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## **Discourses of Extremism and British Values: The Politics of the Trojan Horse**

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### **Abstract**

This article critically investigates the production of party-political discourses of “extremism” and “British values” in response to the so-called “Trojan Horse affair”. This “affair”, which first hit UK media headlines in 2014, relates to allegations of an organised Islamic plot aiming to infiltrate schools in Birmingham to radicalise schoolchildren. Though these allegations remain unproven, they have been used to justify changes in educational policies, practices and government guidance for schools, registered childcare providers, universities and colleges in the UK. This article explores the context that has shaped party-political discourses of “extremism” and “British values” employed in connection with the Trojan Horse affair. It investigates political agendas these discourses have been tied to and considers the impact they have had.

### **Keywords**

British values; extremism; party-political discourses; school governance; radicalisation; representations of Muslims

The tale of the Trojan Horse – the story of a large, hollow wooden horse Greek soldiers used to secretly enter and destroy the ancient walled city of Troy from within – is one of the most well-known stories in ancient Greek mythology. In 2014, the metaphor of the Trojan Horse was very publicly associated with the alleged infiltration of schools in Birmingham and their governing bodies by radical Muslims – which became widely referred to as “Operation Trojan Horse” or the “Trojan Horse affair”. This “affair” attracted considerable media attention in Britain. It reignited long-standing political debates about notions of “Islamist extremism” and the influence of Muslim groups on schools and wider British society and triggered a range of changes in educational policies, practices and government guidance for schools, registered childcare providers, universities and colleges on how to “prevent people from being drawn into terrorism” (HM Government 2015, 3). It prompted leading party-politicians like David Cameron (then UK Prime Minister, Conservative) and Michael Gove (then Secretary of State for Education, Conservative) to call for the promotion of “British values” in schools. Equally, it attracted criticism from parents and teachers, who have argued that party-political debates around the “Trojan Horse affair” have been used as a political football with little regard for children’s educational potential and wellbeing.

There have been a number of scholarly publications that have critically examined the Trojan Horse affair and its handling from a range of different angles. This includes James Arthur’s (2015) study of the effects of neo-liberal educational policies, the academisation project in particular, on the schools involved, Jacqueline Baxter’s (2016) analysis of intensifying media focus on school governors and policy makers, Imran Mogra’s (2016) examination of relevant Ofsted reports, Imran Awan’s (2014a) exploration of the affair’s impact on Muslim communities in Birmingham as well as John Holmwood and Therese O’Toole’s (2018) detailed and comprehensive analysis of events, official reports and legal cases linked to the Trojan Horse affair. Another relevant publication that is particularly noteworthy here is Chris Allen’s (2014)

short piece in *Discover Society*. Drawing on themes and theories he develops in his seminal book on *Islamophobia* (2010), Allen understands media portrayals and political interventions into the Trojan Horse affair as examples of the problematisation of Muslims and Islam in public and political spaces in the UK.

My article builds on this literature, but focuses on a critical analysis of how notions of “extremism” and “British values” have been discursively constructed in party-political debates associated with the Trojan Horse affair. The focal points of my analysis are a parliamentary debate that took place in the House of Commons on June 9, 2014 on the topic of “Birmingham schools” (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 264-285) and an article written by David Cameron published in the *Mail on Sunday* on June 15, 2014 (Cameron 2014). My analysis is based on Fairclough’s and Wodak’s notion of discourse as “language use in speech and writing - as a form of ‘social practice’ ” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258). According to Fairclough and Wodak,

discourse is socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. [...] Discursive practices may have major ideological effects: that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations [...] through the ways in which they represent things and position people. [...] Both the ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them are often unclear to people. (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258)

This understanding of discourse is informed by “the work of Michel Foucault (especially Foucault 1978, 1995), who conceptualized discourse as the defining aspect of social relations and who, consequently, saw the study of discourse as central to the study of how society is constituted in social interaction” (Hjelm 2011, 136). My analysis of discourses employed in this context draws on a wide spectrum of historical, socio-political and legal background information in order to expose and question structures of representation. In particular, it focuses on the use of party-political discourses associating the schools involved with “Islamic extremism” and a rejection of “British values”, and critically investigates the aims and impact of these discourses within their broader socio-cultural context. It will question the extent to which these discourses have done justice to the lived realities of Muslims in the UK or helped to identify and address the issues at stake, including genuine concerns about the governance of the schools involved. I will argue that these discourses have constructed over-simplified representations of complex realities that have had “a detrimental effect on the quality of political decision-making, community relations, and public debate” (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 19). As such, discourses employed in the context of the “Trojan Horse Affair” can be regarded as examples of representations of Muslims that are

[f]ar from being accurate or neutral [...] are almost always tied to an agenda that simultaneously announces its desire to “engage” with them while at the same time forcing debate into such contorted and tenuous channels that make the meaningful flow of crosscultural discussion almost impossible. (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 2)

In order to set the scene, I will begin by briefly outlining some contextual information about the “Trojan Horse Plot” in Birmingham and about the way in which public debates around this alleged “plot” or “affair” have unfolded in the media since March 2014.

### *The context*

As the timing of events linked to the “Trojan Horse affair” and the way in which debates around this controversy were staged are of considerable significance to the development of associated discourses, it is important to consider the sequence of events as they unfolded. In November 2013, a partial and barely readable photocopy of a typed letter was passed on to Birmingham City Council. The sender claimed to have found this anonymous, undated letter when “clearing my bosses files” (anon. cited in Clarke 2014, 19). This letter, which was addressed to an unnamed person in Bradford, referred to an alleged plot by Muslim fundamentalists aiming to destabilise and take over schools in Bradford by ‘parachuting in’ Muslim governors, orchestrating false allegations against staff, removing unwanted head teachers and ensuring schools are run on Islamic principles. The letter referred to this as “Operation Trojan Horse” and claimed that this operation had already “been carefully thought through and [...] tried and tested within Birmingham” (cited in Clarke 2014, 20). Birmingham City Council contacted West Midlands Police, who then passed the letter on to the Department for Education via the Home Office. In January and February 2014, an ‘unknown hand’ circulated the letter more widely to a number of head teachers in Birmingham, who then passed it on to union representatives, who then contacted the Department for Education (again). “Media reporting began at the end of February” (Clarke 2014, 7), when the letter was “leaked” to *The Sunday Times* and other media. From the beginning of March, the “Trojan Horse plot” started to dominate national headlines and became the eye of a “media storm” around education, extremism, radicalisation and school governance (Baxter 2016), “creating one of the most serious scandals the City [of Birmingham] has faced in recent times” (Mogra 2016). By April it became clear that the “Trojan Horse plot” was being separately investigated by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, which describes itself as “independent and impartial” and reports directly to parliament; Ofsted 2016), the Department for Education, Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Police. It became apparent that Ofsted was inspecting 21 schools prompted by the allegations made in the “Trojan Horse” letter, with Ofsted chief Michael Wilshaw personally taking charge of the investigation. The Department for Education (led by Michael Gove) appointed Peter Clarke, the former head of the anti-terrorism branch of the London Metropolitan Police, to lead their inquiry into Birmingham schools.

By the end of April, media (including *BBC News*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*) reported that the “Trojan Horse” letter was “now widely assumed to be a forgery, and appear[ed] to have been written to alarm people” (Cook 2014a; see also: Adams 2014b; Allen 2014; Garner 2014; Kennedy, *et al.* 2014). It has since also been referred to as the “Trojan Hoax” letter. There were even suggestions that it had actually been written by members of a local Evangelical Christian community (Clarke 2014, 17) and that “the plot is ostensibly a Christian extremist one, as opposed to an ‘Islamist’ one” aiming to “launch a war-like campaign against Birmingham schools” (Coolness of Hind 2014).

After a number of leaks to the press, the Ofsted inspection reports for all 21 schools were fully published by June 9, 2014. Three of the inspected schools were judged to be “good” or “outstanding”, twelve were found to “require improvement” and six were classed as “inadequate” and subjected to “special measures” (*BBC News* 2014f), bearing in mind that one of these schools had already been placed in special measures before this inspection. According to the 2005 Education Act, schools in England and Wales are made subject to “special measures”, when the Chief Inspector comes to the conclusion that

- (a) the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and
- (b) the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. (Education Act 2005. 44 [1])

Schools judged to be in this category receive external support and advice, though the head teacher, senior managers and teaching staff can potentially be dismissed and school governors replaced by an appointed executive committee. Schools put into special measures are also subjected to frequent further inspections to monitor their progress, and if these inspections find no evidence of improvement, the school can potentially be closed (Ofsted 2015a).

Though none of the schools concerned were faith schools, all of them had a majority Muslim student population and were located in socio-economically deprived areas of the city of Birmingham (Arthur 2015, 318). A considerable amount of media attention was centred on Park View, one of five schools that underwent a full re-inspection in response to the allegations of the “Trojan Horse” letter and whose Ofsted ratings were changed significantly as a result. Park View had been a secondary school with an exceptionally high academic reputation, 94% Muslim students and a very high percentage of students (60%) receiving free school meals. In 2012, Park View Business & Enterprise School had become the first school in the country to achieve an “outstanding” rating according to the “new” Ofsted criteria - achieving top grades in all areas. In 2012 Ofsted chief Wilshaw had made a personal visit to the school. Indeed Park View had used a photograph of this visit to advertise their school in their school brochure, quoting Wilshaw as saying “Park View is doing fantastically well” (cited in Park View Educational Trust 2014). In April 2012, Park View Business & Enterprise School became an academy: Park View Academy of Mathematics and Science (part of the Park View Trust). As recently as January 2013, it had been celebrated in the press for its “journey from failing to success and outstanding status” (Garner 2013). However, its chairman of governors had been explicitly named in the Trojan Horse letter. It became apparent that Park View had been inspected twice in March 2014: in the first week of March and again, two weeks later. The first inspection “made a series of relatively minor recommendations, and criticised the school's leadership” (Adams 2014c). However, as a result of the second, abruptly widened inspection on March 17 and 18, 2014 Park View’s Ofsted rating for its leadership and safety of pupils dropped to “inadequate” (though the quality of teaching and students’ academic achievements were rated as “good”) and all three schools from the Park View Educational Trust (Park View Academy, Nansen Primary School, Golden Hillock School) - were placed in “special measures” (*BBC News* 2014d; Ofsted 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e).

A number of education experts and members of the Muslim Council in Britain and Islamic Human Rights Commission questioned the integrity and impartiality of the Ofsted inspection process and publically expressed this critique in a letter published in *The Guardian*:

First-hand accounts of the Ofsted inspections [...] suggest that inspectors were poorly prepared and had an agenda that calls into question Ofsted's claim to be objective and professional in its appraisal of standards in schools serving predominantly Muslim pupils.

Numerous sensationalised leaks have reinforced the perception of a pre-set agenda. It is beyond belief that schools which were judged less than a year ago to be “outstanding” are now widely reported as “inadequate”, despite having the same curriculum, the same students, the same leadership team and the same governing body. In at least one instance, these conflicting judgments were made by the same lead inspector. This has damaged not only the reputation of the schools but the integrity of the inspections process. (Brighouse, *et al.* 2014)

*BBC News* reported that Ofsted chief Wilshaw claimed that Ofsted reports had found that "a culture of fear and intimidation" had emerged in some of the inspected Birmingham schools implemented in the context of the Trojan Horse affair and that Head teachers had been "marginalised or forced out of their jobs" (*BBC News* 2014a). According to *BBC News*, Wilshaw also claimed that the findings of these school inspections had convinced Michael Gove to introduce no-notice Ofsted inspections in future – hinting at disagreements with Gove, who apparently had opposed such an approach so far.

#### *Party-political discourses of “extremism” and “British values”*

On June 4, 2014, shortly before the publication of all the Ofsted inspection reports, media widely reported that there had been a fall-out between Theresa May, who was the Home Secretary at the time, and the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, in relation to the handling of the “Trojan Horse” affair. It was reported that a letter from May to Gove had been leaked to the press indicating that May had argued that “the allegations relating to schools in Birmingham raise serious questions about the quality of school governance and oversight arrangements” (cited in *BBC News* 2014b), and that Gove believed the Home Office did not react strongly enough to extremism generally (Cook 2014b). May’s leaked letter criticised Gove for not acting on information about related allegations that had been passed on to the Department for Education in 2010, and felt that stricter responses were needed from the Department for Education “to tackle the problem effectively” (May 2014). *BBC News* claimed that “Those around Mr Gove pointed out it was his view that for over a generation there had been a reluctance in Whitehall to confront extremism unless it developed into terrorism” (*BBC News* 2014b). When Prime Minister Cameron got involved to resolve the row, one of May’s special aids stepped down and Gove publically apologised (*BBC News* 2014c). Retrospectively, it could be argued that this row between Gove and May might have been a factor that would contribute to Gove’s loss of his position as Secretary of Education in the cabinet reshuffle in July 2014.

On the day of the publication of the Ofsted reports, a parliamentary debate took place in the House of Commons (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 264-285) following a statement by Education Secretary Michael Gove on the topic of “Birmingham schools”. Gove and May took this opportunity to publically settle their differences, with Gove declaring, “I totally agree with the Home Secretary and I think her leadership on counter-extremism has been exemplary” (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 284).

It should be noted that this debate was preceded by a debate on the topic of “Extremism” (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 245-263) in response to an “urgent question” posed by Labour MP Yvette Cooper (then Shadow Home Secretary) “To ask the Home Secretary to make a statement on her conduct regarding the Government’s action on preventing extremism” (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 245). In her responding statement, Theresa May made reference to the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby and the role of both, violent and non-violent extremism, in the counter-terrorism Prevent strategy. In the debate prompted by May’s statement, David Ward, Liberal Democrat MP for Bradford East, expressed concerns

about some of the language that has been used today. We are here to listen to statements which, I remind the House, have been prompted by what has been deemed to be the inappropriate behaviour of governors in some schools in Birmingham, yet the Home Secretary’s statement began with a reference to Lee Rigby. Is it right to use the same word, “extremism”, to cover both forms of activity, and, if so, are we going to replace the term “devout Catholics” with “extremist Catholics”, or change the term “committed Christians” to “extremist Christians”? How can we have a sense of proportion if we are using the same word to cover such a vast range of behaviour? (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 255)

The choice of language used in this and related debates is indeed significant. The fact that the parliamentary discussion on the “Birmingham schools” in the House of Commons on June 9, 2014 was preceded by a debate on “Extremism” - with repeated references to the Prevent anti-terrorism strategy and the brutal murder of Lee Rigby, including references in both May’s initial and concluding statements for this debate (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 245 & 264) - meant that the debate on the “Trojan Horse” allegations relating to Birmingham schools was effectively framed by associations with terrorism and murder. As MP Ward noted, the broader use of the term “extremism” in this context is of great significance. As Theresa May pointed out in her concluding statement to the parliamentary debate on “Extremism”, imminently before Michael Gove’s statement about Birmingham schools:

We have changed Prevent so that it deals not just with violent extremism but with non-violent extremism and extremism in all forms. I mentioned earlier that there were two terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom last year. I have referred to one of them, which was the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby. We also saw a far right extremist murder Mohammed Saleem. We must never forget that extremism can take many forms. (May cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 262-263)

While this concept of “non-violent” extremism had been introduced three years earlier in the context of the 2011 *Prevent Strategy* as “ideas that are [...] part of a terrorist ideology” (Home Office 2011, 6), the use of this concept in the context of this debate indicated that it was in the process of firmly establishing itself within Conservative party-political discourse. This rather vague concept can potentially be applied to a very wide range of different contexts and examples, but is equally branded by association with violent extremism. As such, “the term ‘extremism’ is not value neutral and certainly open to misinterpretation” (Arthur 2015, 314).

The term “extremism” (violent and non-violent) also cropped up frequently in the context of the parliamentary debate on “Birmingham schools” discussing the findings of the Ofsted inspection reports (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 264-285), which immediately followed the debate on “Extremism”. The term “extremism” (including variations of it, such as “extreme” or “extremist”) was mentioned 56 times in discourses employed in this debate, predominantly (i.e. 75%) by members of the Conservative Party. The frequent use of the term “extremism” in this context is remarkable, given that Gove himself acknowledged that “the original Trojan horse letter [...] contained a number of facts and allegations that proved to be unfounded” (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 281) and, as Birmingham MP Shabana Mahmood (Labour) pointed out:

It is clear from the reports published today that the central charge that there has been an organised plot to import extremism that has radicalised children in Birmingham has not been met. (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 273)

However, Michael Gove alone used the term “extremism” 32 times in his contributions to this debate, talking, for example, about the “risks” and “dangers” of extremism and “extremist Islamist ideology” (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 265, 270 & 283). He argued that the Ofsted reports showed that children in some of the inspected schools had not been adequately safeguarded or protected against extremism. Gove announced a new focus on extremism in Ofsted inspections:

Ofsted now trains inspectors to understand and counter extremist Islamist ideology, and inspections of schools at risk, like those in Birmingham, are carried out by the most senior inspectors. (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 265)

Another, equally vague, frequently featured concept was that of “British values”, which was mentioned 17 times in the course of the parliamentary debate on “Birmingham schools”. Gove alone used it seven times in the context of the need to “respect” and “promote” British values (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 266, 269, 278 & 284) and his promise that “the promotion of British values [will be put] at the heart of what every school has to deliver for children” (cited in *Hansard* June 9, 2014, 266). While he did not provide a clear definition of the meaning of “British values” in the context of this particular debate – apart from contrasting it with “extremism” –, Gove indicated that a “statement of British values” would be issued shortly (*Hansard* June 9, 2014, 274).

The following day, Prime Minister David Cameron, speaking in Sweden after a summit with other EU leaders, publically laid out his interpretation of the concept of “British values” as including “freedom, tolerance, respect for the rule of law, belief in



personal and social responsibility and respect for British institutions” (cited in *BBC News* 2014e). This definition very much resonated with the 2011 Prevent Strategy, where “British values” are defined as “democracy, rule of law, equality of opportunity, freedom of speech and the rights of all men and women to live free from persecution of any kind” (Home Office 2011, 34). Cameron claimed that plans for schools to promote “British values” were likely to have the “overwhelming support” of people in the UK and said he hoped that Gove's proposals for England would be “inculcated into the curriculum in any school in Britain” (cited in *BBC News* 2014e). A few days later, an article written by Cameron marking the 799<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Magna Carta was published in the *Mail on Sunday* (Cameron 2014) which reiterated his definition of British values, adding

To me they’re as British as the Union Flag, as football as fish and chips. Of course, people will say that these values are vital to other people in other countries. And, of course, they’re right. But what sets Britain apart are the traditions and history that anchors them and allows them to continue to flourish and develop. (Cameron 2014)

He also set out a range of reasons why “we need to be far more muscular in promoting British values and the institutions that uphold them” (Cameron 2014), including “pride and patriotism” as well as economic reasons, arguing that:

The Western model of combining vibrant democracy with free enterprise has delivered great progress and prosperity, but it faces a challenge from more authoritarian models of economic development, like in Russia. (Cameron 2014)

Cameron also gave social reasons, claiming that “Our values have a vital role to play in uniting us” (Cameron 2014).

This discourse of extremism and British values had strong resonance with a speech Cameron gave at the Munich Security Conference in 2011, where he described the origins of terrorist attacks in the UK as “the existence of an ideology, Islamist extremism”. Though he clarified that “the ideology of extremism is the problem; Islam emphatically is not”, Cameron argued that “an important reason so many young Muslims are drawn to it comes down to a question of identity”, and blamed “the doctrine of state multiculturalism” for failing to provide “a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong” (Cameron 2011).

*The findings of the investigation reports for Birmingham City Council  
and the Department for Education*

On July 18, 2014, Ian Kershaw’s independent Investigation Report to the Leader to Birmingham City Council was published (Kershaw, 2014). In light of Kershaw’s report, Birmingham City Council’s Trojan Horse Review Group came to the conclusion that there had been a “credible exposition of inappropriate activity by a small number of governors in a small number of schools in East Birmingham [... but there was...] little evidence of a systematic plot and no evidence of a conspiracy to promote radicalisation or violent extremism” (Trojan Horse Review Group 2014, 6).

However, this review group criticised “the lazy conflation – frequently characterised in the national media in recent months – of what Ofsted have termed issues around ‘a narrow faith based ideology’ and questions of radicalisation, extremism or terrorism” (Trojan Horse Review Group 2014, 13).

Four days later Peter Clarke’s report for the Department of Education was published which came to similar conclusions, stating that there “is ample evidence that individuals who hold or have held key positions in the schools have a shared ideological basis to their faith” (Clarke 2014, 11). Clarke also argued that he

neither specifically looked for nor found evidence of terrorism, radicalisation or violent extremism in the schools of concern in Birmingham. However, [...] I found clear evidence that there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and governing bodies, who espouse, endorse or fail to challenge extremist views. (Clarke 2014, 12)

Clarke made clear that he was using the term “extremism” in its wider sense – “by reference to the definition of extremism in the Prevent strand of the Government’s counter terrorist strategy [...] and the spectrum of extremism described by the Prime Minister in his Munich speech in February 2011” (Clarke 2014, 12). This indicates the significance and implications of a wider definition of this concept.

Clarke’s report also, at least partially, blamed “the process that allowed the Park View Educational Trust to quickly move from a single school to multi-academy sponsor status with responsibility for three schools” (Clarke 2014, 10). He argued that this process “happened too quickly and without suitable systems for holding the new academies accountable for financial and management issues” (Clarke 2014, 12). The process of academisation involves schools becoming “publically funded independent schools [...which...] get funding direct from the government, not the local council [...and are...] run by an academy trust which employs the staff” (*gov.uk*, 2016). Academies can be described as “independent” in the sense that they have a degree of financial and curricular independence along with freedom from Local Authority control (Baxter 2014). The academisation project was initially introduced under the New Labour government, but was also wholeheartedly embraced and promoted by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2015) and Conservative governments elected in 2015 and 2017. However, the academisation project has fiercely been criticised, as it requires an increased level of involvement from governors and is linked to a loss of support and scrutiny from Local Authorities. James Arthur, Professor of Education and Civic Engagement at the University of Birmingham, argues that in the case of the Trojan Horse affair, the implications of processes of academisation made an important contribution to the “failure of some mechanisms of school leadership and governance” (Arthur 2015, 311). He concludes that

a deliberate government policy of weakening the power of local authorities in favour of the de-regulation of schools together with unintentionally encouraging culturally conservative Muslim leaders with entrepreneurial values effectively to run public schools as private institutions [...] have contributed much to the malpractice found and to the suspicions of “extremism” attributed to the governor leaders of these schools by the press and others. (Arthur 2015, 312)

### *Responses from schools and Muslim communities in Birmingham*

The publication of the Ofsted inspection reports and the language used in associated party-political debates provoked strong reactions from school leaders, parents and local communities. Leaders of Park View Academy firmly rejected the claims made in the new Ofsted reports, and there were also outraged responses by parents and teachers from the schools involved, raising doubts about the impartiality of the Ofsted reports. In an open letter to Michael Gove and Michael Wilshaw, the vice-chair of Park View Educational Trust, the academy trust at the centre of the "Trojan Horse" row accused the government of "deliberately misrepresenting" the schools involved. David Hughes claimed that inspectors had followed their "own agendas" and argued that Muslims in Birmingham felt "betrayed" (*BBC News* 2014h). The Muslim Council of Britain expressed concerns that that the Ofsted reports were "conflating conservative Muslim practices to a supposed ideology and agenda to Islamise secular schools" (cited in Arthur 2015, 318).

In light of the findings of the Ofsted reports, parents at Park View Academy voted in favour of the resignation of their school's governors at a public meeting (*BBC News*, 2014g). However, in critique of the handling of the "Trojan Horse" affair by Ofsted and the Department for Education, the campaign "Putting Birmingham School Kids First" was formed by parents, teachers, members of Muslim Associations and local politicians. In their official statement published in *The Guardian*, members of this campaign group expressed concerns not only about the governance of the schools concerned, but also about the impact of the way the affair had been handled, in particular with regard to the impact of party-political discourses employed:

The Putting Birmingham School Kids First campaign [...] aims to, firstly, ensure any issues of governance within Birmingham schools are fixed, and fixed fast. Secondly, to challenge the false and divisive allegation that this is a problem of systematic radicalisation, extremism or terrorism. The central allegation, that there was an organised plot to radicalise schoolchildren in a handful of Birmingham schools, remains unproven. What the Ofsted reports show is some governance issues in some schools. Communities across Birmingham now believe that their children's educational potential and wellbeing is being threatened by politicians, who wish to be seen as "tough" on Muslims. The sensationalist references to extremism and national security have been deeply hurtful and damaging. Most importantly, they could prevent us finding the solutions we need to help schoolchildren in Birmingham. (Caldwell *et al.* 2014)

Speaking at a public meeting of this campaign group, Birmingham Labour MP Shabana Mahmood expressed concerns that pupils from schools in Birmingham that were implicated in the Trojan Horse Affair might face difficulties later in life, for example when applying to universities or colleges, due to stigma attached to the schools they attended (Adams 2014a).

Concerns around the negative and lasting impact of the association of the Trojan Horse affair and associated schools and communities with rather one-dimensional perceptions of Islam were also reflected in the findings of Imran Awan's (2014a) study based on interviews with of a cross section of members of Muslim

communities in Birmingham. Awan, Deputy Director of the Centre for Applied Criminology at Birmingham City University, found

that many participants felt the counter-terrorism and extremism discussion around Trojan Horse had a negative impact on Muslim communities and would damage community cohesion and diversity within Birmingham. Many of the Muslim communities I spoke to were angry at being labelled as “extremists”. 95 per cent expressed their frustration at why they were being described as extremists. (Awan 2014a, 39)

Equally, in her assessment of the impact of the Trojan Horse affair, Jacqueline Baxter, Senior Lecturer in Public Policy and Management at the Open University, comes to the conclusion that

The impact of these high-profile investigations on the communities in which they are situated has had a ripple effect, colouring the relationship between Muslim communities and the British state. Relationships built up over years were compromised by suspicion and doubt as schools that had previously been lionised were downgraded. (Baxter 2016, 156)

The use of the phrase “Trojan Horse” in the context of the alleged infiltration of Birmingham schools to covertly impose conservative Muslim views has also been criticised and concerns were raised about the negative impact of associations with this phrase on the improvement of the schools concerned. These concerns are reflected in Mike Tomlinson’s decision to ban references to the phrase “Trojan Horse” in connection with Birmingham schools amongst members of his department, when he was appointed as Birmingham’s education commissioner in the wake of the controversy (Coughlan 2016a).

### *Further developments*

Party-political discourses employed as part of the debates about the Trojan Horse affair in 2014 have had a long-term impact, in spite of the fact that the central allegation - that there was an organised plot to radicalise schoolchildren - remains unproven. They played a significant role in firmly embedding concepts of “non-violent extremism” and “fundamental British values” in political, legal and educational discourse. Prompted by debates around the Trojan Horse affair, the need to not just respect, but promote “fundamental British values” as part of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to have “a clear strategy for embedding these values and show how their work with pupils has been effective in doing so” has since (i.e. in November 2014) been made an explicit requirement for schools (Department for Education 2014) and relevant Ofsted inspection guidance has been issued and implemented. The Department for Education defines “fundamental British values” in this guidance as “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (Department for Education 2014, 5). This

definition is not only very closely based on David Cameron's definition, but also grounded in the use of this term in the context of the 2011 Prevent Strategy (Home Office 2011, 34).

Educational experts criticised the government's handling of the Trojan Horse affair on a range of different levels. Apart from doubts expressed about the impartiality of the Ofsted inspections (Brighouse, *et al.* 2014), concerns were raised in relation to the impact of party-political discourses of "extremism" and "British values". As James Arthur, Professor of Education and Civic Engagement at the University of Birmingham, argues that "The introduction of 'British values' has created a degree of confusion between different senses or interpretations of the phrase" (Arthur 2015, 322).

At the conference of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) in March 2015, a motion was passed which criticised the government's drive to promote British values in school as a "knee-jerk national policy 'solution' to localised governance issues" which risked "becoming the source of wider conflict rather than a means of resolving it" (Weale 2015). Headteacher Robin Bevan, the ATL delegate who proposed this motion, argued that the government's response to governance issues in a small number of schools was "headline-grabbing act of political posturing" and warned that what constitutes a core British value can change over time, and raised concerns at how these ideas may be interpreted by a "future right-wing government, or a partner in that government" (cited in Weale 2015). Bevan argued that:

If these fundamental British values change with time, then they are hardly fundamental. And let's face it, they have changed with time. We now allow women to vote. We no longer chemically castrate homosexuals. And if you think that's way in the past, it wasn't until the 1990s that marital rape was made a criminal offence. (cited in Weale 2015)

Cameron's assumption that multiculturalism had failed to provide young Muslims with a British identity (Cameron 2011) has been challenged by Alita Nandi and Lucinda Platt's ESRC funded longitudinal study on *Britishness and Identity Assimilation among the UK's Minority and Majority ethnic groups*. This study, which was completed before the Trojan Horse affair hit the headlines, found that ethnic and religious minorities in Britain are actually more likely to identify themselves with "Britishness", with Muslim groups identifying most strongly with British identity (Nandi and Platt 2014). Commenting on the study's findings, Lucinda Platt, Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics, states:

Our research shows that the multicultural project does not seem to have created the problems some have claimed. The second generation is moving towards greater "assimilation" in identity with strengthening endorsement of British identity; and this appears to be especially the case for British Muslim minorities. (cited in Institute for Social and Economic Research 2014)

In the aftermath of the Trojan Horse affair, the concept of "non-violent extremism" continued to gain further prominence in legislation. The *Prevent Duty Guidance*, for instance, which relates to statutory guidance issued under section 29 of the 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, places a duty on local authorities,

schools, registered childcare providers, universities and colleges “to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism” (HM Government 2015, 14). This guidance puts great emphasis on the concept of “non-violent extremism”, stating that “being drawn into terrorism includes not just violent extremism but also non-violent extremism” (HM Government 2015, 14). It defines “non-violent extremism” 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 [...as well as...] calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas, [...] which is not accompanied by violence” (HM Government 2015, 36) but “can create an atmosphere conducive to terrorism and can popularise views which terrorists can exploit” (HM Government 2015, 6). This guidance makes explicit reference to the duty of schools to prevent terrorism through the promotion of “British values” in their teaching (HM Government 2015, 13), though this concept is now frequently linked to the adjective “fundamental” (i.e. “fundamental British values”). As such, the language used in this guidance very much continues to reflect a conflation of discourses of terrorism, non-violent and violent extremism, contrasting them with discourses of “British values” in Conservative party-political discourses associated with the Trojan Horse affair in 2014.

However, in March 2016, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) annual conference “voted to support a motion calling on the government to withdraw the Prevent strategy for schools and to develop an alternative approach to safeguarding”. Supporters of this motion regarded the *Prevent Duty Guidance* for schools as counter-productive, given that “it ‘encouraged a climate of overreaction’ in which pupils were mistakenly reported and the police called and that this policy was stopping teachers from discussing ‘challenging ideas’ with their pupils” (Coughlan 2016b). Commenting on the motion, Christine Blower, General Secretary of the NUT, stated:

The NUT believes there is a moral obligation on schools and teachers to protect children and young people against extremism of whatever nature. The Union does, however, have some concerns regarding aspects of the current Prevent Strategy. [...] Schools’ best contribution to countering any behaviour that could be a problem is by encouraging discussion. Some aspects of Prevent inhibit this and it is for this reason that we need a review of the strategy to find the right, and best way to protect children and young people. (cited in National Union of Teachers 2016)

The government’s academisation project, and in particular government plans to convert every school in England into an academy (which have since been abandoned) also faced strong opposition from teachers’ unions, with the NUT describing it as a “risky experiment” (cited in Adams 2016).

Disciplinary proceedings conducted by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), an executive agency of the Department for Education, against the teachers implicated in the Trojan Horse affair went on for nearly three years. However, they were discontinued in 2017 when it was concluded that it was impossible for the teachers to receive a fair trial (NCTL 2017, 5). This was related to a number of factors, including the revelation that the NCTL had disclosed some documents to the lawyers acting on behalf of the NCTL, but not to those defending the teachers (Holmwood and O’Toole 2018, vi & 202). Concerns were also raised about the length of the

proceedings and about adverse media coverage (Holmwood and O'Toole 2018, 203). The Professional Conduct Panel concluded the proceedings had to be discontinued as there had "been an abuse of the process which is of such seriousness that it offends the panel's sense of justice and propriety. What has happened has brought the integrity of the process into disrepute" (NCTL 2017, 31).

### *Conclusion*

The Trojan Horse affair certainly highlights issues around the influence of religious conservatism or indeed any other ideology in state schools. It also raises concerns about the governance of schools, about the impact of academisation, the impartiality and credibility of Ofsted inspections as well as the role of the media (Baxter 2016). However, the impact of political discourses employed in this debate around notions of "Islamic extremism" and "British values" in relation to "failing" schools also raises concerns. These discourses have damaged community relations and created an atmosphere of suspicion and fear (Awan 2014b), sending "a strong signal to wider society about the nature of Muslims in Britain" (Qurashi 2016). Although the various investigations of schools in Birmingham did not find any evidence of terrorism, radicalisation or violent extremism, or of a systematic plot, the continuing emergence of discourses of "extremism" and of Muslims at odds with "British values" have had a long-lasting impact. As Chris Allen notes:

One of the worrying trends to have emerged out of my research into Islamophobia over the past decade or so is that, even when stories about Muslims and Islam are proved to be incorrect or just untrue, many in wider society continue to believe them arguing that there is "no smoke without fire". (Allen 2014, n.p.)

Discourses used by politicians like Michael Gove, Theresa May and David Cameron within this debate have employed the metaphor of the Trojan Horse to suggest that "British" values (such as democracy, liberty, mutual respect and tolerance) are under threat from Islamist "extremists" taking over British state-funded schools from within. From their point of view, the metaphor of the Trojan Horse applies to schools like Park View that – on the surface - appear to be high achieving schools, but have allegedly been used as potential "breeding grounds" for future terrorists. However, from the point of view of the parents and local community members involved in the Putting Birmingham School Kids First campaign, the Trojan Horse can be regarded as a metaphor for political rhetoric proclaiming values such as democracy, liberty, mutual respect and tolerance, when this debate has actually been used as a political football, with little regard or respect for the educational potential and wellbeing of the children involved. From this point of view, it could be argued that party-political discourses of "British values" are in danger of undermining the very same values that they claim to promote.

My analysis of party-political discourses employed in the context of the Trojan Horse affair reinforces the continuing relevance of Charlotte Heath-Kelly's (2013) observations in relation to the production of "radicalization" discourse within British counter-terrorism initiatives. Heath-Kelly argues that while "radicalization" discourses constituting "British Muslim communities as problematic 'borderlands'

within known society” (Heath-Kelly 2013, 411) have a long history, they have gained particular significance in recent years since the events of 9/11 and 7/7. She concludes that this

radicalisation discourse should be considered as performative security knowledge - a discourse that actually produces (discursively) the threats it claims to identify for the performance of governance, rather than as reacting to the existence of such risks [..., in order ...] to facilitate the illusion of preventative governance. (Heath-Kelly 2013, 408)

However, this illusion comes at a price. Discourses of “radicalization” and “extremism” have had a damaging impact and have indeed been making it harder to identify and address the “actual” issues at stake. In order to do so, a “greater diversity of voices must be brought to the table, allowed to speak and *be seriously listened to*” (Morey and Yaqin 2011, 216).

It could also be argued that a focus on “extremism” and the prevention of terrorism in political discourses employed in the context of the Trojan Horse affair have been used to distract from issues this affair raises in relation to the problematic impact of neo-liberal education policies, such as the academisation of schools – a project wholeheartedly embraced and promoted by Michael Gove, when Secretary of State for Education. The timing of the debate offers some explanation as to why party-political discourses of “extremism” and “British values” gained such prominence in the context of the Trojan Horse affair, which hit the headlines in the lead-up to the European parliament election in May 2014. About two weeks before the parliamentary debates on “Extremism” and “Birmingham schools” were held, it became apparent that the UK Independence Party (UKIP), a right-wing, Eurosceptic populist party calling for a tougher stance on immigrants, had made considerable gains in the European parliament elections, coming top of the poll. This development was of great concern to members of the Conservative Party, fearing that they would lose votes to UKIP in the upcoming general election in 2015. The debate also coincided with internal power struggles within the Conservative Party, most notably between Gove and May, in anticipation of an imminent cabinet reshuffle, where Gove would be replaced as Secretary of State for Education and moved to the post of Chief Whip. The Trojan Horse affair also appeared in the lead-up to the Scottish independence referendum in September 2014, which very much called notions of “British values” and “British identity” into question. So did the later referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union in June 2016, the same year when Theresa May became Prime Minister of the UK. As Kobena Mercer observes,

identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty. (1990, 43)

However, perhaps this doubt and uncertainty is not as much an issue for British Muslims as it is for the majority population in Britain. As Nandi and Platt’s (2014) study shows, British Muslims are more likely to identify with civic “British” values than the majority population in Britain, who - with the exception of those born in Northern Ireland - tend to prioritise national (i.e. Welsh, Scottish and English) identities.



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