is limiting and narrowing, and in the words of Kundnani (2015), produces a 'Muslim problem' which limits individuals within 'fixed binaries of cultural identity.'

More generally, Sen (2007) refers to the 'miniaturisation of identity' whereby one dominant system of classification can be used to categorise human beings. The implication made by Prevent, that humans can be classified into distinct and discrete categories, ignores internal diversities and the 'multi-dimensional nature of diverse human beings' (Sen, 2007:16). Sen instead suggests that we need to recognise the 'plurality of our affiliations and identities', emphasising that identity can be choice and not an aspect of self that you discover. The shift in focus to 'becoming' – acquiring and attributing meaning – is echoed in Braidotti (2012) who proposes that through nomadic thinking, we can belong and associate in many different ways. Perhaps, indeed, that striving for belonging, meaning, and identity is a common part of the human condition, particularly prevalent in young people. It therefore seems pertinent that research is undertaken that explores how democratic, pro-social approaches to education can focus on aspects of 'belonging', fostering social relationships which may in turn address the very issues of social isolation that Prevent exposes.

Yet despite the well-publicised controversy and conflicting viewpoints as outlined here, the Prevent agenda is rarely explored in a philosophical sense by teachers who find themselves at the sharp end of its

implementation. Both Thomas (2016) and O'Donnell (2016) suggest that the way forward is through democratic and political education: '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' (Thomas, 2016:6). While teachers are waiting for this, how can they act with the agenda in a way that stops them becoming stuck in a 'place of pain' (Braidotti, 2013)?

### **The Case Study – A Community Philosophy Inquiry**

Given the controversial context and background to the Prevent agenda, and limited opportunities to explore it, the case study aimed to provide spaces of inquiry for educators to critically discuss the ideology and resulting issues.

In 2016, a small amount of funding was secured to explore how the Prevent and Fundamental British Values (FBV) agenda had affected our in-service trainee teachers in both colleges, by providing a space for philosophical debate and enquiry into the policies and practices. The overarching aim of the project was to provide a space for these educators – teaching across a wide spectrum of FE, HE, adult and community education – to critically discuss and analyse the issues raised by the Prevent and FBV agenda together, as professionals. The practice was undertaken in a spirit of affirmation, inspired by the vitalism of post-humanist thought which continually seeks out and extends 'horizons of hope' which take us beyond places of pain (Braidotti, 2013). Our hope in this instance was that we could enable trainee teachers to find ways of working and thinking together ('assemblages') which would allow them to take affirmative action and gain confidence, both within and beyond the classroom.

We selected a 'community philosophy' (CP) approach to stimulate discussions about Prevent and FBV among groups of trainee teachers whose only prior experience stemmed from participation in conventional workplace 'compliance' training. Using a post-human ontology (Braidotti, 2013), we did not want to be overly prescriptive in terms of identifying the process. Posthumanism stresses affirmation and praxis, as we are always in a process of growth and 'detaching ourselves from the dominant systems of representation' (Braidotti, 2013). Questions for discussion and debate would be provided by the participants themselves rather than ourselves as researchers; this process-driven approach allows information and ideas to emerge organically, and the inquiry does not necessarily end with the conclusion of the study. The emphasis is on praxis and affirmative action, whereby as a result of shared dialogue, positive steps can be taken for social change; and our intention was that these would continue via rhizomatic connections, mediated by technology and played out in online discussion spaces.

The rhizome as a-centred image of thought shifts the focus from knowledge 'about', procedures for producing knowledge, and concerns about what knowing 'is', to questions about what knowledge does, how it works, and how its effectivity may generate more (not less) of life. (Taylor, 2016:24)

Community Philosophy, as the starting point of our process, is an inquiry-based learning technique which encourages questioning and critical thinking. It is 'a growing movement, in which voluntary groups in civil society engage with philosophical thinking and action' (SAPER, n.d). Its most common manifestation in education is via the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement; it is less frequently used in further or adult education. The principles draw on practices of traditional philosophy and are also based on the work of critical pedagogues such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks. The process itself promotes five types of thinking: *Creative, Critical, Collaborative, Reflexive, Active*. The

identification of core concepts (such as justice, love, truth, equality) is particularly promoted. 'They are normally concepts where we might reasonably disagree about meaning and value. If we change the way we understand these concepts, we change ourselves and the world, so we might call them concepts with potential' (SAPERRE, n.d). One task of Community Philosophy is to identify and analyse these in the context of enquiry.

Community Philosophy was deliberately chosen as an appropriate vehicle to instigate discussions due to its emphasis on problematisation, the examination of language, and the potential for action. The importance of talking as a form of action is often underplayed in education, perhaps due to the emphasis placed on individual assessment and the difficulties apparent in linking group discussion to individual performance or acquisition of knowledge. However, as Tiffany (2009:14) suggests: 'talking supports thinking, and thinking is a precondition to changing one's mind; it is the foundation for behavioural change. And reasoned behaviour change (based on critical, creative, caring and collaborative thinking) must be considered a form of action'.

A community philosophy inquiry also encourages democratic participation via turn-taking and the facilitation of a process whereby every voice is heard.

We also wanted to explore whether, having experienced community philosophy techniques themselves, educators would consider implementing this kind of 'pro-social' intervention in their own classrooms. It also supports the idea of 'modelling' teaching practice and the need to work in spaces of uncertainty (Lunenbergh, Korthagen and Swennen, 2007). 'Critical to the process is the educator not being in

control of the setting; teachers would give up some of their ability to predict and control' (Garratt and Piper, 2011:79).

The community philosophy sessions were undertaken, initially with Cert Ed/PGCE students at the two local colleges, and then rolled out more widely to other colleges within the awarding university's consortium group. Over 150 trainee teachers were involved over a period of six months. Approval for the project was provided by the University's Projects Steering Committee and regular updates provided. Final findings and recommendations were made to the Committee and permissions to share quotes and questions (both provided face-to-face and online) were negotiated with all groups on an on-going basis.

We used BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011) to lead our approach, paying particular attention to openness to disclosure and the right to withdraw consent. For some participants, consent was gained post-hoc, where discussions arose in subsequent teacher education classes or in the online spaces provided for further thinking.

Four tutors involved in the facilitation of the workshops received training in Community Philosophy (CP) in January 2016 and were able to undertake enquiry-based approaches using techniques approved by SAPERE (Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education).

### *The Community Philosophy Process*

Starting with an examination of personal and professional values, we considered the wider concept of 'British values' as defined by HM



Government (2011). We then went on to outline the professional duties of education under Prevent before using various artefacts to stimulate a community philosophy (CP) inquiry. One such example was the now infamous ‘cooker bomb’ drawing – an image in actual fact of a cucumber, created by a four-year-old boy at a nursery who was subsequently reported to Channel as described in *The Guardian* (Quinn, 2016). Other stimuli included artwork (Gil Mualem Doron’s *New Union Flag*) or poetry (*I Come From* by Joseph Buckley).

Participants were encouraged to ‘problematise’ and question accepted concepts arising from their discussions, connect ideas, and use reflection and action to gain a critical awareness of social reality. Throughout the inquiry, participants created their own questions. In this way, the views of the tutors were minimised, helping to remove (as far as possible) bias in discussions. Given the emotive nature of the topic, we felt as facilitators that it was important to maintain criticality, limiting the imposition of our own views and values as leaders of the sessions. Discussion of the stimulus led to a number of questions; some specifically related to Prevent itself, others taking the issues wider into consideration concepts such as community, identity, and belonging. Examples included:

‘What does it actually mean to be radical?’

‘Is Prevent racist?’

‘How can we build community in our classrooms?’

‘What does it mean to “belong”?’

‘Who is Prevent for?’

‘How can we change to a world where we ‘enable’, rather than ‘Prevent’?’

Philosophical inquiries always conclude with a call to action, and organically, in the case of every session, this was a consideration of how

to build community and identity, flipping the idea of 'Prevent' to the idea of 'Enable'. We introduced concepts of restorative practice (Mannhardt, 2017) as possible methods to create communities that extend beyond teacher-student to deeper peer support, sustained beyond the classroom. Techniques such as circles and restorative language were explored and discussed; each participant then identified an action to take away and instigate with their own classes.

At the end of each session, participants were also asked to identify one action to implement in their practice. These generally fell into categories of: improving knowledge (either of government policy and ideology or of social issues and history); widening spheres of information by seeking out alternative viewpoints; and learning or experimenting with practical pro-social pedagogical approaches to facilitating debate. The following practical examples were shared:

- re-reading and analysing the original Government guidance
- following diverse voices on Twitter and joining campaigns
- learning more about the nature and rise of fundamentalist movements of all kinds
- researching 'non-violent communication' as a means of facilitating respectful debate
- running a philosophical enquiry on British Values with their own classes
- using restorative practice approaches to build classroom communities.

Interestingly, and as hoped, the intervention did not end with the conclusion of the workshops. In the spirit of 'potensia' (as described by Taylor (2016:34) as 'energy, vitality, the constitutive desire to endure'),

students have continued to explore the issues in a variety of online spaces – thoughts emerging and crystallising through rhizomatic connections. A *Yammer* social networking platform used by the trainee teachers has been instrumental in facilitating this; one student created a space entitled ‘Prevent Question of the Week’ and this continues to be regularly populated one year after the start of the project. In this activist and reflective space, students analyse articles, identify actions, and even produce poetry (see Appendix 1). The agenda has widened to consider anti-fascist approaches to education and consideration of political events more generally (e.g. responses to the election of Donald Trump and reactions to Brexit have been shared and debated). Most recently, British Values themselves have been explored in an etymological sense. One recent discussion has centred on the British Value of ‘mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’ and whether in fact the word ‘tolerance’ is appropriate:

‘I was thinking what ‘intolerance’ would look like - you meet someone who isn’t ‘the same’ as you and react with fear, resentment and prejudice. And what we would like to see from this encounter is - intrigue, acceptance and engagement. So we aren’t looking for the opposite of intolerance as an ideal, we’re looking for engagement!! :)’ (Project participant)

Analysis continued into the idea of ‘tolerance’ as implying maintenance of the status quo and limiting growth or change. Students also explored the idea of the values as not being especially ‘British’ and discussed alternative standpoints, such as ‘human’ or ‘universal’. Echoing Sen (2007:54), students reminded each other that the value of democracy is not only a British or Western concept and that it is part of the ‘long history of public discourse across the world.’

Students also discussed the impact of the sessions on their teaching practice:

‘I’m increasingly experimenting (ethically, I hope) with shelving the session plan to explore issues as they organically arise in classroom discussions. It can become fraught or challenging at times but it is an invaluable opportunity to engage students in critical dialogue.’  
(Project participant)

‘I get scared sometimes during the process because I feel like I’ve lost control, but I know this is a relic of my previous, erroneous ideas of the role of a teacher as an authoritarian figure. I’m not there to wield control or dictate the discourse, instead I can facilitate the discussion in a way that doesn’t silence people but fosters an atmosphere of enquiry as suggested by bell hooks.’  
(Project participant)

The emphasis stressed throughout the project on affirmative action enabled participants to feel empowered. Voices were elevated and thinking valued, so that they felt able to elicit change despite the constraints of the legal agenda.

### *Evaluation, reflections and conclusions*

Feedback from the workshops was extremely positive and the impact continues to be felt one year after the commencement of the project. The sessions were evaluated qualitatively by each participant using a Critical Incident Questionnaire (Brookfield, 1995, see Appendix 2). When asked for views on the use of philosophical enquiry, comments included:

‘I now know how important it is in teaching to allow spaces for disagreement, exploration and uncertainty’

‘I have realised how much I need to learn to really listen’

‘This process makes me stop and think’

‘The process [of philosophical enquiry] brought the whole class together’

‘I want to build enquiry-based approaches into my own teaching to develop critical thinking.’

When asked ‘What surprised you most about the session and why?’ participants noted in particular how struck they were by the luxury of being given time to think. They also welcomed the change to explore the ‘things we dare not ask’ – this perhaps reflects how rare it is that people are given space to challenge hegemonic practices or be allowed to air controversial views.

Following the workshops, a number of participants have gone on to run successful inquiries with their own students; they are being encouraged to reflect on these (both the process and the product) as a part of their on-going Cert Ed/PGCE work. Their own inquiries have not necessarily referenced Prevent or FBV, but instead have addressed general issues of politics, fundamentalism, identity, and media bias. One trainee teacher used a newspaper article on homosexuality and the US Christian far-right to debate human rights issues; another selected one on birth control in developing countries to provoke discussion. In both cases, using CP as a facilitation tool enabled them to be courageous in their selection of materials. Having faith in the process meant that they could focus on enabling positive conversations, rather than controlling them or shutting them down.

Key project findings have been disseminated on social media via a blog and shared Research and Scholarship Conferences at two universities in summer 2016.

### *Recommendations*

In his call to resist the 'miniaturisation' of human beings, Sen (2007:185) states that 'there is a compelling need in the contemporary world to ask questions not only about economics and politics of globalisation, but also about the values, ethics, and sense of belonging that shape our conception of the global world'.

Since the project took place, global and local issues such as Brexit, the refugee crisis, and rise in fundamentalist violence have reinforced the clear need for thinking spaces such as these for both educators and their students. Whilst this is certainly useful in the context of Prevent and FBV, there are clearly possibilities for wider applications of inquiry-based approaches and dialogic work to address. Generally speaking, a curriculum is needed that equips teachers to support students in managing difficult reactions to the modern predicament, handling complexity, and challenging both secular and religious authoritarianism. The following practical recommendations for teacher education have therefore arisen as a result of the project and have been shared with the University awarding body as part of a curriculum review:

- approaches such as community philosophy, that encourage critical thinking and questioning, are included (or considered) more explicitly in the teacher education curriculum sessions
- sessions that go beyond the standard e-learning packages on Prevent/FBV, delivered via CP inquiry or as a minimum facilitated reflection time, should be offered to all Cert Ed/PGCE students
- pro-social behaviour management methods which emphasise belonging and community, such as restorative practice, are included in sessions on classroom management.

## **Conclusion**

‘nomadic thought rejects melancholia in favour of the politics of affirmation and mutual specification of self and other in sets of relations or assemblages’ (Braidotti, 2012:55)

This project took a very different approach to counter-radicalisation measures in education which, to date, have largely been reactive by nature. By focusing on the development of positive, affirmative relationships and behaviours, we have attempted to flip the idea of ‘Prevent’ to the idea of ‘Enable’. We have promoted powerful counter-narratives that speak of the value of creating communities and shared identity through peer learning and growth, by introducing teachers to concepts of philosophical practice, creating rhizomatic networks that extend beyond teacher-student to deeper peer support, sustained outside the classroom walls and impacting on the wider education community. Techniques such as inclusive thinking circles and restorative language have been subsequently trialled by trainee teachers alongside values-based teaching, which seeks out commonality whilst also celebrating diversity.

Teachers using these approaches for learning will develop important critical thinking skills in their own students, encouraging them to question accepted practices and exploring the ‘grey areas’ of the complex and changing worlds in which they live. In this way, the project has led to a belief that ‘pedagogies of belonging’ have the potential to build transformative learning environments that will support students to become resilient through the development of social capital.

Whilst it could be argued that there can never be truly safe spaces for discussion whilst teachers have a legal duty to report, having an ‘ethics of

affirmation' (Braidotti, 2012) encourages us to focus on the importance and hope for the reconstruction of the 'social imaginary'. 'The pursuit of collective projects aimed at the affirmation of hope, rooted in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life, is a strategy to set up, sustain and map out sustainable transformations' (Braidotti, 2012:192).

This research supports Thomas (2016) in his call for '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'. In fact, it goes beyond this to suggest that pro-social pedagogies can be used across every subject and promoted daily, through general teaching processes that foster belonging and community.

Although moving beyond localised approaches is a challenge, the modelling of community philosophy as good educational practice and the 'trickle-down' effect of trainee educators using pro-social methods in their own teaching should not be underestimated. Remembering Braidotti's call to 'think global, act local' (2013), we can continue to work in a spirit of affirmation; continuing conversations in rhizomatic ways via communities of practice and social networks, and making use of 'levers' such as Prevent to open up critical thinking spaces.

Prevent, as a policy, is complex; it needs, as Thomas (2017) suggests, 'a more nuanced analysis' that takes into account its contestation and shift in focus (to more general anti-fundamentalist work) since its first iteration in 2003. It could be suggested that Prevent is asked to do too much: 'There are plenty of reasons to promote tolerance, encourage critical thinking and open closed minds. But try to do those things through a vehicle



designed for counter-terrorism, and you have to work harder to earn people's trust'. (BBC Radio 4, 2017)

Our duty as educators is to help students navigate this complex and uncertain agenda, through honest and humble dialogue. Community Philosophy and other pro-social practices can help us reclaim our roles as radicals and agents for change, through democratic and participative education. Perhaps, by implementing such pedagogical approaches, we can begin to reclaim the 'radical' spaces that education so desperately needs. In the words of Kundnani (2015): 'We must therefore defend the spaces of radical politics, for the right to dream of another world'.

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## **Appendix 1**

### ***Prevent Prevent***

*Politicians colluding to take your freedoms*

*Racism, phobias, communities in crisis*

*Eroding the trust, losing your right to assemble.*

*Visceral policy makers divide this Kingdom*

*Endemic paranoia, reading a book makes you ISIS!*

*Nefarious referrals, schools with students who tremble.*

*Teachers unite, it's our time to lament.*

*Persecution again is back on the agenda*

*Radical thinking the enemy of state*

*Encouraging intolerance and tolerating injustice.*

*Vicarious harassment due to your colour*

*Enforcement of policies that solidify hate*

*Nuanced communities crumbling and schistose.*

*Teachers unite, we must protect not Prevent!*

(Poem shared on social media by project participant and reproduced here with permission)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Critical Incident Questionnaire**

At what point during the session did you feel most engaged with what was happening, and why?

At what point during the session did you feel most distanced from what was happening, and why?

What action did anyone take that was most affirming or helpful for you, and why?

What action did anyone take that was most puzzling or confusing for you, and why?

What surprised you the most, and why?

(Brookfield, 1995)

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Image 18: *Katharsis, detail* © 2014 Xenofon Kavvadias. All Rights Reserved



## The Art of Xenofon Kavvadias

Shakila Maan

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In April 2011, Xenofon Kavvadias mounted an exhibition entitled *The law is no less conceptual than fine art*, based on the words of Lord Carlile of Berriew who provided legal advice after the Metropolitan police had warned Kavvadias that he could be arrested and prosecuted under the Terrorism Act 2006 if he mounted any exhibition that featured texts such as *The Islamic Ruling on the Permissibility of Martyrdom Operations*, a justification for suicide bombings used by Chechen extremists.

The collection of images used in this Special Issue of *Feminist Dissent* goes some way in presenting Kavvadias' brilliant exhibition exploring, as he says, the 'limits of acceptability and the margins of legality' within counter terrorism. We feature three streams of the exhibition. The first thread, accompanying the longer journal articles, is a series of close ups of an image entitled *Holocauston* (not holocaust). The shorter pieces that alternate with the longer articles are accompanied by a series of oil paintings and photographic stills. One of the oil paintings has the title 'And we put him against the wall. A mother's son, a man like we had been and shot him dead. And then to show you all; what came of him we photographed the scene'. Another one has the title: 'It is he who flies above your city. Woman now trembling for your children. From up here we've fixed our sights on you and them as targets. If you ask why, the answer is from fear'. Epigrams 12, 15 and 16, are from the book *War Primer* by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work *On War Primer* (2014). This painting has been inspired by photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism in the last 100 years. Image no 12 has the title: 'Gang Law is something I



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can understand. With man-eaters I've excellent relations. I've had the killers feeding from my hand. I am the man to save the civilisation'.

This short write up of Kavvadias' work is based on the press release issued ahead of his exhibition at Gift in 2011 and an article that he subsequently wrote for *Statewatch*. We are also pleased to showcase a short clip where [Geoffrey Robertson QC](#) speaks at Kavvadias' Private Reception.

The exhibition revolved around images depicting Murano Veronese vases - books on display were burnt and ashes placed in these handmade vases, which were inspired by Paolo Caliari's painting *The Annunciation* (c.1555). Caliari was accused of blasphemy and tried by the Inquisition during which time he said 'sometimes painters take liberties like poets or madmen'. In 1573 Caliari (known as Veronese after this exhibition) completed his controversial work *Feast in the House of Levi*. Originally the work was painted to depict the Last Supper, but the painting was not approved of by the agents of the Inquisition so Veronese was forced to change its title. The urn's quality and elegance make it the perfect vehicle for Kavvadias' *Catharsis* and the ideal ultimate symbol for the concepts and motives behind this provoking installation.

Kavvadias says that his 'work deals with the limits of acceptability and the margins of legality, within the law, as an art and research project. I try to realise what can be seen, said or thought under contemporary legislation and situation. I am also interested in investigating the future of these books - could they exist outside an art project, or do they have to be destroyed?'

This exhibition was not centred on issues of faith, religion or party political debate, rather it was concerned with the exposing and questioning of what and why certain information is withheld from access and indeed may be deemed illegal to own, read or exhibit. Where are these lines drawn and who decides? Indeed should they be drawn at all? For, will they not change

over time? One of the first books to be sensationally banned in several countries and defended in court by Penguin Books was D.H. Lawrence's (1928) *Lady Chatterley's Lover* due to its explicit content (2 'fucks' and 12 'cunts') and the then socially unacceptable depiction of a relationship between an aristocratic woman and a working-class man. Would it have the same reaction if it were first published now?

To this end, Kavvadias had selected documents from a wide spectrum of contentious and opposing social, political and religious ideologies in order to provide an impartial and balanced viewpoint. During the course of the show, the most contentious books were ceremoniously burned, each week, with the resultant ashes placed within handmade Murano 'Veronese' vases. The charred skeletons of the books void of their contents returned to their original place on the gallery walls.

Far from wishing to expose information that may put lives and/or liberty at risk, Kavvadias and Gift 10 VYNER ST aimed to create a space of freedom and equality where visitors encountered, without any didactic attitude or fear, part of what has been denied to them during the last decades due to terrorism and war. Additional installations incorporating both old and new media also offered challenging perspectives of Kavvadias' oeuvre. 'I believe that in the country where the *Magna Carta* was signed and John Milton (1644) delivered the *Aeropagitica*, it is not impossible to differentiate between those who are against the values of 800 years of democratic tradition from those who cherish and believe in them. It is this strong belief that forces one to move outside of the comfort zone in order to defend these values and attempt to reclaim valuable ground that has been lost in a long standing war that the people of this country never really wanted to begin with.'

Kavvadias is interested in exploring the legislation, challenging contemporary notions of freedom of speech, censorship and accepted

public knowledge thereof. Following more than five years of extensive research and planning, he presents a wide range of documents and books containing disturbing contemporary ideologies. Many of these have been used as evidence in court to secure criminal convictions. Subjected to the obscurities of underground internet websites, the public is essentially exempt from what should be an on-going debate, intimidating an informed electorate and seriously undermining our democratic political state. This exhibition encouraged viewers to critically engage with the displayed texts without fear of control or marginalisation, reinstating the public right to challenge and oppose.

Kavvadias asks 'are thousands of UK households who possess these books breaking the counter-terrorism law? Should they not be informed about it? Should they not be required to destroy the books? Is this a solution within the spirit of the Law? For if we ban a book, how far are we from forcing the owner to destroy it? For if we ask, or force the owner of a book to destroy it, how far are we from burning this book? I am convinced that in this country only a tiny minority is prepared to burn books. The last book I can recall being burned was a copy of Salman Rushdie's (1988) *Satanic Verses* in Bradford.'

Focusing mainly on literature and texts, Kavvadias presented CIA files and confidential manuals alongside Islamist books and other texts that one may claim 'glorify terrorism in the strict meaning of the word'.

Kavvadias states that 'I am particularly interested in sections 57 and 58 of the TA. In these sections it is stated that; "a person commits an offence if he collects or makes a record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism". I am also interested in the 2006 Act where it is stated that; "a person commits an offence if he publishes a statement in which he glorifies terrorism or is likely to be understood by members of the public as direct or indirect encouragement

or other inducement to the commission preparation or instigation of such acts or causes another to publish such a statement.'

**Shakila Maan** is an independent film maker and fine artist. A collection of her banners from 1984 to 2018 depicting SBS campaigns have been produced as cards to mark 40 years of Southall Black Sisters. Shakila is a long standing member of Southall Black Sisters and was part of Women Against Fundamentalism.

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## An interview with Dean Atta

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**SD: Can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you got into writing poetry?**

I am a black, queer, working-class writer from London, with Greek Cypriot and Jamaican heritage. I got into writing poetry as a way to tell my story. Spoken word was what first got me writing poetry; I wrote in order to get up and perform it. I grew up performing in theatre productions in London's West End, so I had the confidence to go in front of an audience. My first poetry gig was at The Poetry Cafe in Covent Garden when I was 17. Once you go to one event, you quickly find out about all the others. There are so many more spoken word nights around London and the UK now compared to when I started in 2003, and you can find so much spoken word online. Now poets can build up an online audience without ever performing on stage. For me poetry was a part of my social life, as much as it was an aspiration of something I'd like to do professionally. I held onto this aspiration whilst reading Philosophy and English at the University of Sussex, where I kept on writing and performing in my spare time.

Poetry is now my career. I published my first collection of poems in 2013 and completed a Writer/Teacher MA at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2014. Alongside writing and performing, I now teach poetry workshops in education settings and in the community.

**SD: What are the sorts of issues that you touch on / tackle in your poetry?**



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I write about race and sexuality a lot. I also write about family and relationships, but in terms of what one would call issues, it's mostly the aforementioned. My debut poetry collection is called *I Am Nobody's Nigger*, the title taken from a poem I wrote about my relationship with Hip Hop and the historical and current use of the N-word. Other prominent poems from that collection include "Young, Black and Gay" which is a proud poem about defining oneself, and "Rome is Eternal" which is about using the dating app Grindr on a visit to Italy. "Revolution" which is featured in this Issue is also from this collection and is one of the first poems I wrote when I was 17. I published the collection when I was 28 and the poems within it cover a decade of my life from 17 to 27.

**SD: The three poems that we are featuring in this Special Issue of *Feminist Dissent* touch on quite different but presumably interconnecting issues that connect insofar as they link back to your own sense, location, and representation of yourself. Could you tell us about these three poems, how they came about, and how or if they are connected?**

"Revolution" is one of my first poems and is influenced by what I was reading and listening to at the time: poets like Gil Scott-Heron, Maya Angelou, and Ursula Rucker, music by Bob Marley, Nirvana, and Tupac Shakur, as well as the bible verses, hymns, and patois heard in my childhood. I went to Church of England primary and secondary schools, however, both schools were multicultural and there were people of many faiths. London slang influenced by Jamaican patois was spoken amongst students and some of this has made its way into the poem. At A Level, I studied Drama, English, and Sociology, and I think all three subjects influenced this poem in its performative nature, use of rhetoric, and in the themes covered in the poem, such as conflict and community, and the need for intergenerational dialogue.



“I Come From” is a poem I wrote during my MA at Goldsmiths; it was written to be used in schools to model a workshop I lead where I get students to write about where they come from. I do not say Britain, Cyprus, or Jamaica, but allude to these places with food: “I come from shepherd’s pie and Sunday roast, / jerk chicken and stuffed vine leaves.” I’ve found that food is a great starting point when asking young people to write about culture. Rather than say I’m British I say, “I come from a British passport”. I mention the rainbow flag and the Union Jack to put sexuality on par with national identity, because being part of the LGBT community has been such a strong part of my identity and I have experienced solidarity with LGBT people around the world. The poem ends with these lines: “I come from my own pen but I see people torn apart like paper, / each a story or poem that never made it into a book.” I say this to acknowledge my privilege as someone able to freely tell their own story.

“The Black Flamingo” is one of my newest poems and was inspired by a trip to Cyprus to visit my grandparents. Whilst I was there, a black flamingo arrived on the island and was on the news several times a day. My grandfather kept the TV on the news channel most of the time. I saw the image of the black flamingo on TV a lot during this visit, and not only did my grandfather speak about it, but also when I was in cafes and on the beach, it was a topic of conversation amongst holiday makers and locals alike.

I remembered trips to Cyprus as a teenager when my hair was in locs, and people would shout “Bob Marley” at me on the beach and in the street and even touch my hair without permission. Wearing locs was a way I felt connected to my Jamaican heritage, although my Jamaican grandmother did not approve of it at first. I no longer have that hairstyle, but hearing everyone talk about the black flamingo I was reminded of what it was like when they were talking about me.

I also think of the black flamingo as a metaphor for being black and queer – it represents an intersectional identity. My grandfather died last year and there were many things unspoken between us. I never came out to him. I felt he struggled to understand my blackness and I was not sure if he would be able to accept my queerness.

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Image 20: *Katharsis 3<sup>rd</sup> Week* © 2014 Xenofon Kavvadias. All Rights Reserved

# Report from the Third International Marxist Feminist Conference

Lund University, Sweden, October 2018

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In October 2018 members of the Feminist Dissent editorial collective attended the 3rd International Marxist Feminist conference in Lund, Sweden. The idea of a Marxist Feminist International was proposed in 2015 by the acclaimed German feminist writer and teacher Frigga Haug, with the first conference taking place in Berlin in 2015, and the second in Vienna in 2016. Haug made the call of these international meetings 'in the face of the deep crises of capitalism, with all the safety valves unscrewed so that each crisis is merely an intensification of the previous one; with crises increasingly affecting the everyday lives and living conditions making planning more precarious for an increasing number of women left alone with a double burden to carry...[In such a moment] it was high time also for the Marxist-Feminist forces to meet on the global level, just as capitalism and the crises it produced had become global' (Haug, 2018).

The focus of this year's conference was the theme of 'Reproduction'. Feminist theory has turned in recent years to re-evaluating the concept of social reproduction. This is seen as a riposte to dominant economic structures under neo-liberalism that devalue women's work of care, domestic work and reproduction and value productive labour exclusively. This issue has become a crucial area of activism and theorising for Marxist feminists as the dismantling and marketisation of social welfare in the context of neo-liberal globalisation has had a hugely disproportionate



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impact on women, both as users of services that have been cut or hugely reduced, and as employees of those services which once offered secure employment with pensions and other social rights. The slashing of these services, particularly in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis and the austerity regimes that were instituted in its wake, forces women to spend more time in unpaid care work within the family accompanied by insecure low-paid care work in the labour market. It is in this sense that the crisis of contemporary neoliberal capitalism has thoroughly demonstrated the Marxist feminist theses about the relations of gender being at the same time the relations of production. This body of work represents an important shift away from seeing patriarchal dynamics as a function of capitalism's class driven imperatives (as Engels and later Marxists saw them) and capitalism and patriarchy as 'dual systems'.

While this focus on 'reproduction' has been extremely valuable in pointing to the centrality of gender within capitalism, one of the areas that has been neglected and even avoided within this body of work has been the rise of religious fundamentalism. The refusal to engage with this arises out of a generalised attack on secularism by Left academic feminists, epitomised by the work of Joan Scott, Saba Mahmood and a whole range of work influenced by feminist post-structuralist theory. This work constructs a binary between secularism, presented as an Enlightenment ideology imposed on the everyday piety of women (who may or may not be affiliated to fundamentalist parties and organisations) as part of a colonial project, and religious faith as weapons of the weak. While these arguments are extremely popular within the academy in the West particularly, this work completely ignores the very material impact of the rise of fundamentalism and the impact of this on the dynamics of familial work, on women's labour force participation, on welfare provision (now frequently outsourced by the state to faith based charities) and on

women's legal rights (where personal and family law are handed over by the state to religious bodies such as 'sharia courts' for Muslim women).

The argument *Feminist Dissent* members presented at the conference was that the rise of Christian fundamentalism in the US, Latin America and Eastern Europe, Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and Hindu, Muslim and Sikh fundamentalism in South Asia, as well as in diasporic populations across the developed capitalist world, must be taken seriously by the Left and by feminists. The focus of our presentation concerned the way fundamentalist influence, both institutional and ideological, is essentially a project of social reproduction that reconstructs the family as a site of divinely mandated gender and sexual roles. We are now seeing these arguments promoted by religious leaderships who often have the ear of government across a whole range of social policy areas, but particularly education, which is an absolutely central locus of influence as far as religious fundamentalists are concerned. We noted that when it comes to tackling this issue of fundamentalism amongst minority communities in the West the Left and feminist forces are confused and often adopt cultural relativist arguments that grant legitimacy to the most reactionary forces in the name of anti-racism. What this ignores is the highly detrimental impact that fundamentalism has on women's lives which come to be defined and controlled, often through violence, by retrograde conceptions of gender roles. Many of these movements are engaged in a massive rewriting and flattening of history to normalise the most conservative conceptions of gendered religious identity, which as well as being highly misogynistic also aim to roll back the limited gains for acceptance made by lesbians, gays and bisexuals within those communities.

The participants at the conference were primarily northern European and German; a fact which influenced the perception of the ideas put forward by the UK based *Feminist Dissent*. This is significant because in these

countries the process whereby multiculturalism has morphed into multi-faithism (Dhaliwal and Patel, 2012) is less advanced, as is the destruction of state-based welfare services compared to the UK. In this sense, audience members at the *Feminist Dissent* panel were receptive to these arguments, but at the same time were both unfamiliar and to an extent apprehensive about them, particularly at a time when neo-Nazis and anti-Muslim white supremacist groupings had made such significant electoral advances, not least in Sweden itself. Our response to this was to note the fact that fundamentalist movements need also to be understood as movements of the extreme Right, and which we argued were in fact different branches of the same authoritarian neo-patriarchal world view. There is a politics growing as a consequence of the despair and frustration caused by the crisis of neoliberal capitalism and the complicity of social democratic parties in the destruction of social safety nets. Overall this was a highly valuable experience for us, and one which really demonstrated the resonance our analysis offers in other contexts.

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## **Review of The Muslims are Coming: Islamophobia, Extremism and the Domestic War on Terror**

**Arun Kundani, Verso, 2014.**

**Reviewed by Alison Assiter\***

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This book provides a powerful story of the way in which the ‘war on terror’ has established a ‘paradigm of an open-ended perpetual global war’ (Kundnani, 2014:7) not on a people or on a nation but on ‘a set of ideas’- ‘radical Islam’- a body of thought that is, according to Kundnani, only ever vaguely defined. At the same time, for example, he points out, as ‘the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt’ were providing ‘practical refutation’ of al Qaeda’s argument that ‘violence against western civilians’ was the only way to defeat the near enemy of autocratic regimes in the Middle East, the western war on terror continued apace (2014:7). Kundnani presents a strong case to the effect that the strategies of the US and the UK to prevent the circulation of ‘extremist ideology’ could not be sustained without the ‘racialised dehumanisation’ of its Muslim victims. Kundnani argues that the war on terror is an ideology designed to help sustain the imperial violence of the superpowers.

These superpower states, he claims, rely on a strategy developed many years ago, in Russia under the Tsars and in the UK, by Scotland Yard, of using informants and agents provocateurs amongst networks of radicals to try to uncover potential terrorists. Official definitions of terrorism, however, he argues, ‘are more a matter of ideological projection and



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fantasy' than objective assessment (2014:17). In the cases both of the Boston and the Woolwich attacks, to take two examples he refers to, the connection between the 'isolated and amateurish' nature of the attacks and the violence perpetrated by US and the UK foreign policies went unexamined (2014:18).

Particularly moving are Kundnani's case studies of individuals wrongly pursued by the US or the UK states, or wrongly targeted as being in need of counter radicalisation measures. He gives a number of illustrative cases of individuals wrongly pursued by the FBI or individuals wrongly targeted in the UK by the Prevent programme.

On the other hand, even if Kundnani is right, as he may well be, that imperialism, colonialism and the specific interventions on the part of the US and the UK, in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere have partially produced the Islamist ideology, it is important also to note that violent incidents such as the Boston bombings, the Woolwich attacks and the Westminster Bridge incidents are real and the violence they displayed was real. Moreover, it is also important to note that some Islamist organisations – see below – were supported and aided by the US. Even if he is right as, again, there is no doubt that he is, that there have been arrests and imprisonings of individuals when there is no good justification for this, once again it does not show that there is no violence on the part of some individuals and groups and that some of them have been inspired by an ideology that they themselves have claimed derives from their reading of the Koran. When Kundnani, for example, refers to Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) simply as 'the oldest organisation representing political Islam in south Asia', (2014:171) he fails to mention the nuanced account of this organisation given by thinkers such as Afiya Zia, who refers to the liberal, secular opposition in Pakistan as contributing to preventing key members

of Jamaat-i-Islami's desire to institute a formal Islamic dress code on women. Kundnani also fails to note that the JI leadership has constantly sought to discourage women from working and maintains the notion that the unveiling of women is a threat to Islam (see Zia, 2018). Indeed, Kundnani also fails to mention the work of Gita Sahgal who, in several places, including her film, *War Crimes File*, (Sahgal, 2010) has pointed to their role in running death squads in the genocidal war against the people of Bangladesh. She has also strongly argued that the JI, far from being an oppositional force against imperialism, were partially created through a strong military alliance with the US. Furthermore, they were central in the UK in the anti-Rushdie campaign and in various ways they have been central to the process of state Islamisation of a key US ally – Pakistan.

Kundnani's account, then, in its focus on the creation of an ideology of radical Islam by the western superpowers, risks underplaying both the actual agency of radical Islamists and the violence of the perpetrators of some of the attacks carried out by their supporters. It fails, indeed, to note the power of fundamentalist Islamists in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan, to mention just three. Moreover, just as fundamentalist Islamists, today, are no doubt partially formed in a reaction to imperialism and colonialism, as were communist and Marxist groups in the past, that derivation does not in itself provide an analysis of the value or lack of value of the politics produced by this imperialism.

I'd like to make a comparison with another group that was produced, at least in part, as Kundnani alleges is the case with contemporary Islamists, by western imperialism and colonialism. The Sandinistas came into being as a reaction to US imperialism and to the Contras interference in their country - Nicaragua. They used guerrilla tactics to fight the Contras and, for a while, they appeared to succeed in their aim of becoming the major

power in Nicaragua. Whether or not the government they instigated was a force for good, remains a moot point. There were some significant achievements and some failures. But they were real – the Sandinistas were both created by imperialism and they really existed<sup>i</sup>.

Similarly, contemporary fundamentalist Islamists, who wish to bring about sharia law in some form, really exist, and it is also a moot point whether or not they are a force for good. Moreover, the contemporary case – the Islamists focussed on by Kundnani - are formed in an era of identity politics. Whatever the rights or wrongs of their movement, the Sandinistas were very different. They were formed on principles that set out to create a just and a more equal society for all in Nicaragua. The contemporary fundamentalist Islamists are very different. By their very nature, they exclude anyone who is not a follower of Islam. In their desire to create a state run along the lines of sharia law, they necessarily exclude both non-Muslims as well as Muslims who seek to practice their faith differently from them. It does not matter whether or not those writing about them, like me, follow what Kundnani calls a ‘culturalist’ analysis of them or a ‘reformist’ analysis (Kundnani, Chapter 3), it remains the case that the ‘radical’ fundamentalist religious reaction to imperialism at the present time, whether it be the Islamists, the Hindutva, the Buddhists in Myanmar or the Christian right in the US are all formed within an exclusionary identitarian ideology that excludes and ‘others’ those who do not fall within its remit. Indeed, Kundnani admits as much when he analyses the ‘reformists’ focus on providing funding for religious groups in the UK at the same time as developing strategies for challenging potential recruits to radical Islam.

Kundnani is vociferous in his challenge to those who would denounce radical Islam purely in ideological terms – they are, he alleges, akin to

those who claimed that totalitarianism, for example, was a purely intellectual error, as did Popper, for example in his book *The Open Society and its Enemies* (2014:100). This kind of analysis, he claims, forgets the political context of the label and the way in which its use changes depending on context. 'Liberal' 'tolerant' states such as the US, he argues, helped destroy the civil rights movement because of their 'war' on communism, forged under the heading of a fight against 'totalitarian' movements. Islam, similarly, Kundnani argues, cannot be isolated from the context in which the Koran is read. So, Kundnani claims, one cannot, as the 'culturalists' in the US set out to do, directly link a particular form of Islamic ideology and terrorism. One ought not, then, the implication is, to see possession of certain books as necessarily a sign of extremism.

Once again, though, it is important to note that while it is surely correct to claim that ideologies change their form dependent upon circumstances, and that it is indeed somewhat facile and deeply wrong to see the possession of certain books as a sign of radicalisation, it doesn't follow that there are not radicals who are setting out to maim innocent people and to destroy lives. It is also important, that while it is right to offer a challenge to right -wing racism that seeks to produce a racist ideology that denounces all Muslims as potential terrorists, it is not right to go the whole hog, as Kundnani tends to, and deny the very existence of Islamic fundamentalists. To reiterate, contrary to Kundnani's claim that Islamic fundamentalism is purely a creation of the 'liberal' western state, the picture is more complex. As Cowden and Sahgal (2017) have put it, fundamentalists combine an interest in 'ancient Vedic truths with a fascination with Nazism', and as Chetan Bhatt writes: a 'theocratic concept of politics and civil society' with a 'racial concept of the nation' (Bhatt, 1997:205). This is 'deeply illustrative of the way religious fundamentalism occupies this curious double relationship with

modernity; at once entirely a product of it, but seeking to reject it, all at the same time' (Cowden and Sahgal, 2017:14).

As we have pointed out in this journal, there is a tendency for many on the political left in the UK and the US, to denounce all criticism of any form of Islamism, as 'Islamophobic'. Kundnani indeed seems to fall into this category. Instead of accepting that there are 'fundamentalist' forms of all religions, including Christianity and Judaism, but also including Islam, he sees any such claims as being part of the 'westocentric' ideology that demonises all Muslims. However, there are different ways of conceptualising Islam and some of these comprise 'fundamentalist' forms.

There is a tendency, then, in Kundnani's thinking, to 'victimise' the fundamentalist Islamist too much. He tends to write as though Islamic radicals are the innocent victims of western 'liberal' propaganda rather than being themselves inspired by models of jihad deriving from powerful states like Saudi Arabia. Amongst the states that inspire fundamentalist Islamists are those such as Iran that themselves practice a state form of sharia law, that entails such 'radical' activities as imprisoning women for dressing improperly and allowing the hanging of young children.

These are not simply 'ideological creations' of the western state. As Cowden and Sahgal, once more, point out in their article 'Why Fundamentalism?': 'The Iranian Koranic scholar and writer Navid Kermani has described the Saudi sponsorship of the puritanical ideology of Wahhabism that is behind so much contemporary Islamist politics as a travesty of the 'multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural Orient': "Sponsored with billions from the oil industry [this is] a school of thought

that has been promoted for decades in mosques, in books and on television that declares all people from all other religions heretics, and reviles, terrorises, disparages and insults them...That such a religious fascism even became conceivable, that IS finds so many fighters and even more sympathisers... - that is not the beginning, but rather the end point of a long decline...of religious thought” (Kermani, 2015:80-81, quoted in Cowden and Sahgal, 2017:18). Fundamentalist religions are not simply reactions to the west but are also attempts to establish reactionary interpretations of religious text as the route to political power. As we pointed out, Wahhabism is just one instance of the ways fundamentalists distort religious texts to serve political purposes.

At the same time, then, as he appears to be offering a radical alternative to the right -wing ‘western inspired’ creation of a largely, in his terms ‘imaginary’ Islamic identity, Kundnani reproduces the simple dualisms of ‘western’ and ‘Islamic’. ‘Reformists’ Kundnani claims, when they discover that they have no tools with which to defend ‘western’ values as against the powerful ideology of Islamic radicalisation, attempt to turn liberalism into an ideology itself. He quotes Andrew Anthony, an Observer journalist, (2014:110) in his book *The Fallout* who sets ‘western Enlightenment’ values against what Anthony labels the ‘Endarkment’ of the Islamic world. Anthony, according to Kundnani, sets out to develop a ‘western liberal’ ‘identity’ against the ‘third world’ of ‘petty corruption, sexism, homophobia, tribalism and patriarchal authoritarianism’ (2014:111). In setting up a contrast between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ in this way, Kundnani unwittingly reproduces the very dualism he sets out ostensibly to challenge. It is not only people like Andrew Anthony who set out to defend the values of human rights. There are many people in the ‘eastern’ Islamic world who deploy the language of human rights to critique what they themselves see as the dangers of Islamic religious identity politics. Afiya Zia and others have documented the systematic

murder and torture of those in Pakistan who are resistant to the Islamist militancy there (see Zia, 2018). Indeed, if we were to take the perspective of someone who has grown up, since 1979, under the Islamic law of Iran, then the normal form of radical political identity would not be the form taken up by the western 'radicals' who began as Marxists or American black power movement people but who converted to Islam as a form of political radicalism against the US or the UK state, but rather they would be advocates of equality for women (to be able to wear what they like) or rights to express an identity other than the Islamic one imposed upon them.

So while there is much to commend in this book, it provides a somewhat quasi-Orientalist picture of fundamentalist Islam that, at the same time as it seeks to value 'the Muslim' actually undermines its own intention by painting a too one -faced and one -dimensional picture of the 'Muslim' it seeks to support. Failing to attribute any responsibility to fundamentalist Islamists for the crimes they have committed is surely itself to deny them agency in a way that he would not want to do.

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<sup>i</sup> See Stephen Kinzer *Blood of Brothers*, Harvard University Press, 1991 for one useful account of the period of the Sandinistas rule in Nicaragua.



## Review of *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak*

Azeenarh Mohammed, Chitra Nagarajan and Rafeeat Aliyu  
(Eds.) Cassava Republic, 2018.

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When considering the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights it is all too easy to disregard those outside of our line of sight. Marginalised queer voices are often drowned out by the overriding cis-gendered, white, able-bodied queer majorities. It is for this reason that *She Called Me Woman*, a collection of first person narratives by queer Nigerian women, is such a refreshing and humbling read. Azeenarh Mohammed, Chitra Nagarajan and Rafeeat Aliyu edited the book, bringing their expertise in writing, the law and human rights activism to this fascinating project.

The collection begins with an Introduction, which sets out the aims for the body of work. Firstly, it hopes to centre queer people in the discussion of their own lives. Secondly, to bring to light the range of cultural histories and traditions in Nigeria with regards to gender norms and sexualities, and thirdly, to counteract the denial of queer experiences that many Nigerians, or people they know, engage in. To meet these objectives the editors consulted their own social networks to find queer women willing to talk about their lives and work with the editors to produce a piece based on their own recorded testimonies. Twenty-five women made it into the final collection, with ages ranging from 20 to 42 years old.



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In some parts of Nigeria being queer is punishable by death, in others the punishment is fourteen years imprisonment. With this in mind, when reading this collection, one cannot help being moved by the bravery and vivacity by which these women live their lives. The book opens with: 'It's un-Nigerian. It's against our culture. It's not allowed by our religion. This thing isn't in us- it comes from over there. I'm an African and there are some things I can never accept' (Mohammed et al 2018, p. 1). An example of opinions often expressed by Nigerians about LGBTQ+ individuals acutely sets the scene and highlights why queer narratives by queer individuals are necessary. The deeply entrenched view that being queer is a Western idea, coupled with the laws and religions that vilify LGBTQ+ existence, is why the editors anonymised all participants by using only initials when publishing their contribution. Surprisingly, this detail takes nothing away from the stories we are told, as it gave respondents the freedom to divulge extremely personal and often painful circumstances from their lives. Highlights include JP, a 33-year-old trans woman who talks of her journey to self-acceptance through depression and beatings from family members, and how her life now is like 'living the dream' (Mohammed et al 2018, p.45). Also, 20 years old UE who eloquently states that '[b]eing queer does not depend on whether I have had sex with a woman or not. I am a constant' (Mohammed et al, p.288).

*She Called Me Woman* also educates the reader about Nigeria. From the different testimonies we learn about the country's religious make up, the north-south divide, different tribes and cultures, and previously unknown language used by queer people to describe different genders and sexualities. The editors were successful in their aim to acquire viewpoints of different groups of queer Nigerian women and the religious diversity of the country is evident in the testimonies of participants, with many speaking of their struggle to manage their belief system alongside being queer. VA in Lagos tells of how she stopped going to church when she

heard a pastor claim that homosexuals do not exist, whilst IX in Kaduna explains how being a queer Muslim in the north of the country means a life full of restrictions and has even been detrimental to her mental health. Another point that is worth contemplating is the number of women in the collection imagining their future with another woman and eventually starting a family. Given the current climate in the country, this leads many to surmise that their future may not lie in their homeland. Despite these very affecting revelations the collection ends on an encouraging note with 30-year-old HA believing that, thanks to the globalized world we now live in, the next generation of Nigerians will have a more optimistic outlook on LGBTQ+ life and that 'our rights are just as important as everyone else's' (Mohammed et al 2018, p.357).

A moment of thanks must be given to everyone who contributed to this extraordinary book. Their enthusiasm to take part in this important conversation and invite us in to their life is commendable. Appreciation must also be given to the editors who persevered in gathering so many voices on such a contentious issue. They succeeded in their aims of putting queer Nigerian women at the centre of their own lives, and the expertise and lived experience of the editors as female and/or queer Nigerians adds an authenticity to the collection that cannot be overlooked. This point is particularly emphasised when reflecting on the lexicogrammatical choices within each account, which, justifiably, have not been modified to accommodate the Western reader. Further to this, the determination of the editors to gain in-sights from such a diverse range of individuals shows the benefits of considering intersections when investigating queer identities. Despite not managing to speak to older women, having the thoughts of trans and cis women, women from different socioeconomic and religious backgrounds, gives a fullness to the collection that is incredibly powerful.

In conclusion, *She Called Me Woman* is an essential read for anyone wanting to learn about those on the periphery, those detached from the Western narrative that is more commonly disseminated in LGBT literature. These first-hand accounts cannot be dismissed when researching LGBTQ+ life during the early 21st century and the colourful women in this collection demand your attention from the first page, as they transmit their message loud and clear: we are here, and we, also, are queer.

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## **Review of Indefensible: Democracy, Counter-Revolution and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism**

**Rohini Hensman, Haymarket Books, 2018.**

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Rohini Hensman's (2018) *Indefensible: Democracy, Counter-Revolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism* is a searing critique of those who betray genuine anti-imperialism. She identifies three general categories of pseudo-anti-imperialists: one, those who see only one oppressor, the imperialist West; two, neo-Stalinists, who are apologists for Russian imperialism and have influence over the Trotskyist Left; three, imperialists and despots that position themselves against an imperialist West as anti-imperialists. The pseudo-anti-imperialist Left operates on the credence that my enemy's enemy is my friend. In Part 1, Hensman delineates her politics of anti-imperialism. While rejecting Lenin's conflation of finance capital with imperialism, she advances his political opposition to all imperialisms and support for the oppressed and democracy everywhere; a politics that has been dis-placed by Stalin's theory of socialism in one country and Russian imperialism. Pseudo-anti-imperialists, Hensman argues, betray the progressive political forces attempting democratic revolutions beyond the enemy line of the West and crudely excuse Islamist terrorism in the West as blowback. She details the degeneracy of pseudo-anti-imperialism through case studies in Part 2, specifically: Russia and Ukraine, Bosnia and Kosovo, Iran, Iraq, the Assad regime in Syria, and the Syrian uprising. Central to Hensman's damning critique of the pseudo-anti-imperialist Left is her explanation: Orientalism. This 'makes them oblivious to the fact that people in other



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parts of the world have agency too' (Hensman, 2018, p.13). For example, 'apparently Libyans and Syrians are too backward even to want [democratic] rights and freedoms'; the assumption being 'that non-Western peoples have no agency of their own, and that they can only be victims or puppets of the West' (Ibid, p.264).

In Part 3, Hensman makes five proposals in response to pseudo-anti-imperialism. First, in an era in which the Right works on a new normal of a post-factual world, to challenge those on the Left who do the same. Second, to contest the moral corruption of pseudo-anti-imperialists who (actively or passively) side with the executioners, by reinjecting compassion, humanity, kindness, love, sympathy, and imagination back into politics. Third and fourth, she astutely reminds us of the critical importance to fight for both democracy and an internationalist politics. 'If the emancipation of the working classes is to be achieved by the working classes themselves, the democratic revolution cannot be skipped' (Hensman, 2018, p.287). Moreover, 'solidarity with workers in other countries is not a luxury or something separate and distinct from working-class interests: it is an intrinsic element of working-class interests' (Ibid, p.289). Fifth, to push on global institutions like the United Nations to promote democracy and human rights.

Hensman's starting point in *Indefensible* is her observation that some of the anti-imperialist Left correctly opposed the Iraq war and stood in solidarity with the Iraqi peoples, yet ended up propagating the lies of the imperialist oppressors in Syria and denigrating its oppressed. She opens up the question here of how key sections of the Left lost their way. The trajectory of the anti-imperialist vanguard of Britain's anti-war movement is, I think, a note-worthy case in point. Opposition to the US and UK imperialist invasion (and later occupation) of Iraq was the sole

political demand of the Stop the War Coalition (StWC), whilst solidarity with progressive political forces in Iraq - who opposed imperialist intervention (and later occupation), Saddam Hussein's rule, and Islamist counter-forces - was absent. In fact, StWC offered political support to the so-called Islamist resistance to imperialism (Bassi, 2010). The political deterioration of Britain's Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), the leading player in this anti-war movement, can be traced back to the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Having previously adopted a third camp politics exemplified by the slogan during the Cold War, Neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism, first the SWP opposed both sides in the Iran-Iraq war, recognising it as a war between regional imperialist interests, then, in 1987, when it was apparent that the United States was supporting Iraq, it switched to backing Iran. The priority of the SWP at this point and thereafter - as worked out by its theoreticians - is to upset the global imbalance of forces so that the (i.e. their) prime enemy will be destabilised and the Left at home (i.e. them) fortified (Bassi, 2010). This anti-imperialism of fools functions as the 'slavish mirror image' of the main imperialist power (Matgamna, 2011). The fatal consequences of this 'negativism on principle' was made explicit in 1999, when the SWP initiated Britain's anti-war movement on the singular demand of stopping the NATO bombing of Serbian military installations and sided in full with a Serbian regime attempting genocide in Kosovo (Ibid). Hensman's observation of Orientalism fits with this foolish anti-imperialism, whose myopic foci is domestic organisational gain, because the peoples and workers beyond the West are effectively made invisible.

On the question of in absentia international solidarity, explained by Hensman as the pseudo-anti-imperialist Left's Orientalism, the anomaly unaccounted for is the Palestinians. I am not convinced by Hensman's belief that the Left is disingenuous here; she states, '[h]ow can anyone who feels anguish when Palestinian children are targeted and killed in

Gaza not feel anguish when Syrian children are targeted and killed in Aleppo? Such double standards expose the hypocrisy of those who claim to support the Palestinian case' (Hensman, 2018, p.284). I would contend that solidarity with the Palestinian plight is the international exception on the Left because Israel is singled out as the international exception: the worst of the worst of imperialism. Indeed, this singling out goes as far as left anti-Semitism (see Bassi, 2011, 2017).

Hensman's *Indefensible: Democracy, Counter-Revolution, and the Rhetoric of Anti-Imperialism* is a valuable retort to those on the Left who betray an internationalist working class politics that independently and critically assesses the conditions and forces of existence to decide how to drive the advancement of humanity, and who instead 'reduce socialists to geopolitical gamblers' that 'hedge bets on a return that might generate the most anti-imperialist conditions [at home], and reduce workers to mere supervisors of history, bankrupt of any agency to steer and change its course' (Bassi, 2010, p.130). At its most impassioned, *Indefensible* is a rallying cry against the lethal consequences.

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## The Art of Xenofon Kavvadias: List of artwork and descriptions

### Xenofon Kavvadias

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#### Image no 1:



"*Holocauston*" it is a detail of a charred book that is illegal in the UK.

These books have been burned after the show at 10 Vyner Street in 2011, as they cannot legally exist outside conceptual the space Kavvadia created specifically for the show.

It is part of the work "*The law is not less conceptual than fine art*", 2011.

#### Image no 2:



"*Katharsis, detail*" - ash from the charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 2014.

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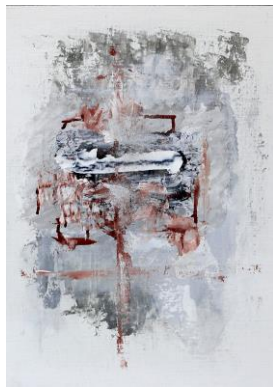
**Image no 3:**



*"Holocauston"* it is detail of a charred book that is illegal in the UK.

These books have been burned after the show at 10 Vyner Street in 2011, as they cannot legally exist outside conceptual the space Kavvadia created specifically for the show.

**Image no 4:**



*I am the doctor. I doctor what gets printed.*

*It may be your world, but I have my say*

*So what? Its history gets reinvented.*

*Even my club foot feels fake today.*

This is an Epigram no 31 from the book *War Primer* by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work *"On War Primer"* 2014. This painting has been inspired from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 5:**



*15 Gang Law is something I can understand.  
With man-eaters I've excellent relations.  
I've had the killers feeding from my hand.  
I am the man to save civilization*

This is an Epigram no 15 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work "On War Primer" 2014. This painting has been inspired from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 6:**



*May he die like a dog. That's my last wish.  
He was the arch-enemy. Believe me, I speak true.  
And I am free to speak: Where I am now  
Only the Loire and one lone cricket know.*

It is an Epigram no 10 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work "On War Primer" 2014. This painting has been inspired

from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 7:**



*"Holocauston"* it is detail of a charred book that is illegal in the UK.

These books have been burned after the show at 10 Vyner Street in 2011, as they cannot legally exist outside conceptual the space Kavvadias created specifically for the show.

**Image no 8:**



*A cloud of smoke told us that they were here  
They are the sons of fire, not of the light  
They came from where? They came out of the darkness.  
Where did they go? Into eternal night.*

It is an Epigram no 21 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work "*On War Primer*" 2014. This painting has been inspired from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 9:**



*It is true he was their enemy's enemy  
Yet one thing they could not forgive, that he  
Was the enemy to his own government  
Lock up the rebel. Throw away the key*

It is an Epigram no 13 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work "On War Primer" 2014. This painting has been inspired from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 10:**



*There was a time of underneath and over  
When mankind was master of the air. And so  
While some were flying high, the rest took cover  
Which didn't stop them dying below.*

It is an Epigram no 21 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work "On War Primer" 2014. This painting has been inspired

from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 11:**



*"Holocauston"* it is detail of a charred book that is illegal in the UK.

These books have been burned after the show at 10 Vyner Street in 2011, as they cannot legally exist outside conceptual the space Kavvadias created specifically for the show.

**Image no 12:**

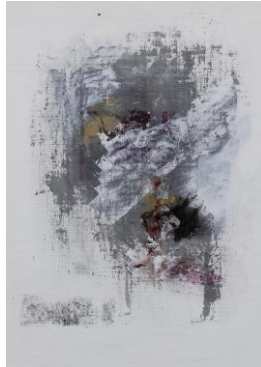


*It is we who fly above the city, woman  
Now trembling for your children. From up here  
We've fixed our sights on you and them as targets.  
If you ask why, the answer is: from fear*

It is an Epigram no 16 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work *"On War Primer"* 2014. This painting has been inspired

from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 13:**



*And so we put him against a wall:  
A mother's son, a man like we had been  
And shot him dead. And then to show you all  
What came of him, we photographed the scene.*

It is an Epigram no 12 from the book War Primer by Bertolt Brecht. It is part of the work "On War Primer" 2014. This painting has been inspired from photographs that depict British war crimes and state terrorism the last 100 years.

**Image no 14:**



*"Katharsis, detail"* - ash from charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 2014.



**Image no 15:**



*"Katharsis 34th week"* - ash from charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 2014.

**Image no 16:**



*"Katharsis 4th week, detail"* - ash from charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 2014.

**Image no 17:**



*"Holocauston"* it is a detail of a charred book that is illegal in the UK.

These books have been burned after the show at 10 Vyner Street in 2011, as they cannot legally exist outside conceptual the space Kavvadias created specifically for the show.

**Image no 18:**



*"Katharsis, detail"* - ash from charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 201

**Image no 19:**



*"Katharsis, detail"* - ash from charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 2014.

**Image no 20:**



*"Katharsis 3rd week"* - ash from charred books in Paolo Veronese handmade Murano glass 2014.

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*Feminist Dissent* is an online peer-reviewed journal hosted at the University of Warwick, UK and edited by an Editorial Collective consisting of academics, writers, artists and activists. It invites submissions of original and unpublished work that reflect the aims and principles of the journal. We publish full-length academic articles, shorter Voices of Dissent pieces and book and film reviews in each issue. We also invite proposals for special issues from potential editors.

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Rebecca Durand at [rbdurand@hotmail.com](mailto:rbdurand@hotmail.com)

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