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The Radical Ambitions of Counter-Radicalisation

Abstract:

The ‘Trojan Horse’ scandal laid bare an anxiety at the heart of the British security establishment; an anxiety that brings together questions of identity, values and security within the demand to manage radicalisation. It is an anxiety that, I will argue, reveals a novel conceptualisation of threat that has driven the UK’s security and communities policies within the ‘war on terror’. This conceptualisation emerges within Prevent, the UK’s counter-radicalisation strategy. Yet, I argue, the extensive literature on Prevent has failed to adequately articulate this underlying, core logic. To date, the Prevent literature has effectively demonstrated the ways in which Muslim communities in the UK have been policed through British counter-radicalisation policy. Yet, this analysis struggles to explain the expansion of Prevent into a wider range of ‘extremist’ spaces. In this article, I contend that it is more useful to situate Prevent as a particular conception of power; a logic and an analysis of threat that demands new forms of government intervention. To do so, this article provides a genealogical reading of Prevent, locating it as a radical extension of state security ambitions to intervene early, making explicit a vision of security in which life as a process of becoming is produced as an object of management. The paper draws out the ramifications of this analysis to think through fundamental shifts in the principles and practices of contemporary security aspirations.

On the 27 November 2013, a letter was allegedly discovered in a school in Birmingham. Whilst of questionable authenticity, it contained the details of a plot termed by those involved as ‘Trojan Horse’. The alleged plotters stated, ‘[w]e have an obligation to our children to fulfil our roles and ensure these schools are run on Islamic principals [sic]’ (Clarke, 2014: 109; the letter is reproduced in Clarke, 2014: 107-12). Whilst the original letter was a hoax, it was seen to reflect practices in some Birmingham schools. Upon being leaked to the press, the story prompted numerous headlines and a number of investigations were launched to ascertain whether the activities cited in the letter had credibility. Within a year, schools that had been judged by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) to be ‘outstanding’, and whose commitment to diversity and cohesion had been praised, were now ‘inadequate’ (Holmwood and O’Toole, 2018: 143-166). Sir Michael Wilshaw (2014), Ofsted’s Chief Inspector, argued that within these schools, the ‘active promotion of a narrow set of values and beliefs’ is making children ‘vulnerable to segregation and emotional dislocation from wider society’, with children ‘not being encouraged to develop tolerant attitudes towards all faiths and cultures’ (Wilshaw, 2014). In evidence to the Education Select Committee, Wilshaw further stated: ‘What we did see was the promotion of a culture that would, if that culture continued, have made the children in those schools vulnerable to extremism because of, as I said, the disconnection from wider society and cultural isolation’ (Education Committee, 2014).

Charting the same terrain, the Clarke Report (commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE)) concluded that there had been a ‘co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action’ to introduce an ‘intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos’ into some of the schools in question (Clarke, 2014: 14). The headline conclusions directly link these

identity practices with an increased vulnerability to radicalisation. Clarke articulates three primary concerns deriving from witness evidence given to the investigation. First, a fear that ‘children are learning to be intolerant of difference and diversity’; second, that, ‘young people [...] are having their horizons narrowed. They are not being equipped to flourish in the inevitably diverse environments of further education, the workplace or indeed any environment outside predominantly Muslim communities’; and third, that the ‘very clear evidence that young people are being encouraged to accept unquestioningly a particular hardline strand of Sunni Islam raises concerns about their vulnerability to radicalisation in the future. I have heard evidence to the effect that there are real fears that their current experiences will make it harder for them to question or challenge radical influences’ (Clarke, 2014: 13). The report concludes that, regardless of the motivations of those involved in this coordinated plot, ‘the effect has been to limit the life chances of the young people in their care and to render them more vulnerable to pernicious influences in the future’ (Clarke, 2014: 14).

The ‘scandal’ has received much academic scrutiny. Miah (2017) has argued it represents a racial governmentality that equated specifically Muslim cultural conservatism with extremism, and he details the problematic and hypocritical approach taken by Ofsted inspectors in their investigations. Holmwood and O’Toole (2018) have convincingly argued the affair represents a serious miscarriage of justice, wherein no evidence of extremism or religious conservatism was present, and exemplary teachers and governors were vilified in service to a wider populism that scapegoats Muslim citizens in the UK. The case aptly demonstrates how expressions of communal Muslim identities have come to be understood in an anxious relationship to a perceived ‘British’ identity. Yet, what has still not been remarked upon, and what

is crucial to understanding the contemporary intersections of security and identity policy in the UK, is that what emerges as central within the framing of Trojan Horse is a particular *analysis of threat*: that this distance from ‘British values’, is seen to constitute a failure in safeguarding these children from *becoming* vulnerable to future radicalisation.

The Trojan Horse scandal thus reveals a wider anxiety at the heart of the British security establishment concerning the relationship between security and identity; an anxiety that has informed numerous aspects of government policy over the past twenty years. Yet, this is an anxiety that has not yet been adequately captured by the wider literature on Prevent and British counter-radicalisation strategy. Prevent, one of the four pillars of the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, is the institutional space that seeks to prevent radicalisation, and has come under significant academic scrutiny. To date, the literature has effectively articulated the ways in which Muslim communities in the UK have been policed through Prevent (Kundnani, 2007, 2009, 2014; Thomas, 2012; Kapoor, 2013, Ali, 2020), with arguments linking such practices to histories of counter-insurgency (Sabir, 2017) and drawing parallels with the experiences of Catholic communities in Northern Ireland, through mobilising the concept of ‘suspect communities’ (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Awan, 2012; Mythen *et al.*, 2012; Breen-Smyth, 2014; Abbas 2018). The ground-breaking work of Paddy Hillyard (1993) that underlies much of this analysis, thus imbues it with an intellectual heritage that privileges an understanding of threat in which perceived belonging to a racialised group becomes a vector for suspicion and police harassment.

Yet, while this intellectual heritage enables a powerful and important critique of the policing of Muslim communities in the UK, it nevertheless limits a fuller understanding of British counter-radicalisation policy in two important ways. First, such accounts, rooted in a critique of the legal frameworks of counter-terrorism, have tended to privilege how police powers have been (mis)applied to Muslim communities. In doing so, they tend to overlook the ‘softer’ powers that Prevent mobilises – such as community engagement and cohesion practices – that I will argue form an important, substantive part of Prevent. Second, the literature has largely framed the question of identity as one of a problematisation of Muslimness within the context of counter-terrorism policing. In so doing, it is a line of analysis that struggles to effectively integrate and explain the expansion of Prevent into a wider range of ‘extremist’ spaces. It is clear, from recent Home Office data (see Martin, 2018; Home Office, 2019), that Prevent work has sought to engage with far-right extremism, and that referrals for such cases have increased significantly in recent years. Moreover, recent reporting has shown that Prevent guidance has identified environmental protests as a site of concern, specifically listing non-violent groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace as groups of potential concern regarding vulnerability to violent extremism (see Dodd and Grierson, 2020).

In this article, I therefore contend it is more useful to situate Prevent as a particular conception of power; a logic and an analysis of threat that demands new forms of governmental management. Building on work that highlights the ambitions of early-intervention within British counter-radicalisation policy (see de Goede and Simon, 2013; Heath-Kelly, 2013), I argue the core logic of Prevent is one that reads *all* performances of identity as a function of risk, with some performances identified (and

thus catalogued, trained, surveilled) as potentially risky, and others as coherent with a secure identity – in this context a normalised ‘Britishness’ – and thus not needing attention. It thus leads to the novel problematisations of threat that we see in the ‘Trojan Horse’ case, in which a distance from perceived ‘British values’ is deemed to be a potential danger. And it leads to a problematisation of identities and ideology, bringing together concern regarding ‘Islamism’, far-right ideologies and environmental protest into the same analytical space. It is a logic that carries out an ideological function, producing and policing what ‘British values’ – and their constitutive outside – are understood to be.

To do so, the article draws on Foucauldian and Deleuzian conceptions of power. By assemblage, the article refers to a complex and heterogenous constellation of actions, statements and bodies that come together around a particular function (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987 [2002]: 88). An *assemblage* is a productive entity that enacts a *diagram of power*; it seeks to combine its elements towards a particular mobilisation of power in order to transform, in some fashion, the problematised object or subject to which it aims. Power is understood in terms of forces; a ‘physics of abstract action’ that passes through the mastered no less than the master (Deleuze, 2006: 60). It is not something that can be possessed, rather it is practised. The question is of how it is being practised and to what function it is being mobilised. The diagram is then ‘the map of relations between forces, *a map of destiny*’ (Deleuze, 2006: 32). It represents an abstract way of thinking about how particular functions within a space of social relations might be produced; or in other words, how mobilisations of power might produce particular outcomes in particular ways. The assemblage is, therefore, that which translates this abstract *function* into a series of concrete *practices* that act

towards particular outcomes. Utilising this framework, the article develops two key insights: it articulates *both* the diagram of counter-radicalisation (the abstract function through which the state makes sense of the problematic of radicalisation), *and* the assemblage of concrete counter-radicalisation practices that respond to this abstract problematisation.

In mapping the diagram of Prevent, the article is able to express its core function – that of producing ‘secure’ identities. In charting the assemblage of Prevent, it identifies how this manifests as concrete practices throughout British policy. Doing so situates counter-radicalisation policy at the cutting-edge of the integration of security into the fabrics of society, a dream vision in which contemporary threats can be preclusively managed prior to their emergence, and in which this duty to secure is distributed throughout the social, enabling all citizens to play a proactive role in managing the risks deemed to threaten the state. *Life as process* becomes *the* site to be secured. Moreover, this analysis shows that Prevent cannot merely be seen as a series of interventions into those deemed to be at risk – important though they are – but represents the driving logic that has structured the British state’s engagement with questions of identity across a number of policy domains, including, but not limited to, security and communities policy, and manifesting in important ways in education, healthcare and social care policy. Read as a diagram of power, Prevent can be seen to occupy a more significant role in contemporary British life than is acknowledged in the current literature, representing a broad way of thinking about social relations at the intersection of security and identity.

The argument of the paper proceeds in three parts. First, the paper situates Prevent within the emergent literature on security and temporality, identifying how Prevent radicalises state security ambitions to intervene prior to the actualisation of the threats they seek to mediate. Second, the paper provides a genealogical survey of the interventions produced by the Prevent policy, identifying three key areas in which policymakers have sought to manage the threat of radicalisation, reconceptualising security/identity in British policy as they go. Third, the paper outlines the diagram of power manifested through Prevent. In doing so, it makes explicit a vision of security - visible in the Trojan Horse scandal - in which life as a process of becoming is produced as an object of management, albeit the burdens of this becoming are dramatically uneven, pivoted around the production of 'Britishness'. By way of conclusion, the paper draws out the ramifications of this analysis for our understanding of contemporary security ambitions and the identity/security relationship they produce.

The Radical Temporal Ambition of Prevent

The emergence of a global regime of counter-radicalisation represents the cutting-edge of a raft of security practices that seek to manage threats before they can emerge. In one sense, this is thus a story of early intervention. Yet this does not do it justice. Rather, Prevent represents both a manifestation of, and the motive force behind, a radical security ambition to intervene into life as a process of *becoming*. Concretely, Prevent does not merely seek to stop someone from committing an act of terrorism, it seeks to stop individuals from *becoming* engaged in terrorism in the first place.

Recent years have seen the development of a wide range of scholarship arguing there has been a transformation of the means through which security is produced. Notably emerging in the disciplines of critical security studies (Massumi, 2007; Amoore and de Goede, 2008; de Goede, 2008; Aradau and van Munster, 2007; 2011) and criminology (Zedner, 2007; McCulloch and Pickering, 2009), it is a literature that argues there has been a contemporary shift towards innovative, radical forms of future-oriented security. A distinction drawn by Massumi (2013) between dangers and threats is of pertinence here. Dangers, in this reading, represent an immediacy and localisability of harm. The harm exists in the future, but there is a linear line between the present and the future-harm. Threat, on the other hand, exists in a future space that cannot be related to the present along linear pathways. Thus, a threat retains a categorical uncertainty; it exists only in its potential. Within British counter-terrorism, the danger of the terrorist attack is the ultimate object to be secured. Pursue – another pillar of CONTEST – targets this danger explicitly, utilising a criminal justice framework to apprehend those engaged in terrorism. Prevent operates at the level of threat. The subjects of Prevent’s interventions are categorically uncertain. They exist in the future as potentials. But due to the possibility they might become a danger – and the harm that would entail – they are seen to require some form of action in the present.

In this regard, a central feature of securing *threats* is that they are ‘preclusive’. The term ‘preclusive security’ is used here to clarify an ontological position: that *all* attempts to act upon a threat must necessarily produce a means of making this threat knowable. Threats are not clear and present, they are produced as interpretations of possible futures. There thus exists a ‘temporal gap’, defined as the temporal space that

exists between the present and the envisaged future harm. To secure threat then requires traversing this space (Anderson, 2010; Massumi, 2013). Threats cannot be read as epistemologically given phenomena; processes of securing threats always generate a dangerous or promissory supplement to the present (Anderson, 2010). To secure therefore requires the traversal of this gap. That is, to disclose the future-object of security will always require work, some form of discursive, material or practical means of making-knowable.

While security policy has always concerned acting on the future, what is notable about contemporary framings of security is the desire to go beyond tackling explicit dangers, and beyond probabilistic and calculative engagements with threat. What emerges within the security politics of the ‘war on terror’ is a privileging of imaginative and hypothetical engagements with uncertain futures. Famously, the report into the attacks of 9/11 argued there had been a ‘failure of imagination’ and that the US needed to find ways to bureaucratise imagination within its security practices (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 2004: 344-6). Similarly, in the UK, the National Security Strategy states that whilst the Cold War was ‘largely predictable’, the country ‘no longer face[s] such predictable threats’ (Cabinet Office, 2010: 18). Rather, the UK must ‘scan the horizon, identify possible future developments and prepare for them. We must be prepared for alternative futures based on key trends, building in the adaptability to respond to different possibilities’ (Cabinet Office, 2010: 15). Summing up this contemporary framing, Sir David Omand (who was central in developing CONTEST), writing on the nature of modern intelligence, states, ‘there will be less inductive reasoning, and rather more hypothesis formulation and testing, for example in relation to the *possible intentions* of groups

that may not yet themselves know their potential capabilities' (Omand, 2009: 13, emphasis added).

In this regard, contemporary security practices enact a self-conscious engagement with threats that are conceptualised as uncertain and unknowable. In this article, the term *preclusive* thus signifies both the productive ontological relation between futurity and the securing of threats, and, importantly, the active engagement of security actors with this problematic, and an explicit ambition to intervene *prior* to the emergence of the dangers they seek to manage. When read in this way, what becomes crucial is the intensification of this security aspiration among state security agents in the post-9/11 era. Within this context, Prevent represents the cutting-edge of this ambition; an ambition to move away from calculative and probabilistic mediations with the future towards sustained, preclusive engagements with incalculable, uncertain futures, seeking intervention as prior to the actualisation of threats as possible. The work of de Goede and Simon (2013) and Heath-Kelly (2013) articulates this relationship effectively in relation to the concept of radicalisation, and its temporal manifestation to intervene into subjects deemed both 'risky' and 'at-risk'. The intent here is to situate this temporal-security framing on a wider footing, at the heart of British security and identity politics. It is to recognise that the novel security ambition of Prevent is inextricably a question of its temporal framing; an ambition and a framing that seeks to produce *life – in all its uncertainty – as a process of becoming*; a becoming that can be made *knowable*, and thus intervened into and transformed into a becoming that is deemed more secure. It is this core ambition that underlies the diagram of power manifested in British counter-radicalisation policy, enabling an

assemblage of practices that can identify and intervene into those becomings that are deemed risky.

The question at the heart of Prevent is thus: how can life as a process of becoming be rendered knowable? The answer, as the next section will demonstrate, is to focus on signifiers of identity, and, in particular, those that are deemed to indicate processes of becoming dangerous.

The UK's Prevent Policy

In seeking to respond to this temporal ambition, counter-radicalisation policies have carved out a new role for the state. The intent of this section is to provide a brief genealogical analysis of the assemblage of counter-radicalisation practices. The examples given, and the history narrated, will be in the context of the UK. Nevertheless, the manifestations of power identified here have clear resonances with transnational and other national counter-radicalisation programmes. This section will show that counter-radicalisation is manifested through a traversal of the temporal gap that produces factors in the present as indicators that particular becomings are becoming dangerous. In so doing, what is central to counter-radicalisation is a consideration of how such potential can be read, and as the following discussion will demonstrate, security is deemed to be produced through acting on certain environments, spaces and individuals, transforming them from identities, values and perceptions of belonging in the present deemed risky, towards those deemed secure.

This is therefore a story of how identity, read as a process of becoming, is manifested as a site of security intervention, and the consequences this entails.

Since its emergence in the response to 9/11, three broad approaches to managing radicalisation can be seen within Prevent, forming an assemblage of practices that seek to manage potentially dangerous becomings. The first is a focus on the environments in which radicalisation occurs. Prevent can be read, in part, as a series of practices that intervene into circulations of ideas and identities, within and across communities. 'Extremist' spaces, alienated from 'Britishness' and 'British values', require opening up to flows of identity and ideas that will reduce the vulnerability of those within them. This takes effect historically and primarily through the conflation of community cohesion and Prevent, positioning communities policy as a key aspect of security policy.

Community cohesion emerges as a key plank of Government policy in the UK in the wake of disturbances between white and Asian youths in the Summer of 2001. The key theme that emerged upon investigation into the violence was a concern regarding segregation, with the differences between ethnic communities in the UK understood to have become entrenched, at the expense of that which is held in common. It is identified that, in many areas affected by the 'disorder or community tensions, there is little interchange between members of different racial, cultural and religious communities' (Home Office, 2001a: 3). As the Cantle report famously stated, they were struck by the 'depth of polarisation of our towns and cities', noting that different communities lived 'parallel lives' (Home Office, 2001b: 9). Cohesion thus posits a

particular preclusive relation to threat, in that, through managing the flows of identities, it is possible to generate more secure future environments. When too much distance between ethnic, cultural or faith groups can lead to future outbreaks of disorder and violence, a shared vision and a common, core identity is held to mitigate such threats.

Whilst the discursive language used within the early years of cohesion is careful not to position it as a move towards assimilation or integration, within its merging into the Prevent agenda, it becomes a discourse that attains a directionality. The mobilising ideal of 'British values' becomes increasingly important as the mechanism for reducing the emergence of violence. It is with the 2007 reworking of Prevent that the merging of cohesion and Prevent work, and the centrality of 'British values' within this, is first explicitly stated. The 'Preventing Violent Extremism' strategy starts by affirming the government is committed to working with 'the vast majority of Muslims who reject violence and who *share core British values* in doing this' (DCLG, 2007: 4, emphasis added). It is stated that:

As a society we must defend and promote our shared and non-negotiable values: respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity, respect for others and responsibility towards others [...] Government needs to support individuals and organisations who uphold those values and to respond robustly when those values are transgressed (DCLG, 2007: 5, emphasis added).

What is clearly at stake in this narrative is, thus, not a question of finding those values that British citizens hold in common. Rather, there is a *de facto* understanding of that

which is already held to be shared, which must now be promoted, and which is the basis upon which further interrelation is possible.

This matters, as it is this distance and alienation from core, ‘British’ values that comes to narrate environments and communities that are deemed to represent vulnerabilities to extremism and radicalisation. Whilst the policy framing of Prevent has attempted to demarcate its communities and security policy strands (Martin, 2014), this shows how the problematic of Prevent is mobilised *through* communities policy, governing interventions into communal identities produced as outside of ‘Britishness’, and therefore as threatening (see also Ragazzi, 2016). Thus, it can be stated in the 2011 iteration of Prevent, that:

There is evidence to indicate that support for terrorism is associated with rejection of a cohesive, integrated, multi-faith society and of parliamentary democracy. Work to deal with radicalisation will depend on developing a sense of belonging to this country and support for our core values (Home Office, 2011: 5).

And that a ‘stronger sense of “belonging” and citizenship makes communities more resilient to terrorist ideology and propagandists. We believe that *Prevent* depends on integration, democratic participation and a strong interfaith dialogue’ (Home Office, 2011: 27). While the 2011 iteration of CONTEST sought to institutionally separate the cohesion agenda from Prevent (see Martin, 2019), this reading shows the important conceptual confluences that remained (and that would go on to re-emerge clearly in the counter-extremism agenda, which discursively and institutionally brings these policy areas back into alignment (see Cabinet Office, 2013; Home Office, 2018). Thus, a key

diagrammatic function of Prevent is that it produces a spatial analysis that sees, within the flow of particular ideas and identities, the possibility of identifying secure or threatening spaces, with spaces that are distanced from mainstream, core, 'British values' rendered as problematic.

This manifests in the assemblage of Prevent practices in three primary ways. First, it is an approach that seeks to open closed spaces of extremist identities to the circulation of 'British', ideas and identities, enabling these more 'secure' identities to challenge and disrupt extremist ideas and values. This is evident in the wider cohesion agenda and early examples such as the 'Radical Middle Way' roadshows that sought to create space for dialogue to engender a mainstream and moderate British Muslim identity (Home Office, 2009: 82). Second, is the explicit ambition to promote 'British' or 'shared' values. One early example is the setting up of the Sufi Muslim Council in July 2006. It explicitly sought to mobilise an apolitical Islam, as opposed to the work of the Muslim Council of Britain (Casciani, 2006). Third, is the need to disrupt and remove extremist ideas, values and identities from public space, such as through continued attempts to regulate extremist content on the internet. Importantly, all three combine to offer a vision of Prevent in which the circulations of identity within British communal life are the object of governmental management, and that through the correct management of these processes, more secure identities can be produced.

The second means through which Prevent seeks to function to prevent radicalisation is through the explicit focus on individuals who are deemed vulnerable. The institutional space in which this occurs is the Channel programme. The active work

carried out by a Channel process consists of three principle tasks: to identify individuals at risk from violent extremism; to assess the nature and extent of the risk; and, if considered suitable for a Channel intervention, to develop the most appropriate support for the individual concerned (Home Office, 2012; see Pettinger, 2020: 4-5 for a fuller account of the Channel process). Since the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, specified authorities now have a statutory duty to engage in this Prevent work, referring individuals they consider to be a risk. Thus, professionals working in healthcare, education, social work, and prison and probation services must maintain vigilance towards vulnerabilities to radicalisation (see Heath-Kelly, 2017; Ragazzi, 2017; Martin, 2018).

The idea at the heart of Channel is that, with the right knowledge and awareness, it is possible to make visible and identify the signs of potential future violence. The mechanism through which Prevent enables the identification of individuals who are deemed vulnerable to radicalisation is the ‘vulnerability indicator’. The Channel Guide lists 22 ‘vulnerability indicators’. It is understood their assessment will provide a rounded view of an individual’s vulnerability, informing the decision over whether an individual needs support, and, through continued assessment, they can be used to track an individual’s progress (Home Office, 2012: 11-2; see CAGE 2016 for a critical account of the ‘science’ underlying these indicators). In many cases, vulnerability indicators are presented merely as an expression, perhaps verbal, perhaps communicated in images, of a politics or religiosity (Martin, 2018). Conceptually, the indicators are not concerned, primarily, with intent, but with attitudes or ways of being, and focus on the individual under analysis, divorced from wider, social contexts (Knudsen, 2018). As the work of Pettinger (2020) has empirically shown, Channel’s

concrete interventions are not concerned with violence. Based on interviews with Channel mentors, Pettinger (2020: 6) notes how individuals undergoing Channel interventions are seen to have little in common with offenders sentenced under terrorism legislation. Rather, the reasons given by mentors for referral and acceptance onto Channel are due to the individual expressing offensive language and ideas. These young people are thus deemed to need support and mentoring, in the form of anti-racism and critical-thinking discussions with a role model (Pettinger, 2020: 6). The process privileges a 'worst-case' scenario logic and a conservatism, concerned with the reputational harm of not intervening in a case where this worst case then goes on to occur (Pettinger, 2020: 4-7).

These referrals and interventions produce the concrete outlines of the 'extreme'. Indicators concerning ideas and expressions of identity form the basis for referrals from across society and specified authorities. They are interpreted by practitioners with minimal training, who are encouraged to use their own intuition to identify and police those expressions and identities they deem to present a potential, worst-case scenario threat for the future (Pettinger, 2020). In so doing, the process serves to demarcate, order and police those identities seen to be containable within 'Britishness', and those which signify its dangerous exterior, potentially requiring intervention.

Third, and, to an extent, mediating the above two sites, the counter-radicalisation assemblage manifests through a focus on institutional spaces. This represents a focus on the flows of identities within discrete spaces, such as the school, the prison, the

hospital and the university. Such institutions are problematic as they may contain spaces potentially inculcating ‘extremist’ ideas, cut off from ‘British values’. Yet they are of utility, in that the professionals who work in them are, it is judged, able to play a positive, perhaps even ‘expert’ role in identifying vulnerabilities. Diagrammatically, they are thus organised as sites of circulation, within which British values and identities must be promoted, and to which vigilance is required.

Different sectors possess their own challenges, but the prison and education sectors provide a window onto how this logic manifests. Since the first public release of CONTEST in 2006, prisons were highlighted as particularly worrying environments, with evidence that radicalisation was occurring in these spaces (Home Office, 2006, p. 13). While prisons are highly regulated environments, there is a need to make the flows of identity within them intelligible and open to monitoring. Thus, in a 2012 Home Affairs Committee report, it could be stated that:

The current thinking in the prison service was that dispersal of terrorist prisoners around the estate was the best method for containing the spread of terrorist views but some argued that concentration would be more effective (Home Affairs Committee, 2012: 40).

This latter view has since won out, leading to the creation of so-called ‘jihadi jails’, segregating small numbers of prisoners convicted of terrorism offences from the wider prison population (see Ministry of Justice 2020 for a summary of the key report that led to this shift in strategy). The point here is not the ‘solution’ *per se*, but the problematisation of circulation and identity that has given rise to various attempts to

manage the flows of ‘extremist’ ideas and identities. It is also interesting to note that the intervention used in prisons to facilitate desistance and disengagement from extremist offending is, apparently unironically named, the ‘Healthy Identity Intervention’ programme.

Moving to the education sector, as early as 2007, Prevent focussed on Islamic supplementary schools; a system, it was argued, violent extremists could exploit (DCLG, 2007: 5-7). The Department for Communities and Local Government and DfE developed materials for an Islam and Citizenship Education programme, which sought to ‘provide teachers with the tools to demonstrate to young Muslims that their faith is compatible with wider shared values and that being a Muslim is also compatible with being a good citizen’ (Home Office, 2011: 81). More recently, developing out of the Trojan Horse scandal, Ofsted is now required to assess ‘how well the school prepares pupils positively for life in modern Britain and promotes [...] fundamental British values’ (Ofsted, 2015: 38) as a part of their citizenship education, explicitly referencing the 2011 iteration of the Prevent policy (DfE, 2014: 5).

Regarding Universities, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee reported that, in as far as there was a problem, it was ‘linked to the fact that universities provided “free space” whose use was difficult to regulate’ (Home Affairs Committee, 2012: 41). The concern being that – especially regarding Islamic societies – ‘extreme’ ideas were going unchallenged. This is reflected in anxieties around external speakers at Universities, and the now statutory duty for University administrations to monitor who is speaking on campus. Speaking to the Home Affairs Select Committee, Charles Farr (at the time, Director of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism) stated:

It is about ensuring a broad spectrum of speakers rather than a consistent series of speakers representing one particular point of view. [...] It is about, in some cases, ensuring that there is more than one speaker speaking, so that people hear a varied and broad range of views rather than simply one (Home Affairs Committee, 2012: Ev. 63).

The goal is thus opening these closed spaces, where extremism could take hold, to the flows of ideas. Across a range of institutions, the counter-radicalisation assemblage is thus manifested in response to a diagrammatic vision wherein threats are managed through intervention into the identities and values that circulate and manifest within them.

Counter-Radicalisation as a Diagram of Power

Taken together, these constitute the assemblage of Prevent practices, and, read in this light, it is now possible to summarise and coherently articulate the diagrammatic function of power envisaged by Prevent. There are identities produced through Prevent as secure. Prevent also produces identities that are risky, uncontainable within an account of a secure expression of identity and values, thus posing a potential threat of becoming radicalised. This boundary does not therefore represent the law, or that of the territoriality of the state. It is a boundary based on potential threat, and this potential is produced through performances of identity in the present.

Communities or institutional spaces possess their own identities. These environments may be, in some sense, physically enclosed, as is the case in the Trojan Horse schools. They may be more abstract, for instance, representing a particular ethnic or religious community. Yet they matter, as they represent the physical or conceptual space within which ideas and identities circulate. Due to the circulation within these environments, they act as a milieu which effects those who are within them, rendering them more likely to cohere with the ideas and identities prominent in that environment. Yet, these environments are not static and are capable of being transformed. Counter-radicalisation seeks to open closed, potentially threatening circulations, increasing the flow of secure identities such that they can transform and secure these environments.

Through understanding these flows of identity, individuals can be visibilised as lines of potential becoming, perhaps extending away from a secure identity. These are temporal lines, representing the possible futures of an individual. What matters is therefore an individual's momentum and direction of travel towards or away from a secured identity. When these trajectories intersect with environments, these circulations can act as an accelerant, providing momentum to a particular trajectory. By identifying the signs an individual displays, their potential becomings can be identified and monitored.

Becoming in itself is not a problem, but rather a natural occurrence that is capable of being influenced. Negative movement is a consequence of exposure to problematic ideas and identities. Prevent therefore manifests as a series of interventions into this movement across time. Reacting to these problematic temporal lines is envisaged as

co-emergent with the threat. Responsibility is dispersed throughout society. When signs of a threat emerge, the assemblage seeks to have individuals trained to spot them in close proximity, enabling the process of intervention as soon as such signs manifest.

The radical temporal ambition of Prevent – to prevent an individual from *becoming* violent – is made possible. The temporal gap is traversed through an analysis of identity in the present, wherein certain performances are now rendered as potentially indicative of a future threat. Intervention then occurs at the level of identity. The diagram of counter-radicalisation functions to secure the future through ensuring and transforming environments and individuals into coherence with a secure identity. Within the concrete assemblage of Prevent, this identity is powerfully narrated through the language of ‘Britishness’ and ‘British values’. Prevent thus produces an account of those subjects and spaces deemed to be coherent with a *normalised* ‘Britishness’, expressing British values and identity and thus unthreatening; and those identities deemed to be uncontainable within this space, and which are thus risky, requiring mediation. Prevent produces, and polices, ‘British’ identity.

The (Wider) Terrain of Prevent

So, what does this tell us about Prevent and its role within the UK, and about the impacts of counter-radicalisation policies more broadly? In one sense, this is an old story, one in which difference and identity play out in the security anxieties of the liberal state. Yet there is a clear novelty in the security/identity logic at play; a diagram of power that ontologises all life as *becoming*, promising to identify and manage that

life which is read as *becoming dangerous*. A diagram that enables an understanding of how and why the ‘Trojan Horse’ scandal dominated headlines within a national security framing. Yet that also has wider ramifications for an understanding of contemporary security ambitions. Read as a diagram of power, Prevent can be seen to occupy a more significant role in contemporary British life than is acknowledged in the current literature.

The implications of this analysis can be seen through contrasting it with the concept of ‘suspect communities’, an analysis that has circulated widely, in both academic critique and grass-roots mobilisations against the policy. First developed by Hillyard (1993), the term denotes the designation of a community as targeted through counter-terrorism powers, wherein the members of the group are ‘suspect’ not due to perceived illegality, but due to the perception they belong to the said group. These powers are enforced through security mechanisms such as profiling, stop and search, surveillance and detention. The work of Pantazis and Pemberton (2009), Awan (2012), Mythen *et al.* (2012), Breen-Smyth (2014) and Abbas (2018) argues for the application of the concept to the policing of Muslim communities in the UK. Work in this tradition has provided an excellent analysis of how, through legislation and policing practice, those considered to be part of Muslim communities in the UK have been rendered suspect and subjected to police powers such as stop and search, and counter-radicalisation (mis)interventions such as Channel.

Yet this analysis maintains a blind spot as to how this production manifests in a demand to *transform* these identities that are rendered as threatening. The heritage

of this approach, rooted in the application (and misapplication) of legal frameworks, entails it overlooks the wider implications of Prevent. In so doing, it powerfully critiques the legal framework of the War on Terror. However, by failing to recognise Prevent's radical temporal demand to intervene *prior to* the criminal act, this approach misses the pernicious power that is made clear through the diagram of counter-radicalisation: that Prevent functions through ordering, and then seeking to produce, 'secure' identities, and in so doing, ontologises an account of those identity performances that are deemed to constitute a normalised 'Britishness', and those deemed external to such 'Britishness', and thus risky and 'extreme'. This blind spot leads to perverse outcomes, wherein those advocating this analysis frame the negative impacts of suspect communities as detrimental for the broader, positive goals of cohesion (Awan, 2012). Similarly, this approach often situates 'hard' policing methods, such as stop and search and detention without charge, as jeopardising positive, 'soft', policing methods, such as community engagement, that make up aspects of Prevent work. Pantazis and Pemberton (2009: 660), for instance, argue, 'it is difficult to see how such skilful, yet ultimately fragile, "soft approaches" can thrive, when the weight of state suspicion and the brutality of "hard" methods have fallen on these communities'. In contrast, a diagrammatic reading draws clear attention to not just the 'hard' end of contemporary counter-terrorism, but the powerful mechanisms through which 'soft' approaches to counter-radicalisation have sought to produce 'secure' identities, and mandate a plethora of interventions on this basis.

Moreover, read as a diagram of power, it is possible to situate the conceptualisation of, and response to, radicalisation, as having had a profound impact upon British communities policy. The early years of Prevent, wherein community cohesion and

counter-radicalisation were institutionally aligned, is a clear demonstration of this. Yet, a diagrammatic reading allows for a thicker understanding of the conceptual relationship Prevent has drawn between security and identity/communities policy. Many of the early readings of the relationship between Prevent and communities policies sought – much like the suspect communities literature – to highlight and identify the damage being done to communities policy (notably community cohesion) due to its proximity with the counter-radicalisation agenda (see Thomas, 2009 for a clear example). The diagram of counter-radicalisation shows the analytical limits of this approach. The ‘soft’, valourised interventions of cohesion derive from exactly the same analysis of threat that informs the more targeted aspects of counter-radicalisation practice. They are two sides of the same coin.

Further, while there is now a formal distinction between communities and counter-radicalisation policy, the diagram allows us to recognise the limits of this separation; it highlights the analysis of threat that emerges within the twin context of the Cattle report and the war on terror, and that remains discursively and functionally intact to this day. Take, for example, key statements made by Dame Louise Casey in her report into opportunity and inequality in the UK. While charting a variety of indicators and factors of social inequality, the text retains an underlying theorisation in which a lack of integration is seen as fostering extremism, is thus potentially threatening, and therefore requires some form of management. The report effectively reiterates the analysis of Cattle, stating that ‘resilience, integration and shared common values and behaviours – such as respect for the rule of law, democracy, equality and tolerance – are inhibitors of division, hate and extremism. They can make us stronger, more equal, more united and able to stand together as one nation’ (Casey, 2016: 8), and, more

broadly, argues that in an attempt to accommodate difference, the UK has ‘lost sight of our expectations on integration and lacked confidence in promoting it’, condoning regressive practices, and playing ‘straight into the hands of extremists’ (Casey, 2016: 16). More recently, a widely publicised intervention by Tony Blair directly links a perceived failure of migrants to the UK to integrate as a key driver of the rise of the extreme right, stating that ‘politics has failed to find the right balance between diversity and integration [...] Particularly now, when there is increasing evidence of far-right bigotry on the rise, it is important to establish the correct social contract around the rights and duties of citizens, including those who migrate to our country’ (Blair, 2019).

The approach to communities policy in the UK – and, to education, healthcare and social work – is thus formed in the shadow of Prevent, owing a commitment to the analysis of threat it contains. It is a narrative beset by metaphors of mixing, cohesion and integration, wherein a failure of individuals and communities to cohere – implicitly or explicitly framed in the context of identity and ‘British’ values – generates potentials towards extremism and political violence. What thus emerges is a complex assemblage of practices, targeting individuals, institutions and communities, within which the management and promotion of ‘secure’ identities is the driving function.

Lastly, and crucially, this analysis highlights the analytical limits of much of the literature that takes Muslim communities to be *the* problem site of Prevent. A recent paper by Ali (2020) makes a strong case for this argument. In the following section, I hope to make explicit a tension within the critical literature on Prevent between an

account that situates race as conceptually central to our understanding of the strategy (as exemplified by Ali, and informing much of the ‘suspect communities’ literature), and one that foregrounds temporality and preclusivity (as put forward by this paper).

Utilising a critical race framework, Ali’s core claim is that race – and the particular socio-historical context of the British Empire – is *the ‘condition of possibility’* of Prevent (Ali, 2020: 4, my italics). Ali’s analysis rightly draws our attention to the ways in which Britishness – a category central to Prevent – is racialised. The discursive reliance on narratives of extremism and radicalisation as that which is opposed to ‘Britishness’ and ‘British values’ thus functions to produce racialised borders, concerning who is and who is not seen as threatening. The account given of threat in Prevent – and associated concepts of extremism and radicalisation – is thus, for Ali, coded as Muslim. In reproducing an account of threat as racialised and *external* to Britishness, whiteness is then normalised *as* Britishness, and removed from accounts and perceptions of extremism and terrorist violence. This produces the hyper-visibility of Muslim violence, and the identification of the Muslim community as the problem site for Prevent, and, in contrast, the violence of white supremacy is *unseen* through Prevent.

It is an argument that is at its most powerful in challenging the supposed equivalence within Prevent in responding to ‘Islamist’ and ‘white supremacist’ violence. Reading the case of Thomas Mair, who murdered MP Jo Cox in the midst of the Brexit referendum campaign in the UK, Ali shows how this violence was presented as a ‘lone wolf’ attack, linked to mental health concerns. This removes Mair from the context of

a Brexit discourse that echoed white supremacist, anti-immigration and anti-refugee sentiments. As Ali concludes, to ‘argue Brexit was accomplished without violence [as Nigel Farage famously stated] is to unsee the murder of Cox by a white supremacist’ (Ali, 2020: 14). For Ali, this is demonstrative of the inability of Prevent to respond to white racial violence, individualising the murder, invisibilising its white supremacist violence, and thus serving to reinforce and reproduce racial, colonial borders within the UK that defend structures of white Britain. The production of racialised borders, producing Muslimness as threatening and normalising Britain as a white nation, are thus *essential* to Prevent. This is then mobilised to critique work on Prevent that privileges temporality and preclusivity (such as my own, i.e. Martin, 2014; 2018) which reads the racialised bordering practices of Prevent as *contingent*; as a product of Prevent’s particular application.

This approach thus rests upon the claim that, in the context of the war on terror, ‘Britishness’ is understood within the strategy as co-terminus with whiteness, such that the framing of Prevent and extremism as concerning ‘British values’ can *only* be read as a coding of Muslim difference and the reproduction of Britain as a white nation. On this I am not convinced. This is in no way to downplay the very real harms that Prevent has caused for those racialised and securitised as Muslim in the UK, nor to deny that such communities have been the focal point for Prevent interventions. It is important to acknowledge that the language of ‘British values’, that underpins the articulation of identity and threat within Prevent, emerges in the context of specific state anxieties regarding Muslim communities. Namely, it reflects suspicions that the exercise of Muslim faith represents an alternative allegiance in the UK, and perceived failures of Muslim communities to integrate into the UK. Read through a prism of

identity that privileges articulations and performances of ‘British values’, and which expects these to be judged and assessed by millions of non-traditional security actors, it is no surprise that existent assumptions regarding race, religion, threat and terrorism come to the fore within Prevent, leading, for instance, to the disproportionate number of subjects referred for ‘Islamist’ extremism to Channel (see Martin, 2018).

Yet the analysis in this article diverges from Ali on the concept of ‘Britishness’ in two important ways. First, empirically, this analysis reads ‘Britishness’ and ‘British values’ as relatively mobile signifiers. While they clearly carry racialised and post-imperial meaning, they can also be engaged to articulate other aspects of identity with which security actors are concerned. In this sense, and as the diagram of radicalisation seeks to establish, Prevent itself is *productive* of the boundaries of ‘British values’ – and who is thus bordered within and without them – through its security interventions. This is not to argue that anything can be framed as a signifier of extremism or radicalisation, but it is to argue that such signifiers are, to an extent, fluid, and cannot be solely conflated with representations of Muslim threat within the context of the war on terror.

Second, and through the conceptual language developed in this paper, there is a question as to whether ‘Britishness’ represents an aspect of Prevent’s *core diagrammatic logic*, or is a particular manifestation within its *assemblage of concrete practices*. In the reading of Prevent here, ‘Britishness’ and ‘British values’ form the latter – an aspect of the assemblage that is used to interpret and apply the underlying

diagrammatic logic; a logic which does not *require* the concept of ‘Britishness’ to function *per se*. This diagrammatic reading allows the article to make a broader claim regarding the *ambitions* of counter-radicalisation. Prevent’s problematisation of threat *can* be deployed towards other performances of identity that are read as signifying potential violence. What is at stake within the diagram of counter-radicalisation is a way of making sense of life as a process of (potentially) becoming (violent), and a series of mechanisms for making such processes visible through performances of identity, thus rendering them intelligible and actionable.

‘Britishness’ is thus neither empirically stable, nor analytically essential within the function of Prevent, something which a reading of the preclusive ambitions of Prevent makes visible, but which is obscured by the critical race analysis developed by Ali. What Ali thus reads as a contradiction between Prevent and action against white supremacist violence, I instead read as an important tension. In seeking to police far-right terror through the existing assemblage and discourses of Prevent, the policy invokes a narrative of ‘Britishness’ that is contested by such groups themselves. It is thus an open question as to how effective framing signs of vulnerability through this language will be in respect to far-right ideologies. Moreover, this reading enables a substantive engagement with the application of Prevent into different forms of ‘extremism’ including perceived vulnerabilities to radicalisation concerning the far-left, and animal rights and environmental activism (Grierson, 2020), something that Ali’s paper does not engage with, and whose framework cannot analytically capture or explain. The assemblage of Prevent clearly seeks to extend and manifest the diagram of counter-radicalisation towards different ends, and these need not be coherent with each other; there may be internal disjunctures and confusions, and the rationale and

practices directed towards ‘Islamist’ extremism may differ from those concerning ‘far-right’ or other extremisms. Nevertheless, read as a diagram of power, what emerges through this analysis is a core approach and logic that underlies the *vision* of counter-radicalisation, and *allows* these disparate interventions and practices to be brought together within the same strategic, intellectual and bureaucratic space.

Prevent’s Radical Security Ambitions

This paper has thus sought to draw a thicker, conceptual analysis of the core logic and analysis of threat produced within the history and practices of British counter-radicalisation policy; a radical security ambition that functions through producing and policing identity. Thus, while interventions that have articulated the racialised practices contained within Prevent are crucial, I argue that it is equally important to situate counter-radicalisation as a particular conception of power; a function that renders certain subjects as ‘secure’ and renders other subjects as risky, and thus requiring mediation (while simultaneously acting as a powerful ideological function in producing, through these acts of policing, just what the state considers the boundaries of a ‘secure’ identity to be).

By way of conclusion, it is worth reflecting on the consequences of such a conception of power, and the role of the state that it demands. This form of power defines its own boundary. Not coterminous with the territory of the state or the law, it enacts its own political geography of who belongs and who, in their ‘riskiness’, must be brought into coherence with – in the context of Prevent – a normalised account of ‘Britishness’ and

‘British values’. Existing work on Prevent demonstrates the consequences of counter-radicalisation practices for the political participation of those who identify as Muslim. Studies show that respondents who identify as Muslim are very much aware of the practices that are seen to signify risk, self-censoring accordingly (see Mythen, Walklate and Khan, 2012; Brown and Saeed, 2015; McGlynn and McDaid, 2016). What has not yet been adequately remarked upon though are the consequences of Prevent for the constitution of the *political order* (although see also Boukalas, 2019). A diagrammatic analysis of Prevent allows this more fundamental claim to be made. Prevent can be understood as a *productive and deeply political* function of power. In producing ‘Britishness’ and its outside, and then rendering this outside as potentially threatening and therefore in need of mediation, Prevent produces this potential exteriority as unable to contribute to the reproduction of that which is shared, common and ‘British’, and thus to make a claim on that which is ‘Britishness’. It thus troubles an understanding of citizenship rooted in legal and juridical borders, instead directing the gaze towards the bordering practices that are produced when security takes becoming as its privileged site of intervention. It denies formally equal citizens of the UK the ability to make claims upon the identity of the state. A denial that is based upon potential ascribed to them. A potential that, even on Prevent’s own terms, may never manifest. The diagram of counter-radicalisation can be understood as a mode of power that actively reproduces and secures the existing order. In producing a normalised British identity at the centre of its topography of secure and securing identities, perceived potential disassociation from this centre becomes policed. At a political level, the diagram of counter-radicalisation functions as an anti-becoming machine; a politics of stasis that produces and directs a wide-ranging assemblage towards

producing and reproducing that which is considered by state actors to be secure, 'British' values and identities.¹

Prevent has carved out a new role for the state, at the cutting-edge of preclusive ambitions to manage threats prior to their emergence and actualisation. If part of the human condition is change over time – of *becoming* – then the promise held by Prevent is that, with the right training, becoming that is becoming dangerous can be made visible in the present, identified, and, ultimately, mediated before such danger manifests. It is life as a process of becoming that is the site of security; and, when security takes as its object processes of becoming, we can thus see that it takes as its object the constitution of the political itself.

¹ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this formulation.

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