Counter-Radicalisation
Critical perspectives

Edited by
Christopher Baker-Beall, Charlotte Heath-Kelly and Lee Jarvis
This book offers a wide-ranging and critical examination of recent counter-radicalisation policies, using case studies from several countries.

Counter-radicalisation policies, such as the UK Prevent strategy, have been highly controversial and increasingly criticised since their introduction. In this edited volume, voices from disciplines including sociology, political science, criminology and International Relations are brought together to address issues across the global roll-out of counter-radicalisation agendas. In so doing, the book critically interrogates:

- the connections between counter-radicalisation and other governmental programmes and priorities relating to integration and community cohesion;
- the questionable dependence of counter-radicalisation initiatives on discourses and assumptions about race, risk and vulnerability to extremism; and
- the limitations of existing counter-radicalisation machineries for addressing relatively new types of extremism including amongst ‘right-wing’ activists.

Through examining these questions, the book draws on a range of contemporary case studies spanning from counter-radicalisation in the UK, Germany and Denmark, through to detailed analyses of specific preventive initiatives in Australia and the United States. Conceptually, the chapters engage with a range of critical approaches, including discourse theory, autoethnography and governmentality.

This book will be of much interest to students of radicalisation, critical terrorism studies, counter-terrorism, sociology, security studies and IR in general.

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This book series will publish rigorous and innovative studies on all aspects of terrorism, counter-terrorism and state terror. It seeks to advance a new generation of thinking on traditional subjects and investigate topics frequently overlooked in orthodox accounts of terrorism. Books in this series will typically adopt approaches informed by critical-normative theory, post-positivist methodologies and non-Western perspectives, as well as rigorous and reflective orthodox terrorism studies.

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Contributors

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Acknowledgements

This volume emerges from a conference organised by the BISA Critical Terrorism Studies Working Group on 6 September 2012 at King’s College London. Convened by this book’s editors, the conference was titled, ‘Prevent and Counter-Radicalisation in 2012: Challenges and Ways Forward’. We gratefully acknowledge all of those who participated in and contributed to this event and express our gratitude to the UK’s British International Studies Association for the grant which funded the conference.

The editors would like also to thank Richard Jackson for his enthusiasm for this project, and we are delighted to see it published in the Routledge Critical Terrorism Studies series that he edits. We are grateful, too, for all the support for this volume that we have received from Andrew Humphrys at Routledge.

Furthermore we gratefully acknowledge the consent of the Institute of Race Relations to print a revised version of Arun Kundnani’s work, originally published as ‘Radicalisation: the journey of a concept’, in Race & Class, 54 (2), 3–25.
Introduction

Charlotte Heath-Kelly, Christopher Baker-Beall and Lee Jarvis

How should we understand an era in which militancy is framed by policymakers and practitioners as the consequence of psychological and social vulnerability, rather than as political choice? How should we tackle the reductionism of a counter-terrorism discourse that strips political action and ideologies of their contextual situation in factors of poverty, injustice and anger? And what should be thought of counter-terrorist policies that make tacit gestures towards right-wing extremism, but dedicate the majority of their resources towards communities identified as racially and religiously suspect and/or vulnerable?

We live in the era of ‘radicalisation’ – understood not as an actually-existing process, but as the policy, media and academic discourse which encompasses the uncomfortable trends outlined above. In the years since 2004, ‘radicalisation’ has burst onto our screens and political agendas, seemingly from nowhere, replacing decades of social movement research into the contextual and political factors which inform the turn towards clandestinity within groups and movements (Crenshaw 1992; Della Porta 1992, 1995; Della Porta and Tarrow 1986; Tarrow 1989). The salience of the counter-radicalisation agenda has now become so entrenched that each new terrorist attack immediately prefaces a media investigation into the factors which ‘radicalised’ the perpetrators, alongside responses from UK, US and international politicians that promise greater support for counter-radicalisation solutions.

To ask whether ‘radicalisation’ actually exists would be the wrong question. Even while the ‘radicalisation process’ is a highly suspect contention, as most contributors to this volume would agree, ‘radicalisation’ has been called-into-being in an era of response to, and anticipatory governance of, terrorism. It does not matter whether people experience a process of radicalisation or not, because the discursive apparatus of academia, media and state have already decided that radicalisation always precedes violence. It has become impossible to explain violence otherwise, because the socio-political hegemony has already decided that we live in a world where anger, poverty and injustice do not matter – and are instead obscured by explanations for violence which focus upon ideology. Even more problematically, this focus on ‘ideologies which cause violence’ then leads to the attribution of ‘vulnerability’ and suspicion upon those groups and spaces already identified as problematic (the racially and religiously ‘othered’
subjects of the antecedent community cohesion policies). As a result of radicalisation’s salience, political policy need not look to policy or injustice to explain insurgency; instead, counter-terrorism has invented a feedback loop between vulnerability and ideology to explain away the resurgence of violence in the supposed heartlands of liberty, democracy and equality.

This book refuses to accept that. Building upon a groundswell of critical disquiet with the politics of ‘radicalisation’ (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010; Heath-Kelly 2013b; Richards 2011), it collects the empirical and theoretical research of scholars who wish to upset the easy rhetoric of simplistic, reductionist and often counter-productive counter-terrorism policies. The book has been forged against three backdrops. The first of these was a conference held in King’s College, London in September 2012 by the BISA (British International Studies Association) Critical Terrorism Studies Working Group. The conference – ‘Prevent and Counter-Radicalisation in 2012: Challenges and Ways Forward’ – brought together academics from a range of universities within Europe and beyond, as well as individuals within the worlds of policy and think tanks. Many of the papers initially presented at the conference have been turned into chapters for this volume, which reflects the event’s focus on the critical interrogation of counter-radicalisation programmes such as the UK’s Prevent strategy. As detailed further below, this focus includes:

• first, excavating the impact of counter-radicalisation programmes on political processes and dynamics of governance, policing and security policy;
• second, tracing the impact of such programmes on individual citizens or subjects, including those deemed at risk of becoming radicalised due to demographic, social or other indicators;
• third, exploring the consequences of counter-radicalisation for communities that might disproportionately experience such initiatives (hard or soft, overt or covert, intentional or otherwise);
• and fourth, tracing the interaction between knowledge claims and power effects in this context – including the role that ‘radicalisation’ discourses play in shaping counter-radicalisation programmes, rendering these practices possible, legitimate and even desirable in response to the perceived threat of terrorism.

The holding of this conference in the autumn of 2012 was itself a reflection of the book’s second pertinent backdrop. This relates to the growing prominence of broadly critical approaches to the study of terrorism and counter-terrorism. However we understand ‘critical’, there can be no doubting the groundswell of contemporary interest in alternative ways of thinking, studying and debating (counter-)terrorism. Although a relatively recent area of academic scholarship, critics of ‘traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ terrorism research have become increasingly confident and vocal in outlining a number of perceived limitations of this field. These include, *inter alia*: the proximity of terrorism studies to state interests and programmes; a focus on contemporary and seemingly pressing
empirical issues, with a consequent lack of historical or theoretical research; insufficient attention to the politics by which certain violences are labelled ‘terrorism’; a dearth of primary research and attendant recycling of ostensible ‘truths’ about terrorism; and a prioritisation of problem-solving rather than critical research (see Jackson et al. 2009, 2011; Jarvis 2009; Heath-Kelly 2013a, 2013b; Hayward 2011; Jackson 2012).

These criticisms, to be clear, are not limited to advocates of, or those associated with, ‘critical terrorism studies’ in any of its guises. Many long-standing scholars of terrorism have written at length about the stakes of these definitional debates, including drawing attention to the importance of state terrorism and the politics of labelling (for example, Horgan and Boyle 2008; Schmid 2011). Neither have these criticisms themselves passed without rejoinder, whether broadly sympathetic to these critical aims or (in some cases) markedly less so (compare Heath-Kelly 2010; Jones and Smith 2009; Weinberg and Eubank 2008; Rich 2013). While it is vitally important to remember that ‘orthodox’, ‘traditional’ or ‘non-critical’ approaches to terrorism are a heterogeneous and fluid group, at the same time efforts to critique, deconstruct and challenge discourses and practices of counter-terrorism have undoubtedly grown in prominence and legitimacy within the past ten years or so. And this book’s emphasis on the critical analysis of counter-radicalisation frameworks fits squarely within this orientation.

This brings us to our third backdrop of relevance, which concerns the spread of counter-radicalisation policies and discourses in the UK and beyond in recent years. As Kundnani (this volume) demonstrates, the concept of radicalisation is a relatively new one within debates on the causes of terrorism. Although traceable to the early 1990s, the concept’s currency enjoyed a notable increase – at least within academic discussion – from 2004 onwards. In the UK, this growth of attention to the apparent religious, cultural, social and other processes that contribute to the making of ‘terrorists’ found political manifestation in the Prevent strategy, originally titled Preventing Violent Extremism. One of the government’s four counter-terrorism workstreams – with Pursue, Protect and Prepare – Prevent offered a locally-oriented, community-focused ‘hearts-and-minds’ approach to counter-terrorism (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010: 123; Thomas and Sanderson, 2011: 1030). This was an approach targeted, as Thomas notes, at ‘increasing the resilience and addressing the grievances of communities, and … identifying vulnerable individuals, as well as challenging and disrupting ideologies sympathetic to violent extremism’ (Thomas 2010: 444).

Although Britain may be thought of as something of a ‘market leader’ in counter-terrorism policy, the counter-radicalisation industry is no monopoly. As the chapters in this book demonstrate, states as politically diverse and geographically dispersed as Australia, Denmark, and Germany have all implemented counter-radicalisation initiatives since the start of what became known as the War on Terror. While such initiatives percolate through national political and cultural lenses, a shared emphasis on preventive counter-terrorism lends them coherence. We live in an era when ‘radicalisation’ supposedly explains
everything we need to know about transitions to violence, and can provide the
map for anticipatory governance of dissent which may lead to clandestine action.
Against these three related backgrounds, we have forged this edited collection
as an attempt to reflect on the global extension of ‘counter-radicalisation’. Importantly, for us, this has required not only a geographical diversity of con-
tributors but also disciplinary diversity. Our contributors offer critical analyses
of this topic from various fields including, but not limited to, sociology, political
science, International Relations and criminology. Although this diversity of
writers and backgrounds makes for much disagreement in the pages that follow,
the chapters share an effort to critically interrogate three aspects of counter-
radicalisation:

1 the connections between counter-radicalisation and other governmental pro-
grammes and priorities relating, for example, to integration, multicultural-
ism and community cohesion;
2 the dependence of counter-radicalisation initiatives on questionable dis-
courses and assumptions about race, risk and vulnerability to extremism; and
3 the limitations of existing counter-radicalisation machineries for addressing
relatively new types of extremism including, among others, those associated
with so-called ‘right-wing’ activists.

To do this, the book draws on a range of contemporary preventive initiatives for-
mulated in the UK, Australia and mainland Europe. Conceptually, our authors
draw on a plurality of approaches, including discourse theory and government-
ality, with a number of chapters also drawing on primary empirical data including
from the UK’s Channel Project and the Australian Resilience agenda. This theo-
retical, methodological and empirical diversity is vital, we argue, for any
informed debate around counter-radicalisation and its impacts upon social, polit-
ic and everyday life.

Radicalisation: the emergence of an essentially contested
concept

Given the rapid rise of the radicalisation discourse since 2004, we may some-
times feel that that world has suddenly plunged us into the era of ‘radicalisation’
– yet the term ‘radicalisation’ is not new. A brief analysis of the etymology of
the term reveals that it has been used in varying political contexts throughout
history. What is new, however, is the salience accorded to the political dis-
course on radicalisation as the dominant frame for understanding militant vi-
olence. The contemporary radicalisation discourse gained prominence in the
aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York (11 September 2001), Madrid (11
March 2004) and London (7 July 2005) and has since come to form the ‘conven-
tional wisdom’ for explaining the processes by which individuals become
involved in acts of political violence or terrorism. In the context of these events,
the term first emerged in European policy circles in 2002–2003 with European Union (EU) member states, such as the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, engaging in initiatives to make sense of and respond to ‘new’ terrorist phenomena. However, while a consensus has since emerged internationally that radicalisation constitutes a threat to the political, economic, social and cultural security of nations, the debate over what exactly radicalisation is has been marked by a substantial degree of conceptual confusion.

On the one hand, the UK’s Prevent strategy refers to radicalisation as ‘the process by which people come to support violent extremism and, in some cases, join terrorist groups’ (Home Office 2009: 10–11). Similarly, the Danish government speaks of radicalisation as ‘the process in which a person gradually accepts the ideas and methods of extremism and, possibly, joins its organised groups’ (Danish Government 2009: 8). On the other hand, the European Commission introduces an explicit distinction between the holding of illiberal views and the use of violence by introducing the notion of ‘violent radicalisation’, contra non-violent, which it defines as ‘the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism’ (European Commission 2005: 2). So does radicalisation necessarily lead to violence or not? And where should states draw the line between applying liberal tolerance to illiberal behaviours, and prosecuting those beliefs that will lead to violence? This policy confusion surrounding enunciations of ‘radicalisation’ and ‘violent radicalisation’ reflects the problematic nature of the terms themselves. ‘Radicalisation’, or ‘violent radicalisation’, is taken to refer to a socialisation process through which people become involved in terrorism (ENER 2008). This motif forms the centrepiece of the feedback loop constructed to explain terrorist events through combinations of vulnerability and ideology. However, such renderings of socialisation are misleading in the sense that these processes do not have to be ‘violent’ or involve violence. Moreover, there is an inherent difficulty that exists in differentiating between people who adopt or support political positions or beliefs that might be interpreted as ‘radical’ and identifying those who would actually engage in acts of political violence as a direct result of those same political positions or beliefs.

At this point it is worth reflecting on the origin of the term ‘radicalisation’ in more detail. ‘Radicalisation’ is derived from the word ‘radical’, which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is defined, in a political sense, as ‘advocating thorough or far-reaching political or social reform; representing or supporting an extreme section of a party’ (*OED Online* 2014a). Similarly, the term ‘radicalisation’ retains a problematic relationship with the term ‘radicalism’, which can be interpreted as an expression of legitimate political thought, and has been defined as ‘politically or socially radical attitudes, principles, or practice’ (*OED Online* 2014b). In essence, there is nothing acutely wrong with being radical or holding radical beliefs. There are numerous historical examples of movements deemed radical at their point of emergence that would later elicit positive social change, such as those involving women’s suffrage in the early twentieth century or the civil rights movement in 1960s America.
Following Jonathan Githens-Mazer (2012), we recognise that the understanding of radicalism outlined above, as a challenge to the status quo of existing political, social, economic and cultural norms, has been replaced. Radicalism, as is now commonly understood, is best conceptualised as ‘an ideology that pits “extremism” against “moderation”’, a conceptualisation that has given rise to and made possible associated governmental programmes of counter-radicalisation (Githens-Mazer 2012: 556). From this perspective, the notion of radicalisation has provided the basis for new political agendas based upon ‘how best to counter what are interpreted, or indeed socially constructed, as problematic challenges to existing orders of states and societies’ (ibid: 556). It is this simplistic notion of radicalisation that makes possible certain types of governmental intervention against instances of radicalism that are both subjectively and normatively constructed as ‘bad’. As we have seen, however, the deeply unstable boundary between radicalisation as involving violence and radicalisation as a precursor to violence reveals a lack of foundation to contemporary counter-terrorism policy. In essence, the notion of radicalisation, like other concepts such as security or terrorism, can be identified as an ‘essentially contested concept’ in the sense that the term generates such debate about its actual meaning that no objective or neutral definition is possible.2

Conventional wisdom on radicalisation

Despite the lacunae at the heart of the radicalisation signifier, the discourse continues to function through prescriptions that there exists a ‘radicalisation process’ whereby individuals are socialised through their ‘vulnerabilities’ and exposure to extremist ideas to commit violent acts (Home Office 2009). Sometime this process is described as ‘complex’ rather than linear, emphasising the ‘combination of push–pull factors’ which lead toward the use of violence (Ranstorp 2010: 1). Respected figures within the academic community identify the process entirely within Muslim communities (rather than, for instance, studying right-wing radicalisation),3 basing their conclusions on the identification of ‘outsiders’ who have come to the ‘West’ and find themselves disorientated. French sociologist Gilles Kepel has, for example, situated the radicalisation problematique as a ‘war for Muslim minds … fought not in Palestine or Iraq, but in the communities of believers in the outskirts of London, Paris, and other European cities where Islam is already a growing part of the West’ (Kepel 2004: 8). As such, radicalisation often draws upon the existing salience of globalisation as a contemporary phenomenon to make the Orientalist claim that ‘others’ are ill-equipped to adjust to life within the European metropole. Social movement theorist Quintan Wiktorowicz takes this problematic neo-colonial delineation even further in his identification of three parallel processes that lead to radicalisation: first a ‘cognitive opening’, such as the moral shock of sudden exposure to life in the West, creates a conducive climate for receptivity to extremist discourse; then a process of ‘religious seeking’, in response to discontent, leads the individual towards non-mainstream Islamic movements who can explain away experiences of
disaffection and isolation; and then the role of charismatic leadership can convince the religious seeker of the authenticity of a movement’s message (Wiktorowicz 2005).

Such sociological and political studies of religiosity and transitions toward violence underwrite the radicalisation discourse as it is found in policy, and consolidate its conventional wisdom. The ‘radicalisation’ process they describe and underwrite is then used as an explanatory tool in any and all given contexts of political violence to attribute causality, to silence politically inconvenient factors such as poverty, exclusion and foreign policy, and to invoke the possibility that future violent acts can be prevented by targeting suspect communities with counter-radicalisation policies. The discourse of a ‘radicalisation process’ is thus highly efficient and functional, if also reductive, racially biased and highly problematic. It provides a convenient and effective method whereby politicians can externalise responsibilities for, and the origins of, political discontent. To put it bluntly, they construct a religious and racial ‘other’ who takes the blame for violence, while simultaneously making claim to provide solutions that will prevent future instances of violence. The deployment of the ‘radicalisation process’ is also extremely malleable – it allows the exteriorisation of ‘otherness’, even when ‘terrorists’ have been born in, are naturalised citizens of, or are long-term residents of ‘Western’ nations. Their socialisation, by default, must have happened on foreign visits or be attributed to their racialised ‘otherness’ in the era of globalisation, despite the quite obvious common-sense connections that exist between socialisation and the political society in which one lives. Consider the political, investigative and media hysteria surrounding the origins of the Tsarnaev brothers in the Caucasus, as if their birthplace could explain their actions rather than their long-term residency in the United States.

Given these problematic origins and functionalities, how does this book challenge the assumptions that underwrite the radicalisation discourse? First, we have gathered together a variety of critical perspectives on radicalisation and counter-radicalisation that address an assortment of theoretical and pragmatic concerns, ranging from research that interrogates the problematic nature of the conceptual debate on radicalisation to studies that focus on issues arising from specific counter-radicalisation programmes. Second, drawing inspiration from emerging fields of enquiry such as critical security studies and critical terrorism studies, we have sought to open up an explicitly critical ‘space’ for further research into the contemporary political discourse on radicalisation – in the hope that we can disrupt what has fast become the new orthodoxy for explaining and responding to the causes of political violence.

**Book overview**

The book begins with a discussion of the concept of radicalisation and its relatively brief history by Arun Kundnani. In his chapter, Kundnani points to the growing importance of this concept within terrorism studies and counter-terrorism efforts associated with what has become known as the War on Terror.
Kundnani develops a sociology of knowledge approach which points to the industry of advisers, analysts, scholars and community representatives responsible for propagating this concept. He then follows this up with a critical interrogation of its biases and limitations, arguing that it contributes to the constitution of ‘suspect’ Muslim communities as well as to a host of civil rights abuses. A corollary of this, Kundnani suggests, is the occlusion of alternative conceptions of terrorism as a mode of political action.

Paul Thomas, a noted scholar of the community cohesion policies which preceded and informed the development of counter-radicalisation, then takes the reins for Chapter 2. His chapter, entitled ‘Prevent and Community Cohesion in Britain: the worst of all possible worlds?’, discusses the renewed intrigues and controversies surrounding Prevent in the aftermath of the Woolwich murder of fusilier Lee Rigby in 2013. Writing in support of the previous community cohesion policy discourse, Thomas argues that Prevent now represents ‘the worst of all possible worlds’ because it introduces a securitised approach to multiculturalism which jars with previous formulations and produces counter-productive results. Prevent, he argues, has succeeded the multicultural approach to British society – dominating the policy sphere and usurping the resources which might otherwise have been spent on non-securitised efforts to promote good community relations.

In keeping with Thomas’ discussion of the British context, Chapter 3 continues with Phil Edwards’ critique of the ideological inconsistency within the Prevent strategy and the strange reluctance of policymakers to consult extensive sociological studies and literature on desistance from gang violence. Edwards persuasively argues that literature on gang membership could inform and develop policy approaches toward potential terrorist subcultures. Exploring this related literature, he comes to the remarkable yet well-founded conclusion that countering radicalisation would require policy programmes which encourage non-violent Islamist activism! As unlikely as it might be that the British government would support such an undertaking, Edwards shows that a functioning and anticipatory strategy for counter-terrorism would require the fostering of non-violent yet illiberal expression for marginalised groups. The chapter provides a blistering critique that exposes the in-built Orientalist logics of counter-radicalisation policy, which resolutely oppose the expression of illiberal views rather than logically assessing relevant literature and methods for mediating the expression of dissent.

Chapter 4 then moves the focus of the book to the other side of the world, to the strange Australian context in which counter-radicalisation policies have been adopted despite the complete absence of jihadist attacks on Australian soil. Anne Aly makes a solid critique of the Australian Resilience policy and its deployment of categories of ‘vulnerability to radicalisation’ that disproportionately target Muslims. Despite the almost total absence of attacks in Australia, the policy context of the radicalisation era has led to the demonisation of Muslims and multiple hate-crimes against mosques, religious leaders and even a synagogue deemed ‘Middle-Eastern’. Situating this policy paradox in literature on...
the functionality of fear for political discourse and action, Aly argues that counter-radicalisation policy should be reframed through the deployment of counter-narratives which target those extremist frames that advocate and legitimate violence. Only then might some of the more counter-productive aspects of counter-radicalisation be ameliorated.

From the revealing context of Australian counter-radicalisation, the book then moves to explore the unique situation of Germany vis-à-vis counter-terrorism policy. In Chapter 5, Julia Berczyk and Floris Vermeulen interrogate the deployment of counter-radicalisation in the context of German ‘militant democracy’ – a constitutional dictum that advocates the suppression of anti-democratic extremism, given the country’s historical experiences. Unlike other European nations, who have only very recently begun contemplating the extension of Islamist-focused counter-radicalisation policy towards right-wing activists, Germany’s counter-radicalisation efforts run in the opposite direction. Berczyk and Vermeulen argue that pre-emptive preventive measures to tackle extremism enjoy greater acceptance in German society, given their historical place in the constitution. They also highlight how this embedding of ‘militant democracy’ has contributed to a far greater focus on popular responsibility for tackling extremism, contra the security-service- and intelligence-led approaches of other European nations.

Exploring the contra-direction of counter-radicalisation’s roll-out, Michelle Bentley then contributes her analysis of the UK’s application of Prevent to right-wing extremism in Chapter 6. She argues that the recognition of right-wing extremism as a threat, while welcome, does not guarantee the application of appropriate neutralising measures. Her analysis critically explores the limited attention given to right-wing extremism in the extension of Prevent, such that a large imbalance between Islamist and right-wing focused counter-radicalisation still dominates the policy; for instance, right-wing extremism is not even defined within Prevent despite the significant definitional discussion of Islamist-inspired extremism. Furthermore this half-hearted, copy-and-paste application of Prevent to right-wing extremism also masks, Bentley argues, a fundamental misunderstanding of the drivers of right-wing action. The UK government may have recognised the far right as a threat, but this recognition has not led to a considered or appropriate response.

In Chapter 7, Rocio Cifuentes turns to the recent application of counter-radicalisation programmes to those deemed vulnerable to right-wing extremism. In so doing, she draws on her autobiographical experience of working within youth organisations in the UK on projects aimed at preventing seemingly vulnerable Muslim and white young people being drawn towards various forms of extremism. As she points out, there are numerous challenges to being at once a sociologist and community worker, not least the fear of collusion in the deeply political act of labelling those individuals with whom one is working. While awareness of the importance of this politics of labelling may be self-evident within reflexive academia, Cifuentes points to the difficulties it poses in the world of the practitioner. In so doing, she presages themes to which the subsequent chapters by Nadya Ali and Francesco Ragazzi also point.
Chapter 8, by Nadya Ali, draws on Michel Foucault’s governmentality approach to explore how radicalisation policies help to constitute the ‘Muslim community’ within the UK with which they purport to engage. Taking issue with essentialist readings of all stripes, Ali looks at the way in which this ‘community’ has been mapped by various organisations across the UK and the importance of this for efforts to govern the conduct of Muslims therein. She demonstrates clearly how Britain’s counter-terrorism policies have helped to construct and produce the ‘Muslim community’, rendering it as a governable entity which is subject to intervention and management.

Chapter 9, by Francesco Ragazzi, then focuses our attention upon the divisive consequences of counter-radicalisation initiatives. Rejecting the ‘suspect communities’ thesis that has gained considerable traction amongst critics of counter-radicalisation, Ragazzi approaches these initiatives instead as efforts to manage diversity. Notions of partnership which run through policies in this area must be situated, for Ragazzi, within neo-liberal impulses. And, as with Ali’s analysis, these policies produce the communities with whom they claim to engage. In addition, attempts to ‘win hearts and minds’ through community policing and the like are deeply depoliticising and some way from the alternative – normatively desirable, ‘soft’ counter-terrorism – that they are normally portrayed as.

Chapter 10, by Lella Nouri and Andrew Whiting, focuses on the operation of counter-radicalisation frameworks in cyberspace. Taking the UK’s Prevent programme as their focus, Nouri and Whiting argue that this programme misunderstands the relationship between terrorism and the internet with potentially harmful consequences. In their view, Prevent not only undervalues the internet’s centrality within radicalisation dynamics, it also compounds the construction of suspect communities through a discourse of ‘vulnerable people’ that disproportionately focuses on young British Muslims. This focus, they suggest, potentially undermines the values needed to challenge extremist narratives that appear online, potentially exacerbating constructions of the internet as a home for deviance, and of communities therein as suspicious.

Chapter 11, by Thomas Martin, investigates the formulation of the UK’s counter-radicalisation strategy, the Prevent programme, using the technique of discourse analysis. He argues that Prevent is underscored by a pre-emptive security logic, which promises to reduce the potential of terrorist violence even before the threat has emerged as a choice in the minds of potential perpetrators of terrorist acts. Martin explains that in order to ‘prevent’ such acts from occurring, the programme has itself been designed on the basis of a series of assumptions that have come to constitute knowledge about what radicalisation is and who is likely to become radicalised. He contends that this knowledge about radicalisation, which makes possible interventions against certain subjects deemed to be potentially dangerous, is ascribed through notions of identity and belonging. Taking this as the central logic governing the Prevent programme’s implementation and practice, Martin demonstrates how the policy legitimises and provides justification for governmental intervention into the lives of individuals and communities who express disassociation from conventional or normalised conceptualisations of ‘Britishness’.
Chapter 12, by Mohammed Elshimi, also investigates the UK’s Prevent programme. However, whereas the focus of other contributions to this volume centres around the concept of radicalisation, he draws our attention to the concept of de-radicalisation, which he argues has often been neglected within the literature. His chapter explores the concept of de-radicalisation in great detail with the specific aim of differentiating this idea from other concepts such as counter-radicalisation and disengagement. Building his analysis on empirical data gathered from a number of semi-structured interviews conducted with policymakers and practitioners working within the field of counter-radicalisation, as well as individuals drawn from targeted communities, Elshimi seeks to offer clarity to the concept of de-radicalisation, which he argues has thus far been characterised by a lack of primary research and great confusion over its actual meaning.

Chapter 13, the final contribution to this volume, by Lasse Lindekilde, offers further substance to the notion of de-radicalisation by focusing on Danish counter-radicalisation policies with the aim of drawing attention to what he identifies as the problematic logic underpinning the governance and practice of individual de-radicalisation efforts. His chapter begins by situating the analysis of such efforts within the broader scheme of Danish counter-terrorism strategies, before zooming in on the individual de-radicalisation interventions, based on mentoring practice, which he argues are now central to Danish counter-radicalisation efforts. Lindekilde contends that these new initiatives harbour potential pitfalls and present significant challenges moving forwards, not least because of the different understandings that exist between various frontline workers over what constitute ‘signs of radicalisation’. His analysis concludes by considering the extent to which Danish counter-radicalisation efforts can be considered a case of neo-liberal governmentality.

Concluding thoughts

Given the range of perspectives collected within this book, we attempt to identify, contest and ‘make strange’ the assumptions of ‘radicalisation’ which have become so conventional and common-sense in contemporary discourse. Where advocates of ‘radicalisation’ emphasise its coherence and objectivity, we interject evidence of its sudden appearance as signifier post-2004 (Kundnani, this volume) and the ideological inconsistencies that have plagued incarnations of counter-radicalisation policy (Edwards, this volume). Where ‘counter-radicalisation’ is conventionally presented as an appropriate response to terrorism, we highlight the counter-productivity of such policies, which actually encourage hate-crime (Aly, this volume) and decrease community cohesion rather than foster it (Thomas, this volume). Where policymakers insist that radicalisation is a non-racist discourse that can be extended to the prevention of right-wing violence, we highlight its internal logics which function to constitute racialised/religious populations as ‘other’ (Ali, this volume; Ragazzi, this volume), as well as the problems that beset the cross-application of counter-radicalisation between right-wing and jihadist referents (Bentley, this volume; Vermeulen and Berczyk, this volume).
In short, this volume deploys critical methodologies and analyses to challenge the conventional wisdom of radicalisation, ‘making strange’ that which has become the commonplace explanation for violence.

Notes
1 See the etymology of the term ‘radicalization’ in the OED Online (2014c).
2 The idea of an ‘essentially contested concept’ was first put forward by the social theorist Walter B. Gallie (1956).
3 For an exception, see Bjorgo (2009).

References


1 Radicalisation

The journey of a concept

*Arun Kundnani*

**Introduction**

How a government makes sense of political violence directed against it usually tells us at least as much about the nature of that government as it does about the nature of its violent opponents. After Ulrike Meinhof, of the West German Red Army Faction, was found hanged in her prison cell in 1976, officials secretly removed her brain in the hope that neuropathologists might discover physical clues as to why she gave up her successful career as a journalist to co-found the far-left armed group. To state officials, it seemed more natural to locate the source of her violence in brain deformities than in the political conflicts of post-war Germany. Likewise, Mau Mau rebels captured in the 1950s by the British army in colonial Kenya were examined by the psychiatrist J. C. Carothers, who claimed to find ‘hard scientific evidence’ demonstrating that the uprising was ‘not political but psycho-pathological’, a conclusion which conveniently validated the need for continuing colonial government (Elkins, 2005, pp. 106–107).

In the aftermath of 9/11, public discussion of the causes of terrorism was largely curtailed, on the assumption that there could be no explanatory account of terrorism beyond the evil mindset of the perpetrators. Catchphrases – that terrorists were motivated by a hatred of freedom or by a fanaticism inherent to Islam – were prevalent. Terrorism became an ‘evil ideology’ that did not require further analysis (Johnson, 2002). Those wanting to cover such simple formulae in the veneer of scholarship turned to the founding father of terrorism studies, Walter Laqueur, whose ‘new terrorism’ thesis distinguished between older, political forms of terrorism inspired by nationalism, communism or fascism, and the new ‘Islamic fundamentalist violence’ that he saw as ‘rooted in fanaticism’ (1998, pp. 51, 50). The thrust of these accounts was that terrorists and those perceived to be their ideological fellow travellers in Muslim communities were unformable and no political or economic change could stem their hatred. Only overwhelming force would be successful against this new enemy; thus the greater evil of terrorism justified the lesser evil of ‘shock and awe’ in Iraq and incarceration at Guantánamo.

By 2004, however, this account of terrorism was showing its limitations. As the US ‘victory’ in Iraq gave way to a bloody war of counter-insurgency, and...
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terrorist attacks took place in Madrid and then London, governments began to ask if ‘hearts and minds’ were as important as ‘shock and awe’. No longer believing that killing and capturing could by themselves bring success, they looked for a new discourse that could better guide their counter-terrorism efforts. The taboo on discussing causes of terrorism now had to be broken. The concept of ‘radicalisation’ emerged as a vehicle for policy-makers to explore the process by which a terrorist is made, and to provide an analytical grounding for preventive strategies that went beyond the threat of violence or detention.

Peter Neumann, one of the founders of the new radicalisation discourse, described in 2008 the value of the concept of radicalisation:

Following the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, however, it suddenly became very difficult to talk about the ‘roots of terrorism’, which some commentators claimed was an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians. Even so, it seemed obvious (then) that some discussion about the underlying factors that had given rise to this seemingly new phenomenon was urgent and necessary, and so experts and officials started referring to the idea of ‘radicalisation’ whenever they wanted to talk about ‘what goes on before the bomb goes off’. In the highly charged atmosphere following the September 11 attacks, it was through the notion of radicalisation that a discussion about the political, economic, social and psychological forces that underpin terrorism and political violence became possible again.

(Neumann, 2008, p. 4)

In the context of the evolving ‘War on Terror’, this new discussion of radicalisation could present itself as the wiser, more liberal alternative to the simple accounts of terrorism offered immediately after 9/11. It acknowledged that terrorism was a problem that could be investigated, analysed and subjected to policy solutions beyond the use of physical force. In actuality, however, the radicalisation discourse was, from the beginning, circumscribed by the demands of counter-terrorist policy-makers rather than an attempt to objectively study how terrorism comes into being. Rather than provide a location for scholarly understanding of the causes of terrorism – what Kant (1784) called the ‘public use of reason’, aimed at the general enlightenment of society – the radicalisation discourse limited itself to the ‘private use of reason’ (serving the needs of a ‘particular civil post or office’), constraining the intellectual process to the needs of government security establishments (2006, p. 19).

As such, the concept of radicalisation inherited at birth a number of built-in, limiting assumptions: that those perpetrating terrorist violence are drawn from a larger pool of extremist sympathisers who share an Islamic theology that inspires their actions; that entry into this wider pool of extremists can be predicted by individual or group psychological or theological factors; and that knowledge of these factors could allow government policies that reduce the risk of terrorism. The study of radicalisation, ostensibly a reflection on the causes of terrorism, is
thus in practice limited to a much narrower question: why do some individual Muslims support an extremist interpretation of Islam that leads to violence? This question, of course, takes terrorist violence to be a product of how Islam is interpreted, and so renders irrelevant consideration of terrorism not carried out by Muslims. An a priori distinction is drawn between the ‘new terrorism’, seen as originating in Islamist theology, and the ‘old terrorism’ of nationalist or Leftist political violence, for which the question of radicalisation is far less often posed. Answers to the question of what drives this radicalisation process are to exclude ascribing any causative role to the actions of Western governments or their allies in other parts of the world; instead, individual psychological or theological journeys, largely removed from social and political circumstances, are claimed to be the ‘root cause’ of the radicalisation process. While some accounts acknowledge politics as a component of radicalisation – using euphemistic phrases, such as ‘grievances against real or perceived injustices’ – this is only done in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence, before quickly moving on to the more comfortable ground of psychology or theology. While terrorist violence is not seen as having political causes, non-violent political activity by Muslim groups that are thought to share in the belief system of terrorists is seen as another manifestation of the same ‘radicalisation’ process, with roots in individual theological and/or psychological journeys; it is thereby depoliticised and seen as complicit with religiously inspired terrorism.

As Mark Sedgwick argues in one of the few critical reflections on the radicalisation discourse: 2

> The concept of radicalisation emphasizes the individual and, to some extent, the ideology and the group, and significantly de-emphasizes the wider circumstances – the ‘root causes’ that it became so difficult to talk about after 9/11, and that are still often not brought into analyses. So long as the circumstances that produce Islamist radicals’ declared grievances are not taken into account, it is inevitable that the Islamist radical will often appear as a ‘rebel without a cause’.

(Sedgwick, 2010, pp. 480–481)

In pursuing this path, radicalisation analysts supply what policy-makers demand. Following the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004 and the 7/7 attacks on the London transport system in 2005, the issue of ‘home-grown’ terrorism, involving citizens of European countries carrying out violence domestically, came to prominence. Government officials, first in the Netherlands, and later elsewhere, began to devise counter-radicalisation policies they hoped would pre-empt such violence. Their assumption was that knowledge of the ‘indicators’ of individual or group radicalisation would allow for the construction of an early warning system to detect theological violence. Authorities came to believe that they could monitor and profile Muslim citizens for the signs of radicalisation and then intervene to prevent the drift to extremism. Rather than providing governments with a full analysis of the causes of ‘home-grown’
terrorism, think-tanks and terrorism studies departments – which had been established in universities after 9/11 to attract new government funding for national security research – began to model the process by which an individual was thought to become a supporter of the extremist ideologies assumed to lie behind terrorist violence. After all, addressing the wider political context to terrorism was a non-starter with government officials, for whom the basic parameters of foreign policy in the Middle East and South Asia were written in stone, whereas ‘counter-radicalisation’ policy was an emerging area that demanded new forms of knowledge.

For those establishing themselves as purveyors of this knowledge, the period from 2004 onwards was a time of new opportunities, new funding and new audiences. Disraeli once remarked, at the high point of British colonial expansion, that ‘The East is a career’; Edward Said used the phrase as the epigraph to his Orientalism (1978); today, ‘counter-radicalisation’ is a career, as young scholars enter the mini-industry of national security think-tanks, terrorism studies departments, law enforcement counter-terrorism units and intelligence services to work on modelling radicalisation. Of course, scholars of political violence should want societies to make use of their work, but true scholarship also involves a duty to question the underlying assumptions that define academic disciplines, particularly when those assumptions reflect the priorities of governments which are themselves party to the conflict under investigation.

Whereas before 2001 the term ‘radicalisation’ had been used informally in academic literature to refer to a shift towards more radical politics (usually not referring to Muslims), by 2004 the term had acquired its new meaning of a psychological or theological process by which Muslims move towards extremist views. The upsurge of academic interest in radicalisation from 2004 is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

In what follows, I examine the work of some of the leading scholars of radicalisation and try to show how their analyses owe more to the aims and objectives of the states that are the primary consumers of their literature, than to an objective study of the subject. This is not solely a matter of biases introduced by funding, revolving doors between government agencies and think-tanks, or other institutional pressures, but rather a matter of ideological assumptions that determine what counts as legitimate and illegitimate within the terms of this discourse. The result is a systematic failure to address the reality of the political conflicts that radicalisation scholars claim they want to understand. Instead, a concept has been contrived which builds in to official thinking biases and prejudices that, in turn, structure government practices introduced to combat radicalisation, resulting in discrimination and unwarranted restrictions on civil liberties.

‘A cultural-psychological predisposition’

A 2004 article by Walter Laqueur – a bridge between the older terrorism studies and the then emerging radicalisation literature – provides a useful starting point to explore the concept of radicalisation. Laqueur, a seasoned Washington insider
who first came to prominence in the 1950s as the Israel representative for the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom (Saunders, 1999, p. 214), begins by asserting that ‘al Qaeda was founded and September 11 occurred not because of a territorial dispute or the feeling of national oppression but because of a religious commandment – jihad and the establishment of shari’ah’ (Laqueur, 2004, p. 51). His argument for rejecting any linkage between terrorism and either poverty or causes such as Palestine is that there are many groups who suffer poverty or oppression but not all resort to violence. With this, he moves away from a macro focus on economics or politics and descends to the level of the individual: ‘How to explain that out of 100 militants believing with equal intensity in the justice of their cause, only a very few will actually engage in terrorist actions?’ (2004, p. 53) Here we confront the founding question of the radicalisation discourse, which, Laqueur states, has been hitherto neglected. Answering it will provide a root cause that no longer references the wider political context but instead focuses on what he calls ‘a cultural-psychological predisposition’ (2004, p. 53). Framing the root cause question in this way and providing a model of this ‘predisposition’ also, of course, offers intelligence and law enforcement agencies the possibility of an analytical framework that can be used for surveillance purposes. Scholarship that associates a particular kind of ‘predisposition’, be it ‘cultural’, ‘psychological’ or some combination of the
two, with terrorist violence enables intelligence gatherers to use that predisposition as a proxy for terrorist risk, and to structure their surveillance efforts accordingly.

To illustrate the argument, Laqueur turns his attention to Europe, which he describes as ‘probably the most vulnerable battlefield’ and ‘the main base of terrorist support groups’. He claims that: ‘[T]his process has been facilitated by the growth of Muslim communities, the growing tensions with the native population, and the relative freedom with which radicals could organize in certain mosques and cultural organizations’ (2004, p. 55). The failure of ‘Muslim newcomers’ to integrate into Europe – ‘cultural and social integration was certainly not what the newcomers wanted’ – reflected a desire to maintain a separate religious and ethnic identity. This, in turn, led to ‘the radicalization of the second generation of immigrants’: acute feelings of ‘resentment and hostility’ towards the authorities and non-Muslim neighbours, nourished by under-achievement and ‘sexual repression’. Hence a ‘free-floating aggression’ underlies the ‘milieu in which Islamist terrorism and terrorist support groups in Western Europe developed’ (2004, p. 56).

In this early account, the main components and confusions of the radicalisation discourse are already present:

- the focus on the religious beliefs and psychology of individuals and the downplaying of political factors;
- the view that terrorism is rooted in a wider youth culture of anger and aggression; and
- the listing of factors likely to drive individuals towards support for terrorism, such as anti-Western attitudes, religious fundamentalism and self-segregation.

Already, the term ‘radicalisation’ tends to merge a number of meanings – disaffection, youth alienation, radical dissent, religious fundamentalism, propensity to violence – which ought to be kept analytically distinct. Already, unfounded and biased assumptions about the social and political history of Muslims in Europe are being introduced; and a causal process from ‘a cultural-psychological predisposition’ to violence is being asserted without any substantial evidence. Finally, it is worth noting that there is no mention of US and UK government rhetoric on the need to fight a war against ‘radical Islam’, of the war on Iraq, of the uniting of millions of European Muslims and non-Muslims to actively oppose it, and the failure of these mobilisations to prevent the war by democratic means.

Later works in the radicalisation discourse can be seen as attempts to systematise the basic framework laid out by Laqueur in 2004. For some, the question of religious belief – the ‘cultural’ part of Laqueur’s ‘predisposition’ – is most significant. If a set of religious beliefs can be identified that terrorists share with a wider group of radicals but which ‘moderate’ Muslims reject, then a model can be developed in which such beliefs are seen as ‘indicators’ of radicalisation, a point along a pathway to becoming a terrorist. This can be called the theological
approach to radicalisation. For security officials, it offers the possibility of a
formula for detecting future terrorist violence, because holding a specific set of
religious beliefs is regarded as a plausible indicator of terrorist risk. Intelligence
agencies can then believe that they have a scientific basis for targeting surveil-
lance and investigative resources at a specific group of people who happen to
have these beliefs – say, for example, Salafi Muslims. The problem is that if
there is no real reason to think that these radical religious beliefs are associated
with terrorist violence, then the theological radicalisation model is merely legiti-
mising unwarranted state intrusion into the private religious lives of large
numbers of citizens.

The other direction of travel from Laqueur’s 2004 paper is to attend to indi-
vidual and group psychology. What is the process by which, for some indi-
viduals, mental states of alienation or resentment escalate to extremist beliefs,
whereas for others they do not? This psychological approach to radicalisation
offers the same predictive possibilities for security officials; if particular patterns
of behaviour – for example, forming a close-knit group that isolates itself from
wider society – can be scientifically associated with terrorist violence, then that
can serve as another ‘indicator’ of risk. With this approach, a more complex
account of radicalisation is developed in which a psychological process, such as
a group dynamic or struggles with identity, is seen as interacting with a process
of acquiring an extremist theology, so that a particular combination of psycho-
logical factors and religious beliefs is the best guide to identifying radicalisation.

Implicit in both the theological and psychological approaches is the notion
that the ‘new terrorism’ of radical Islamism no longer organises itself in formal
hierarchies but operates through social networks. Rather than political propa-
ganda recruiting individuals into a group organised with a clear command struc-
ture (as, for example, the Provisional IRA was assumed to function), the
suggestion is that individuals are radicalised into supporting an ‘ideology’ as
part of an informal social network. This is taken to be a fundamental change; the
driver of terrorism becomes a set of ideas, rather than a coherent organisation.
Use of this model to inform counter-terrorist practices has obvious civil liberties
consequences; rather than the central focus on the activities of a criminal organ-
isation, attention turns to the circulation of ‘extremist ideas’, seen as a kind of
virus, able to turn people into violent radicals. This then leads law enforcement
agencies to try to prevent exposure to this virus, whether it be via books, web-
sites, preachers or radical activists. But is the distinction between an older and
newer organisational form, even if accurate, any more than a difference in
tactics? Hierarchical organisations as much as social networks rely on ideology
to bind them together; even if some terrorists appear to have learned that
informal networks are harder for states to intercept, that does not imply that the
underlying causes of terrorism have changed in any way.

One further point worth noting is that because security officials are interested
in patterns of belief and behaviour that correlate with terrorist risk, irrespective of
whether they cause terrorism, questions of causality are usually left unaddressed
in the radicalisation discourse. Instead of asking what causes terrorism – the key
Radicalisation as a theological process

A 2009 study by Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, entitled *Homegrown Terrorists in the US and UK: an empirical examination of the radicalization process*, published by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), provides a case study of scholarship that attempts to demonstrate the central role of theology in radicalisation. While the study is typical of many in its approach and conclusions, it stands out for its claim to rigour – ‘an empirical examination of behavioral manifestations of the radicalization process in 117 homegrown “jihadist” terrorists’ (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, 2009, p. 11) – and the interest it has attracted among policy-makers in Washington, DC.

The key question the study sets out to answer is: ‘What clues might there be that an individual is self-identifying with, or being indoctrinated into, jihadist ideology?’ (2009, p. 26) The data for the study are statements by terrorists themselves, trial transcripts and newspaper reports that provide biographical information on ‘every known Islamic homegrown terrorist in the US and UK who perpetrated an attack, attempted to do so, or illegally supported Islamic terrorism through the end of October 2008’ (2009, p. 27). Based on this data, the authors claim to discover clusters of ‘indicators’ that recur sufficiently to suggest a shared trajectory of radicalisation. The ‘indicators’ are not regarded as sufficient conditions to produce a terrorist but are useful markers of risk:

This study primarily focuses on specific behavioral changes that homegrown terrorists went through as they radicalized. It examines six manifestations of the radicalization process: the adoption of a legalistic interpretation of Islam, coming to trust only a select and ideologically rigid group of religious authorities, viewing the West and Islam as irreconcilably opposed, manifesting a low tolerance for perceived religious deviance, attempting to impose religious beliefs on others, and the expression of radical political views. (2009, p. 29)

The study concludes that the first five factors – all associated with religious ideology – are sufficiently present in enough cases to demonstrate that ‘the individuals' theological understanding was a relatively strong factor in their radicalization’ (2009, p. 14).

There are a number of rather obvious problems with the study:

- it does not include a control group of persons who are not terrorists
- it has no basis on which to associate terrorism with the religious manifestations it is considering; there seems to be no basis on which these six
manifestations of the radicalisation process were chosen as opposed to other possibilities;

• and, since the presence of any of these manifestations is tested by consulting sources that are more likely to record the presence of a particular manifestation than its absence, the results are likely to be skewed towards presence (for each manifestation considered, in only a low number of cases is its absence explicitly noted in the sources while, in around half of the cases, there is not enough information to determine its presence or absence).

Another difficulty is that, in some of the cases considered, there are serious questions as to the validity of the criminal convictions by which the individuals concerned are classed as terrorists; there are plausible arguments that some convictions were secured by entrapping individuals who were not terrorists but merely suspected of having ‘radical’ religious opinions (Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, 2011). This possibility is not considered but would imply that the study’s selection of cases is biased by the inclusion of persons who have particular religious opinions but are not violent. In addition, one might ask how much insight into ideology can be gleaned from breaking down a person’s beliefs into six discrete religious and political ‘manifestations’.

Even if these problems are set aside, there remains the difficulty that selecting to study the category of ‘jihadist’ terrorism assumes this form of terrorism has specific causes that differ from those of other forms of violence. In fact, this assumption runs up against even the limited data gathered by Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman. It turns out that belief in a ‘political’ narrative – which the study summarises as: ‘Western powers have conspired against Islam to subjugate it, both physically and morally. At the same time, Muslims worldwide have lost their faith, and lack the strength that they possessed during Muhammad’s time. The only proper response to the present situation is military action’ (2009, p. 52) – scores highest among the manifestations examined; indeed, there are no cases in which this political dimension was found to be absent. But the study seeks to evade the implications of its own data. Having noted that the political component of radicalisation appears more consistently than the theological, the authors immediately caution that to conclude politics is more significant than religion would be ‘crude’ because ‘when individuals are committed to a physical fight against the West, it is natural that they will try to justify this on multiple levels’ (2009, p. 53) – which rather defeats the purpose of looking to a person’s own account of his/her beliefs, as the study sets out to do. The authors go on to ask whether individuals’ religious awakening preceded or followed their political awakening. For the homegrown terrorists who exhibited signs of political radicalization, the religious awakening preceded the political awakening 40.7% of the time. In contrast, we found that political radicalization preceded any kind of religious radicalization 11.6% of the time. (In the other 47.7% of cases, it is unclear whether political or religious ideology came first.) Thus, in our view, a nuanced look at the role of religious ideology in
Radicalisation

homegrown terrorists’ radicalization should find that religion likely plays an important role.

(2009, p. 54)

But whether ‘religious awakening’ or ‘political radicalisation’ comes first is only relevant if we assume that either ‘religious awakening’ is a gateway to ‘political radicalisation’ or vice versa. No empirical evidence is offered for this assumption.

Why this eagerness to downplay political factors, even when the data suggests otherwise? Part of the answer might lie in the politics of the study’s publishers and funders. The FDD is one of several neo-conservative pressure groups set up in the wake of 9/11 that helped build support for the US war on Iraq. Its study was funded by three private foundations, one of which is the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation that donated more than $1.2 million to the neo-conservative Project for the New American Century and has provided millions of dollars to Islamophobic groups in the US, such as the Center for Security Policy and the David Horowitz Freedom Center (Ali et al., 2011, pp. 18–19). For such groups, it is convenient to root terrorism in Islamic extremism rather than in the political interaction of Western foreign policy and Muslim terrorist groups.

But perhaps the main reason is that a bias in favour of knowledge claims that can be put to use by national security ‘practitioners’ without institutional discomfort. Breaking down religious extremism into five different ‘manifestations’ that can be ‘scientifically’ associated with terrorism is knowledge that law enforcement and intelligence agencies can easily utilise. On the other hand, painting a more reflexive picture, in which state agencies and terrorists are caught in a dynamic political conflict, is much harder to ‘sell’. In an introductory section to the FDD study, Brian Jenkins Mead, a prominent analyst of terrorism at the RAND Corporation, makes clear its potential use by law enforcement and intelligence agencies: ‘The indicators identified by Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman … have value … in deciding whether to initiate a closer look or to not waste limited resources where it is not warranted’ (2009, p. 8). And the FDD study’s lead author has, according to his website, provided ‘instruction to members of the US military preparing for deployments to the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf. He also designs training courses and specific modules for use by US government agencies, including the State Department’s Office of Anti-Terrorism Assistance’ (Gartenstein-Ross, 2012).

**Radicalisation as a theological-psychological process**

While accounts of radicalisation that focus on religious ideology have had a certain influence, at least as significant have been more complex models of radicalisation that see an interactive process between theological and social psychological journeys. Rather than religious beliefs by themselves driving individuals to violence, the picture is one in which ideology becomes more extreme in response to a ‘cognitive opening’, an ‘identity crisis’ or a group bonding process.
This implies a more sophisticated counter-radicalisation practice that addresses the interdependence of theology with emotions, identity and group dynamics.

Among the most prominent exponents of this perspective is Marc Sageman, whose *Understanding Terror Networks* (2004) and *Leaderless Jihad: terror networks in the twenty-first century* (2008) together constitute perhaps the most ambitious attempt to develop a comprehensive theory of radicalisation. His model has come to be known as the ‘bunch of guys’ theory because of its emphasis on friendship and kinship. Sageman, a psychiatrist, was formerly a CIA operations officer specialising in Afghanistan and was based in Islamabad from 1987 to 1989, where he ran ‘unilateral programs with the Afghan Mujahedin’ (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2012). (At the time, the US government funded the Afghan ‘jihad’ against the Soviets; today it funds studies of what causes ‘jihad’.) Sageman has also been an adviser to the New York Police Department (NYPD) for a number of years and in 2008 was named its ‘scholar-in-residence’ (Sciolino and Schmitt, 2008).

In line with the basic assumptions of the radicalisation literature, Sageman rejects accounts that consider economic or political conditions as significant, on the grounds that these factors affect millions of people, whereas only a small number become terrorists. And, for similar reasons, he breaks with those who see religious ideology as the sole cause: ‘These perspectives imply an overly passive view of terrorists, who are the recipients of social forces or slaves to appealing ideas’ (2008, p. 23). Instead, he argues convincingly that we need to ask how terrorists interpret the structural conditions with which they are confronted and how they attempt to forge a common struggle in response. In addressing these questions, Sageman makes strong claims to academic rigour, claiming to bring the methods of social science (statistics, sampling theory, survey techniques, measurement, data analysis) to the study of radicalisation. Yet the object of his study lacks any definition. The closest we get to a description of the category of activities he is analysing is the statement that he is interested in ‘the men responsible for the September 11, 2001, attacks and all those who, like them, threaten the United States and the West on behalf of a larger community, the vanguard trying to establish a certain version of an Islamist utopia’ (2008, p. 15). This, he says, gives him a database of around 500 persons ‘linked’ to the 9/11 attackers. Based on this sample, he claims that the most striking feature of the ‘jihadist’ profile is that ‘joining the global Islamist terrorism social movement was based to a great degree on friendship and kinship…. About two-thirds of the people in the sample were friends with other people who joined together or already had some connection to terrorism’ (2008, p. 66). He concludes that there are two major pathways into terrorism:

1. the ‘bunch of guys’ who collectively decide to join a terrorist organisation; and
2. joining a childhood friend who is already a terrorist.

Social bonds, therefore, ‘come before any ideological commitment’ (2008, p. 70).
Sageman delves into the process by which a ‘bunch of guys’ radicalises to the point of supporting terrorism. He identifies four prongs to this process:

1. a sense of moral outrage about a perceived injustice in the world;
2. ‘an enabling interpretation’, such as that there is a war on Islam, which places this outrage in the wider context of a moral conflict (2008, pp. 75–81);
3. personal experiences, such as of discrimination, which become ‘another manifestation of the war on Islam’ (2008, p. 83); and
4. mobilising networks. ‘Only other people who share their outrage, beliefs, and experiences, but who are further along the path to violence or who are willing to explore it with them, can help them cross the line from venting their anger to becoming terrorists’ (2008, p. 84).

Thus, a ‘natural and intense loyalty to the group, inspired by a violent Salafi script, transformed alienated young Muslims into fanatic terrorists’ (2008, p. 88). For Sageman, it is the embedding of theological radicalism within a group dynamic that is the root cause of radicalisation.

In response, he argues, policy-makers should understand that the ‘war against the al Qaeda social movement is basically a battle for the hearts and minds of the Muslim community’ (2008, p. 94). He recommends that community policing can pre-empt the radicalisation process by reducing alienation, that the ‘American Dream’ of equal opportunity and individualism is better at integrating Muslims than the European welfare state model, which fosters dependency and indolence, and that the Iraq War was counter-productive because it fostered moral outrage (2008, pp. 102, 155). Above all, governments should quietly partner pro-Western Muslim leaders, advising them on the techniques of ‘political and cultural influence’, in order to ‘battle for the soul of the community’ and win over young Muslims with new role models and leaders who reject the narrative of a ‘war on Islam’ (2008, p. 160).

Sageman’s stress on social networks has an obvious implication for law enforcement and intelligence agencies; if tomorrow’s terrorists are likely to be today’s associates of terrorists, then that gives a simple formula for identifying targets of investigation – suspicion by association has anyway long been a staple of counter-terrorist policing. But claiming social bonds to be the root cause of terrorism is inadequate. Even if we accept the implication that terrorism spreads like a virus from a person already infected to his associates, all we have done is explain the process of infection; we have said nothing of why the ‘virus’ exists in the first place. Moreover, Sageman’s work shares with the rest of the radicalisation discourse a failure to distinguish between radical beliefs and violent methods. Despite Sageman’s stated aim to explore how terrorists interpret their situation and how they decide to respond, we get no discussion of the conditions under which violence is chosen over other means. The picture is one in which the ‘Salafi script’ is already a predisposition to violence that only needs a friendship dynamic to activate it. Sageman argues, with regard to al-Qaeda and the
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‘many other terrorist groups that collaborate in their operations’, that ‘Salafi ideology determines its mission, sets its goals, and guides its tactics’ (2004, p. 1). In other words, as a ‘bunch of guys’ intensifies belief in a radical theological worldview, violence is likely to follow. For that violence to pose a terrorist threat, the only other condition is that the social network is able to successfully seek out the ‘global Salafi jihad’ in order to access skills and resources (2004, p. 120). Thus, for Sageman, jihadi terrorism is the product of:

- a socialisation process of friendship and kinship;
- progressive intensification of beliefs leading to acceptance of the Salafi ideology; and
- a link to know-how and support (2004, p. 135).

At the heart of Sageman’s model, then, remains an unexamined assumption that violence has its origins in theology.

Sageman’s work has been a major influence on how law enforcement agencies understand radicalisation. He also provides an analytical basis for those who favour a managerial approach to Muslim ‘grievances’, using soft power methods to contain radical dissent and promote ‘shared values’, without asking too many questions about where that radicalism comes from. Conceiving the ‘War on Terror’ to be not only a series of military actions but also a global ideological campaign, Muslims are to be won over to a pro-Western ‘narrative’ using the same ‘cultural’ approach that had been favoured in the early Cold War. An ideological battle against radical Islamism thus becomes the new anti-Communism, with ‘moderate Muslims’ the new non-Communist Left, whom the CIA had sought to recruit against Moscow in the 1950s (Saunders, 1999).

A similar approach is favoured by Quintan Wiktorowicz, another leading advocate of a combined theological and social psychological model of radicalisation. Wiktorowicz spent a number of months in London in 2002 conducting ethnographic fieldwork with al-Muhajiroun, the radical Islamist group founded by Omar Bakri Muhammad. This research was published in 2005 as Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West. He subsequently worked at the US Embassy in London, at a time, after the 7/7 terrorist attacks, when the US government became keenly interested in the potential radicalisation of Britain’s Muslim population. He built up a network of links with Muslim leaders in Britain and observed the impact of the UK government’s Preventing Violent Extremism policy, which aimed at mobilising ‘moderate Muslims’ to oppose ‘the ideology that supports violent extremism’ (Temple-Raston, 2011; Kundnani, 2009). In early 2011, with the White House’s interest in developing similar policies, Wiktorowicz was appointed to the National Security Council and credited with developing the Obama administration’s counter-radicalisation policy (White House, 2011).

In Radical Islam Rising, Wiktorowicz seeks to determine why ‘thousands of young Britons are attracted to the panoply of radical Islamic movements with bases or branches in the UK, including Hizb ut-Tahrir, Supporters of the Shariah,
al-Muhajiroun, and al-Qaeda’ (2005, p. 3). Like Sageman, he emphasises the way that groups place ‘grievances’ within an interpretative ‘frame’, and the importance of socialisation into the group’s construction of reality to create a ‘network of shared meaning’ (2005, p. 17). But his account of radicalisation adds still more levels of complexity, while maintaining the same underlying assumptions. He introduces the concept of a ‘cognitive opening’, which refers to a psychological crisis in which previously accepted beliefs are shaken and an individual becomes receptive to other views and perspectives (2005, p. 20). This might be caused by emotional distress (such as a death in the family), experiences of discrimination, political repression, confusion over identity, or as a result of ‘consciousness raising’ or persuasion by activists. Those who experience a cognitive opening may then attempt to find religious answers to the discontent that has prompted it, through initiating a process of ‘religious seeking’. Finally, exposure to networks of radicals socialises individuals into participation in the movement, as would-be activists are ‘cultured’ into accepting the religious authority of the movement’s leaders and adopting their ideology (2005, p. 6).

Wiktorowicz begins his study with an account of two erstwhile members of al-Muhajiroun – Asif Mohammed Hanif and Omar Khan Sherif – who in 2003 carried out a suicide attack on behalf of Hamas at the Mike’s Place bar in Tel Aviv. The rest of the text effectively becomes an attempt to explain how it was possible for these two British citizens to be willing to carry out such an act of violence. Yet the people studied by Wiktorowicz, through his interviews and participant observation, are radical activists not terrorists, a distinction that gets lost in the attempt to construct a model of ‘radicalisation’. Most of al-Muhajiroun’s activities consist of ideological propagation but the group supports violence in certain contexts, and individual and former activists have been involved in violent actions. But Wiktorowicz offers little reflection on what factors legitimise or delegitimise the use of violence by the movement. As with Sageman’s work, the question of what causes radical religious beliefs becomes a proxy for the question of what causes violence.7 As Wiktorowicz himself acknowledges at the end of his study, the social psychological process by which individuals become active in radical Islamist groups is ‘not all that different’ from moderate, non-violent Muslim groups or from non-Islamic social movements, even if the content of the ideology differs; it therefore becomes impossible to use his account of that process to plausibly explain why violence occurs (2005, p. 210).

**Radicalisation models as policing tools**

The view, shared by Sageman and Wiktorowicz, that radicalisation is essentially a theological-psychological process, in which radical religious beliefs, activated by group dynamics or cognitive openings, transform individuals into terrorists, has been influential among law enforcement agencies. In 2007, the Intelligence Division of the NYPD published a study, entitled *Radicalization in the West: the homegrown threat*, that outlined a simplified version of this kind of radicalisation model. It was the first time that the NYPD had chosen to publish a document...
that claimed any kind of scholarly credentials; it did so, it stated, in order ‘to contribute to the debate among intelligence and law enforcement agencies on how best to counter this emerging threat’ (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 2). Backed by outside ‘experts’, such as Brian Jenkins Mead of RAND, and strongly influenced by the work of Sageman and Wiktorowicz, the report identifies ‘jihadist’ ideology as the key driver of radicalisation, suggesting four phases by which an individual goes from being ‘unremarkable’ to a person who is ‘quite likely to be involved in the planning or implementation of a terrorist act’:

1. **pre-radicalization** (the situation before exposure to ‘jihadi-Salafi Islam’);
2. **self-identification** (beginning to explore ‘Salafi Islam’ as a result of a cognitive opening);
3. **indoctrination** (progressive intensification of beliefs, leading to complete adoption of the ideology, as a result of group socialisation); and
4. **jihadisation** (acceptance of an individual duty to participate in jihad) (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, pp. 6–7).

These stages are described as a ‘funnel’ through which ordinary persons become terrorists, as their religious beliefs become progressively more radical (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 10).

The NYPD study argues that each of these four stages of radicalisation has its distinct set of indicators that allow predictions to be made about future terrorist risk. For example, the second stage of the radicalisation process has ‘typical signatures’ that include:

- ‘Becoming alienated from one’s former life’ and ‘affiliating with like-minded individuals’;
- ‘Joining or forming a group of like-minded individuals in a quest to strengthen one’s dedication to Salafi Islam’;
- ‘Giving up cigarettes, drinking, gambling and urban hip-hop gangster clothes’;
- ‘Wearing traditional Islamic clothing, growing a beard’; and
- ‘Becoming involved in social activism and community issues’ (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 31).

The study acknowledges that these behaviours are ‘subtle and non-criminal’ but nevertheless the need ‘to identify those entering this process at the earliest possible stage’ means that intelligence-gathering based on these indicators is ‘the critical tool in helping to thwart an attack’ (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 85).8

Following Sageman and Wiktorowicz’s emphasis on the group dynamic in radicalisation, the NYPD considers it crucial to identify ‘radicalization incubators’ – the venues where socialisation into radical ideology is occurring. These the study describes as ‘places where like-minded individuals will congregate as they move through the radicalization process’. They can be mosques but are more likely to be ‘cafes, cab driver hangouts, flophouses, prisons, student
associations, non-governmental organizations, hookah (water pipe) bars, butcher shops and book stores’ or ‘extremist websites and chat-rooms’ (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 20).

Thus, in the hands of the NYPD, Sageman and Wiktorowicz’s radicalisation scholarship becomes a prospectus for mass surveillance of Muslim populations. An investigation by the Associated Press, published in a series of articles beginning in August 2011, revealed that such surveillance has been systematically practised by the NYPD in recent years. With assistance from the CIA, every aspect of Muslim life in and around New York has been thought worthy of observation and infiltration. More than 250 mosques in New York and New Jersey and hundreds more ‘hot spots’, such as restaurants, cafés, bookshops, community organisations and student associations, have been listed as potential security risks, for reasons that included endorsing conservative religious views or having devout customers. A secret team known as the Demographics Unit has dispatched undercover officers and recruited informants to eavesdrop at these ‘locations of interest’. An NYPD ‘Moroccan Initiative’ has watched Moroccan restaurants, gyms, barbershops, meat markets and taxi companies – and compiled a list of every known Moroccan taxi driver (Associated Press, 2011).

According to Senate Committee testimony, the FBI uses a similar model of radicalisation to that outlined in the NYPD’s report (Miller, 2007). However, the FBI tends to give more weight to community partnerships in countering the radicalisation process. Muslim community leaders, often local businessmen, are briefed by FBI agents on the process of radicalisation, presenting the same four-stage model as the NYPD’s, and told of warning signs to look for among young people in the community. Through a combination of community self-policing and tip-offs, the FBI believes that this approach can prevent extremism (Kundnani, 2011). This mirrors the strategy outlined by the Obama administration’s August 2011 position paper, *Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States*, which heralded community partnerships as the government’s chief means of countering radicalisation among American Muslims (White House, 2011). Wiktorowicz was largely responsible for drafting the strategy.

Speaking about this new strategy in an interview with NPR Radio, Denis McDonough, deputy national security advisor to the White House, listed who was being asked by the government to monitor communities for signs of radicalisation: ‘Well, I think it’s not just local law enforcement, although local law enforcement is addressing this issue and is ready. It’s also local community leaders. It’s teachers. It’s principals. It’s coaches’ (NPR Radio, 2011). The strategy thus envisages a web of surveillance and engagement by a range of professions that might interact with young Muslims and whose members would be trained in spotting the signs of radicalisation, following the models developed in the scholarly literature. It is hard to see how this does not amount to a substantial intrusion into the mental and spiritual lives of young Muslims. But by outsourcing this kind of surveillance to educators and community leaders, and relying on community self-policing initiatives as much as law enforcement
interventions, the government hopes to avoid charges of violating the First Amendment to the constitution on freedom of speech and religion.

The inspiration for these approaches is Britain’s Preventing Violent Extremism programme, which was launched by the Blair government in 2007 and has sought to build partnerships between Muslim community organisations, police forces and local authorities to mount an ideological challenge to radicalism and identify individuals thought to be on a radicalising path (Kundnani, 2009). The latter of these objectives is met through the Channel project, which involves youth workers, health workers and teachers being trained to spot supposed indicators of radicalisation in order to identify ‘vulnerable’ young people, who are given mentoring, religious instruction or counselling to stem their journey towards extremism. 1,120 individuals were identified by Channel project practitioners as on a pathway to radicalisation between 2007 and 2010. Of these, 290 were under 16 years old and 55 were under 12. Over 90 per cent were Muslim (the rest were identified for potential involvement in far-right extremism) (Home Office, 2011a). Official Channel guidance on the signs that radicalisation is taking place appears to be influenced by Sageman and Wiktorowicz and their focus on socialisation and cognitive opening. Listed as potential factors of radicalisation are, for example:

- abandoning current associates in favour of a new social network;
- experiencing a crisis of identity or family separation; and
- expressing ‘real or imagined grievances’ (HM Government, 2010, pp. 9–10).

Wiktorowicz’s analysis had earlier been strongly influential in similar programmes run by the Amsterdam municipal authority following the Van Gogh murder in 2004 (Mellis, 2007). The approach there, subsequently replicated in other Dutch and Scandinavian cities, was likewise to embed surveillance in a range of formal and informal agencies in the hope of creating an early warning system to detect radicalisation. Both the Dutch programme and the UK’s Channel project depend on the ability of the state to collect highly detailed information about the lives of Muslims, including children. While ostensibly this information is not routinely shared with law enforcement and intelligence service investigators, it is of course available to them should they wish to access it. In any case, such programmes raise substantial issues of religious discrimination and disproportionate invasion of private life.

The primacy of politics

Radicalisation models, whether based solely on theology or including a social psychological component, have encouraged national security establishments to believe that they can pre-empt future terrorist attacks through intensive surveillance of the spiritual and mental lives of Muslims. Radical religious ideology has been conceived as a kind of virus infecting those with whom it comes into contact, either by itself or in combination with psychological processes. But the
radicalisation literature fails to offer a convincing demonstration of any causal relationship between theology and violence. Moreover, the concept of radicalisation tends to confuse propensity to violence with radical ideas, leading the question of what causes violence to be insufficiently isolated from the question of how belief systems and ideologies come to be adopted.

In a paper that is less widely read than his better-known books on Islamism, Olivier Roy argues that it makes more sense to separate theology from violence: ‘the process of violent radicalisation has little to do with religious practice, while radical theology, as salafisme, does not necessarily lead to violence’ (Roy, 2008, p. 2). The ‘leap into terrorism’ is not religiously inspired but better seen as sharing ‘many factors with other forms of dissent, either political (the ultra-left), or behavioural: the fascination for sudden suicidal violence as illustrated by the paradigm of random shootings in schools (the “Columbine syndrome”’) (2008, pp. 3, 15). While a Salafi semantic register might be part of the way that groups articulate their narrative, this by itself is not evidence that religious ideology is causing violence, merely that, within this milieu, legitimacy is secured using theological references.

Despite its analytical problems, the radicalisation concept continues to be popular among policy-makers in Europe and the US. And the alternative possibilities for conceiving of terrorism, particularly those that view it as a mode of political action, are neglected. While policing agencies search for scholarship that can give them a magical formula to predict who will be a future terrorist, an honest survey of individual cases suggests that the micro-level question of what causes one person rather than another in the same political context to engage in violence is beyond analysis and best seen as unpredictable (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010, p. 893). For policing agencies, the best approach is therefore to investigate the active promotion of violence, rather than wider belief systems which are wrongly assumed to be precursors to violence.

On the other hand, the meso-level question, of what conditions are likely to increase or decrease the legitimacy of the use of particular types of violence for a particular political actor (either a social movement or a state), is amenable to productive analysis. So, too, is the macro-level question of how particular social movements and states are constituted to be in conflict with each other, and how the interaction between these different political actors produces a context in which violence becomes acceptable (della Porta, 2009, p. 9). This relational aspect requires us to investigate the ways in which Western states themselves ‘radicalised’ following 9/11 as much as non-state actors, both becoming more willing to use violence in a wider range of contexts. An objective study would examine how state and non-state actors mutually constitute themselves as combatants in a global conflict between ‘the West’ and ‘radical Islam’, and address the conditions under which each chooses to adopt tactics of violence, paying close attention to the relationship between the legitimising frameworks of the various actors. Only by analysing the interaction between the different parties in the conflict and how each interprets the other’s actions is it possible to explain why the number of incidents of home-grown terrorist violence increased dramatically in Europe following the launch of the Iraq War.
Of course, such a perspective on terrorism would also imply a very different approach to ‘counter-radicalisation’, one that sought solutions in the political empowerment of young people, the creation of political space for Muslim communities to engage in radical, democratic alternatives to violent vanguardism, and a rethinking of the foreign policies of US and allied governments.

Notes

1 For a critique, see Burnett and Whyte (2005).
2 Other critical studies include Dornhof (2009), Huq (2010), Githens-Mazer and Lambert (2010) and Patel (2011).
3 This graph was generated using full-text searches on journal publisher websites and on the EBSCO website. A journal was included in the survey if it had published at least one article on radicalisation in the last twenty years, based on a wide-ranging literature review of the subject. No adjustment has been made for the moderate growth in the total number of articles published each year in these journals over the period of time under consideration. Biases were also potentially introduced due to variations in how different search engines handled keywords. Both British (‘radicalisation’) and American (‘radicalization’) spellings were included in the survey. The 30 journals included in the survey were: British Journal of Criminology; British Journal of Politics and International Relations; Brown Journal of World Affairs; Civil Wars; Comparative Politics; Criminology and Public Policy; Critical Studies on Terrorism; Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict; European Journal of Criminology; International Affairs; International Security; Journal of Conflict Resolution; Journal of Peace Research; Media, War and Conflict; Middle East Journal; Middle East Policy; Policy Review; Policy Studies; Race & Class; Religion, State and Society; RUSI Journal; Security Dialogue; Security Studies; Small Wars and Insurgencies; Social Identities; Social Issues and Policy Review; Studies in Conflict and Terrorism; Terrorism and Political Violence; Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science and Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions.
4 For example, in December 2011, Ahmed Faraz was convicted in the UK of possessing and distributing ‘extremist’ material, including Sayyid Qutb’s book Milestones (BBC News, 2011). In April 2012, Tarek Mehanna was convicted in the US of conspiring to provide material support to a terrorist organisation, for translating a widely available jihadist document (Cole, 2012).
5 Support for violent methods should itself also be further distinguished from being willing to plan and commit violent acts. The former is usually constitutionally protected.
7 Many less scholarly accounts of radicalisation suffer from the same drawback, for example Malik (2007) and Husain (2007). For a critique, see Kundnani (2008).
8 The NYPD stated in a subsequent ‘clarification’ that the report did not mean to imply that religious behaviours such as growing a beard could be indicators for the purposes of surveillance.
9 Similarly, Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson (2011) question the assumption that ‘religious terrorism’ is the product of religious ideology and unpack the distinction between ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ forms of terrorism. And Mark Sedgwick (2004)
argues that al-Qaeda’s violence is best understood in terms of classic theories of the political strategy of ‘propaganda of the deed’, as developed by nineteenth-century anarchists.

According to Home Office figures, the number of people convicted of terrorism-related crimes in Britain more than doubled between 2003, when the Iraq War began, and 2006, before halving again by 2009 (Home Office, 2011b, pp. 29–30). Pape has used quantitative data to argue that suicide bombing is a tactic used to oppose foreign occupations carried out by democracies (Pape and Feldman, 2010). However, his account is overly mechanical in the way it conceives the use of violence by non-state actors.

References


A. Kundnani


2 Prevent and Community Cohesion in Britain
The worst of all possible worlds?

Paul Thomas

Introduction
The shocking murder of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London, in May 2013 has obliged the security frame which highlights the radicalisation of British Muslims as a continuing threat to the UK. Although this was the first British civilian fatality caused by domestic terrorist actions since the 7/7 London bombings of 2005, the Woolwich attack was quickly utilised to support the discourse of a continuing Islamist threat to Britain – a frame which has, since 7/7, been largely forced to rely upon the prosecution of plots rather than incidents. Given the sudden re-emergence of (admittedly low-impact) terrorist violence, the Woolwich murder has played a central role in the renewed political and media attention paid to Prevent, Britain’s policy for preventing attraction towards terrorism and tackling those ideologies which justify violence. Introduced in 2006 as part of the wider CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (Home Office, 2003), Prevent has involved a spend of at least £200 million on community-based education and engagement. This British approach has been significantly influential on similar policies subsequently developed by other Western countries that have also identified threats of domestic Islamist terrorism (Aly, this volume; Neumann, 2011). Political commentary after Woolwich has been largely articulated through the radicalisation frame and the proposed responses to the attacks involve the amplification of the Prevent strategy. Yet Prevent has been significantly controversial and contested from its very beginning. This controversy has not just focused on the effectiveness of Prevent in preventing further terrorist plots and actions, but also on its impact on wider relationships between the state and Muslim communities. A persistent allegation is that Prevent has been a key vehicle for a fatal securitisation of this relationship, with a supposedly educational ‘hearts-and-minds’ programme actually covering for the development of a large-scale surveillance scheme controlled overtly by the police and security services (Kundnani, 2009). Connected but secondary to that headline critique has been the suggestion that Prevent has had a messy, unhelpful and confused relationship with the parallel British policy priority of Community Cohesion, the post-2001 state policy approach to ethnic community relations, ‘multiculturalism’ and the societal integration of ethnic minorities (Cantle, 2001; Thomas,
It is the central contention of this chapter that the relationship between these two policy agendas now represents the worst of all possible worlds. Here, Prevent continues to work in contradiction to the analysis and approach of Community Cohesion, not only causing organisational problems between the two policy programmes at national and local state levels but also fatally undermining the effectiveness of Prevent on its own terms because of its failure to take on that analysis. The 2011 Prevent Review has actually deepened the problematic, securitised nature of Prevent’s monocultural focus on British Muslims while at the same time any national policy concern with community cohesion, or ‘integration’, across communities has disappeared.

It is the relationship between the two British policy agendas of Prevent and Community Cohesion that this chapter is therefore concerned with. The Prevent–Community Cohesion relationship was a significant concern for the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry into Prevent in 2009–10. The resulting report (House of Commons, 2010) criticised a confusing overlap of the two policies and suggested a clear demarcation, with Prevent becoming the sole property of the Home Office and its Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) focusing solely on Community Cohesion and ethnic integration. This recommendation was accepted in the new Coalition government’s Prevent Review of June 2011 (HMG, 2011), leading to a general perception that the two policies of Prevent and Community Cohesion (or ‘Integration’, as the Coalition preferred to refer to it as; DCLG, 2012) were in synergy and that the newly streamlined Prevent was therefore more effective.

This analysis, and the claims of productive synergy they lead to, is entirely disputed by this chapter for a number of reasons. First, it argues that the clear policy demarcation claimed simply doesn’t, and cannot, exist at the ground operational level. Second, it argues that this national level, post-2011 policy split has significantly exacerbated and further securitised inherent problems and tensions within Prevent; it has left the ‘spooks’ (the security services and their security-focused police colleagues) in sole, centralised charge of what is supposed to be a ground-level engagement programme based around youth and educational programmes. Third, and most importantly, the chapter argues that this later demarcation of Prevent and Community Cohesion has made Prevent even more problematic and less effective in its own terms because it removes Prevent even further from, and privileges it even more in relation to, the policy analysis and practices of Community Cohesion. Here, Prevent has sidelined the development of local Community Cohesion practice (Monro et al., 2010) and increasingly securitised local and national state relationships with Muslim communities (Husband and Alam, 2011), with the resulting suspicions and mistrust badly undermining the very ‘human intelligence’ needed to prevent active involvements in terrorism and its ideologies (English, 2009).

In contrast, the chapter argues that Community Cohesion, as it has been understood and practised at ground level in areas of the UK (Thomas, 2011), is actually the most effective way to engage marginalised young Muslims and their
communities in a ‘hearts-and-minds’ anti-terrorism programme without a counter-productive stigmatisation and reification of their essentialised faith identity, and without the fatal securitisation of state–Muslim community relations that is inherent to Prevent as it currently stands. In short, this chapter proposes that the conflict between Prevent and Community Cohesion is addressed not by a further split and demarcation, but instead by a much closer relationship and synergy that would involve the end of Prevent as it is currently constituted. Instead a ‘hearts-and-minds’ programme aimed at marginalised young people of all communities should be utilised, concerned with addressing attractions towards hatred and intolerance and advocating greater support for, and engagement in, democratic political processes.

To develop and justify these arguments, the chapter first gives an overview of the nature, content and scope of Britain’s Prevent programme to date, alongside consideration of its inherent tensions and problems. The chapter then focuses in particular on the relationship between Prevent and Community Cohesion and what the Community Cohesion analysis suggests about an effective counter-terrorism community education and engagement strategy. Here, it needs to be acknowledged that Community Cohesion itself has been, and remains, a highly contested concept and policy agenda (Cantle, 2001; Alexander, 2004; Robinson, 2005; Thomas, 2011). The chapter briefly outlines these controversies but also explains and justifies the positive conception of Community Cohesion utilised here. It then goes on to analyse the developing relationship between the Prevent and Community Cohesion policy agendas and to suggest how a more positive synergy can be developed, a synergy that can contribute towards effective counter-terrorism education and community engagement.

**Making sense of Prevent**

While Prevent was one of the four work strands identified by the initial CONTEST strategy in 2003, it remained underdeveloped until the 7/7 bombings prompted an urgent consideration of the need to understand and prevent a British domestic Islamist terror threat (Hewitt, 2008). These reactive beginnings need to be borne in mind as the developments, and problematic limitations, of Prevent are considered. The development of a preventive, ‘hearts-and-minds’ element of Britain’s counter-terrorism work deserves some praise, particularly as the natural reaction of states subject to domestic terror atrocities is to concentrate on utilising their repressive power to identify perpetrators and plotters (Gupta, 2008).

However, a preventive counter-terrorism policy in itself is no guarantee of avoiding counter-productive reactions, with both the scale and nature of Britain’s Prevent policy approach proving problematic from the start (Thomas, 2008, 2009). Describing this policy programme is not straightforward as it has involved a number of distinct and arguably contradictory elements. Large-scale programmes of community-based engagement and education aimed at young Muslims have been operationalised through local authority youth and community work departments, and through state funding for third-sector Muslim
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Community organisations. However, Prevent has also involved a large number of new police posts, over 300 in the 2008–11 iteration of the policy, split between enhanced regional Counter-Terrorism Units (CTUs) and ‘engagement posts’, an arguably curious hybrid approach for a supposed ‘hearts-and-minds’ programme. Up until 2011, a significant proportion of Prevent funding via local authorities was channelled to Muslim community organisations for what can only be described as community capacity-building around after-school madrassas (mosque schools) and other forms of community facilities, while at the national level significant efforts were made through Prevent to develop new and more polyphonic forms of Muslim representation and even religious leadership. Specific Prevent programmes have been developed in prisons, Young Offender Institutions and through youth justice organisations, with some of this involving direct educational delivery to young Muslims groups and individuals. In contrast, Prevent work aimed at universities and further education colleges has not involved direct educational delivery to students, but rather enhanced liaison between educational institutions and police/security services and greater scrutiny of student meetings and activities on and around campuses.

A number of distinct phases can also be identified within Prevent’s development. The initial ‘pathfinder’ year of 2007–8 (DCLG, 2007a, 2007b) saw local authorities and other bodies expected to initiate activity with little notice or negotiation (Thomas, 2008; Husband and Alam, 2011). These local authorities were selected on the crude basis of having a population that was 5 per cent or more ‘Muslim’ (i.e. mainly of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin, with ethnic origin simplistically conflated with a ‘Muslim’ faith identity: Thomas and Sanderson, 2011), with this statistical approach providing a clear indication of the lack of intelligence insights around Islamist extremism in Britain. In the following 2008–11 period, Prevent was expanded to all local authorities with populations 2 per cent or more Muslim, and very significant amounts of money being committed across the programme – £140 million in total between 2008 and 2011. Local authorities were asked to account for this Prevent activity under ‘National Indicator 35’ of the government’s spending monitoring system but were, in practice, given very significant latitude over how they allocated Prevent money. Some handed all or large parts of it to local Muslim community organisations in a very ‘light-touch’ approach to monitoring and evaluation by the relevant local authority (Iacopini et al., 2011), while others used the funding ‘in-house’ to develop Prevent activities (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010). On a national level, Prevent money was utilised to develop new umbrella bodies such as ‘advisory groups’ for Muslim women and young Muslims, and bodies such as the Sufi Muslim Council that were encouraged to provide ‘moderate’ religious interpretations and leadership. This very significant funding given directly to local and national Muslim organisations has been portrayed as a ‘responsibilisation’ strategy that puts responsibility for countering extremism onto Muslim communities (McGhee, 2006), something arguably consistent with the wider ‘third-way’ and communitarianist social policy approach of New Labour which doubted the ability of government alone to make social progress (Levitas, 2005). This can also be seen as consistent with Labour’s
acknowledgement and encouragement of faith bodies as governmental partners (Meer and Modood, 2009; O’Toole et al., 2013).

While some Labour ministers talked the talk of the ‘values-based’ approach (Birt, 2009), in practice their pragmatic and ‘means-based’ approach to funding allocation enabled the involvement of a wide range of Muslim community organisations, including Salafists capable of influencing individuals increasingly attracted to violent extremism. Such an approach came to an abrupt halt with the election of the Coalition government in May 2010. They first suspended much of the Prevent budget and then, in their eventual Prevent Review of June 2011 (HMG, 2011), significantly altered the size and approach of Prevent. Funding was restricted to 28 priority areas on an ‘intelligence-led basis’ (though this list looked curiously like the old demographically-based one; O’Toole et al., 2012), and the sole, securitised control of OSCT identified above meant that local autonomy over Prevent activity was very significantly restricted. This downsizing and re-shaping of Prevent had succeeded in putting it below the radar for the general public and the media until the 2013 Woolwich murder. Alongside this came the clear triumph of the ‘values-based’ approach, highlighted in Cameron’s ‘Munich’ speech (2011) and demonstrated by the withdrawal of Prevent funding from a number of Muslim organisations regarded as ideologically suspect in relation to Western liberal norms.

Prior to 2011, a number of local authorities receiving Prevent funding identified positive outcomes resulting from their involvement (Turley, 2009; O’Toole et al., 2013). This included greater understanding of, and better partnership relationships with, local Muslim communities for some local authorities and police forces, though it is somewhat surprising that a counter-terrorism programme was needed to bring this about. The limited number of independent local evaluations of Prevent identified a strengthening of Muslim civil society structures locally (Thomas, 2008), a new focus on faith and on local faith organisations (Iacopini et al., 2011), significantly increased funding for Muslim organisations (Husband and Alam, 2011), stronger collective bodies for local Muslims and a development of contact with more Muslim young people (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010). However, arguably these positives were, and are, greatly outweighed by the negative interpretations of Prevent’s content and impact. Kundnani’s Spooked report (2009) highlighted a growing ground-level feeling that surveillance was a key aspect of Prevent, presenting specific examples of youth workers being pressured to pass intelligence to the police, and CTU staff playing pivotal roles in decisions over Prevent funding to community groups. The key architect of Prevent, Sir David Omand, has argued that making a distinction between intelligence-gathering and education within a ‘hearts-and-minds’ programme is unrealistic (APPGHS, 2011), but the evidence of police, and even CTU/security service, Prevent personnel getting involved in direct education delivery to Muslim young people and their communities (Thomas, 2009; Knight, 2010) arguably illustrates an unacceptable blurring of boundaries, with Prevent increasingly looking like ‘Pursue in sheep’s clothing’ (Husband and Alam, 2011). Alongside that has come very significant social engineering of representation,
debate and even religious interpretation and practice within British Muslim communities, an ‘internal penetration’ by the state of Muslim communities that Stuart Hall has characterised as a dangerous and worrying development within British state policies of multiculturalism (BBC Radio 4, 2011). Underpinning both of these critiques was the concern that Prevent focused on Muslims only, and on entire Muslim communities, leading to issues of state stigmatisation, ‘virulent envy’ (Birt, 2009) from other ethnic and faith communities not receiving such dedicated central government funding, and problematic contradictions between Prevent and Community Cohesion. It is to the latter tension, and its direct impact both on these other problematic features and on Prevent’s ability to be successful in its own terms that the chapter now turns.

Community Cohesion and its implications

Britain’s post-2001 policy shift towards Community Cohesion (Cantle, 2001; Home Office, 2005) has been both significant and highly contested, with the meaning and implications of this shift fiercely argued over by academic commentators (Robinson, 2005; Finney and Simpson, 2009; Thomas, 2011). Community Cohesion has become both an analysis of existing ethnic relations in Britain and a concrete policy agenda to be implemented at ground level (Thomas, 2011). Its development was both pre-existent to, and stimulated by, the 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford. In the wake of those riots, the government-commissioned Cantle Report suggested that Britain’s multicultural towns and cities were significantly less harmonious, or ‘integrated’, than was popularly portrayed – no surprise to those who had previously analysed the sort of duo-cultural ex-industrial towns that had witnessed rioting (Webster, 1995). For Cantle, and for the locally-commissioned reports (Ouseley, 2001; Ritchie, 2001; Clarke, 2001) in the areas experiencing violent disturbances (with the Bradford report commissioned and written before the July 2001 disturbances but reaching strikingly similar conclusions to Cantle), the ground-level reality was of ‘parallel lives’, with different ethnic communities – particularly white and Asian communities, in the case of the north of England – having very little to do with each other and very little commonality in terms of feelings and identifications. Cantle’s analysis, accepted by the government (Denham, 2001), was that in this situation of parallel lives it was much easier for separatist feelings, cultures and identifications to develop unchallenged and unmediated by cross-community contact of any quality or depth. The significant media and political focus here on the ‘separateness’ of British Muslim communities (Travis, 2001) led many commentators to see Community Cohesion from the start as a one-sided policy of blaming Muslims and forcing them to change (Kundnani, 2002; Alexander, 2004).

While this analysis has prompted on-going academic controversy over the direction of travel for physical ethnic segregation (Carling, 2008; Finney and Simpson, 2009), the concern for Cantle was as much about social interactions, culture and the lack of shared identifications, an emphasis often over-looked, with
the clear implication that extremist attitudes can develop more easily in separatist environments. Here, the undoubted evidence that British towns and cities are slowly becoming more ethnically mixed does not necessarily translate into greater tolerance or more positive feelings about ‘others’ (Thomas and Sanderson, 2013), and towns like Oldham and Rochdale can feel somewhat removed from the aspiration of convivial cosmopolitanism (Gilroy, 2004). The suggestion, though, that such towns have handled ‘race relations’ less well than apparently more ‘integrated’ cities like Leicester has to be scrutinised carefully. Leicester, like many other apparently multicultural cities outside of London, has significant ethnic segregation, or ‘congregation’ to view it slightly differently (CRE, 2001). The difference between Leicester and northern ex-industrial areas like Oldham and Bradford is that in Leicester a viable post-industrial economy has developed, whereas there is much less positive sign of such economic regeneration in many areas of the north of England. Such negative economic re-structuring has left both white and Asian communities in northern towns and cities with both economic marginalisation and resentments, and with highly constrained housing and work options. However, the data on the ethnic make-up of British schools shows more ethnic segregation than local population data would predict, suggesting that some parents from all ethnic communities are using their agency to send their children to schools where ‘they’ are the majority (Burgess et al., 2005).

While Cantle and others identified a significant role for agency, both in causing ‘parallel lives’ and to any approach for overcoming it, there was also a clear indictment of previous state policy approaches of multiculturalism, particularly the post-1981 phases of political multiculturalism (Solomos, 2003). That approach, also created in the aftermath of urban riots, saw local authorities and eventually national government employ strategic essentialism to challenge the open racism and gross ethnic inequalities that then pervaded British society (Law, 1996). Such an approach necessitated identifying the relative position of separate, essentialised ethnic communities and then developing targets and action plans to close inequality gaps. Alongside this came funding streams and the development of public sector posts and facilities dedicated to specific ethnic communities. While this approach has very significantly contributed to reducing ethnic inequalities and non-white marginalisation in Britain, it did come with downsides. The Community Cohesion analysis suggests that it also strengthened and solidified separate, ethnic-specific identifications, significantly reduced spaces for cross-community dialogues and cooperation, inevitably promoted conflicts over funding led by ‘community leaders’ fighting for ‘their’ community, and provoked significant envy and resentment from white majority communities who perceive multiculturalism to be about favouritism for non-whites. The fact that political multiculturalism developed in tandem with a very significant downplaying of concern with social class has left some white communities feeling that they are the marginalised (Kenny, 2012). This perception undoubtedly influenced the 2001 riots in Oldham and Burnley, and such British feelings are mirrored by the evidence around the white majority backlash in the Netherlands against the language and priorities of multiculturalism (Sniderman and
Hagendoorn, 2009). Such an analysis would suggest that political multiculturalism had run its course by 2001, causing resentment within majority communities while privileging ethnic minority communities that, in some cases, could no longer be termed ‘disadvantaged’ (Modood et al., 1997).

This political judgement can be seen as central to the post-2001 discursive policy shift from multiculturalism to Community Cohesion, and from the separate needs of individual communities to commonality. These shifts in themselves have been used as evidence of cohesion being a return to failed policies of assimilation (Alexander, 2004). It is possible to identify some statements by politicians and some sections of the 2001 reports to support such an analysis (Travis, 2001), but the post-2001 debates about British Community Cohesion have been remarkably evidence-free. The evidence that is available of Community Cohesion being understood, mediated and operationalised at a local level (Thomas, 2011) suggests that Community Cohesion in practice has been actually been a re-naming, and a re-balancing, as Meer and Modood (2009) term it, of British multiculturalism, rather than its death (Kundnani, 2002). This case study evidence showed youth workers operationalising Community Cohesion through processes that still recognised and worked with distinct ethnic, faith and social identities, but that then augmented those identifications with stronger experiences of, and identifications with, commonality through educational processes built around ‘contact theory’, a social psychology approach to prejudice reduction (Hewstone et al., 2007). While contact theory itself is contested because of the potential for contact to harden, rather than reduce, significant prejudices, the processes of youth cross-community contact avoided such dangers through their depth and longevity. Such processes, as with the Community Cohesion agenda nationally, were implicitly working towards ‘cooler’ and more intersectional conceptions of identity (McGhee, 2006).

**The Prevent/Community Cohesion conflict**

The significant ground-level support for the analysis and approach of Community Cohesion meant that Prevent was immediately viewed as problematic by many when it was hastily launched in April 2007. Indeed, local authority leaders in the key area of West Yorkshire, home to the 7/7 bombers and site of the Bradford riot, failed to see the need for Prevent, given that the substantial Community Cohesion programmes that they had already initiated were directly concerned with reducing support for racialised extremism within segregated communities (Thomas, 2008; Husband and Alam, 2011). This concern was also shared by key Muslim community figures at the national and local level:

Many government and civil society actors in our study were critical of the ways in which Prevent was conceived and implemented, its impact on Muslim communities and the constraints it placed on Muslim civil society organisations’ engagement with government.

(O’Toole et al., 2013: 53)
Only a great deal of national government pressure brought the West Yorkshire authorities, and other reluctant local authorities nationally, on board with Prevent. Indeed, many local authorities avoided using the title ‘Prevent’ at all, preferring opaque titles like ‘pathfinder fund’ or ‘stronger communities’ (Thomas, 2008; Iacopini et al., 2011). Such formulations ran a very real risk of deceiving local communities, but were part of how local authorities managed the thankless task of balancing contradictory national government demands and suspicious local Muslim citizens who felt increasingly under surveillance as entire communities. Such a ground-level response reflected how local authorities were wrestling with the contradictory government policy agendas of Prevent and Community Cohesion, and their clear preference for the latter’s assumptions, as a case study of policy implementation in Sheffield highlighted:

The result for local actors is a dual, conflicting process: community cohesion de-emphasises ‘race’, while ethnic and religious differences are accentuated in security and immigration discourses.

(Lewis and Craig, 2014: 21)

Furthermore, it is important to note that the independent evidential base which underpinned Prevent’s early years of operation was painfully thin (Thomas, 2010), a highly worrying reality given the scale of Prevent’s programme and its intrusion into other policy programmes concerned with minority ethnic communities, as discussed above. The very varied ways that local authorities initially managed and dispersed Prevent funding (Thomas, 2012), even within one geographical region (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010) highlighted both local-level uncertainty over Prevent and the Labour government’s initial willingness to allow significant local autonomy. This rapidly changed, as the newly-established regional Counter-Terrorism Units and their staff took increasing control of local Prevent operations and the funding decisions around them, with the result that any initially creative or ‘off-message’ variations such as trying to work with non-Muslim communities around ‘extremism’ were quickly ended (Kundnani, 2009), though such varied practice managed to survive a little longer in specific sectors like youth offending teams.

This tension over the degree, if any, of local autonomy regarding Prevent work partly reflected the national government tensions between the two departments running Prevent: the DCLG, who also co-ordinated Community Cohesion and who favoured local autonomy, and the Home Office/OSCT, who favoured no local autonomy whatsoever and wanted the ‘amateurs’, as the police/CTUs saw them, of local authorities to do what they were told. This progressive securitisation continued in the 2011 Prevent Review. Furthermore, alongside this increasingly securitised direction and control came a more mundane restriction on the local authorities attempting to develop creative Community-Cohesion-based programmes. National government demanded that local authorities should operationalise Prevent rapidly and develop the multi-agency local command and control mechanisms (largely controlled by the police/CTUs) of the so-called ‘Gold’, ‘Silver’ and ‘Bronze’ groups.
alongside continued enhancement of ‘tension-monitoring’ structures. This meant that any focus on and continued development of Community Cohesion work and supporting structures was sidelined because the elected councillors and professional staff needed to drive this new work approach had been completely engulfed by Prevent work (Monro et al., 2010). Alongside this was the OSCT/police Prevent money and power in comparison to the DCLG/local authority limited resources and widespread responsibilities at both national and local level, resulting in increasing Prevent domination over Community Cohesion. O’Toole et al. quote a senior civil servant at the OSCT as acknowledging that, because of the sheer power of OSCT, ‘so what happened was Prevent took over Cohesion’ (2013: 57).

It was also the case that, because of the securitised and overtly counter-terrorist basis of Prevent, the police and security services were bound to dominate that specific policy programme, despite the rhetoric of local engagement and partnership. Key Labour DCLG Minister John Denham is quoted as saying:

I found in the CLG, after some very rigorous examinations with officials that there was no understood model of how Prevent was meant to work.

(O’Toole et al., 2013: 57)

Just as the cohesion- and community-engagement-focused DCLG struggled with an overtly securitised agenda, so local authorities at ground level were ill-equipped to lead Prevent, leaving the door open for police/CTUs to run programmes supposedly based on education and partnership. This is highlighted in an empirical study of the role played by the West Midlands CTU and its officers in Prevent:

The Police seem to have been given the responsibility of delivering Prevent because other local bodies did not possess the organisational capability to successfully implement, manage and adapt a programme…. Despite Prevent being proposed as a multi-organisational programme, the Police in the West Midlands are the central organisation and undertake the majority of the work relating to Prevent.

(Lamb, 2012: 91)

The intra-national government tensions identified above regarding Prevent’s direction and control came to a head in 2009, when the allegations of spying made in the Spooked report (Kundnani, 2009) and picked up by the national media (Dodd, 2009) provided an opportunity for the Labour-dominated CLG Select Committee to launch an inquiry into Prevent and to attempt to free DCLG from Prevent and its increasing OSCT control. The inquiry process saw consensus among many contributors that DCLG should not ‘do’ Prevent, but in the course of the inquiry evidence-gathering there were some questionable assertions around the Community Cohesion–Prevent relationship. Prominent here was an assertion in police evidence that Prevent had been ineffective locally because most activities had, in reality, been ‘Community Cohesion’ (ACPO, 2009).
This demonstrated a significant lack of understanding around what the Community Cohesion policy agenda actually represented. What such an assertion actually meant was that much local Prevent activity in its initial two or three years had been bland, comprised of general youth and community activities for large numbers of Muslim young people (DCLG, 2008; Thomas, 2010). Such Prevent activity was emphatically not Community Cohesion because it involved Muslims only, selected on the basis of their ‘Muslimness’ that was re-enforced by the faith focus of some work (Iacopini et al., 2011), and had no element of cross-community contact or even the involvement of anyone who was not a Muslim (Thomas, 2009). What such work was in reality was generic community development or community capacity-building work aimed at one community only – the very policy approach that Community Cohesion was designed to replace (Cantle, 2001). Indeed, during the evidence hearings for the CLG Select Committee Inquiry, representatives of the other major faiths queued up to complain that Muslims were getting funding for general community/faith capacity building and that they were not – pointing to virulent envy even at the elite actor level (Birt, 2009). I personally made an evidence submission (House of Commons, 2010) and gave oral evidence in support of more focus on Community Cohesion. The Select Committee accepted that perspective as evidence in support of their eventual recommendation for a formal Community Cohesion/Prevent, DCLG/Home Office split, a recommendation later accepted and implemented by the 2011 Prevent Review. However, my assertion to the Select Committee, and the overall thrust of their resulting Report, was actually saying something deeper and more fundamental about Prevent itself – both myself and the Select Committee were actually arguing that everyone should get out of the Prevent business, because it was not, and still is not, a productive way to win ‘hearts and minds’ regarding violent extremism. Community Cohesion is, but was and is being fatally sidelined by the focus and scale of Prevent.

**Divorced but still co-habiting?**

The Coalition government’s Prevent Review of 2011 was portrayed as dealing with the Prevent–Community Cohesion relationship once and for all through organisational change. Significantly delayed by disputes within the Coalition over the extent to which the new iteration would take a ‘values-based’ approach and identify supposedly problematic attitudes within wider Muslim communities as a whole (Thomas, 2012), the Review apparently accepted the Select Committee’s recommendations in separating Prevent and Community Cohesion by removing the DCLG from involvement in Prevent. This, and the associated downsizing in the scale and breadth of the new Prevent, did succeed in winning broad support, albeit largely because no one was actually satisfied with the original version of Prevent for significantly different reasons (Thomas, 2009, 2010).

The withdrawal of the DCLG from involvement in Prevent was portrayed as good for both Community Cohesion and Prevent by addressing their supposed
overlap and confusion. However, this was hardly a case of full speed ahead for Community Cohesion. Prior to 2011, the national prioritisation and compulsory local enactment of Prevent had already sidelined development of Community Cohesion policy and practice (Munro et al., 2010; Thomas, 2012), while post-crash austerity increasingly squeezed budgets for work such as cohesion that was seen as less nationally vital than Prevent. Having criticised Prevent in opposition for approaching entire Muslim communities only as Muslims, not as British citizens (Neville-Jones, 2009), the dominant Conservative element of the Coalition might have been expected to prioritise cohesion or ‘integration’, but instead they visibly washed their hands of any concern with it. Delayed even longer than the Prevent Review, the eventual Coalition policy document on integration (DCLG, 2012, deployed as part of a deliberate attempt to avoid Labour’s language of ‘Community Cohesion’) was a flimsy and woefully brief document. Rejecting any notion of national targets or monitoring, it portrayed integration as a local matter that national government would offer no comment on and it confirmed the ending of all national policy direction and funding on the issue while failing to use the terms ‘racism’ or ‘equalities’ at all. The claim that this was simply driven by the wider, and very deep, cuts in overall public spending (which have fallen disproportionately on local authorities serving multicultural urban areas) was undermined by the fact that the only national funding identified for integration work was given to the Church of England and the Scout Association, both white, ‘establishment’, middle-class-dominated organisations that are arguably not well-placed to lead cross-community dialogue.

While Community Cohesion has been sidelined and undermined as a policy agenda and British local authorities have simultaneously suffered very significant spending cuts as a whole, all local authorities have been forced to continue focusing on Prevent-related activity. Even if not Prevent-funded, local authorities are required to maintain multi-agency co-ordination arrangements and tension-monitoring processes, while some have also had to deal with very significant costs and public order threats associated with rallies by far-right groups such as the English Defence League that can be understood as part of an ongoing cycle of ‘cumulative extremism’ (Eatwell, 2006: 215). In almost all cases, these responses have to come from the same local authority officers and practitioners charged with continuing to work on cohesion and integration (O’Toole et al., 2012), so questioning the supposed demarcation of the Prevent Review. Indeed, the Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance project run by the University of Bristol identifies that ‘our data suggests that actors charged with the delivery of Prevent are sceptical about this separation’ (O’Toole et al., 2013: 61) and quotes one local police Prevent co-ordinator as saying: ‘It’s virtually the same individuals who are involved in the cohesion bit that are predominantly involved in the Prevent bit (O’Toole et al., 2013: 61). Furthermore, the Prevent activity that has continued in the 28 funded areas is still very significantly focused on work with key Muslim young people and community groups at a local level and is organised through local authorities. Key local authority staff have to develop proposals and bid for funding, while local
authority practitioners lead and implement many of the funded programmes – in both cases, largely the same local authority staff responsible for the continuing development of cohesion and integration activity despite the absence of national government funding or interest. The policy and departmental distinction between Prevent and cohesion/integration called for by the Select Committee Inquiry and supposedly implemented by the Prevent Review simply does not, and cannot, exist on the ground. The failure of elite political actors to recognise this ground-level reality can be highlighted through contrast with one of the conclusions within the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry Report into the ‘roots of violent radicalisation’:

Witnesses tended to broadly welcome the outcome of the Prevent Review, following the clearer split between counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation work, the separation out of activity between the Home Office, focussing on violent extremism and the DCLG focussing on non-violent extremism.

(House of Commons, 2012: 19)

This claimed distinction was and is not recognisable at the ground operational level. Arguably, the Prevent–Community Cohesion relationship now represents the worst scenario possible. Any national direction and support for cohesion/integration has disappeared while the same policy officers and practitioners charged with attempting to take cohesion forward locally are still facing Prevent demands. Since the Prevent Review, autonomy over the direction and content of Prevent activity has significantly reduced, but local authorities are still expected to organise and deliver the work. The Prevent-funded local authority areas now have to apply for funding to the OSCT at six-monthly intervals against OSCT-determined criteria. This time-consuming application process brings no guarantee of success for these funded areas, with applications being refused or returned for significant amendment. Anecdotal evidence suggests that bids significantly involving research or activity largely with mainly white communities are still refused, with many of the other applications going as far as ministers themselves before being approved. Detailed scrutiny and approval processes are undertaken by the OSCT staff of CTU police and security service officers. Thus it can be argued that the Prevent Review of 2011 represented a significant further securitisation of Prevent and hence of the local state’s relationship with Muslim communities, but also that the securitised Prevent agenda is still delivered and co-ordinated by local authorities and their staff, despite the window dressing of the removal of DCLG from the policy agenda. Meanwhile cohesion/integration policy work has progressively slipped off the agenda.

Creating Prevent–cohesion synergy

This chapter has acknowledged that past and present British governments deserve praise for developing a preventive educational and engagement strategy that
addresses attractions towards terrorism and ideologies supporting it. However, Britain’s Prevent programme has been conceptually flawed and contradictory from the start, with the 2011 Prevent Review simply reducing the scale and profile of the programme rather than effectively addressing those inherent tensions. It has been argued here that the Prevent–Community Cohesion tensions acknowledged by government are not just at the organisational and responsibility level (addressed by later policy adjustments); rather, they are at the fundamental conceptual level. The chapter has argued, drawing on clear support for the position from ground-level policy makers and practitioners identified in empirical research (Thomas, 2008, 2011; Husband and Alam, 2011; Turley, 2009), that there must be much greater synergy, rather than separation, between Community Cohesion and Prevent for the goals of the latter to be effectively addressed. To date, Prevent has been a separate and contradictory programme, aimed at Muslims only, that has created understandable alarm and resentment within Muslim communities and ‘virulent envy’ over resource allocation within other non-Muslim communities (Birt, 2009). In this way it has been contradictory to the analysis and policy agenda of Community Cohesion in both essentialising and reifying Muslim identity, so simplistically conflating strong faith identity with a heightened terrorist threat and advocating ‘moderate’ faith identity as the only possible solution. This both ignores other possible understandings of attraction to terrorism for individuals and runs counter to wider British policy efforts to develop a human-rights-based conception of citizenship founded on more intersectional and ‘cooler’ understandings of identity (McGhee, 2006).

In contrast, Community Cohesion, as it has been actually understood and practised at ground level (Thomas, 2011) has worked with and acknowledged distinct ethnic, faith and geographical identifications, but has sought to augment them with stronger forms and experiences of commonality through the application of ‘contact theory’ (Hewstone et al., 2007) and programmes that address common needs and interests. The strong support for such policy approaches amongst ground-level political leaders, policy-makers and professional practitioners outlined above meant that from the start the need for a separate, distinct Prevent programme – especially one with all the monocultural, essentialising flaws outlined above – was questioned. Such local concerns were overruled but the initial iteration of Prevent under the Labour government did allow significant local autonomy. That progressively reduced until it largely disappeared under the Coalition government. Here, the real story of Prevent has been the increasing securitisation of the British state’s relationship with its Muslim communities, a reality arguably inevitable as the rapidly growing OSCT and its network of CTUs and Prevent police officers has asserted its national and local control over the programme. This does not provide a productive basis for genuine educational and engagement-based strategies that enable young people to explore challenging political, philosophical and religious issues and to embrace democratic processes and conventions. Such strategies can only be developed through Community-Cohesion-based processes that acknowledge distinct identifications and experiences but that also bring young people of different backgrounds
together in substantial and meaningful ways to explore real political and moral questions, in recognition of the fact that young people of all backgrounds have vulnerabilities regarding political extremism and terrorism. ‘Mainstreaming’ and even re-naming Prevent processes (House of Commons, 2012) without having a clear and resourced cohesion/integration strategy will only obscure rather than address Prevent’s fundamental flaws.

Real progress would require a re-energised, nationally funded, cohesion-based educational programme that encompassed the goals of Prevent while moving away from the counter-productive title and distinctness of Prevent as it currently stands. Such an approach was advocated by the think-tank Demos and other contributors to the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into Prevent in 2011/12 (House of Commons, 2012). Indeed, the Home Affairs Select Committee concluded that:

The strongest forces against radicalisation are the partnerships of mutual respect and shared citizenship within the UK and within local communities in our towns and cities.

(House of Commons, 2012: 34)

Such a programme could and should build on existing positive youth-based process, such as the UK Youth Parliament initiative and the National Citizen Service. It should include work with specific groups of young people with particular needs and interests, including explicit anti-extremism work programmes with marginalised and vulnerable groups and individuals, but within a much stronger cross-community framework that focuses on strengthening democratic citizenship for all young people rather than state-sanctioned forms of surveillance and acceptable Muslim identity for some.

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3 How (not) to create ex-terrorists
Prevent as ideological warfare

Phil Edwards

Introduction
When the Prevent programme was developed in 2003, and announced publicly three years later, it proffered the policy aim of ‘preventing terrorism by tackling the radicalisation of individuals’ (Home Office 2006: 9). Prevent has now become a permanent fixture on the counter-terrorist scene, rearticulated across the manifestations of the CONTEST strategy. However this apparent continuity in policy and implementation may not only produce the impression of a single continuing Prevent project, but – more importantly – also lead the integrity of the project to be read back into its conceptual basis. Key questions risk going unasked: whether there is a distinct experience of ‘radicalisation’; if so, how strong an association there is between radicalisation and subsequent terrorist involvement; and, if such an association exists, whether a concerted programme of state-driven de-radicalisation measures is likely to be viable and productive. This chapter will review the current state of the Prevent programme. It will argue that the government’s approach to counter-terrorism has been characterised by two distinct models of radicalisation and de-radicalisation, the key distinguishing factor being the salience given to ideological as distinct from social factors. The significance of ideological factors in the literature on desistance from crime will then be reviewed, focusing on the interaction between social and situational changes on the one hand and subjective and ideological changes on the other, and on particular types of subjective change that do or do not promote desistance. Reference will then be made to a qualitative study of desistance from gang involvement, which will suggest some ways of conceptualising the belief factors that may be involved in desistance from political as well as non-political crime. These will provide a frame of reference for suggestions as to how government interventions to reduce organised political violence might best be structured, and a concluding discussion of the ideological focus of the Prevent programme.

Into the swamp: the contradictory evolution of Prevent
At the time of the 2011 review of Prevent, the programme had already been through significant redevelopment. The definition of radicalisation offered by
Prevent in its original form had suffered from a fundamental ambiguity. On the one hand, ‘radicalisation’ was defined as ‘processes whereby certain experiences and events in a person’s life cause them to become radicalised, to the extent of turning to violence’ (Home Office 2006: 9; emphasis added). On the other hand, it was acknowledged that ‘a tiny minority of radicalised individuals actually cross over to become terrorists’ (Home Office 2006: 10). Radicalisation was thus defined both as a process that culminates in becoming active as a terrorist and as one that may not, and usually will not, lead to this. The question of why and how the government should take an interest in thwarting radicalisation was left open.

The CONTEST 2 strategy, published in 2009, resolved the ambiguity, in part by introducing the new term of ‘violent extremism’. ‘Radicalisation’ was redefined as ‘the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to join terrorist groups’; the goal of Prevent was ‘to stop radicalisation, reducing support for terrorism and discouraging people from becoming terrorists’ (Home Office 2009: 82; emphasis added). The goals of the revised Prevent included ‘challeng[ing] the ideology behind violent extremism’ and ‘disrupt[ing] those who promote violent extremism’ (Home Office 2009: 83). As such, the problem of distinguishing between terrorism, support for terrorism and ideologies giving justification to terrorism was resolved by conflating them as a single problem of ‘violent extremism’, where radicalisation became the process leading individuals to adopt ‘violent extremist’ positions.

However, the term ‘violent extremism’ was officially abandoned when the Prevent strategy was revised in 2011. The Home Office stated that ‘the term is ambiguous and has caused some confusion in the past, most notably by giving the impression that the scope of Prevent is very wide indeed…. We avoid using the phrase here’ (Home Office 2011: 25). ‘Radicalisation’ became explicitly defined as ‘the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism’ (Home Office 2011: 108). The vexed term ‘extremism’ was given its own definition, 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’ (Home Office 2011: 107–8).

The aim of Prevent in this revision is ‘to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism’ (Home Office 2011: 6). It has three specific objectives:

1. respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it;
2. prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and
3. work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation which we need to address.

Radicalisation does not have to include actual recruitment, but neither is it simply a matter of acquiring the wrong (‘violent extremist’) ideas; it has to include supporting terrorism. Some forms of extremism may themselves be
cause for concern, but to qualify as extremism an ideology must be supported actively or vocally. To be radicalised is not to be on the verge of recruitment to a terrorist group or to be contaminated with ‘violent extremism’, but, more straightforwardly, to be a political activist aligned with groups that use terrorist tactics. The ideological orientation of the earlier iterations of Prevent remains, but on a much narrower canvas; there is even an acknowledgment of concerns that earlier Prevent interventions had been ‘disproportionate and intrusive’ and ‘restricted free speech’ (Home Office 2011: 8). The report argues that Prevent needs to ‘challenge extremist ideas where they form part of a terrorist narrative’ (Home Office 2011: 50, emphasis added), suggesting that extremism and radicalisation are only dangerous at the point where they actually foster terrorism.

However, there are some indications in the report, and in particular in contemporary ministerial statements, of a less discriminating and more straightforwardly ideological approach. Thus the report makes reference to extremist views ‘espoused by apparently non-violent organisations very often operating within the law’ (Home Office 2011: 50), implying that an unacceptably extreme group may be reclassified as only apparently non-violent and legal. Speaking in the House of Commons in the month before the publication of the report, the Prime Minister used two heavily loaded images to describe extremist groups and ideologies:

there has been a pernicious ideology among a minority of some communities that has given some comfort to the stories that al-Qaeda provides…. We have to address that issue in order to drain the swamp in which al-Qaeda has been swimming, we must combat not just violent extremism, but extremism itself. I think there has in the past been a sense of a conveyor belt, with some extremist groups and organisations taking people into a career of jihadism, and we will never deal with that unless we deal with the conveyor belt itself.

(Cameron 2011)

The May 2013 murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich led to an intensification of the government’s counter-radicalisation effort, with the constitution of a ‘Task Force’ on extremism and radicalisation. Announcing the formation of the new body, the Prime Minister David Cameron was unambiguous: ‘Since coming into government we have made sure the Prevent strategy focuses on all forms of extremism – not just violent extremism’. After reiterating the ‘conveyor belt to radicalisation’ image, the Prime Minister concluded: ‘It is not enough to target and go after violent extremists after they have become violent. We have to drain the swamp which they inhabit’ (Cameron 2013).

In summary then, the initial Prevent report suggested that radicalisation might or might not be the precursor to terrorist activity. This nuanced but ambivalent model was swept away by the certainties of the second Prevent strategy, for which the ideological contagion of ‘violent extremism’ was tantamount to terrorist involvement. The 2011 version of Prevent returned to and refined the
original model. Its key ambiguity was resolved by identifying the problematic end-state to be deterred as neither active terrorist involvement nor ideological radicalism, but ideological alignment with terrorism. As sophisticated as this formulation was, it left unresolved the key question of how non-violent radicalism relates to active support for or involvement in terrorism, and hence of how (or whether) counter-terrorism should address non-violent radicalism. Cameron’s ‘swamp’ and ‘conveyor belt’ statements, reiterated after Woolwich, cut the conceptual knot by collapsing the distinction between radicalism and alignment with terrorism. Radical ideas themselves are seen as a ‘conveyor belt’ to violence, and the milieu in which those ideas are accepted as a ‘swamp’ – a source of inevitable contagion – that must itself be eradicated.

The 2011 review and Cameron’s statements in 2011 and 2013 encapsulate rival ways of analysing the relationship between ideology and terrorist involvement, and hence rival policy priorities. 2011 Prevent distinguishes between the process of acquiring radical ideas and the process of becoming involved or aligned with terrorist groups. On this perspective, ideological radicalisation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of terrorist involvement; preventive interventions might take a number of forms, such as providing vulnerable individuals with alternative authority figures or addressing the grievances that might make the message of terrorist sympathisers seem plausible. Cameron’s statements articulate the relationship between radicalisation and terrorist involvement in a much cruder and more straightforward form. Radical ideas are denied any legitimacy, and the processes of radicalisation and terrorist recruitment blur into one; preventive interventions can only be ideological, in the straightforward sense of denouncing, excluding and delegitimising ‘extremism’.

Counter-terrorism, desistance, resilience

These two versions of ‘radicalisation’ suggest quite different policy priorities. While governments have a legitimate interest in minimising the incidence of terrorist attacks, counter-terrorism itself can pose a risk to society when it is used to clamp down on ideas, policing the limits of the thinkable and speakable. This is all the more likely to happen if ideas held by significant numbers of people are delegitimised by association with the relatively tiny numbers who use or advocate political violence in the name of those beliefs. If counter-terrorism efforts are to be effective without being dangerously illiberal, it is crucial to develop an understanding of the role which ideological radicalisation is likely to play in terrorist life-stories, and hence of the relationship (if any) between counter-radicalisation efforts and decisions not to become active as a terrorist.

According to one model – reflected in Cameron’s statements – extremism is something that can be preached, and converts to extremism are well on the way to becoming terrorists. The implication is that it would have been possible to prevent the process of recruitment by removing or counteracting the radicalising stimulus. If this model is valid, counter-terrorism interventions must be ideological; potential terrorists must be called on to abandon their existing extremist ideas.
The more complex model of radicalisation, reflected in the 2011 version of Prevent, suggests that radicalisation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for terrorist recruitment. The complex model, like the simple model, would suggest that every terrorist had previously been radicalised; however, in the complex model we would also see the effects of one or more additional, non-ideological factors. Crucially, this model would also imply that the radicalisation that lay behind processes of terrorist recruitment might be undergone by individuals who were not themselves recruited. While the complex model does imply that an ideological counter-attack could be effective in preventing recruitment, it also suggests that ideological counter-measures would inevitably affect many individuals who were not in danger of recruitment, and would consequently have negative side-effects in restricting the range of legitimate public debate. Even if radicalisation was identified as a necessary condition for terrorist recruitment, this would not preclude the existence of one or more further necessary conditions, which might prove to be more amenable to intervention. If the complex model is valid, counter-terrorist interventions may take any of a number of forms; challenging radical ideas is not mandatory and may not be the most effective approach.

The question, however, is whether the processes of onset and desistance – becoming a terrorist sympathiser and ceasing to be one – are best represented by the simple model, the complex model or neither. Studies of desistance from criminal careers may be informative in this area. Studies of the factors which lead long-term offenders to desist – as all eventually do (Sampson and Laub 2003) – may be relevant here. Admittedly, where terrorism is concerned, it can be argued that we cannot afford to wait for active militants to desist. As a result, studies of desistance from offending may have limited applicability to the problem of building resilience to the temptation to begin offending. However, this argument rests on an unstated assumption that the first decision to offend is qualitatively different from every subsequent decision, which may not be warranted. Maruna, Porter and Carvalho argue that ‘the real story when it comes to understanding the criminal “careers” of ex-prisoners’ lies in the ‘middle ground’ or ‘grey area’ between persistence and desistance (Maruna, Porter and Carvalho 2004: 223). By analogy, it can be suggested that the roots of what becomes a criminal career are less likely to be found in an identifiable ‘gateway offence’ than in a drift among many different forms of deviance or non-conformity. The aim of preventive counter-terrorism, seen in this framework, is not to save vulnerable innocents from an abrupt conversion experience, but to intervene in the lives of people who are already navigating among more or less deviant forms of political action, with a view to guiding their course away from more extreme or violent options.

In this context it may be useful to re-examine the concept of ‘resilience’ – used in the Prevent literature to refer to a quality of ‘communities’ that makes them resistant to the persuasion of violent extremists. In the psychological literature, ‘resilience’ is not a quality but an experience; it is defined as ‘a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma’ (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 858). At issue in
discussions of resilience are the processes by which individuals succeed (and fail) in making a positive adaptation to adversity, as well as the personal strengths and community resources that they draw on in order to do so. In this framework, desisting from – or declining the opportunity to embark on – an offending career can be considered as a positive adaptation to adverse personal or social circumstances. More precisely, the absence of offending behaviour can be seen as one element – or marker – of a positive adaptation built around alternative activities: legal employment rather than drug-dealing, conventional political activism rather than political violence.

Desistance from crime can thus be seen as a form of resilience: a process through which offenders ‘bounce back’ (the root meaning of ‘resilience’) into a law-abiding lifestyle. The relative salience of subjective and social factors in desistance from crime may be informative in identifying the factors likely to succeed in dissuading potential terrorists from becoming active, and hence the appropriateness of either the simple or the complex Prevent model.

**Why offenders stop offending, part 1: desistance from crime**

Contemporary debate on desistance is framed within three main perspectives. The ‘life-course’ perspective, first, analyses individual careers in terms of long-term ‘trajectories’ (‘pathway[s] or line[s] of development over the life span’ (Sampson and Laub 1992: 66)) and episodic ‘transitions’. Once an individual is embarked on a given trajectory – such as a criminal career – a substantial change in external circumstances is required to modify it. Particular types of change recur in many desisters’ life stories: ‘The key elements [in desistance] seem to be aging; a good marriage; securing legal, stable work; and deciding to “go straight”’ (Laub and Sampson 2001: 3). The decision to ‘go straight’ is often secondary. The desister first makes a commitment to a new lifestyle – marrying, finding stable employment, etc – and then adapts to a changed configuration of demands and opportunities, which embed the individual in an altered trajectory. Desisters may ‘[make] a commitment to go straight without even realizing it’ (Laub and Sampson 2001: 51).

The second main perspective on desistance is the ‘narrative’ model. The narrative model challenges this model of ‘turning points’, focusing on individual narrative identity, understood as ‘a life-long project that individuals continuously restructure in light of new experiences and information’ (Maruna 1999: online). Desisting, in other words, has a subjective component as well as an objective change of life-course: ‘To truly desist from crime, according to the narrative perspective, a person needs to restructure his or her understanding of self’ (Maruna 1999: online).

A key adaptive mechanism is the ‘redemption sequence’:

In a redemption sequence, the storyteller depicts a transformation from a bad, affectively negative life scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive life scene. The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good.

(McAdams et al. 2001: 474)
Desisters ‘re-script’ their sense of their own identity around a redemption sequence: a turning point by which the ‘bad’ (the offending career) can be ‘redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better’ through the ‘good’ of a new, non-offending life. The desister’s offending past becomes a resource to be mined for hidden traces of the good intentions the desister now intends to live by and the good personal qualities that (he or she now believes) will make this new form of life possible. The desister’s past is rewritten, retrospectively moving the trappings of an offending career to the narrative sidelines and highlighting moments that gave expression to the desister’s positive potential.

The third and final perspective on desistance incorporates elements of both narrative and life-course models in ‘integrative theories of desistance’ (Barry 2013: 48); examples include Bottoms et al.’s ‘“interactive framework” for studying desistance’ (Bottoms et al. 2004: 372) and LeBel et al.’s ‘subjective-social model’ (LeBel et al. 2008: 139). In McNeill’s formulation,

"Desistance resides somewhere in the interfaces between developing personal maturity, changing social bonds associated with certain life transitions, and the individual subjective narrative constructions which offenders build around these key events and changes. It is not just the events and changes that matter; it is what these events and changes mean to the people involved.\[\text{(McNeill 2006: 47)}\]

Integrative theories focus on the interaction between subjective and objective factors in the process of desistance. Successful desistance may be associated with ‘an overly optimistic sense of self-efficacy and control over the future’ (Burnett and Maruna 2004: 399), contrasting with the tendency of active offenders to describe themselves as ‘caught up in a cycle of poverty, stigma, and criminal associates’ (Maruna et al. 2004: 225). This fatalistic mindset is easy to justify; ex-offenders will find it inordinately difficult to go straight if there are no available non-criminal ways to gain income, self-respect and pleasure. However, offenders who have those opportunities will only be motivated to take them – and to commit themselves to the non-criminal trajectories that may open up as a result – if they believe it is possible for them to progress out of their current situation. This belief may be undermined by interactions with agencies such as the probation service, if these agencies reinforce stigma and a sense of needing to be controlled by others and lacking the resources to go straight: ‘When the probation relationship is reduced to one of targeting risks and needs, these deficits may become a reified and internalized aspect of the probation client’s self-identity’ (Maruna et al. 2004: 228). Where probation strategies are oriented towards minimizing the risk to society posed by the ex-offender, in other words, the effect may be to inculcate fatalism in would-be desisters, reducing their capacity to progress in desistance.

In short, integrative theories stress the importance of would-be desisters’ interaction with the criminal justice system in supporting or undermining their sense of self-efficacy and of the relationship between their past and their present..."
narrative identity. These subjective factors in turn may condition their ability to take and benefit from the chance of a new trajectory; experience of the criminal justice system may leave an offender hopeful and motivated to desist, fatalistic and apathetic, or positively motivated to reoffend.

It is worth noting the high degree of overlap between integrative models of desistance and the ‘resilience’ perspective referred to above. The integrative perspective understands desistance from crime as a change in trajectory underpinned by a sense of efficacy and self-worth and sustained by multiple interlocking social and subjective factors. Similarly, to think in terms of resilience, understood as a process of positive adaptation to adversity, implies ‘a focus on positive outcomes and not just negative ones’; it also entails ‘an emphasis not only on deficits but also on areas of strength’ and ‘a commitment to understanding processes that underlie the effects of vulnerability and protective factors’ (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000: 861).

By contrast, neither the integrative perspective nor the narrative model has any overlap with the two Prevent models outlined above. As we have seen, the simple Prevent model takes a straightforwardly ideological approach; the subjective repudiation of the past, offending or anti-social, identity is key, and interventions should aim to promote this. The complex model embraces the possibility of interventions that would counter ideological influences indirectly; as such, it puts some emphasis on engagement in new social interactions and changes of life trajectory, leading to the abandonment of a past, anti-social identity and the adoption of a new, non-offending or conformist outlook. A similar contrast can be drawn between the narrative and integrative models, with the narrative model stressing ideological factors and the integrative perspective emphasising a process of engagement in social interactions; however, in both cases desistance is seen in terms of personal continuity and redemption of aspects of the past offending identity. The only identifiable overlap is between the complex Prevent model and the life-course model of desistance, which similarly emphasises the role of changes in social relationships in bringing about desistance from crime.

The lack of overlap between the Prevent models and the main perspectives on desistance could be explained by reference to the difference between the types of crime and offender involved; ideological motives are central to terrorist offences, in a way that they are not to the crimes of career offenders. However, this distinction may be more apparent than real. What is at issue in decisions to desist from political crime is, arguably, not so much the commitment to an ideological belief as the belief in the commission of crimes as a means of furthering that cause. Committed political offenders can be assumed to believe in the justice and necessity of their actions; arguably the key goal of counter-terrorism initiatives is to induce them to lose this belief (as distinct from the belief in their ultimate political goal). However, we can also assume that any serial offender will have some belief in the justice and necessity of their actions: they will have made an accommodation between their actions and their own sense of right and wrong, and will have formed the view that they cannot, or cannot afford to,
desist. Like the political criminal, moreover, the serial offender will be aware that such a belief runs counter to the express morality of society; the belief that their actions are justifiable and necessary will serve a psychologically adaptive purpose, shielding offenders from the cognitive dissonance that their ascribed deviant status would otherwise produce.

The contrasts between the different approaches and models thus prompts two key questions in assessing the effectiveness of different types of intervention in promoting desistance:

1. Is a subjective change of direction the sole condition of success, as the simple Prevent model and the narrative perspective both suggest in different ways? Alternatively, do subjective changes need to be embedded in broader changes of lifestyle or association, as the complex Prevent model, the lifestyle perspective and the integrative perspective all suggest?

2. Should the offender be brought to the point of breaking with his or her past, as both Prevent models and the lifestyle perspective suggest? Alternatively, should the offending past be mined for positive factors which can be redeemed in support of a sense of subjective continuity, as the narrative and integrative perspectives argue?

Four possible mechanisms can be identified:

1. Subjective repudiation (simple Prevent model);
2. Subjective repudiation embedded in social interactions (complex Prevent model, life-course model of desistance);
3. Subjective redemption (narrative model);
4. Subjective redemption embedded in social interactions (integrative model).

Why offenders stop offending, part 2: youth gangs

This prompts the question of which of these mechanisms is in fact likely to operate in the case of individuals vulnerable to terrorist recruitment. Research on contemporary gang involvement – and, in particular, the reasons for terminating gang involvement – may be relevant. Street gangs have many features in common with groups specialising in covert political violence; both are relatively small groups, specialising in violent and illegal activity and organised on a face-to-face basis, often using pre-existing affinity and kinship networks.

Data from the 2007 ESRC-funded study ‘Youth Gangs in an English City’ make it possible to identify some key factors underlying decisions to leave or not to leave a gang. One is the role of loyalty to friends. Gang involvement, for many study participants, is seen at once as being distinct from socialising with friends and as a natural progression from it. On some accounts, gangs effectively crystallised out of friendship networks. A key factor seems to be a need for collective self-defence. The availability of violence – actual or threatened – in defence of any gang member is a significant factor both in the appeal of gang
membership and in cementing loyalty to the gang: ‘when it comes to me and my little firm, no one can’t fuck with us … everyone’s got everyone’s back’ (male interviewee 1, 25). This parallels the informal process of aggregation traced by Claudio Novaro in the formation of an ‘armed struggle’ group in late 1970s Italy; while ‘the link that unites them always predates the political “formalisation” of the network’, group members developed ‘a vision of the group centred on itself, as the place of satisfaction of the needs of sociality and identity’ (Novaro 1991: 169, 165).

This association between gang membership, loyalty and existing friendship networks carries over into decisions to remain involved – or, as some study participants saw it, failures to decide to leave. One participant linked gang involvement to family ties, suggesting that gang loyalties were so pervasive that exit was effectively impossible without a complete change of life-course: ‘They’ll always be part of it cos they’ve got families on the estate so as much as we may disagree [on] the issues we’re always part of it’ (male interviewee 3, 40s). The shift mid-sentence from ‘they’ to ‘we’ is telling, suggesting a strong personal identification with the level of commitment being described. Gang membership is also seen as a commitment in itself, over and above previous social ties. The idea of breaking from the gang milieu by moving away is viewed with suspicion: ‘you move away, you go to the next area, who’s to say that you’re not gonna see them down there, and it’s all over again?’ (male interviewee 4, 27). Gang loyalty shades into fatalism, denying the possibility of leaving: ‘if you get too involved then it’s hard to get out, and that’s the way it is in gangs’ (female interviewee 1, 30s).

A third, associated theme is that of neutralisation, defined in textbook terms by one ex-member: ‘You start to justify the wrong things you’re doing by the counteraction of what the world’s doing to you. ‘They did that to me, so I’m doing that,’ you know what I mean’ (male interviewee 1, 25). Study participants recalled using neutralisations to justify actions they carried out as gang members, but that they themselves viewed as wrong in retrospect. In other words, neutralisation figures in ex-members’ narratives as a technique for aligning the individual’s moral judgment with the morality of the group.

If loyalty, fatalism and neutralisation characterised continuing involvement in gangs, decisions to leave were characterised by their opposites: individual choice, self-efficacy and personal morality. In the words of one ex-member, ‘I’m just myself, an independent individual trying to build something different’ (male interviewee 3, 40s). The insistent reiteration of concepts associated with individuality – ‘just myself’, ‘independent’, ‘individual’, ‘different’ – attests to the importance of defining a subjective identity in individual rather than collective terms. Another ex-member reacted indignantly to the suggestion that, in the experience of some gang members, it might be too late to leave: ‘Why would it be too late if they want to get out of it? You’re either in it or you’re not’ (male interviewee 4, 33). Personal efficacy overrides broader social and relationship factors; anyone who wants to leave the gang has only to make the choice. Tellingly, the same participant rejected the idea of gang members ‘being changed’
by their experiences or by encounters with other people: ‘No one should change you’. The belief in individual choice here hardens to an assertion that only the individual can change his or her life; to be changed by anyone else would be unworthy.

Another recurrent cluster of ideas in the context of decisions to leave gangs concerns maturation and personal progress. Progress is associated with individuality – ‘an independent individual trying to build something different’ (male interviewee 3) – and counterposed with the earlier identity as part of a collective: ‘I do believe there’s other ways of life. ... I don’t know where my journey’s leading to but it’s got me away from that’ (male interviewee 3). Progress is conceptualised in vague but optimistic terms; the future is bright but hazy. This is perhaps a reflection of the heavy stress placed on personal agency; the promise of the future lies not in any specific opportunities but in how the individual will build it. Maturation is conceptualised in less abstract terms; it is seen as a process that grounds the individual more firmly in reality, often involving the recognition of responsibility within relationships: ‘I’m going through things with my baby mother ... through a lot of emotional difficulties.... A lot of gangster, man, they grow up and they see reality’ (male interviewee 6, 23).

In the first cluster of concepts – individual choice, self-efficacy, personal morality – former gang members assert and celebrate their personal agency as individuals. In some accounts, a free choice to go straight cancels out the earlier free choice to join a gang; in others, gang membership is associated with a temporary lack of choice, so that the choice of leaving is seen as a recovery of the personal agency the individual had all along. In the second cluster – progress, maturation, responsibility in personal relationships – this emphasis on personal continuity is qualified by a focus on development and ‘growing up’. These accounts suggest that desistance from gang activity represents progress into social independence. This outlook echoes Barry’s finding that ‘many of the respondents ... gave up crime in anticipation of something constructive happening in their lives rather than in response to something already having happened’ (Barry 2013: 62; emphasis in original)

To sum up, key factors in successful desistance from gang activity, as understood by former gang members, are a sense of personal continuity as a free agent and a sense of personal development towards the responsibilities of an adult. How do these factors relate to the list of alternative desistance mechanisms outlined above? The first of the four – subjective repudiation of the past, offending identity – is not supported by these accounts; while successful desisters did dissociate themselves from their past gang activity, they did not offer the kind of conversion narrative that this mechanism would imply. On the contrary, subjective continuity was stressed, with at most a sense that personal agency had in the past been temporarily overpowered by other factors. The second proposed mechanism – changes of life trajectory entailing the abandonment of a past identity – receives some equivocal support. References to external relationships as a factor in desistance are in line with this perspective; it could also be argued that the negative references to family and neighbourhood ties, as a factor for
continuing gang involvement, argue in favour of breaking social ties as a means of desistance. This type of process is not referred to by successful desisters, however. In short, the accounts given by former gang members offer little support to a pure ‘life-course’ perspective on desistance or to the complex Prevent model, and none at all to the simple model.

The third and fourth mechanisms are much better supported. The third mechanism – redemption of aspects of the past offending identity, supporting a sense of continuing self-efficacy – corresponds closely to the ‘continuity’ factors listed above, as well as some of the more subjective ‘development’ factors. The fourth – engagement in social interactions that underpin a redeemed sense of self – maps onto the more social ‘development’ factors, i.e. those that relate to dyadic relationships and the assumption of adult responsibilities in society. As noted, these mechanisms correspond to the narrative and integrative perspectives on desistance, respectively; neither of them is compatible with either of the Prevent models.

Making Prevent work

Both gang research and the broader literature on desistance suggest that interventions based on the Prevent model of de-radicalisation will not be effective in dissuading people from engaging in organised political violence. The influences and pressures exerted by Prevent, in either of its forms, do not represent the kind of approach that has been effective in promoting desistance from criminal careers or from gang involvement; if anything, they are its opposite.

This rather startling conclusion prompts two questions:

1. If we assume that it is desirable and appropriate for governments to promote desistance from organised political violence, what – in the light of desistance research – would be the best way to go about this? What would be the elements of an alternative Prevent programme?

2. How should Prevent itself be understood? If Prevent’s de-radicalisation approach is not likely to bring about effective desistance from political violence, should Prevent be dismissed as unfit for purpose – or is there an alternative policy agenda which Prevent is designed to serve?

As we have seen, former gang members who spoke positively of decisions to desist did so in terms of two clusters of values: individual-centred values of personal autonomy and freedom to choose, and social values of progression and maturation in social relationships. In terms of the theme of personal autonomy, the suggestion was either that the gang member had suspended his or her autonomy upon joining the gang but subsequently reactivated it – so that the decision to leave was as authentic as the earlier decision to join – or that an autonomous outlook had been surrendered in the process of joining the gang but had been recovered in the decision to leave. This is very much in accordance with the stress placed by the narrative and integrative perspectives on personal continuity.
and redemption of positive qualities from the offending past; the decision to leave is framed as a decisive step forward in an interrupted journey, reconnecting the desister with his or her earlier trajectory.

Autonomy plays a twofold role in this context: it features, first, as a value that can best be realised outside the gang milieu; second, and more importantly, it is a quality that desisters from gang activity feel that they once had, and have not entirely lost. It follows that the individual’s trajectory prior to gang involvement will be viewed retrospectively as a valid part of a personal narrative, by virtue of the autonomy with which the individual acted – or believes in retrospect that he or she acted. Any intervention aiming to encourage desistance from gang activity therefore would need to frame desistance as a choice that could be freely made in the context of a valid and meaningful trajectory – indeed, one that would help to achieve the goals associated with that trajectory.

In practice, this model would focus on how gang members understood their trajectory prior to their gang involvement. Gang members would be encouraged to find positive value in their past choices, up to and potentially including the choice of gang involvement, and to consider the possibility of leaving the gang in the same terms. It is worth stressing that this retrospective assessment of the pre-gang trajectory would precede (and contribute to) any actual decision to leave; the values that were stressed, and the terms in which personal choices were assessed, would be those of a gang member rather than a repentant ex-member.

The second cluster of values, centred on personal progress and maturation, relate less to the individuals’ past trajectories than to how they conceptualise their future role in society. Desistance from gang activity is associated with ideas of forming committed relationships outside the gang, being on a journey towards ‘other ways of life’, and ‘grow[ing] up and [seeing] reality’. These ideas echo some of the key features of both the life-course and the integrative models of desistance; gang members themselves associate desistance from gang activity with forming conventional dyadic relationships and taking on social roles that will embed them in law-abiding society. However, this is a process that is undertaken deliberately and modelled consciously, rather than gang members passively undergoing the process and emerging from it changed; indeed, subjective modelling of future engagement in responsible social roles may loom as large – and be as effective – as roles that have actually been undertaken. As such, it echoes the integrative rather than the life-course model.

The idea of personal progress has two key components. Subjectively, the gang member’s projected future life-course is understood in terms of engagement with a field of possibilities that is at once broader and more in line with societal norms than the options previously open to him or her; the norms of the gang are framed retrospectively both as restrictive and as a diversion from a socially normal process of maturation. On the level of social relationships, meanwhile, this vision of progress into normality and maturity can only be realised if desisting gang members can in fact take on law-abiding social roles – which in turn requires that they are permitted to present themselves as unexceptional, law-abiding members of society.
An intervention keyed to this second model of desistance would emphasise the desister’s situation within a socially normative life-course, with the same basic needs as any other ‘independent individual trying to build something different’: for means of subsistence, sustained relationships, fulfilling employment. Perhaps even more importantly, such an intervention would address any material and social factors that prevented these needs being met: poverty, denial of social security, refusal of work opportunities, stigmatisation.

An alternative Prevent programme designed in accordance with these values would thus have two key elements:

1. It would offer the possibility of resuming an earlier life trajectory, presenting association with armed groups as a diversion.
2. It would offer an exit into normality, with the armed milieu presented as a block on social and personal development – but one whose effects could be left behind as the desister took up ‘normal’ social roles.

The ‘trajectory resumed’ model would address the period before the individual joined – or formed – an armed group. While personal relationships and social networks can play an important part in individuals’ decisions to become involved in ‘armed struggle’ activity (Novaro 1991), a key element of the pre-involvement trajectory will generally be commitment to a radical political project with no representation in the legitimate political mainstream, leading the individual to explore different forms of investigation, discussion and political intervention. (Even if a period of political activity was not in fact the decisive element in an individual’s pre-group trajectory, it is likely to appear to have been decisive in retrospect.)

In order to make a connection between the past trajectory and the possibility of desistance, members and supporters of armed groups would need to be addressed as individuals engaged in a genuine and legitimate field of political activity and inquiry; the suggestion would be that armed struggle activism was damaging to the values that had motivated their independent pursuit of this field of activity. An effective intervention would begin by guaranteeing the legitimacy of the political values held by armed militants and the broader political project in which they believed themselves to be engaged; the proposition would be not that an illegitimate political project has led inexorably to armed violence, but that a legitimate project has been made harder to pursue as a result of the mistaken choice of armed violence.

The ‘exit into normality’ model would take a prospective rather than a retrospective approach; supporters of armed groups would be addressed as individuals with ‘normal’ social and personal needs and capabilities. This model would stress the role of interactions with criminal justice and other agencies. As well as offering support and practical assistance where required, this would involve offering endorsements of the desister’s capabilities and good intentions. Interactions would be designed to bring about redemptive and de-labelling experiences, avoiding stigmatisation and where possible undoing the effects of earlier stigmatisation.
Why Prevent?

In short, under this alternative Prevent programme sympathisers with armed groups would be encouraged to pursue their political agenda by other means and offered support and assistance in taking up responsible roles in society. These two strands would be mutually reinforcing. Association with a radical and distinctive political agenda would help individuals gain standing in local communities; acquiring responsible positions would help their political programme gain recognition. The political landscape that would result would be one in which ‘extreme’ ideologies were much less likely to lead to organised political violence, largely because those ideologies had a recognised place in the legitimate political spectrum. An effective counter-terrorism strategy, then, would not be criminalising Islamist militants but encouraging them to pursue their beliefs by becoming political activists and community representatives.

The actual approach of the Prevent programme, by contrast, seems designed to promote political exclusion and personal stigma. Labelling certain political ideologies as illegitimate – as unacceptably extreme, or as inherently ‘violent’ – will inevitably lead some believers of those ideologies to adopt illegitimate means of expressing those ideologies and pursuing their goals, including illegal and violent means. Isolating and condemning holders of views seen as unacceptably extreme is likely to lead to the stigmatisation of individuals, with direct personal and social costs. Stigmatisation, in turn, is more likely to promote increased commitment to socially excluded beliefs and illegal activity than it is to foster desistance and conformity. In short, Prevent – in all its forms, but especially in its currently dominant ‘simple’ form – seems designed not to reduce the number of individuals who pose a threat of violence, but to maximise the stigmatisation and criminalisation of individuals who hold unacceptable beliefs.

This analysis calls into question the rationale of Prevent. A general programme of isolating, stigmatising and penalising non-violent extremists – and those only suspected of holding ‘extreme’ views – will impose immediate costs on individuals who have not been found guilty of any offence, and who may be entirely innocent; it will increase social division and exclusion, at the cost of ethnic and religious minorities whose members already suffer from prejudice and discrimination; it will have a chilling effect on public discourse, flagging certain views as criminal in themselves and marking certain areas of discussion as off-limits; and it will promote alienation and disaffection, tending in the longer term to increase the numbers who turn to illegal and violent means of political expression.

To take Prevent at face value, we would have to believe that all these costs could be justified by the benefit of reducing the threat of violence, by disrupting the activities of the minority of extremists who are already committed to violent means. However, since Prevent is plainly intended as a long-term programme, and since there is a good case that the long-term effect of these measures would be an increase in organised political violence, even this reading is not available. The assumption must be that the purpose of Prevent is what it does: to narrow
the political spectrum, delegitimate unfavoured viewpoints and stigmatise those who hold them. Prevent attacks the ‘pernicious ideology . . . that has given some comfort to the stories that al-Qaeda provides’ not as a means to the end of reducing the incidence of Islamist violence, but as an end in itself. There are other, better ways to produce ex-offenders, ex-gangsters, ex-terrorists; Prevent has to be understood as an exercise in ideological warfare.

Acknowledgements

Research used in this paper was funded by the ESRC (RES-000–23–0615), and entitled ‘Youth Gangs in an English City’.

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4 Countering violent extremism

Social harmony, community resilience and the potential of counter-narratives in the Australian context

Anne Aly

Introduction

The UK’s Prevent strategy, Australia’s Resilience approach and the United States’ Diminish all share a focus on countering violent extremism on the home front through a policy approach that promotes democratic values, social harmony and active participation of Muslim communities. This chapter presents an overview and assessment of soft counter-terrorism strategies in Australia and highlights the conceptual understanding driving the policy response. It argues that such responses are informed by a flawed assumption that individuals or communities (predominantly Muslims) are more vulnerable to extremist violence because they are politically and socially marginalised from the broader society. Such assumptions have little or no evidentiary basis in the literature and have resulted in a policy approach that targets Muslim communities with a strong emphasis on social harmony and community capacity-building programmes. This chapter calls for a re-conceptualisation of the Resilience approach through a focus on the emergence of radicalising settings and the broader conditions that promote violent extremism rather than an emphasis on assumed vulnerability. This requires a re-framing of the problem of terrorism in the political discourse and recognition that emergence and exposure to radicalising settings is best countered through the development of effective counter-narratives.

Framing the problem: the political discourse on home-grown terrorism

Following the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001, Australia, like many other nations, embarked on a series of policy responses aimed at addressing the threat of terrorism by non-state actors. Responses varied from committing military aid to the coalition efforts in Afghanistan (and later Iraq) to domestically focused, policy-driven programmes designed to address the perceived threat of home-grown terrorism.

According to the Global Terrorism Database (2012), Australia experienced ten terrorist incidences in the decade between 2001 and 2011. Of these incidences, only one resulted in fatalities. This incident, though categorised as a
terrorist incident by the Global Terrorism Database, occurred when an explosion on board the Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) 36 resulted in the deaths of Australia-bound asylum seekers in April 2009. Of the remaining listed terrorist attacks, one had a government or diplomatic target (an unknown chemical agent in a letter to the United States Consulate in Melbourne) and three targeted religious figures or institutions. An armed assault on a synagogue in Sydney in 2006 occurred when a group of men described as ‘Middle Eastern’ hurled stones at the synagogue, damaging its roof and windows. No group claimed responsibility for the attack. In 2001 and 2010 mosques were attacked by arson and armed assailants in Brisbane and Perth respectively. While no group has claimed responsibility for these attacks, Combat 18, a right-wing white supremacist organisation, is believed to be responsible for the Perth attack. This track record of successful terrorist incidences in Australia indicates the varied nature of the home-grown terrorist threat. Yet Australia’s national security policy and programmes has been singularly focused on the threat of ideologically inspired jihadist attacks.

Since 12 September 2001, Australia’s National Terrorism Public Alert System has been set at medium (‘terrorist attack could occur’), the second level of four tiers. More than ten years after the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001 and the Bali bombings in 2002, which killed 202 including 88 Australians, the threat of terrorism continues to be at the forefront of government policy making despite what appears to be waning public interest. While public opinion polls suggest public fatigue with the protracted campaign against terrorism, Australian policy makers are still vigorously tackling the threat of terrorism to Australia’s national interests. Over the decade or so since the Australia’s public alert system was set to medium, the political discourse on terrorism has evolved. Originally framed as the threat of an imminent physical attack, the contemporary discourse on terrorism incorporates politicised issues including Muslim immigration, border control and the maintenance of ill-defined ‘Australian values’.

Given the disconnection between this security discourse and the lack of any domestic terrorist attacks inspired by radical Islamism, how should we understand Australian counter-radicalisation? A starting point is to note the academic literature that identifies the functionality of fear, and the ‘other’, for politics. For example, Aly and Balnaves (2005) note how terrorism has pervaded public life and claim that ‘terrorism has become the new metonym for our time’ where the ‘War on Terror’ refers to a perpetual state of alertness as well as a range of strategic operations, border control policies, internal security measures and public awareness campaigns such as ‘Be alert, not alarmed’. The media and political construction of September 11 and the subsequent ‘War on Terror’ is one in which the West is in a perpetual state of alert from a foreign, alien, politically defined ‘other’, where, as Brian Massumi states, ‘Insecurity … is the new normal’ (2005: 31).

David Altheide’s (1997) extensive work on the news media and the promotion of fear goes even further. Summarily, the problem frame is a way of defining a particular social issue as troublesome and ultimately generates fear by promoting messages that stress danger and risk. The problem frame connotes:
Something exists that is undesirable; Many people are affected by this problem (it is relevant); Unambiguous aspects or parts are easily identified; It can be changed or ‘fixed’; There is a mechanism or procedure for fixing the problem; The change or repair agent and process is known (usually government).

(Altheide, 1997: 655)

While Altheide (1997) applies the problem frame to social issues such as crime and drugs, the elements described in his typology of the problem frame are also applicable to the discourse on terrorism. Importantly, the problem frame facilitates the movement of discourses by framing a particular social event or issue (terrorism) in a way that associates it with other social events or issues (border control, invasion, threats to Australian values, Muslim immigration, gang crime). The historical construction of the threat of invasion in Australia as a source of anxiety, and the conflation of terrorism with border security and the threat to Australian values, has linked the discourse on terrorism with the discourse of fear. In this way, the discourse on terrorism is inextricably linked to the permeation of community fear in Australia.

In the political discourse on terrorism, asylum seekers, Lebanese gangs, racial conflict, radical Islam and, by association, Australian Muslims are collectively identified as a problem and a source of anxiety. The use of the problem frame allows for these issues to be assimilated into a single discourse, the discourse on terrorism (Aly, 2010), and ultimately inform the ways in which the problem (terrorism) is addressed by policy makers.

The policy response to the home-grown threat

In October 2002, an agreement between the heads of government in Australia established the National Counter-Terrorism Committee shortly after the Bali bombings that killed 88 Australian holiday makers in Kuta, Bali’s central entertainment district. Among other things, the Committee was charged with the development and maintenance of Australia’s National Counter-Terrorism Plan (henceforth The Plan).

The Plan replaced the existing National Anti-Terrorist Plan developed in response to the Hilton Hotel bombing in Sydney in 1978. The Plan was first issued in 2003 and has since undergone three revisions (2003, 2005 and 2012). It is the principal document setting out Australia’s overarching approach to counter-terrorism. This approach encompasses four aspects of preventing and responding to terrorist attacks on Australian soil: preparedness, prevention, response and recovery. While these four areas of the strategy overlap, prevention refers specifically to ‘measures taken to eliminate or reduce the occurrence or severity of a terrorist act’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 8). Prevention covers a broad range of capabilities including intelligence, threat assessment, criminal investigation, security, border control and critical infrastructure protection. Nestled among these hard approaches to counter-terrorism within the
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prevention approach is Countering Violent Extremism, a new addition to the latest 2012 edition of the Plan, described as a vital element in the prevention of terrorism. According to the Plan, ‘[t]he effective prevention of violent extremism involves combining an appropriate security and law enforcement response with broader strategies to enhance resilience to, and lessen the appeal of, violent extremist influences’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012: 13).

Apart from the National Counter-Terrorism Plan, Australia’s policy response to terrorism has also been iterated through the release of various strategic papers, plans and national programmes. The Transnational Terrorism White Paper: The Threat to Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004) reinforced the approach set out in the Plan. It committed the government to spending around $670 million to support programmes aimed at improving law enforcement and judicial capacity to counter terrorism. The White Paper also acknowledged the necessity of soft approaches with a long-term objective of countering the appeal of extremist narratives and addressing the social contexts in which terrorism emerges. In accordance with the political discourse on terrorism prevalent in Australia, the White Paper framed the problem of terrorism as a value-based conflict. Accordingly, counter-terrorism efforts were driven by a re-commitment to and defence of Australian values:

In defending our values, we must make it clear that we will not resile from our commitment to tolerance, openness, freedom and equality. We must not let the terrorists turn Australians against each other. The government will continue to make it clear that this is not a campaign against Muslims or against Islam. There is a clear distinction between the vast majority of moderate and tolerant Muslims and the tiny minority who carry out acts of terrorism in the name of Islam.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2004: 106)

In 2005, the London bombings focused attention on the threat of home-grown terrorism, prompting the Australian government to meet with selected representatives from Muslim communities and establish the Muslim Community Reference Group. The Group was charged with assisting the government by acting as an advisory group and by working with Muslim communities to ‘promote harmony, mutual understanding and Australian values and to challenge violence, ignorance and rigid thinking’ (Parliament of Australia, 2005). During a two-hour summit, the group developed a Statement of Principles committing members of Muslim communities to combat radicalisation and pursue ‘moderate’ Islam. In 2006, the final report produced by the Muslim Reference Group confirmed commitment to the evolving government policy approach of countering terrorism through building social cohesion and commitment to shared Australian values.

Aly and Balnaves (2005) describe the Muslim Community Reference Group as an affective machination: a useful political tool for modulating the existing anxieties in the Australian populace. The very need for a Muslim community summit in response to the London bombings and for the development of a
Statement of Principles (later endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments or COAG) sends a lucid message to the Australian public that not only are Australian Muslims responsible for terrorism but that they also have the capacity to prevent or minimise the threat of an attack in Australia.

In 2005, the policy response to terrorism took its first step towards linking the social harmony agenda to the securitisation of the state in the form of the National Action Plan to Build Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). The stated purpose of the National Action Plan (NAP) notably conflated national security with social cohesion and harmony and clearly indicated an understanding that violent extremism could be addressed through programmes designed to reinforce Australian values, social harmony, interfaith understanding and tolerance. Between 2005 and 2010, the National Action Plan provided funding for 83 community-based projects deemed to meet the Plan’s criteria of addressing extremism and the promotion of violence. Of the 83 projects funded, 33 were undertaken by associations that identified as Muslim or Islamic (some applicants received funding for more than one project or in more than one round). The remaining 50 organisations funded included universities and vocational training organisations (4), multicultural social services or migrant resource centres (14), interfaith groups (3), local councils (4), ethnic organisations (specifically African, East African, Afghan, Hazara, Arabic and Pakistani), sporting clubs (4) and miscellaneous social clubs and service providers.

The kinds of projects that were funded were predominantly aimed at Muslim communities, most notably youth and women, and the provision of services, programmes, education, information and dialogue. Sixty-five of the projects funded were explicitly aimed at Muslim communities and identified their target groups variously as: ‘African Muslim’; ‘Muslim youth’; ‘Muslim women’; ‘at-risk Muslims’; ‘young Muslims’; ‘Iraqi Muslims’; ‘Lebanese Muslims’ and ‘young Muslim men from Arabic-speaking backgrounds’. Seven projects were described as involving ‘interfaith’ elements, though a further 13 projects described some form of interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim communities and groups through activities such as sport, dialogue, fashion parades, workshops, art and craft programmes, and music workshops. Twenty-nine projects involved some form of leadership training for Muslims: youth, women and young men. Overall, the range of projects funded under the National Action Plan in the five years of its operation reflects a policy approach that specifically identifies Muslim communities (including ethno-specific and new and emerging Muslim communities) as the primary target of Australia’s broader security strategy.

Subsequently, in 2010, the Australian government released the Counter-Terrorism White Paper: Securing Australia, Protecting Our Community (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010), primarily driven by an ASIO National Security Assessment which found that the greatest risk to Australia’s national security were home-grown proponents of an extremist and violent interpretation of Islam. Although the White Paper continued to reinforce the threat of terrorism as predominantly a threat arising from religious motivations (specifically Islamic), the
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re-focus on violent extremism created a new policy space for the development of programmes that addressed the specific drivers of extremism and radicalisation, as opposed to issues associated with social integration and harmony. It also created a new language and terminology, ‘violent extremism’, that provided an opportunity for a renewed discourse on terrorism to be constructed. In this new discourse, violent extremism and the project of countering violent extremism could be broadened to include violence that is driven by various forms of extremism: ideological, social and religious.

In 2011, the Australian government introduced the Countering Violent Extremism Strategy. The Strategy supports Australia’s broader counter-terrorism efforts (as spelled out in the 2010 White Paper) by addressing factors that make people vulnerable to extremist influences and recruitment by terrorists. Its stated goal is to ‘[r]educe the risk of home-grown terrorism by strengthening Australia’s resilience to radicalisation and assisting individuals to disengage from violent extremist influences and beliefs’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010: 11).

In an effort to move away from the problem of conflating the policy agendas of social harmony with counter-terrorism, the Countering Violent Extremism Strategy set out distinct focus areas that are designed to more clearly focus on the aims of counter-terrorism:

- **identification and information sharing** to identify extremist ideology in community;
- **understanding the motivations** of recruits and the methods of recruiters;
- **referral and support**, diversion and rehabilitation;
- **education initiatives** that equip people to reject extremism;
- **communication** of non-violent key messages and counter-narratives.

The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Grants Program, which has succeeded the National Action Plan, ‘aims to support community projects across Australia that build resilience to violent extremism. The goal of the BCR Program is to encourage and empower communities and individuals to resist or disengage from intolerant and radical ideologies’ (Australian Government, 2011). The BCR Program distinguishes itself from other social cohesion and harmony programmes and, while acknowledging that the most prominent expression of violent extremism is a militant interpretation of Islam, does not limit the understanding of violent extremism to religious motivations.

Since its inception in 2011, the BCR Program has funded 51 community-based projects (this number does not include a further eight projects recently funded in the 2013–14 round of BCR grants). Of these, seven projects were undertaken by Islamic or Muslim associations with the remainder split between a diverse range of service associations including migrant and multicultural centres, sporting clubs, universities, local councils and miscellaneous groups. Ten of the projects specifically target Muslims or Muslim communities, with six of these being Muslim youth leadership and/or mentoring programmes. The
remaining four Muslim-focused projects include a project designed to encourage Muslim youth to build positive connections with the broader community, the development of a Common Curriculum Framework for teaching Islamic studies in Australian Islamic primary and secondary schools, a project to address misconceptions about Islam and promote cultural understanding, and the production of a DVD for schools to address misperceptions about Muslims. The 40 or so projects that do not have a Muslim-specific focus range from interfaith and intercultural programmes, multicultural sporting programmes, community inclusion projects, ethno-specific programmes (Afghan and Somali), civic participation and development, education and raising awareness of violent extremism and school-based programmes. Notably, only one project specifically targets white supremacist violent extremism.

Despite the positive steps taken in attempting to move the BCR Program away from the social harmony policy agenda, it continues to reflect an underlying preoccupation with the assumptions of its predecessor. The project descriptions focus primarily on individual and community vulnerability to violent extremism. At least 24 of the projects target or involve Muslims, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, refugee communities, Somali communities, Afghan youth, ethnic communities and/or Arabic-speaking groups. Ten of the projects specify vulnerability, marginalisation, at-risk youth or groups and isolation as a primary issue to be addressed. Those projects that promote leadership among Muslim or ethno-specific groups reflect an understanding that such groups lack leadership and that the issue of leadership (or lack thereof) is a central driver of radicalisation to violent extremism.

However, a rapid evidence assessment of vulnerability and resilience to al-Qaeda violent extremism and other types of violent activity (animal rights activism, cults, gangs, right-wing extremism and youth crime) prepared for the UK’s Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism concluded that the evidence on risk and resilience factors for violent extremism is lacking. Based on limited empirical evidence, the report concludes that there is no specific risk or vulnerability profile for al-Qaeda-influenced violent extremism (Munton et al., 2011).

Vulnerability to radicalisation cannot be pre-determined. The existing literature on radicalisation and violent extremism confirms that there is no single trajectory to terrorism and that vulnerability is a weak indicator of radicalisation to violent extremism. Despite this, the policy response to terrorism in Australia continues to be framed by a combination of flawed assumptions about individual and community vulnerability, rather than focusing on the contexts and settings within which radicalisation occurs. These flawed assumptions have produced a policy response that allows for the identification of suspect individuals and groups as the basis for the development of programmes designed to counter violent extremism. Thus programmes become generated by a focus on groups (Muslims, Somali, Afghan, CALD, ethnic, multicultural, refugee, etc.) rather than on defusing the contexts, situations and opportunities that present as possible supportive settings and the mechanisms by which these settings arise.
The policy response that focuses on vulnerability is a direct effect of the constructed political discourse on terrorism (and violent extremism) as a social problem arising out of ideological differences between the Western liberal democratic values and Islamic values: where Muslims, refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers were collectively identified as a source of anxiety and threat. A shift in the policy response to more effectively address the root causes of violent extremism requires a shift in the political construction of terrorism and violent extremism that more accurately defines the problem.

The heritage of flawed assumptions

This section explores the progressive development of counter-terrorism policy generated through flawed assumptions about radicalisation and vulnerability in order to contextualise how counter terrorism became conflated with narratives of conflicting values and identities. It is argued that the policy response to the threat of home-grown terrorism in Australia is largely based on assumptions that terrorism is primarily religiously motivated and more likely to be a tool for marginalised individuals or groups who are more vulnerable to radicalising forces.

1 Marginalisation

The marginalisation hypothesis (elsewhere referred to as the ‘alienation–radicalisation hypothesis’ (Duffy, 2009)) has its roots in political behaviourism. Gurr (1970) argued that radicalisation is motivated by individual frustration at barriers to achievement, while Schwartz (1973) embedded radicalisation in the individual’s perceived alienation from the political values and institutions of the society in which they live. Both Gurr and Schwartz related their theories to political dissent while other theorists (Hirschi; McCord; Martin and Fitzpatrick) rationalised social deviancy and individual psychopathy through alienation from the norms and values of society (cited in Duffy, 2009). According to this analysis of alienation, individuals are more likely to engage with radical groups when they perceive themselves to be isolated from and not represented by the social constructs of the broader community. Applications of the alienation hypothesis to active involvement in terrorist activities clarify that alienation should be seen as a pre-condition for terrorist activity as opposed to a precipitant of terrorism (Crenshaw, 1981; Duffy, 2009). This analysis suggests that radicalisation is more likely to occur in pre-existing conditions of alienation (Duffy, 2009). It also suggests that certain individuals and groups are therefore more vulnerable to engage in terrorism because they are alienated. A natural progression of this analysis is that involvement in terrorist activities can be addressed through targeted efforts that (a) identify vulnerable individuals and groups and (b) attempt to integrate these groups by promoting engagement with the political and social structures from which they are presumed to be alienated.

The London bombings of 2005 reproduced the ‘marginalisation hypothesis’ to explain the home-grown origin of the event, for which no viable links to
al-Qaeda could be proven. Much attention was focused on the perceived motivations of the British-born suicide bombers. The marginalisation hypothesis assumes that the London bombers’ social and political alienation from the institutions and constructs of British society were causal factors for the suicide bombings and the likely factors behind the new threat of home-grown terrorism in other Western nations. The Intelligence and Security Committee Report (2006) into the London terrorist attacks dismissed marginalisation as the primary motivational force for the London attacks, affirming that the threat is just as likely to come from citizens who appear to be well integrated into British society as those who are socially or economically isolated. Despite this, the suggestion that the four young men were isolated from the broader British community and had experienced racism prompted governments in the UK, Australia and elsewhere to introduce new programmes aimed at addressing the marginalisation of Muslim communities, promoting social harmony and enhancing participation by Muslims. The debate about the relevance of strategies based on models of radicalisation that pinpoint marginalisation as a significant contributing factor arises out of the growing recognition that there is little substantiated evidence to support the link between social or economic inequality (either real or perceived) and terrorism.

2 The primacy of religion and ideology

Another flawed assumption that has underwritten the counter-radicalisation strategy in Australia is that of the primacy of religion and ideology in transitions to violence. Rabasa and his colleagues at the RAND Corporation provide an example of this flawed assumption in their 2007 monograph entitled Building Moderate Muslim Networks. The authors argue that the United States has a critical role to play in enabling networks of moderate Muslims to counter extremist interpretations and set out a ‘road map’ for the development of moderate Muslim networks based on elements of the US policy of containment during the Cold War. According to this report, ‘moderate’ Muslims are characterised as those who ‘share the key dimensions of democratic culture. These include support for democracy and internationally recognized human rights (including gender equality and freedom of worship), respect for diversity, acceptance of nonsectarian sources of law, and opposition to terrorism and other illegitimate forms of violence’ (Rabasa et al., 2007: 66).

Contrary to this appropriation of the Cold War containment counter-strategy, much of the evidence about transitions to violent extremism suggests that ideology plays a less important role in radicalisation than is assumed. Thornberry et al.’s (2003) analysis of delinquent gangs demonstrated that ideological sympathies played a far lesser role than group loyalties in motivating violence. Members of radical or extremist groups were therefore more liable to commit acts of violence in defence of the group itself rather than in defence of its ideologies (Duffy, 2009: 134). Stevens (2009) constructed his argument somewhat differently and contended that the primary reason for joining radical groups is not
religious but for the personal benefits associated with group membership. Stevens further argued that assuming that individuals join radical groups because they lack either the opportunity or capacity to engage with viable alternatives is reminiscent of initial reactions to the ‘brainwashing’ activities of New Age cults in the 1970s. Aly and Striegher’s (2012) analysis of the role of religion in the radicalisation of Jack Roche, Australia’s first convicted terrorist, asserted that religion played a far lesser role in his radicalisation than group dynamics and sustained exposure to terrorist-supportive moral environments. The authors concluded that:

While the policy response to terrorism tends to give primacy to religion and ideology as the main driving forces of radicalisation, Roche’s trajectory from ‘moderate’ Muslim convert to JI member suggests that sustained exposure to extremist ideologies and close interaction with radicalised individuals may be key triggers for the radicalisation process.

(Aly and Streigher, 2012: 859)

Furthermore, in relation to the lack of democratic participation of diaspora Muslim youth, the consensus in the literature is that there is no relationship between religion and participation. A study on the relationship between religiosity and civic participation among Muslim and Christian youth in the Netherlands found that, despite popular assumptions that Muslim youth are disassociated from democratic institutions, both Muslim and Christian adolescents have more developed democratic competencies than their non-religious counterparts (Grundel and Maliepaard, 2011). These findings were echoed by Attar-Schwartz and Ben-Arieh (2012), whose study on political attitudes and knowledge among Palestinian and Jewish youth concluded that political involvement was higher among more religious youth, both Jewish and Arab. Similarly, research on the political participation of ethnic minority youth in Belgium revealed that while they do have lower levels of political participation, participation was influenced not by citizenship status or religion but by gender, socioeconomic status, language attributes and group identity (Quintelier, 2009). These studies indicate that programmes targeting Muslim youth political participation and democratic engagement are more likely to be effective if they also take into account the broader social and economic conditions of Muslims in the diaspora.

The focus on religion as a driver for extremist violence oversimplifies radicalisation and confounds a range of motivations, issues and historically specific contexts into a single interpretation. Explanations for radicalisation towards violent Islamism that focus on religious interpretation treat the political agenda of al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, Islamist ideology, Arab–Western historical relations and jihadist objectives as one. Often, radicalisation is seen to be an expression of Islamism’s contempt for Western democracy. Such interpretations also fail to take into account the different and varied contexts in which radicalisation occurs and are based on an assumption that radicalisation is overwhelmingly religious in nature.
3 The focus on individual radicalisation

The connection between terrorism and individual radicalisation insofar as it represents a progression towards extremist interpretations of religious texts or ideologies is, at best, tentative. Australia’s National Action Plan failed to make any real connection between radicalisation and terrorism other than acknowledging that radicalisation has the potential to erupt into violence and disruption. The Countering Violent Extremism arm of the Resilience strategy in Australia draws a similarly tenuous link between counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism, stating that the countering violent extremism approach will ‘reduce the potential for a home grown terrorist attack through building a more resilient Australia that is less vulnerable to the processes of radicalisation and through assisting individuals to disengage from violent extremist influences’ (Australian Government, 2011). More importantly, the focus on radicalisation does not distinguish between violent extremism and non-violent forms of radicalisation such as tacit support for terrorists perceived to have a legitimate cause while rejecting the use of violence. Aly and Striegher (2012) found that, consistent with other case studies in the literature, in the case of Jack Roche, disengagement from violence did not also lead to de-radicalisation. The authors made an important distinction between disengagement and de-radicalisation, asserting that radicalisation to extremist ideological, social or religious belief systems may still be present after the individual (or indeed group) have abandoned violence as a legitimate tactic. This distinction was also made by Horgan (2009) who asserted that not all disengaged terrorists may necessarily become de-radicalised.

Assuming that vulnerability to radicalisation is the primary marker for identifying potential terrorist threats risks misinterpreting violent extremism as a manifestation of irrational behaviour. The implication is that de-radicalisation is the appropriate response for addressing the threat of terrorism. Yet individuals can be radicalised and never engage in violence. They may also continue to be radical even after disengaging with violent extremist groups. For radicalisation to be a relevant and effective basis for counter-terrorism strategies, concerted efforts should be directed towards understanding the drivers of radicalisation on the one hand, and more importantly, the relationship between radicalisation as psychological process and extremist violence as a behaviour on the other.

Redefining the problem: addressing emergence and exposure through counter narratives

The analyses of terrorism through frameworks of communication construct terrorism as a form of communication by weak actors who use violence as a last resort for communicating their cause. While psychologists argue that violence communicates internal conflict in the perpetrator (Blumenthal, 2006), scholars of terrorism argue that the use of violence by terrorists is not an outcome of individual psychology but a strategic choice to communicate through violence that
problems exist (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982). At the core of the terrorism-as-communication model, terrorism is understood to be a tactic or strategy of provocation and coercion. Terrorists use violence as a communication strategy to provoke effects that are not necessarily connected to the victim population. The effectiveness of violence lies not in the violence itself (the capacity for destruction) but in its ability to indirectly or strategically mobilise audiences. As such, conceptual understandings of terrorism as communication necessarily examine the ways in which terrorism generates narratives that influence how it is perceived and provoke behavioural responses that meet the terrorists’ strategic goals. Over the past decade or so, governments have been increasingly engaged in the development and employment of counter-narratives that challenge terrorist narratives and offer alternative frameworks of meaning.

While governments are still in the early stages of understanding how counter-narratives can be effectively constructed and utilised as part of a long-term strategy, the developing attention to this approach signals a shift away from the flawed policy response based on nebulous understandings of vulnerability and radicalisation. Importantly, counter-narratives that effectively contest and challenge terroristic narratives potentially focus on both individual and situational factors of violent extremism, thus addressing concerns with the overemphasis on individual vulnerability to radicalisation. As discussed in the previous section, the focus on religious or ideological radicalisation by individuals assumed to be vulnerable has resulted in a policy response that conflates the social concerns of participatory citizenship with those of counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. Much of the literature on terrorism points to the importance of multi-level approaches that do not focus singularly on individual radicalisation but that also take into account group dynamics, social structures and the environmental conditions in which terrorism occurs. An Occasional Paper published by the UK Home Office entitled Al Qa’ida Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory (Bouhana and Wikstrom, 2011), asserts that radicalisation is not simply a matter of individual vulnerability. The paper proposes that radicalisation is best approached as a combination of vulnerability (defined as the propensity for individuals and groups to come into contact with and be influenced by terroristic narratives) and exposure to terrorist-supportive environments. The paper calls for an approach that is less focused on vulnerability and more focused on the environmental elements that facilitate radicalisation – the emergence of radicalised settings and exposure to radicalising influences:

To acquire a propensity to terrorism, people have to become exposed to terrorism-supportive moral contexts (exposure). For them to be exposed, settings with terrorism-supportive moral contexts have to be present in their environment (emergence) and they have to come into regular contact with these settings (vulnerability to selection). For radicalisation to result from exposure, individuals have to be sensitive to the influence of the
terrorism-supportive features of the settings they come into regular contact with (*vulnerability to moral change*).

(Bouhana and Wikstrom, 2011, viii; emphasis in original)

Bouhana and Wikstrom’s understanding of radicalisation, described above, begins with the exposure to terroristic narratives and contextualises individual vulnerability within a framework that gives primacy to exposure and emergence. In contrast, other models of radicalisation begin with individual vulnerability and describe radicalisation as a process through which individuals or groups become socialised to a particular world view that is considered radical or extreme (see for example Silber and Bhatt, 2007). The preference for counter-narrative strategies over vulnerability-based policies depends on counter-narratives being informed by frameworks that equally consider environmental and individual drivers of radicalisation and that contextualise individual radicalisation within a broader understanding of the problems of exposure and emergence.

An effective counter-narrative can address the problems of emergence and exposure by providing alternative settings to those that create terrorism-supportive moral contexts. Theoretically, counter-narratives are not just acts of discursive exchange – they are understandings about events and issues that are constructed not only in the way in which events and issues are talked about but also in what we do about them. Counter-narratives challenge the normative claims about violence that are made in extremist narratives and invite alternative constructions. One of the reasons why the al-Qaeda violent extremist narrative has been so successful is its ontogenetic nature; their story is constantly regenerated, reconstructed and re-told. The telling of the narrative, whether by word or deed, creates an emergent terrorism-supportive moral setting; its re-telling becomes the mechanism for sustained exposure. In the absence of a convincing and compelling alternative narrative, the terroristic narrative becomes the only viable narrative for the construction of individual and collective identity. De Graaf (2011) emphasises the importance of conceptualising counter-terrorism as communicating a narrative. Describing counter-terrorism as performativity, she states:

The way in which policymakers perform, or in other words carry out the process of countering terrorism, can have more impact than the actual arrests being made (or not being made). This is the so-called performativity of counter-terrorism or its performative power. Performativity in this context indicates the extent to which a national government, by means of its official counter-terrorism policy and corresponding discourse (in statements, enactments, measures and ministerial remarks), is successful in selling its representation of events and its set of solutions to the problem, as well as being able to set the tone for the overall discourse regarding terrorism and counter-terrorism – thereby mobilising (different) audiences for its purposes.

(De Graaf, 2011: 3)
De Graaf limits performativity to official discourses, strategies and actions. However, community-based and citizen-driven responses also have a performative power for the construction of counter-narratives. Conceptualising counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism policies and programmes as performative acts that have the potential to create and sustain convincing counter-narratives provides an opportunity to develop counter-narratives that disrupt the emergence of terrorism-supportive moral contexts and prevent exposure to these settings.

With respect to individual factors of radicalisation, a counter-narrative that is conceptually informed by evidence on mechanisms of engagement and disengagement from violence (as opposed to engagement and disengagement with radical or extremist religious views) can be constructed to target psychological processes of moral disengagement (vulnerability to moral change), effectively disrupting this process through targeted messaging. Bandura’s (1999) theory of moral disengagement supplements this understanding by suggesting that individuals engage in violence and aggression in violation of their own moral standards. Moral disengagement is a psychological process through which self-regulatory mechanisms of internal control are disengaged or dismissed. Self-sanctions are disengaged through the mechanisms of moral disengagement: ‘reconstruing conduct as serving moral purposes, obscuring personal agency in detrimental activities, disregarding or misrepresenting the injurious consequences of one’s actions, and blaming and dehumanizing the victims’ (Bandura, 1990: 2). Collectively, the mechanisms of disengagement allow individuals to cognitively reconstruct the moral value of violence, putting aside self-sanctions, so that acts of violence can be committed.

The majority of research on moral disengagement in the field of terrorism studies examines extremist narratives in relation to the mechanisms of moral disengagement. A study by Hafez (2006) of the last-will-and-testament video speeches made by Palestinian suicide bombers drew linkages between the content of these media products and mechanisms of moral disengagement. In Hafez’s study, Palestinian suicide bombers used moral justification and dehumanisation to moralise their violence as serving an altruistic cause of freedom from an oppressive and dangerous threat. Aly’s (2009) analysis of the narratives employed on Islamist extremist websites acknowledges that biographical narratives of suicide bombers on such websites adhere to a strict format that portrays the suicide bomber as a devout martyr motivated to self-sacrifice by absolute submission to faith and an intense desire to fulfil the greatest demonstration of piety possible. Extremist narratives also displace the responsibility for violence onto the victims of terrorist acts, claiming that atrocities perpetrated against Muslims by Western regimes are the primary cause for their retaliatory actions. The claims made in extremist narratives empower individuals to absolve themselves of blame for inhumane acts and behaviours while religion provides a moral template for justifying acts of violence as a moral response to perceived injustice.

Considering the application of moral disengagement to radicalising influences, it is pertinent to also examine if social-cognitive mechanisms of moral disengagement
can also be applied to the development of preventive measures in the form of counter-narratives that disrupt the moral disengagement process. In this respect, the literature is lacking, with no studies examining how processes of moral disengagement may make individuals more vulnerable to violent extremist influences or, importantly, how preventive interventions may enhance personal resilience to radicalising influences by activating self-sanctioning mechanisms.

**Conclusion**

The political construction of terrorism as a problem in Australia relied on a historical tradition that allowed the Australian government to conflate historical sources of anxiety with the threat of terrorism. In effect, the policy response to terrorism evolved as a response driven by the need to protect the Australian community from elements within the broad community perceived as a threat to national security. Early programmes under this policy driver focused almost exclusively on Muslim communities as a threatening ‘other’. On this basis, community projects funded under the security agenda attempted to build Muslims capacity to resist radicalisation by tackling broader social issues of social harmony, cultural awareness, civic participation and capacity building. A re-focus of soft counter-terrorism measures to the problem of countering violent extremism has had some positive effects in encouraging programmes that take a broader approach, but these continue to reflect a preoccupation with the false assumptions of the policy response to terrorism: vulnerability, emphasis on the role of religion and radicalisation. While the consideration of narratives and counter-narratives is relatively new to the field of terrorism studies, there exists an opportunity for researchers to contribute to the development of policies that re-construct the counter-narrative in ways that effectively address individual vulnerability as well as the broader aspects of contexts and settings within which radicalisation is likely to occur.

**References**


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Militant democracy, right-wing extremism and the prevention of Islamic extremism in Berlin

Julia Berczyk and Floris Vermeulen

Introduction
Islamic extremism and terrorism have become highly polarizing and emotive public concerns. Authorities are under mounting pressure to counter their effects, and strategies involving a variety of actors and instruments are being developed at international, national and local levels. But even more is needed than just tackling actual violence, which often falls under the remit of police or security agencies. Authorities are being confronted with a responsibility to address root causes and to develop counter-mechanisms for preventing extremism in the first place. As such, authorities are not only expected to develop responsive measures but, more and more, to come up with preventive ones, too.

A common denominator in current anti-extremism and counter-terrorism policies across Europe is the emphasis placed on the role of local communities and on the concepts of prevention, community cohesion and resilience (Thomas 2010, 2012; Spalek and Lambert 2008; Briggs et al. 2006; Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012). Due in part to the implication of European Muslims in violent attacks, particularly since 9/11, European countries have been accused of failing to integrate their minority populations. With a view to countering the perceived ‘threat from within’, Muslim social integration has thus become a top policy priority (Haverig 2012; Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012).

Recently, anti-extremism and counter-terrorism policies have come to focus on the community level and, within it, on the concepts of community cohesion, stakeholder security and policy transferability. The local level is considered vital; it is where contact between diverse individuals and groups takes place on a daily basis and where integration, democracy and notions of community come to the fore. Moreover, the community frequently serves as the level of implementation. National authorities increasingly stress localized responsibility; being well acquainted with circumstances on the ground enables the development of targeted interventions. This is a better alternative to getting caught up in national policy guidelines that may anyway be irrelevant to specific local needs. What is more, communities are seen as actively contributing to the prevention of extremism and terrorism. Some ways they may do this are by tackling underlying economic, social and political drivers of radicalization; challenging narratives and
discourses; spotting signs of vulnerability; and providing information and intelligence (Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2010: 4). In sum, according to current policies and scientific research, a community – be it understood in terms of ethnic group, neighbourhood or district – is considered an important resource for tackling extremism, radicalization and terrorism.

In local preventive programmes and policy initiatives, communities are deemed important for understanding the functioning and effectiveness of preventive counter-terrorism and anti-extremism measures. And yet we know fairly little about these very issues. For one thing, preventive policies are difficult to evaluate. In part this is because any measurement entails a great deal of mere speculation by policy actors regarding a threat itself, its underlying causes and risks (de Goede 2008, 2012). As an illustration, the root causes, mechanisms and processes of violent and non-violent forms of extremism are hotly debated among academics. We are even less well informed about how preventive measures function and what their effects are. Authorities therefore often base their initiatives and policies on assumptions and preconceived notions of a threat and its potential target group (de Goede 2008: 164). More detailed knowledge of local policy practices is therefore imperative for understanding the mechanisms at play (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012; Vermeulen 2014).

Public and academic voices have become increasingly critical of the unidirectional approach adopted by community-based counter-terrorism and anti-extremism policies. Violent offences committed by far-right activists have only very recently begun being recognized as terrorism (Kundnani 2012). In the last decade, policy documents frequently exclusively targeted violent and non-violent Islamic extremism, while neglecting right-wing activities and other manifestations. Many scholars follow Kundnani, maintaining that right-wing extremism and terrorism have not been appropriately incorporated into national policy guidelines or local community-based counter-measures. In the Netherlands and the UK, for instance, existing counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization programmes have only recently begun to apply to all violent extremist ideologies within local communities – not solely targeting Islamic extremism (Kundnani 2012). Largely owing to the unprecedented attacks by Anders Behring Breivik in Norway and the Nationalsozialisticher Untergrund NSU terror cell in Germany, these policies across several European countries have been expanded to also target right-wing extremism.

But Germany’s policy trajectory is unlike that of any other nation in Europe or the world. In light of its extremist and violent past, the country has regarded right-wing extremism as a fundamental threat to existing democratic institutions ever since the end of the Second World War. Policies targeting and preventing any form of extremism thus have a strong tradition in post-war Germany, and they are best understood from a historical perspective. The German constitution and its concept of militant democracy – which together proclaim to defend the liberal democratic system from extremist pressures – set a unique context in which forms of extremism, including Islamic, are targeted.
This chapter thus examines the impact of historical context on emerging strategies against Islamic extremism in Germany. We do this by recounting relevant past milestones and subsequently analysing recently developed local projects aimed at Islamic extremism in Germany. We argue that due to the concept of militant democracy, German authorities understand and address Islamic extremism as a form of extremism, similar to how they would right-wing extremism. This approach has two notable consequences. First, unlike many other European countries, the authorities are less inclined to see Islamic extremism and terrorism as something inherent to Islamic communities and their supposedly failed integration into Western societies (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012). Second, in dealing with Islamic extremism, the authorities make use of practices already developed for right-wing extremism.

In this chapter, we will first describe the context in which local authorities in Berlin develop their preventive measures, looking specifically at the notion of Germany as a militant democracy with a substantial and enduring policy of countering extremism. In addition, we will do a first preliminary analysis of some recently implemented preventive measures against Islamic extremism to see what influence the existing preventive policy framework against right-wing extremism in Berlin has. Some scholars have only very recently begun to study how far authorities addressing different forms of extremism may choose similar approaches, methodologies, interventions and ways to understand the concept of vulnerability. Yet comprehensive research on countering and preventing Islamic extremism is still lacking in the German realm. As has been observed, ‘the current state of research in Germany concerning the impact and evaluation of counter-terrorism strategies in general and particular counter-terrorism measures is disheartening’ (Jesse and Mannewitz 2012: 49). Following our analysis, we will look at how closely the understanding and implementation of countering right-wing extremism relate to contemporary local practices to counter Islamic extremism. We will focus, in particular, on their similarities and the transferability of their approaches.

Germany as a militant democracy

Policies concerning all different forms of extremism and terrorism must be understood in the context of Germany’s past and its efforts to prevent any extremist ideology from ever again gaining ground. Totalitarianism and its devastating effects during the Third Reich generated some fundamental idiosyncrasies in Germany’s constitution. ‘Albeit in retrospect, the Nazi regime’s power-seizing strategy sparked a realization that existing penal means to safeguard democracy were insufficient’ (Bötticher and Mares 2012: 43). Within the newly established German democratic system, Hitler and his NSDAP were able to come to power through democratic means and then ultimately to abolish the democratic system itself. The Federal Republic was the first state in which the concept of militant democracy – termed ‘streitbare Demokratie’ in this particular German version – was taken to the constitutional level. A constitutional
militant democracy thus first came into being through the German Basic Law in 1949 (Tyulkina 2011: 65). No other country in the world has constitutionally articulated the defence of democracy against extremism so explicitly. This has decisively shaped Germany’s political landscape as well as its national self-understanding.

The concept of militant democracy was introduced into the German constitution after the Second World War in the interest of safeguarding the democratic system. Yet protection as such required defining the object being protected. In 1952, upon banning the extreme-right party SRP (which succeeded the NSDAP), the Bundesverfassungsgericht, the Federal Constitutional Court, defined freiheitlich demokratische Grundordnung (FDBO) – meaning ‘free democratic basic order’ – as follows:

an order which excludes any form of tyranny or arbitrariness and represents a governmental system under a rule of law, based upon self-determination of the people as expressed by the will of the existing majority and upon freedom and equality. The fundamental principles of this order include at least: respect for the human rights given concrete form in the Basic Law, in particular for the right of a person to life and free development; separation of powers; responsibility of government; lawfulness of administration; independence of the judiciary; the multi-party principle; and equality of opportunities for all political parties.

(Bundesverfassungsgericht, translation by Thiel 2009: 116)

The principle behind streitbare Demokratie is that, even through majority rule, people cannot be allowed to install a totalitarian regime and, in so doing, violate principles of the German Basic Law and the free democratic basic order. Scholars dispute whether the concept of militant democracy is unique to Germany, is a kind of ‘German tradition’ or is a ‘German problem’ (see for example Thiel 2009: 109; Klamt 2008: 154). However, the basic idea and the implementation of certain principles of militancy are certainly not only specific to the Federal Republic (Klamt 2008: 154). Many democratic states have introduced protective mechanisms into their political systems. However, the peculiarity of the German case is that streitbare Demokratie applies not only to penal law, but also to many constitutional, institutional and societal/discursive dimensions. Consequently, several articles of the German Basic Law allow for a range of different measures to defend the free democratic basic order.¹

In constitutional terms, streitbare Demokratie implies that the government, the Parliament and the judiciary are given extensive powers and duties to defend the democratic system. There is also a so-called ‘eternity clause’ (Ewigkeitsklausel) anchored within the German Basic Law. It states that certain principles can never be dismissed, such as the protection of human dignity, democracy, federalism, a republican form of government, the separation of powers and the rule of law. Even through a majority rule, the logic goes, these principles cannot be abolished. This would thus prevent the establishment of a dictatorship on legal
grounds, as witnessed in 1933 through Hitler’s Enabling Act. Streitbare Demokratie further implies that certain individual liberties can be restricted, such as freedom of speech, the right to assemble and the right to practise a profession (e.g. civil servant, judge). Individuals or groups as well as their activities can therefore be declared unconstitutional and prohibited by the Federal Constitutional Court. A citizen’s right to assemble, along with plurality and free political competition – basic principles within a liberal democratic state – can thereby become severely limited. The main intention of these bans is to annihilate organizational structures as well as to limit related groups’ and movements’ freedom of action.

These constitutional provisions necessitate the involvement of institutional and administrative bodies. Besides an established police and intelligence apparatus, Germany has additionally set up one national and 16 federal Verfassungsschutzämter, offices for the protection of the constitution. Though lacking police authority, the offices are allowed to surveil suspected verfassungsfeindliche (‘anti-constitutional’) groups and individuals until their Verfassungswidrigkeit (‘unconstitutionality’) or their innocence is proven. The offices are responsible for the surveillance of movements and individuals who, independent of their political or ideological orientation, are considered a threat to the democratic order. The offices also communicate information about these potential threats to the authorities and the public. Working under the auspices of their respective national and federal ministries of interior, the Verfassungsschutzämter constitute an early warning system; they are activated prior to any penal violations that may be committed by a suspect and prosecuted by the police. Their legal basis is the Bundesverfassungsschutzgesetz, the Federal Constitution Protection Law, which allows them to employ the methods of intelligence services. They also publish annual reports that inform the general public about extremist and terrorist activities. As a consequence, organizations mentioned in the annual report may encounter major hindrances when engaging with national and local authorities. Accordingly, the reports affect public debates around extremism and particular groups or associations (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012). There is also a penal dimension addressing various norms that are relevant in the realm of political extremism. The legal paragraphs specify, among others, offences regarding propaganda. For instance, it is considered a felony to use symbols or material of unconstitutional organizations and movements, such as those of the former Nazi regime. When it comes to right-wing extremism, the paragraph on incitement is of major relevance; it regulates penalties for the denegation or belittlement of Nazi crimes. Moreover, any attempt to abolish the free democratic basic order is considered treason, with a penalty of ten years’ imprisonment. The formation of terrorist organizations and the execution of terrorist acts are also implied in the German Penal Law. The concept of militant democracy is thereby unique in regard to its correlation of ideology and violence. No penal law must be violated in order for an act or group to be declared anti-constitutional and ultimately unconstitutional. So even prior to carrying out an activity or turning to violence, a group or an individual can be arrested or banned if the goals at hand are
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considered ‘aggressively countering’ to the free democratic basic order. This issue was recently discussed around the ban of the right-wing NPD party, consequently putting the party on guard regarding its rhetoric as well as any possible connections to activists and militant movements.

As Loewenstein noted in his famous article ‘Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights’ in 1937, the protection of democracy cannot be based on legal provisions alone – a democracy needs active democrats. In the German tradition, this discursive dimension is in fact considered the most essential factor for countering extremism and terrorism. First and foremost, it focuses on the spiritual, moral and political examination of extremism (Gerlach 2012: 66). Streitbare Demokratie in Germany thus cannot be understood merely as a collection of repressive paragraphs within the constitution, but rather as a complex, political and societal system of norms, regulations and ‘lived’ democracy. It is precisely this complexity that makes the German version of militant democracy unique and, consequently, non-equivalent to other countries’ methods of defending democracy. Due to the fact that, even prior to any violation of penal law, authorities as well as the general public are supposed to counter any form of extremism, it thus becomes quite clear that the militancy of streitbare Demokratie also heavily rests on aspects of prevention, rather than mere repression.

When it comes to political goals and motives, Germany sets a clear forward displacement of the defensive line, bringing it to the fore even before an actual threat to security is posed (Scherb 2008: 13). The German understanding of militant democracy affects any ideological conception that could be considered a threat. That way, in the prevention of extremism and terrorism, the leading actors in streitbare Demokratie remain the ‘ordinary’ citizens and society in general (Scherb 2008: 19). In this, we see how the German version of militant democracy is anchored in a preventive nature and how, within that narrative, the protagonist and the antagonist (often a suspect) are regular citizens. This is described as the Böckenförde Theorem, the doctrine that the state alone cannot protect the liberal democracy, for it needs constant social discourses as well as societal militancy.

Regarding the protection and defence of the highest principles of the constitution, it is not state institutions, but rather attentive civil society, who mainly comprise the intended addressees of streitbare Demokratie (Scherb 2008: 20).

It is the constitution that sets legal and constitutional provisions, but it is lived democracy, collective memory and a resulting historicized meaning system that determines how streitbare Demokratie is actually realized and how anti-extremism and counter-terrorism policies are interpreted by society. The general society as subject and object in countering extremism and terrorism manifests itself in practice along two important lines: civic education and community engagement.

Civic education plays a central role in Germany’s militant democracy. In the Second World War, this societal, discursive dimension was crucial for the Allied forces – first and foremost the US – who promoted de-Nazification and re-education programmes. Democracy constituted an experiment for the West
German state, believed to still need safety and protection. At its foundation, the Federal Republic was still being questioned by some for being ‘a democracy without a majority of democrats’ (Glaeßner 1999: 417). Concerning the appointment of police, justice and administration personnel, Germany’s first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, noted: ‘You cannot pour out the dirty water if you don’t have fresh water’. The aim of civic education has therefore long been to encourage critical reflection among German citizens and to sensitize them to history, politics and democratic values. It is also meant to promote active citizenship, which foresees societal and political participation (BPB 2012). Democracy is thus ‘brought’ into the daily life of students and the public. This could be described as an educational, pedagogical approach to the prevention of extremism by fostering civil society and promoting democracy. A substantial part of German school curricula is an intensive coming-to-terms with the past and instilling in students democratic values. That said, civic education is directed at society on the whole. There is also an official institution that deals with these issues, known as the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (BPB), the Federal Agency for Civic Education. It hosts numerous seminars and lectures, provides teaching materials for schools, publishes a steady stream of books and articles (largely available cost-free) and runs a comprehensive website. Nevertheless, civic education is complex. It must also deal with questions concerning what characterizes a democratic citizen and how best to structure the education of a democracy-competent citizen (Scherb 2008: 47). When it comes to prevention work and official funding, according to some scholars, there is even an Überbetonung sozialpädagogischer Momente, an ‘overemphasis of pedagogical elements’ (Butterwegge 1999: 150). This criticism is also sometimes lodged when it comes to countering Islamic extremism or anti-Semitism among immigrants.

Another aspect of the German understanding of militant democracy is its community focus and the value placed on engagement. Entire municipalities have been engaged in efforts against extremism; this demonstrates the significance of the discursive, societal level. To this day, the community level plays a central role in German right-wing extremism. In both German states, authorities were confident about having developed sufficient measures to counter the fascism that haunted the country for far too many years. However, right-wing extremism as a social movement – and its solidification as a complex syndrome with racial, xenophobic and increasingly anti-Semitic sentiment and violence – has been largely underestimated (Wagner 2003: 4). Notably immediately after German reunification, many municipalities struggled with a flourishing right-wing extremist scene that dramatically changed the climate of some German cities. The violent attacks in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln and Solingen exemplify a violent right wing active in Germany during the 1990s. Also in small municipalities, it was easy to create hegemony since modest-scale social networks could be easily infiltrated via personnel or local institutions, such as the town sports club. A principal goal of right-wing extremists is to establish a hegemonic position within a community, mainly by exploiting real problems and deficits as a gateway. Such groups often employ a double strategy that incorporates
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both social services (e.g. planting trees, running errands for the elderly) as well as intimidation and violence. The grassroots tactic is to anchor the group in local communities and, in so doing, to ultimately establish itself at the next higher political level (Strobl and Lobermeier 2009: 17). This tendency has raised serious concern; national and local authorities have increasingly come to focus on countering right-wing extremism in small municipalities. Strengthening and financing civil society activity against extremism has therefore become a top priority (ZDK 2003).

The town of Fürstenwalde in Brandenburg provides one of numerous such examples. The year 1997 saw the founding of the Plattform gegen Rechts, the so-called ‘Platform against the Right’ comprising various regional and local actors from political parties, organizations, churches and other initiatives aimed at countering violence, right-wing extremism and xenophobia. The organization has coordinated civil society actions, disseminated information, sensitized the public and organized discussion rounds and demonstrations. But since the foundation of the Federal Republic, there have been tens of thousands of initiatives and projects, conducted at various levels, aimed at countering right-wing extremism, xenophobia and intolerance. They have often addressed local communities in a general sense and not solely a specific aspect or part of the population.

The concept of streitbare Demokratie thus foresees active defence of the free democratic basic order by every citizen. In that sense, Germany has long practised negotiating relations between democracy and extremism and the role played by citizens, communities and society in preventing extremism and terrorism. Unlike in other European states, Islamic extremism – not right-wing extremism – has been seen as a ‘new’ challenge and is thus being integrated into already existing national and local approaches that target right-wing extremism.

Taking a concrete look at the local level, we show in the next section how this practice is reflected in measures to prevent people from becoming drawn to extremist Islamic ideologies. We will start with a brief overview of preventive policies in Berlin. We will then turn to three cases in which prior experience with preventive programmes against right-wing extremism has been transferred to newly developing programmes and pilot projects against Islamic extremism, either because the implementing organization had the experience to work off or because civic educational programmes became focused on Islamic groups as well.

Preventive policies in Berlin: the role of the Verfassungsschutz

We begin this section by giving some details about the existence of Islamic extremism alongside the more widely known incidents of right-wing and left-wing extremism in Germany. In recent years, the country has witnessed a number of major incidents that can be classified as manifestations of Islamic extremism. For example, in 2011 at Frankfurt Airport, a young Muslim man from Kosovo, who grew up in Germany and later said he became radicalized
through internet content, killed two US soldiers and left two others severely injured. This constituted the first successfully executed act of Islamic terrorism on German soil. In 2007, a group known as ‘the Sauerland Cell’ was foiled in its plan to bomb US military personnel and facilities in Germany. The trial gained considerable media attention, particularly since two of the four perpetrators were German-by-descent converts to Islam.

Precisely how many Islamic extremists there are in Berlin is difficult to say because estimations depend on what is considered ‘extreme’ and by whom. The local Verfassungsschutz plays a central role in defining extremism in Berlin. Their annual reports serve to identify extremist movements – be they left-wing, right-wing or Islamic – and to distinguish between violent and non-violent Islamic groups. The latter are referred to as ‘legalistically operating Islamist organizations’ that comprise orthodox political Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Pakistani Jama’at-e Islami and the Turkish Millî Görüs. Violent and non-violent Islamic extremist groups are defined by the Verfassungsschutz as movements that understand Islam not only as a religion, but as an ideology of domination and a social system. Central to this is the idea that Islam not only embodies ‘religion and world existence’, but further represents the inseparable unity of ‘religion and politics’ (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012: 130). The Verfassungsschutz is not involved in implementing preventive measures towards any form of extremism; for that, a range of other political and social actors is responsible.

Berlin is peculiar in that it comprises both a city and a federal state, which is the reason the city has its own Verfassungsschutz. This also means that its city districts have great autonomy; separately elected district governments design their own policies across many fields, including preventive measures against potential extremism. For example, the decision of whether or not to work with Millî Görüs mosques on specific local projects is made by each individual district. As at the national level, Berlin has no general policy document or framework that specifically addresses Islamic extremism, though such a policy programme does exist for right-wing extremism. Generally speaking, in Berlin, as elsewhere, local communities are identified as the level for best preventing extremism and terrorism. However, great emphasis is placed on avoiding the creation of ‘suspect communities’. A general policy framework targeting Islamic extremism is therefore intentionally omitted. According to Berlin officials, doing otherwise would put the Muslim community under manifest scrutiny and create polarization and segregation based on religious affiliation (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012).

Many measures concerning integration, street social work and other social policies are directed at the city’s Muslim population, but they are not implemented in the framework of security concerns or discourses on terrorism and extremism. Accordingly, no central institution or authority defines problems, threats, causes or strategies in the campaign against Islamic extremism. Responsibility instead falls on many different actors operating at various levels, such as the Innensenat (Senate for Internal Affairs), the Beauftragte des Senats von
Berlin für Integration und Migration (Senate for Migration and Integration) and the city police. At a district level, district mayors attend to their respective remits, and at a neighbourhood level, we find Quartiersmanagements (‘neighbourhood managements’ installed by the Berlin senate to enhance social cohesion in Berlin neighbourhoods), NGOs and civil society actors who work closely with Islamic mosques and organizations on a daily basis. All these actors choose on their own if – and, if so, how far – they will engage with Muslim individuals and groups, including those who may be identified as extremist in a Verfassungsschutz publication (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012).

That Germany and Berlin have no overarching policy framework for Islamic extremism does not mean that authorities in the capital do not address the topic of Islamic extremism – on the contrary. City districts and neighbourhoods strategically incorporate preventive initiatives in which local Islamic organizations play an important role (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012). Alongside law enforcement and security measures (for a detailed overview, see Jesse and Mannewitz 2012), existing national programmes to combat right-wing extremism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism were expanded in 2010 through the Initiative Demokratie Stärken (‘strengthening democracy initiative’). The programme, directed at left-wing and Islamic extremism, should not be understood as a comprehensive, well-defined policy like the UK’s Prevent strategy. Nor is it a policy document outlining the problems, causes or mechanisms underlying these phenomena. Rather, it is an umbrella initiative that funds diverse projects undertaken by a variety of actors working against extremism. Its priority is to finance educational and intercultural approaches mainly aimed at strengthening young people’s resilience against radical influences. The programme supports projects throughout Germany, though with a majority in Berlin.

Generally speaking, Germany has shown robust engagement with Muslims and local Islamic organizations on all kinds of issues, including extremism and terrorism. One of the most overtly official ways authorities in the capital engage with the city’s Muslim communities is through the Islamforum Berlin. Established in 2005 to enhance communication and cooperation between city officials and the Muslim community, the forum hosts meetings uniting representatives from organized and non-organized Islamic groups, Berlin politicians and officials (including senators and district mayors), the Berlin police, three Quartiersmanagements, civil society actors and representatives from Berlin’s Jewish and Christian communities. One memorable meeting in 2010 dealt with violent and non-violent Islamic extremism and how it was depicted in the Verfassungsschutz’s annual report. On the whole, however, the forum is more often inclined to discuss general socio-economic issues. Local authorities have made great effort to make the forum as inclusive as possible, representing Berlin’s entire spectrum of Muslim ideologies and denominations, including more orthodox and non-violent extremist organizations. Some forum members represent groups under observation by the Berlin Verfassungsschutz, a testament to the city’s endeavours to address everyone and include even controversial voices from the Muslim population (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012; Vermeulen 2014).
EXIT-Deutschland

The Gesellschaft für demokratische Kultur gGmbH (ZDK), the Centre for Democratic Culture, has been a major player in countering extremism in Berlin. The ZDK is in charge of EXIT-Deutschland, the country’s largest and most widely recognized project aimed at disengaging and de-radicalizing right-wing extremists. EXIT was founded in 2001 by criminologist and former police detective Bernd Wagner and former neo-Nazi leader Ingo Hasselbach. So far, over 500 individuals are reported to have gone through its rehabilitation process.

While defectors usually leave a right-wing movement on their own volition, EXIT assists them insofar as possible, while also encouraging critical reflection to challenge their past ideology. The EXIT team arranges contacts with various state institutions and civil society actors, provides practical advice and helps to strengthen the individual’s skills and competencies. It also attempts to address concerns regarding social problems, personal safety and individual reappraisal. In sum, EXIT assists defectors in restructuring their lives.

EXIT-Deutschland is one of the few organizations that specifically deals with the ideological aspects of right-wing extremist thinking, something often facilitated by individuals or working groups comprising former right-wing extremists who can motivate others to leave a neo-Nazi environment (EXIT-Deutschland 2012). Families and friends may also contact EXIT for help if they are worried about a loved one or feel unwilling to stand by as he or she becomes drawn to an extremist ideology. Based on scientific studies and past cases, EXIT identifies family and friends as vital in the deceleration and reversal of radicalization processes and developed the concept of Familienhilfe (‘family counselling’).

Though reasons for radicalization are manifold and hard to generalize, there are various levels at which intervening in the radicalization process may occur. The ZDK identifies three in particular: the affective, the pragmatic and the ideological. At the ideological level, any de-radicalization process must emphasize the delegitimization and invalidation of a group’s narratives and interpretations. At the pragmatic level, emphasis is placed on the discontinuance and/or prevention of courses of action that individuals or groups have established as necessary to achieve their goals. The affective level addresses the need for individuals to be emotionally supported as well as the establishment of an alternative reference group; in this regard, EXIT-Familienhilfe is considered a vital instrument. Past cases show that prior to any exit, nearly every right-wing defector entertained doubts about his or her movement, its goals, values, ideological credibility and structures. The uncertainty often developed through talks or debates with close relatives or friends. EXIT-Familienhilfe seeks to exploit this emotional bond to sow the seeds of doubt required for de-radicalization. Families and friends, who tend to be of high social and emotional significance to a radicalized person, get coached on ways to engage in debate and present opportunities for exit. In this way, the reference group gets placed in a new relation – namely, in opposition – to the radical structures.

The ZDK project known as Hayat (a word meaning ‘life’ in Turkish) has institutionalized EXIT-Familienhilfe’s very method. Established in 2011 by
Germany’s Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, *Hayat* works anonymously and cost-free to detect signs of dangerous development as well as to suggest thresholds and opportunities for intervention. Muslim families have also started to contact ZDK with questions concerning Islamic extremism and Turkish ultranationalism. But in contrast to cases of right-wing extremism, the ZDK team cannot fall back on insights gained from workers’ former experiences.

*Hayat*, launched in Berlin, thus endeavours to curb the growth of potential Islamic extremists by considering the phenomenon’s cultural, political and social dimensions. The project focuses on the specifics of Islamic extremism and Turkish ultranationalism while striving to apply the transferability of methodological approaches and real-life experiences gathered from work with right-wing extremists. When faced with a potential situation, the ZDK team first tries to gain an overview, identifying networks and structures, to assess whether there is radicalization to begin with. At this point, it is important for the ZDK to distinguish between deep orthodox beliefs, on the one hand, and terrorism, radicalism or violence, on the other. It is also important that family and friends recognize what may simply be a loved one’s religious re-orientation. The programme does not intend to distance a person from his or her faith, but rather stresses the potential utility of religion in a de-radicalization processes. In the next step, the team tries to detect the individual’s disposition and/or motivation to join a radical group, and looks for any possible related family strife. However, the priority always remains the advice-seeking individual’s needs, not those of the presumably radicalized individual. On the basis of gathered information, the team develops a plan of action, along with goals and a realistic time frame for the advice-seeking individual. If necessary, external partners, such as religious mentors, psychologists and local authorities, are included in the process. So far, the ZDK has addressed over 35 cases from all over Germany but also with families of persons that are currently abroad. The ZDK team stays with the process for as long as necessary and is available 24 hours a day by telephone to attend to families dealing with critical situations (ZDK 2010). Providing support and guidance to relatives via telephone counselling has become a common method in German de-radicalization work in countering right-wing extremism. The service has proved vital in EXIT-Familienhilfe’s experience, since 2002, with right-wing extremism.

**Community Coaching**

As already noted, the community level is pivotal for implementing policies dealing with German right-wing extremism. Local civil society institutions, networks and projects are of utmost importance for the implementation of preventive policy programmes throughout Germany. Since 2000, national and local authorities have become more aware of the need to actively address threats to the democratic system within their administrative districts and thus decided to invest in strengthening the role of civil society. Examples in this regard are the
foundation of the AG Netzwerke gegen Rechtsextremismus, the ‘Working Group of Networks against Right-Wing Extremism’, as well as political programmes like CIVITAS, ENTIMON and XENOS. But in as early as 1991, the Regionalen Arbeitsstellen für Ausländerfragen, Jugendarbeit und Schule (RAA) – ‘Regional Working Groups on Immigration, Youth Employment and Schools’ – were established as private agencies in the federal states of the former GDR. This complex system was implemented and financed to different extents by respective regional and local administrations and political authorities. ‘Right from the beginning, the RAA set out to provide the instrumental link between politically and societally relevant aspects of actual practice within communities’ (Wagner 2000: 33). Emerging from the RAA concept, furthermore, was the first Mobiles Beratungsteam gegen Rechtsextremismus (MBT), the ‘Counselling Team against Right-Wing Extremism’, launched by the federal state of Brandenburg in 1992. This initiative has been involved in increasing the sensitivity and knowledge around right-wing extremist phenomena and improving the conceptualization and development of existing counter right-wing extremism measures and activities. At the same time, the MBT tries to strengthen the competencies and sustainability of local practitioners by establishing community-based resistance and initiating local discourses around democracy, human rights, right-wing extremism and racism (Wagner 2000: 33–35).

Effective intervention requires a concrete analysis of the problem situation or area at stake. It also calls for an understanding of what options for intervention exist. This systematic approach prevents uncoordinated activism and the subsequent deterioration of social momentum and motivation. The ZDK’s Community Coaching project offers communities and their respective practitioners support in strengthening processes of democratization. In 1999, it was developed by the director of the ZDK, Bernd Wagner, already mentioned as head of the EXIT programme, who also developed the RAA and MBT strategies in the same decade, following a spate of right-wing extremism across various German towns and communities. Community Coaching’s mission is to provide scientific analysis, the coordination of practices among civil society and political counselling. The ZDK thereby sees itself as an independent, external partner for local engagement. It works to generate a common process that identifies crucial local difficulties as well as sustainable perspectives and opportunities for democratic developments.

Action within the Community Coaching framework first and foremost requires a common understanding of the phenomena at hand. Yet, many actors lack a general overview of the problem situation or area to be able to refer beyond their own sphere of influence. Teachers report on everyday life at school; social workers and youth workers on their institutions; police on their beats; and churches and local organization representatives on their particular experiences. However, there is no overarching perspective, particularly on ties to and among extremist networks, their background and nature, appearance and shape, or how they manifest themselves. This information is essential for creating structures and coordinating efforts among diverse practitioners within local communities. Thus,
the first goal of Community Coaching is to generate concrete analysis of a local situation. Its main focus is placed on the portrayal of various manifestations of extremism, combined with the question of how democratic actors react to this phenomenon. Local meeting points and localities thus play a central role. On this basis, local topics of concern can be specified. After this empirical assessment, the ZDK advises various local actors on how these problems can be addressed and how long-term engagement and preventive measures for safeguarding democratic structures can be set up most effectively. Through Community Coaching, local initiatives and institutions are brought together and strengthened in developing long-term approaches for action. The main tools used here include networking, discussion rounds, training sessions and thematic publications.

The ZDK has carried out this community approach in several municipalities and districts within Berlin. Since July 2010, the Neukölln district has employed Community Coaching to analyse the manifestations and structures of political Islam and Turkish ultranationalism, as well as to encourage political and societal discourses around them. Together with district authorities, the ZDK conducted a series of measures in Neukölln to develop solutions for problems around neighbourhood conflicts, schools, mosques and more pragmatic issues of a socio-economic nature. The dialogue series ‘Islam in Neukölln’, for example, gave the local population a chance to discuss topics they believed were being exploited by radical groups. The ZDK also organized open dialogues on education, schooling and violence, thus allowing representatives from youth and educational facilities, parents, police and religious organizations to meet with one another. This resulted in strengthening the network – which comprised practitioners, local Muslim organizations and other civil society actors – and promoting respectful contact with each other. Multiple training sessions have also taken place for civil servants and other interested persons (ZDK 2003; Dantschke and Köhler 2013).

**‘Schools without Racism – Schools with Courage’**

The network Schule ohne Rassismus – Schule mit Courage (SOR–SMC), which translates as ‘Schools without Racism – Schools with Courage’, has operated in Germany since 1995. It is the largest school network that implements innovative approaches to countering right-wing extremism and xenophobia in civic education. It allows students to take part in the democratization of their own schools as well as in civil society on the whole. There are now 1,250 schools throughout Germany that have become network members; 55 are located in Berlin. Within their immediate environment, students are encouraged to find opportunities to positively influence their school ethos and to engage in activities that strengthen moral courage and mutual respect. To become a network member, 70 per cent of a school’s students and teachers must agree to the criteria of the project and are requested to regularly come up with activities for countering violence, discrimination and violence. Though specifically developed in view of right-wing extremism and racism, in recent years the network has broadened its scope to include Islamic extremism and other anti-democratic ideologies.
Islamic extremism and its ideology are seen as influencing schools in various ways; sometimes teachers may claim to recognize a change in their students’ behaviour or style of reasoning and argumentation. Teachers, however, often lack knowledge about Islamist manifestations, arguments and ideology. SOR–SMC gives students and teachers alike the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and to discuss relevant issues through information and vocational training. The network also provides literature and other materials for schools about Islamic extremism. For example, the publication *Jugendkulturen zwischen Islam und Islamismus* (Youth Cultures between Islam and Islamism) addresses questions that deal with the boundaries between legitimate religiosity and problematic, extremist ideology. It also gives an overview of youth organizations, music and other manifestations of both Islamic extremism and unproblematic youth cultures that directly refer to Islam. Other publications deal with Muslims and the stigmatization they face at school, on the job market or in other aspects of daily life (SOR–SMC n.d.).

There are many other ways Islamic extremism is addressed in Berlin schools. The SOR–SMC network serves as a prime example of how the topic is included in a broad, pedagogical approach that follows the tradition of militant democracy in civic education, with an emphasis on strengthening democratic culture.

**Conclusion**

Our analysis of Berlin leads us to believe that the concept of *streitbare Demokratie* has impacted Germany’s critical separation of, on the one hand, threats to the democratic system and, on the other hand, policies on integration, national security and Islam. Prevention is generally less debated in Germany than in other countries; after all, it is already anchored in the German constitution. An emphasis on preventive work receives broad societal consent. Every citizen – not just parts of the population (e.g. ‘the Muslim community’) – is defined as both subject and object of action. This chapter has demonstrated how certain preventive measures targeting Islamic extremism in Berlin follow the practice of countering right-wing extremism across Germany. More research is needed to see the extent to which these examples are generalizable, though already they illustrate how the concept of militant democracy seems to play an indirect role in preventive programmes against Islamic extremism. Several elements of the German understanding of militant democracy are apparent. For one, there is heavy emphasis on active democratic citizens who constitute the basis for a resilient democratic order. Furthermore, authorities attempt to make a clear distinction between: (1) ideologies that challenge national security; (2) ideologies that are dangerous to the free democratic basic order; and (3) ideologies and religions that are not threatening. Authorities also tend to understand Islamic extremism as a broad social phenomenon; different parts of society are thus responsible for preventing fellow members of society from becoming attracted to such ideologies.

Local communities often play a pivotal role in such programmes, and many measures hone in on the district or neighbourhood level. Prevention is also
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important; here the ideological level is stressed and emphasis is placed on educational methods and the teaching of democracy. Pragmatic, non-ideologized considerations are crucial when it comes to engaging Berlin’s local Muslim population. This is particularly relevant when it comes to smaller engagement units, whereby personal relationships and past first-hand experiences shape the extent of engagement. That also means that local authorities do not base their engagement on preconceptions of the nature of specific organizations, but rather assess these organizations on an individual basis in order to determine the intensity of future collaboration (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012). Authorities tend to avoid official definitions for extremist groups and thus also precise outlines for prevention. This seems to lead to integrating Islamic extremism into already existing counter-measures for right-wing extremism and, consequently, a variety of approaches at various levels.

Though also referring to a very local level, ‘community’ in the German context is often defined in broader terms; decade-long efforts against right-wing extremism did not always single out particular groups within society. Moreover, the way Islamic extremism is targeted largely depends on previous means of countering right-wing extremism along community, civil, societal and pedagogical lines. Absent policy formulations and targeted interventions led to an observation that ‘[c]ounter-terrorism strategies and measures have not played a major role in Germany’s Muslim communities so far’ (Jesse and Mannewitz 2012: 15). These German policy measures do not necessarily create ‘suspect communities’, as they have in the UK, though that does not mean that Germany’s Muslims feel no stigmatization whatsoever. For example, the Deutsche Islamkonferenz, Germany’s major dialogue platform between state authorities and various Muslim representatives, has often been criticized for focusing on security concerns in such a way that it places the entire Muslim population under suspicion (Jesse and Mannewitz 2012: 15; Vermeulen and Bovenkerk 2012), which is further exemplified by the foundation of the Initiative Sicherheitspartnerschaft in 2011. This ‘Security Partnership Initiative’ involves cooperation between Muslim representatives and national security agencies targeting radicalization and extremism. Generally, many Muslims, particularly since 9/11, have expressed a feeling of being expected to apologize in the name of Islam. For them, group-based discrimination is a reality (Jesse and Mannewitz 2012: 17–19). ‘Nevertheless, German responses to Islamic extremism have not been as repressive as in other European countries, and authorities have not taken action just for the sake of doing something’ (Jesse and Mannewitz 2012: 30; italics ours). Further research is needed to establish whether – and if so, how far – Germany’s militant democracy and policy towards combating right-wing extremism may indeed be primarily responsible for this.

Notes

1 Space constraints keep us from describing the concept of streitbare Demokratie in full detail here. We only briefly address those aspects essential for understanding German approaches to countering extremism and terrorism.

2 www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/globke-filbinger-fassbinder-walser-flick/743304.html
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6 Recognition masking response

Preventing far-right extremism and radicalisation

Michelle Bentley

Introduction

Extremism is not exclusively Islamic. While in the wake of 9/11 and 7/7 the threat may have come to be associated (at least primarily) with Islamic-inspired factions, this is clearly not the only motivation for extremist behaviour. This was demonstrated in all too vivid detail on 22 July 2011, when right-wing extremist Anders Breivik killed 77 people – mainly teenagers – in the strikes on Oslo and Utøya. The bombing of the Office of the Prime Minister and the mass shooting that followed at the Labour Youth League summer camp – acts designed to punish Norway’s political elite for their supposed role in allowing Muslim immigration into Europe – highlight that the threat of extremism can be linked to other ideological and political elements, specifically here the far right. Yet even before these attacks took place it was recognised that extremism, and the processes of radicalisation underpinning that behaviour, were not solely Islamic concerns. The month before Breivik carried out his assault, the UK government made an explicit commitment to addressing far-right extremism and radicalisation as part of the 2011 review of Prevent, the community-based counter-radicalisation strand of the CONTEST strategy. In acknowledging that the previous version had focused exclusively on Muslim interests, the revised document actively recognised that such an approach was misrepresentative of the scale of the issue and that future community engagement and counter-radicalisation must directly tackle the threat posed by all forms of extremism, especially the far right. Indeed, this has been held up as an essential aspect of the strategy’s reframing. Extremism and radicalisation are now officially recognised within the context of the right wing.

However, the recognition of a threat does not automatically entail that any response to it (a) accurately understands the exact character and scope of that threat and/or (b) attends to that threat in an effective way. This chapter seeks to explore these themes – running in antiparallel to Julia Berczyk and Floris Vermuelen’s discussion (in the previous chapter) of the extension of the scope of right-wing counter-extremism policies to address Islamic extremism in Germany. In extending the scope of Prevent to address extreme right-wing radicalisation, does the strategy fully comprehend this threat and can that comprehension play into the formulation of a successful response? Does this commitment correctly
conceptualise, and demonstrate a sufficient understanding of, the radicalisation issues posed by far-right elements? Do the subsequent provisions contained within it constitute a positive response? And, more specifically, does this expansion in policy represent a serious intent to control radicalisation in this area?

In answering these questions, this chapter will show that the new Prevent fails to adequately conceptualise far-right extremism, specifically where this undermines the strategy as an effective method of counter-radicalisation. Three issues will be discussed. First, the revised document fails to define the far right. There is no attempt to clearly ascertain what this is: what the threat looks like, what motivates it or who engages in it. While Prevent describes Islamic extremism in great detail, the far right is discussed only in highly abstract and vague terms. This absence of understanding makes successful response problematic in that the risk from the far right is not sufficiently explained. How can you prevent a threat when you do not know what that threat is? Second, Prevent erroneously conflates far-right and Islamic extremism. Right-wing activity is viewed as merely an extension of concerns surrounding Islamic radicalisation; it is something that can be ‘tagged on’ to existing perceptions of extremist behaviour. Yet in identifying significant differences between these two ‘types’ of extremism, it can be seen this conflation is unsustainable and ineffective, thereby challenging the terms of the strategy. Finally, Prevent constructs an awkward prioritisation of Islamic over far-right radicalisation. While it now claims to acknowledge the far-right threat, Prevent continues to sideline this in favour of engagement in Muslim communities, where the latter is identified as the more pressing concern. But in applying such a hierarchical approach, this substantially weakens Prevent’s commitment to addressing the far right as well as limiting its capacity to respond.

Ultimately, it is concluded that Prevent is not conducive to stopping far-right extremism and radicalisation. In fact, the current provisions threaten to further marginalise right-wing elements – which may actually encourage far-right activity – and complicate the UK government’s ability to address this risk. While Prevent recognises the far right, therefore, this masks a failure to respond appropriately. It may appear that Prevent is dealing with the issue, but its poor conceptualisation of that issue means this is not the case.

Recognising the far-right threat

It could be argued that the extreme right in Britain has never had it so good. Record levels of public concern over immigration, anxiety over already settled Muslim communities, dissatisfaction with mainstream politics and the effects of economic recession have all created opportunities for a movement that has long been associated with failure.

(Renton 2010: 89)

Concern surrounding right-wing extremism and radicalisation is growing. While the far right has been dismissed as unorganised, weak and non-violent – a movement that has only really sought influence at the ballot box (and has failed even
such perceptions are increasingly being questioned. In particular it is claimed that not only is support for the extreme right escalating, but also that those engaged in such ideologies are now ‘far more confrontational and willing to engage in violence’ (Home Affairs Committee 2012: 8). In demonstrating this, many point to the arrests and imprisonment of a number of people in connection with violent far-right behaviour (Gregory 2010: 7). At the time of writing, 17 right-wing extremists were serving prison sentences within the UK for terrorism-related activities. These include Robert Cottage, a former British National Party (BNP) electoral candidate jailed in 2007 for stockpiling chemical explosives; and Terence Gavan, also associated with the BNP, convicted in 2010. Police discovered 54 explosive devices (including a booby-trapped cigarette packet) and a number of guns at Gavan’s home, as well as evidence that he was attempting to build a rocket launcher. Specifically, it has been argued that the inherently violent nature of these extremists’ actions – encompassing the use of firearms, military explosives and even biological/chemical weapons – demonstrates that the far right now poses a credible and significant threat, one that represents an important step forward in the destructive potential of the right wing as an extremist ideology (Thomas 2009: 286; Renton 2010: 89; Home Affairs Committee 2012: 20). It is an indication the far right is no longer restrained in its motivations towards violence, or that it is incapable of carrying out any such violent objectives.

This concern has gained traction within UK political discourse following the 2011 attacks carried out by Anders Breivik. The terrible events experienced in Norway appeared to exemplify and underscore the claims made in relation to the extremist potential of the right wing. While prior to Oslo and Utøya the idea of the far right as a destructive terrorist threat still lay largely in the realm of the hypothetical, its reality had now been played out in graphic detail. The deaths of 77 people meant the risks of far-right extremism could no longer be easily dismissed. Indeed, within the UK the strikes were used to emphasize existing anxieties as to the development of this threat. It was claimed they demonstrated that it was now only a matter of time before such attacks were repeated, specifically somewhere in Britain. Norway was a warning sign that the potential associated with the far right could realistically be capitalised upon to carry out similar assaults within the UK. As Security Minister James Brokenshire, commented in March 2013:

That appalling massacre [in Norway] gave rise to new fears about the nature and potential of the threat of further attacks by similar far-right extremists. In Britain we have begun to see a worrying phenomenon on our streets; groups such as the English Defence League inflaming tensions and spreading hate-filled prejudice within communities.

(Brokenshire 2013)

Specifically, Breivik’s actions reinforced concerns already expressed in the expansion of Prevent to address this dual issue of far-right extremism and
Recognition masking response

radicalisation. In the month prior to the Norway attacks, the UK government launched a revised version of the strategy following a major policy review. Among the changes was a new focus on the emerging threat posed by the far right. The previous manifestation of Prevent had been widely criticised for referring only to Islamic forms of radicalisation and engagement in predominantly Muslim communities. While this initial strategy did technically cover issues pertaining to extreme right-wing activity, it was accepted that ‘the common perception is that [the former] Prevent has dealt solely with terrorism associated with Al Qaeda’ (Home Office 2011: 25). This was considered misrepresentative of the extremist threat to the extent it ignored other ideologically motivated risks worthy of consideration. Even the government’s own Communities and Local Government Committee concluded that: ‘Prevent has too strong a focus on Muslims and insufficient regard to other forms of extremism, such as that stemming from Far Right politics’ (2010: 20). Indeed, this criticism was a key feature of the review, with 80 per cent of those consulted expressing a need to extend the scope of the strategy to address right-wing concerns (Home Office 2011: 25).

New Prevent sought to respond to this strategic deficit by recognising all forms of extremist elements, especially the far right: ‘the new strategy will apply to all terrorist threats we face, including in particular the threat from extreme right-wing terrorism’ (Home Office 2011: 40–41). Yet while this commitment represents an important step forward in terms of the strategy’s focus, it does not automatically entail that this newly recognised threat of far-right extremism is adequately understood within the context of Prevent. At one level, the claim that Prevent fails to sufficiently comprehend this complex issue is based on a simple lack of data. Right-wing extremism is severely under-analysed, especially where this relates to processes of radicalisation and pathways into extremist behaviour (Goodwin, Ramalingam and Briggs 2012: 7). While extensive research has been carried out into Islamic-inspired extremism, there is no such extent of information available on the far right. Briggs and Goodwin (2012) demonstrate that far-right activity is especially problematic to monitor where it tends to consist of numerous acts of low-level violence, ‘which cumulatively are having a serious impact on communities across Europe but are less likely to make the national headlines’. Moreover, the way in which these acts are typically classified as crimes, as opposed to terrorist activity, means they are frequently ‘lost’ within crime-reporting statistics. Indeed, even Prevent accepts that the strategy’s underpinning knowledge of right-wing extremism is significantly ‘less developed’ than that of Islamic elements (Home Office 2011: 20). As such, there exists a problematic gap in understanding relating to Prevent’s declared containment of the far right. The threat is not fully known. Furthermore, there is nothing within the strategy to provide for the resolution of this, e.g. the recommendation of further research into this area.

Even more troubling is the matter of how Prevent conceptualises the far right as an extremist concern. There are serious issues pertaining to the nature and scope of its current framing, two in particular. First, the strategy actually says very little about far-right extremism and radicalisation. While Prevent discusses
Islamic issues in significant detail, the far right is barely mentioned. Simply on the basis of the amount of space devoted to it, right-wing concerns total merely a handful of short paragraphs in the review document. To the extent then that it is always Islamic extremism (particularly al-Qaeda) that is drawn upon in order to describe, construct and exemplify the issues of radicalisation discussed, it is difficult to see that Prevent has been successful either in conceptualising the extreme right wing or introducing any effective measure to address it. Second, to the minimal degree the far right is discussed, the threat is fundamentally misrepresented. The conceptualisation of right-wing terror is not only largely absent, but also flawed. This chapter will now assess what that means and why this understanding (or lack of) has developed. Specifically, it will discuss this in relation to three key points: the failure to define the far right; the conflation of the threat with Islamic extremism; and the prioritisation of Islamic concerns.

A failure to define

The first issue pertaining to Prevent is its failure to define the far right, specifically from the perspective of extremism and radicalisation. While Prevent has made a clear commitment to addressing the far right in these terms, it has done little to specify what precisely this threat relates to. Who engages in, or would be attracted to, this specific form of ideological behaviour? What does that ideology comprise and how is it expressed, especially where this translates into the resort to violence? And what are the means and processes by which radicalisation occurs within the far right? These are key issues that are not resolved within the review document. In contrast, extensive efforts are made to define – or at least establish core boundaries of understanding in respect to – Islamic forms of extremist activity. Prevent constructs a rich conceptual map of the ideological and political motivations driving Islamic extremism and the ways in which these play into a (well-examined) process of radicalisation. This is not to suggest, of course, that this constitutes an accurate reflection of Islamic extremism; indeed, it can be argued this represents a highly simplistic and over-determined understanding of the issue. But regardless of this, Prevent attempts to develop a detailed behavioural model on which to base counter-radicalisation measures in respect to Islamic-inspired terrorism. This is a type and method of understanding not evident in terms of conceptualising the far right.

The most prominent example of this disparity is that Prevent identifies specific Islamic groups in its discussion of radicalisation; it refers in extensive detail to actual organisations. Critically, this is not merely al-Qaeda (which is analysed in considerable depth), but others including: Hizb-ut-Tahrir; Al-Muhajiroun, banned within the UK under the terms of the 2000 Terrorism Act; Lashkar-e Tayyiba, responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attacks; and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, who claimed responsibility for the Times Square attack of May 2010. Moreover, it discusses key individuals, such as: Nicky Reilly, convicted of an attempted terror attack on an Exeter restaurant; Taimour Abdulwahab al-Abdaly, who killed himself in a suicide bomb attack in Stockholm; and Andrew Ibrahim,
jailed in 2009 for conspiring to set off an explosion in a Bristol shopping centre. In comparison, Prevent does not do this in respect of the extreme right. It does not identify specific organisations, despite the known existence of key groups relevant to the radicalisation debate, even where these may not be expressly understood as connected to violent extremism, e.g. the BNP, English Defence League (EDL) and the Aryan Defence League (ADL). Similarly, no individual cases are discussed. Despite acknowledging the 17 people currently imprisoned for far-right-related offences (Home Office 2011: 15), the strategy never identifies and discusses any of these ‘examples’, specifically in terms of understanding the threat of, and constructing an appropriate response to, extremist radicalisation. As such, the far right is constructed as an inherently abstract threat. While Islamic extremism is understood within a framework of detailed information and analysis, there is no comparable attempt to signpost or clarify what the far-right risk may constitute.

This same trend is evident in the strategy’s discussion as to what motivates the adoption of extremist ideologies and engagement in extremist behaviour. In terms of Islamic-inspired extremism, Prevent talks in depth about ideological motivation (Home Office 2011: 45–47). For example, it discusses the ideational roots of al-Qaeda in detail, including the influence of Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb and the Salafist theological tradition, specifically where this relates to the justification of violent activity as a form of worship and submission to God. Additionally, Prevent outlines the organisation’s wider goals, including the desire to establish an Islamic caliphate. Critically, it discusses these ideas and aims in terms of how they play into processes of radicalisation. Drawing on an extremely wide range of survey-based data detailing levels of support for the organisation, al-Qaeda is presented as an ambitious network, highly motivated to engage in radicalisation and prepared to employ a range of tactics in order to achieve this. It identifies and analyses key drivers of radicalisation, including the impact of identity and socio-economic value systems. Interestingly, it also looks at the radicalisation narratives employed – such as rhetorical constructions that the West is at ‘war with Islam’ – and how individual al-Qaeda cells exploit these to facilitate recruitment. More specifically, it considers the dissemination of extremist ideas and the concepts expressed within those narratives, especially the circulation of videos and texts on the internet and the production of radicalisation manuals.

Yet again, however, this is a type and depth of discussion that is not applied to the far right. While the nature of right-wing extremism is identified as supremacist (discussed further below), this is little more than passing comment and there exists a clear absence of discussion as to what motivates that ideological commitment or how this becomes manifest in terms of radicalisation. There is no evidence of even an attempt to construct a detailed understanding of what constitutes the threat. Yet Prevent acknowledges the need to fully understand an extremist risk at the level associated with its approach to Islamic-inspired activity, not least where considerations such as ‘identity and community are essential factors in radicalisation’ (Home Office 2011: 17). If these are
supposedly vital in comprehending the radicalisation threat, why then does Prevent not do more to ascertain how they relate to the far right? This lack of analysis is problematic, not least in that it leads to an approach that creates disparity in understanding between these two aspects of extremist behaviour.

At present, there exists little in the way of information – or any effort to acquire such information, particularly by the government – on the far right that could resolve this. Moreover, the far right is a diverse threat that exists in many forms. Goodwin, for example, has constructed a four-strand model of the extreme right (Goodwin, Ramalingam and Briggs 2012: 43):

- First, there are the primarily electoral sections which are most clearly seen in respect of groups such as the BNP, who actively contest elections and are officially registered with the Electoral Commission. Such groups act principally within the confines of the law, but there is clear potential for members to go on to pursue illegal means of expression, specifically as engagement in violent extremism (as demonstrated by the examples of Cottage and Gavan).
- Second, there is the non-electoral mobilisation of the far right, a sector that includes such organisations as the EDL. This type of group does not typically condone violence, although – once again – this cannot be ruled out, not least where a significant aspect of their expression takes place via social protests that have resulted in violence and civil unrest.
- The third strand is more clearly associated with extremist behaviour and includes groups such as the ADL. Members are significantly more likely to adopt extreme ideological positions and pursue violent forms of direct action.
- Finally, outside this inherently organisation-based structure, it is increasingly recognised that there is a fourth aspect to the far right. This concerns the rise in lone extremists, termed ‘lone wolves’; that is, persons who act alone and in isolation of established groups. Goodwin (ibid) argues that there is a high likelihood such actors may be willing to engage in violent extremism, as seen in the actions of Anders Breivik or Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh.

As such, the far right exists in many overlapping forms – each with an inherent potential to engage in violent extremism – and dissecting this in order to ascertain sites of possible radicalisation is difficult. Yet even taking into account these difficulties, there remains an issue in that there is still no attempt towards constructing any such definitional model. Al-Qaeda and other Islamic-inspired factions are similarly complex as issues of extremism and radicalisation, yet Prevent has endeavoured to map a conceptual understanding of that threat. In contrast, there is no such effort to comprehend the far right. There is no picture, no conceptualisation of what far-right extremism and radicalisation looks like, specifically as a basis for future counter-radicalisation action. Prevent has made a commitment towards addressing the extreme right wing, yet fails to understand
or incorporate any provision for acquiring such understanding of – what it seeks to address. And the sheer extent of this failure can be seen in this comparison with Islamic extremism. In looking at the way Prevent discusses this in depth, this serves to highlight the fundamental lack of comprehension in respect of the far right. Within the context of this absence, how can Prevent ever truly know the threat?

Conflating extremism

A second issue with Prevent is the way in which the revised document conflates the threat with Islamic extremism. Prevent simply ‘tags on’ the far right to a pre-existing discussion surrounding Islamic radicalisation. Within this context, and in incorporating this ‘new’ threat, the same discursive and institutional framework constructed around Islamic terrorism has effectively been transferred to discussions of the extreme right, where Prevent essentially views this as an addition to existing debate. And in understanding why such conflation is adopted, the strategy emphasizes a number of similarities between these two identified forms of extremism, although these are not outlined in depth. Most prominently, it is claimed that both are driven by a supremacist ideology, one that sanctions excessive violence as a reply to social injustice and where that ‘ideology is a response to and reflects a perception that identity itself is under threat from social change’ (Home Office 2011: 21). Furthermore, a link is also established whereby the far right is considered a counter-jihadist reaction to Islamic extremism:

In recent years, Islamophobia has increasingly become part of extreme right-wing terrorist ideology. People have justified their actions as a response to Al Qaeda-influenced terrorism, extremist organisations and to alleged threats from Muslim communities. But extreme right-wing groups and radical Islamist groups such as Al-Muhajiroun increasingly define themselves by their opposition to each other: that opposition facilitates radicalisation and recruitment.

(Home Office 2011: 21)

As such, a conflated approach is justified on the basis there is sufficient comparability and/or association between the two to treat each identically. Yet this approach fails to recognise the way in which these comprise very different threats, specifically where that differentiation undermines their strategic conflation under Prevent. For example, while far-right and Islamic ideologies can both potentially be discussed as supremacist – whereby each seeks supremacy over another, demonised, group – it is problematic to suggest this specific ideological feature provides sufficient grounds for conflation; not least where the concepts of supremacy employed in either case are based on distinct ideational standpoints that are expressed through, and motivated by, very different beliefs and narratives. Whine, when discussing the concept of grievance as a motivating
and radicalising factor, highlights the disparity between Islamic and far-right elements. He says:

Well, certainly both sets promote a grievance strand very strongly and, as you have heard, the grievance within the far right, and particularly among these populist, extremist parties like the EDL, is that Government is failing by allowing mass immigration and so on. That is a different sort of grievance from that promoted by Islamists and by Jihadi terrorists, which is that Muslims are oppressed, that the West or Christians or Jews are out to defeat Islam.

(Whine in Home Affairs Committee 2012: Ev 38)

This can be applied within the context of supremacy in that it demonstrates the grievances underpinning claims to supremacy – the reasons why a specific group may feel challenged to the point at which they seek dominance – are dissimilar. Even where one can be seen as a reaction to the other, i.e. right-wing Islamophobia, this cannot overcome the distinction in motivation highlighted by Whine. Indeed, Whine specifically states that this ideological variation between the two means they should be treated as separate threats.

This can also be seen by analysing the role of religion in the construction of supremacist ideas and processes of radicalisation. Religion plays into Islamic radicalisation in a way that it does not (necessarily) in respect of the far right. While in the United States strong links can be identified between religious motivation and the extreme right, elsewhere less of a connection exists, if any. This is evident in the case of Anders Breivik. Some have attempted to classify Breivik as a Christian fundamentalist, yet he clearly declares in his manifesto that he is not particularly religious. Writing under the pseudonym Andrew Berwick, Breivik draws a distinction between religious and cultural Christianity, where he states that: ‘Myself and many more like me do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God. We do however believe in Christianity as a cultural (social) identity and moral platform’ (Berwick 2011: 1037). It is this understanding of religion that informs Breivik’s long-term aims for a European society capable of precluding Muslim immigration. Specifically, this is a societal structure reliant on Christian traditions, e.g. forced worship/conversion, as tactics in order to ‘purge’ Europe of Muslim influence. While religion has relevance to Breivik’s overall strategy, therefore, there is no evidence that this has comprised a significant influence or played any necessary part in his radicalisation.

Indeed, Prevent recognises this disconnect between religion and the far right; the revised document accepts it is not defined by religious motivation. But even more importantly, it specifically asserts this has direct implications for understanding extremist radicalisation: ‘extreme right-wing terrorism is not driven or justified by religion: this has a substantial impact on how we may intervene to prevent terrorism of this kind’ (Home Office 2011: 22). The religious difference between Islamic and far-right elements, therefore, changes how radicalisation
and extremist behaviour can or should be addressed. Yet if Prevent accepts this, it cannot also sustain an approach that treats these distinct forms of radicalisation identically. If it adheres to a view that these two threats are not motivated in the same way – and that this differentiation impacts on the very nature of radicalisation – then this undermines its current conflation of risk. It then has to concede there exists an inherent disparity, one that precludes addressing the far right as merely an addition to existing policy.

As such, the idea that counter-radicalisation strategies can start drawing direct parallels in terms of Islamic and far-right radicalisation to this extent falls apart. There are key differences in the ideological and strategic foundations of these two forms of extremist behaviour. And this subsequently opens up an argument that Prevent does not sufficiently attempt to comprehend the issue of the far right, specifically where it conflates that issue with such a disparate threat as Islamic-inspired extremism. These comprise two fundamentally diverse risks, each with their own individual set of considerations in respect to radicalisation and actors’ resort to extremist activities. Of course, this is not to suggest there is no overlap in counter-radicalisation; that certain associated tactics will be effectively the same e.g. general forms of community engagement, controlling websites, etc. Yet the failure of Prevent to acknowledge and identify the ways in which the far right may differ from the Islamic-centric provisions in place – how differences in ideational motivation and the tactical expression of ideology may impact on counter-radicalisation – weakens the strategy’s commitment to controlling the extreme right. Consequently, Prevent cannot justifiably conflate all forms of extremism in this way or, at least, must concede that its current mode of conflation is ineffective.

**Setting priorities**

The third issue is the strategy’s prioritisation of Islamic extremism and radicalisation over respective threats from the far right. While Prevent has proclaimed its commitment to extend the scope of counter-radicalisation provisions to address the extremist right wing, this has been constructed within a caveat that Islamic elements remain the priority. Although Prevent declares that no form of terrorism ‘is singled out for special treatment outside the operational demands of current threat levels’ (Home Office 2011: 3), it is clear that these ‘operational demands’ recognise al-Qaeda as the greater concern. As the strategy states:

> The review concludes that Prevent should address all forms of terrorism, but continue to ensure resources and effort are allocated on the basis of threats to our national security. As it is the greatest threat to the UK as a whole, the priority will be to focus on terrorism associated with al Qa’ida.

(Home Office 2011: 25)

This is also reflected in Home Secretary Theresa May’s speech launching the revised strategy:
Prevent should address all forms of terrorism, including the extreme right wing. That is only right and proper and will also provide a more flexible basis to adapt to emerging threats in the future. But in a world of scarce resources, it is clear that Prevent work must be targeted against those forms of terrorism which pose a greater risk to our national security. Currently, the greatest threat comes from Al-Qaeda and those they inspire.

(HC Hansard 2011)

While it could be argued this strategic model represents a rational allocation of limited resources, this remains problematic in that there exists an inherent contradiction at its heart. On the one hand, Prevent proclaims it now incorporates threats other than Islamic extremism, specifically as a response to the review’s insistence that it do so. But on the other hand, it places a major restriction on the scope of that commitment, one that effectively removes the far right from realistic consideration. For as long as Islamic extremism is allowed to take priority, then there is little within Prevent to ensure that any extensive time is devoted to addressing the extreme right wing. The hierarchical approach constructed by the strategy not only sidelines the far right as a secondary issue, but also fails to provide any clear incentive or provision requiring that far-right radicalisation be addressed. In fact, it actually encourages an exclusionary focus on Islamic extremism by reinforcing a perception of this as the most pressing concern. By highlighting the prominence of the Islamic threat, this actually strengthens the ideas that the expansion of Prevent was supposed to overcome.

Yet as well as sidelining the risk, there are two further and interconnected issues requiring attention; specifically, that Prevent’s hierarchical prioritisation overlooks the far right’s capability for violent extremism by dismissing it as a core concern and also exacerbates an existing discrimination of Muslim communities, whereby ‘singling out’ those communities in preference to other groups promotes a sense of exclusion and resentment. This chapter will now address each of these in turn.

**Extremist capability**

Prevent portrays the far right as less capable of violent extremism and radicalisation than Islamic elements. This is in part an organisational issue: ‘Extreme right-wing terrorism in the UK has been much less widespread, systematic or organised than terrorism associated with Al Qa’ida’ (Home Office 2011: 15). The far right does not possess the organisational capacity necessary to sustain extremism on the scale achievable by Islamic groups, not least where it is highlighted that right-wing extremists are significantly more likely to be lone actors: ‘right-wing terrorist plots have predominantly been undertaken by people acting on their own or with one or two associates’ (Home Office 2011: 15). Within this context, it is argued that the far right does not have the power, skills and access to supporting resources (e.g. weapons) available to highly networked groups...
such as al-Qaeda, thereby undermining the ability to engage in serious acts of extremist behaviour:

People involved in extreme right-wing terrorism have not received the same training, guidance or support as many of those who have engaged with Al Qaeda or an Al Qaeda-influenced organisation. Nor have they ever aspired or planned to conduct operations on the scale of those planned by their Al Qaeda counterparts.

(Home Office 2011: 15)

On this basis, then, Prevent claims the far right is not a major radicalisation or extremist threat, at least as comparable to its Islamic equivalent. The systemic support required to carry out such violent activity is simply not in place.

Some would argue there is more than an element of truth to this, where it is recognised that the far right has typically been less organised and less successful comparative to Islamic factions (Goodwin 2012: 70). Yet this must be contrasted with the view ostensibly put forward by Prevent that this ‘lesser’ threat is still sufficiently extensive to warrant concern, specifically where this underpins the expansion of the strategy to incorporate the extreme right. Prevent claims to represent an increasing concern that the far right is evolving into a credible threat, one more than capable of violent extremism. Indeed, to place this in the organisational context raised by Prevent, the far right is seen as developing the abilities and resources necessary for extremist behaviour, even those typically associated with more networked and expansive structures. Goodwin, Ramalingam and Briggs (2012: 5) demonstrate the far right is becoming significantly savvier in terms of organisation, especially where members are now professionally exploiting new technologies, social media and cross-European networks in order to maintain a group at the systemic level. As such, access to those all-important attributes associated with successful extremism – training, weaponry and the capacity for the wider radicalisation of new and existing members – cannot be ruled out. The concept of an able far right is at the very least credible, if not fully realised on a widespread scale at present.

Once again, this increased ability is evident in the actions of Anders Breivik, where this casts doubt on claims that the extreme right wing is insufficiently trained, skilled or capable of major terror activities (Thomas 2010: 75). While on the surface Norway may appear unexceptional in terms of terrorist assault, not least where Breivik employed conventional forms of weaponry (guns and explosives), this was a relatively extensive attack. Compared to the numbers killed in other acts of terror, the deaths of 77 people represent a significant strike (Blair, Gregg and Garbose 2011). No 9/11 perhaps, but an event that killed substantially more than during other – specifically Islamic-inspired – acts such as 7/7. Moreover, this example also disproves the argument that limited organisational ability undermines the far right as a significant threat, specifically where that claim underpins the strategic prioritisation of Islamic extremism. Breivik was not affiliated with any wider organisational structure. Although he has claimed
membership of a Europe-wide militant faction – the Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Solomonici (Knights Templar) – his failure to provide any clear evidence of the group’s existence means that experts involved in his case refute that this is a genuine or viable organisation. But even alone, Breivik was more than competent in carrying out an extensive and chilling attack, one requiring a significant degree of planning. Acting alone, Breivik still killed a vast number of (primarily young) people in a terrifying assault that made headlines around the globe. Consequently, dismissing the far right on the basis of the prevalence of sole actors – where this comprises such a key aspect of the reasoning inherent to Prevent – is problematic. Specifically, it is insufficient to uphold the prioritisation of Islamic forms of extremism and radicalisation.

Overall, then, it is difficult to establish a clear line between the ability and scope of far-right extremism as a violent threat and the comparable risks posed by Islamic-motivated terrorism. Significantly, that threat should not be overstated; indeed Breivik’s attacks – however horrific – represent only one example of far-right extremist activity. Yet despite this, the potential for violent extremism outlined here remains sufficient to question the assumption inherent to Prevent that the far right is not plausible as an extremist risk, at least in comparison to Islamic factions. Where Prevent specifically presents itself as a response to the increased threat from the far right, and where there is evidence to suggest that threat is credible, it is difficult to sustain a strategy that so decisively sidelines the extreme right wing as a minor concern. If this is so worthy of attention, why then place the threat within a context of understanding that effectively removes it from consideration by stating it is not a critical issue?

**Counter-productivity of the Islam-centric approach**

This prioritisation is also problematic in that it exacerbates a ‘singling-out’ of Islamic elements. Pre-review, Prevent was criticised for engaging in Muslim communities only, especially where this disproportionate application of counter-radicalisation strategies produces a number of detrimental consequences. One of the most prominent has been where this exclusionary focus generates resentment within those communities, in that Muslims feel they have been set apart as a particular threat; they perceive themselves as unfairly targeted. Indeed, it is argued that the very notion of ‘radicalisation’ inherent to this process has been constructed as a fundamentally discriminatory concept that has encouraged, and allowed for, the stigmatisation of specifically Muslim sectors and caused their exclusion from UK political systems (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010: 901; Githens-Mazer 2012: 560; Heath-Kelly 2013; Jarvis and Lister 2012). This feeling is exacerbated where that targeting is seen to take place in preference to addressing extremist threats within the far right and other racist ideologies, specifically where activity by these other groups is treated differently (Alyas Karmani in Home Affairs Committee 2012: Ev 30). For example, there is a major disparity within counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism policy in that Muslim actors have been charged under the Terrorism Act 2006 for engagement
in extremist activities, whereas far-right individuals have been charged under other, specifically criminal, legislation for carrying out similar acts. Indeed, in the case of Robert Cottage mentioned earlier, Cottage was not convicted on the basis of terrorism legislation, but the Explosive Substances Act 1883. As such, this differentiation between Muslim and right-wing acts of extremism – where one is marked out as terrorism and the other as a crime – creates significant hostility, one that vastly increases the likelihood of radicalisation within extreme Islamic factions. As Thomas says on this issue:

Such a clear focus within PVE [Preventing Violent Extremism] on Muslim communities, and the associated lack of focus on racist extremism within white communities, could well have the unintended consequence of hardening a defensive and antagonistic ‘Muslim’ identity among those involved in response to a perception that their whole identity and community lifestyle is being implicitly criticised and scrutinised.

(Thomas 2009: 287)

Furthermore, this Islamic focus fuels and promotes far-right extremism where that process of exclusion inspires hatred of Muslim groups. Poynting and Mason (2006: 367) demonstrate that exclusion entails a form of ‘othering’ – a construction of Muslim groups as intrinsically different – that effectively creates a ‘permission to hate’ these groups and ideologically justifies racist acts against them. The distinction inherent to exclusion reinforces negative perceptions surrounding a specific group, further exacerbating the revulsion felt for it: ‘If the State is assaulting, harassing and vilifying Muslims as the enemy in the war on terror, and thus terrorising whole communities, then perhaps white-thinking citizens feel justified in personally attacking this enemy wherever they might encounter them’ (ibid.: 379). Indeed, this is also recognised by the UK government itself. A Home Affairs Committee report directly links the ‘victimisation of Muslims under anti-terrorism legislation’ to increased Islamophobia and hate attacks on Muslim communities (2004: Ev 30).

Interestingly, however, this is also a case where the disproportionate attention paid to Muslim groups may not be viewed as process of ‘victimisation’, but as an unfair advantage given to those communities. Thomas (2009: 290; 2010: 451) highlights that the government’s concentrated focus on Muslim communities – specifically where this relates to financial investment in those communities and/or the development of social programmes – creates resentment amongst white populations. In particular, young, underprivileged and working-class white groups may see their Muslim counterparts as benefitting from ‘opportunities’ created as a result of counter-radicalisation efforts, e.g. youth clubs, employment schemes, etc. Where they may feel they are being denied those same social advantages, this can incite even greater levels of hatred and promote radicalisation within the far right. It creates an ideological and political environment in which far-right radicalisation potentially becomes attractive.
Within this context then, Prevent’s hierarchical approach creates a major problem, specifically where it exaggerates this ‘othering’ of Muslim actors. By identifying Islamic extremism as the priority threat, the strategy legitimises the controversial ‘singling-out’ of Muslim communities detailed above. It reinforces the normative separation of Islamic extremism, even where Prevent itself acknowledges that this is an ineffective and provocative approach to counter-radicalisation. And especially where it explicitly prioritises the Islamic threat over the risks posed by the far right, Prevent not only downplays and ignores those risks as a secondary consideration, but also threatens to encourage them further. By reinforcing a perceived distinctiveness of Islamic extremism through this act of prioritisation, Prevent actually serves to exacerbate the resentment associated with previous approaches to counter-radicalisation. It may promote the incentives towards far-right radicalisation that it seeks to overcome. Despite Prevent’s commitment to containing the far right, therefore, its current strategic approach threatens to make the present situation significantly worse in that it potentially increases radicalisation within the extreme right by aggravating core grievances.

Conclusion

Extending the scope of Prevent to address the far right has been presented as a major step forward in counter-radicalisation. Bringing all forms of extremism under the banner of Prevent is portrayed as a significant shift in thinking on radicalisation and extremist behaviour, not only in terms of policy understandings of this dual threat, but also the response to it. Yet in looking at the detail of this commitment to address the far right, it can be seen this is fundamentally hollow, not least where the conceptualisation of that threat – to the extent that any effort has been made to formulate such an understanding – is flawed and characterised by pre-existing hierarchical beliefs surrounding Islamic extremism. This failure to conceptualise is evident in three key ways: that it fails to understand the threat; that it misunderstands the threat; and that it essentially states understanding the threat is insignificant. The first of these relates to the lack of definition. While Prevent constructs a detailed conceptual map outlining Islamic-inspired extremism and radicalisation, there is no such attempt to comprehend the far right. As such, it remains under-analysed to a point at which the strategy cannot effectively respond. Second, to the extent Prevent discusses the nature of the threat, this is problematic in that it does not treat this as an issue within its own right. The strategy merely ‘tags on’ the far right to an existing conception of counter-radicalisation without considering the degree to which this constitutes a distinct and separate issue, thereby misrepresenting the risks associated with the extreme right wing. Finally, Prevent sidelines consideration of the far right by stating that Islamic extremism will remain the clear priority. While there may be legitimate differences in threat level, where Prevent’s conceptualisation of the far right takes place within a pre-existing context that assumes it can only ever be a secondary concern – and where this places such restrictive boundaries on its
understanding – then the strategy can never pay the extreme right the attention its expansion was designed to achieve.

Ultimately, the very conceptual framework of Prevent is flawed. And as such, the strategy’s declared commitment to addressing the far right looks more like rhetoric than a fully developed response. This is not to suggest Prevent ignores the threat entirely; indeed, there is evidence of programmes being put in place in respect of extreme right-wing radicalisation (see Chapter 7). Yet this express commitment to expanding the strategy cannot be seen to represent a major change in policy where so little has been done to understand, and respond to, the far right as a valid extremist and radicalisation threat. In fact, in reinforcing the line between Islamic fundamentalism and right-wing extremism – in further institutionalising that separation – this may actually make it even more difficult to focus on right-wing extremism, where that threat is so decisively sidelined. It may also encourage greater far-right radicalisation and extremist behaviour by emphasising controversial perceptions of Muslim communities as distinct. While the potential exists to make progress on this issue, therefore, in that Prevent now highlights an important threat, the strategy is currently structured in a way that precludes an appropriate response. Prevent does make an important statement on the future of counter-radicalisation. But until that is framed within a more detailed and assertive conceptualisation of the far right, this can be little more than an empty promise.

Notes
1 Citing the evidence of Dr Matthew Goodwin, University of Nottingham.
2 This is also reflected in the 2013 CONTEST Annual Review (Home Office 2013: 21).
3 For an excellent discussion of the wider discursive construction of ‘Islamic terrorism’, see Richard Jackson (2007).

References


7 Challenging far-right extremism
The other side of the coin?

Rocio Cifuentes

Introduction
Since 9/11 and 7/7, concerns about international and national security have become increasingly centred on the threat from violent extremism, which the UK Government’s 2007 Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) strategy aimed to address. Known as Prevent, it initially focused exclusively on the risk from Islamic extremism and neglected that from far-right extremism and non-Muslim communities. This focus led to the strategy being widely criticised for being ineffective at best and counter-productive at worst, with critics suggesting that the exclusive focus on Muslims had both alienated and antagonised the Muslim community and given credence to the far right. Recognising some of these critiques, as well as taking stock of events on the ground, the UK government’s revised 2011 Prevent strategy has widened its focus to include all forms of terrorism, including the extreme right wing.

On the one hand, this widened strategy has been hailed as a welcome development that goes at least some way towards redressing the perceived imbalance against Muslim communities, and it also offers an opportunity to examine right-wing extremism through the same frameworks as those applied to Islamist extremism. But, on the other hand, this widened focus also brings up further questions. Do white communities need resilience-building in the same way as Muslim communities were once (and still are) deemed to? Or, as with Muslims, is it part of a wider rhetoric that is arguably demonising the white working class, and perhaps turning them into ‘suspect communities’? Consequently, to what extent can lessons learnt from the Government’s earlier Prevent strategy, focused on counter-radicalisation within the Muslim community, be applied to attempts to prevent right-wing radicalisation and violent extremism? Can similar concepts of ‘vulnerability’ be used, can similar methodologies or interventions work, and do similar pitfalls exist? Furthermore, how do differing interpretations of all of these concepts play out between stakeholders at the local level? And how do issues of race, religion, class and gender all intersect within specific local contexts?

This chapter will consider these questions, drawing on autobiographical experiences, as well as academic debates. These experiences arise from my position as director of Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST) – a voluntary, not-for-profit ethnic
minority youth organisation, based in Swansea, South Wales – and its role in delivering two discrete projects over the last five years: the Positive Street Project, a three-year Welsh Government Community Cohesion-funded project aimed at preventing young Muslim males from being drawn into Islamic extremism; and the Think Project, a three-year project funded by the Big Lottery Innovation Fund and aimed at preventing vulnerable white young people from being drawn into far-right extremism. As a community-based practitioner and academic researcher, questions of how government policies affect local practice and communities on the ground, and vice versa, are never far from my thoughts and this iterative questioning continuously shapes my practice and theorising. Thus, I aim to present a case study of how theory and practice affect each other, and are shaped and reshaped in the local context, and so contribute in a small way to the ‘yawning gap’ between theory and practice that Eatwell and Goodwin have identified, particularly in the field of extremisms. All views expressed are also my own and not necessarily those of EYST.

‘Home-grown terrorists’

Swansea is a mid-sized post-industrial city by the sea. It is home to around a quarter of a million people, around 7 per cent of whom are from a non-white background, with the largest minorities being of Muslim, Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin. At the beginning of February 2005, EYST was constituted as a voluntary organisation – set up by and for ethnic minority young males (initially) in Swansea. It was set up as a targeted youth support service for this group, providing a broadly youth-work-based, culturally sensitive programme including an after-school drop-in centre and in-school support. Around five months after EYST was set up, 7/7 happened, and there was a sense of this event being both a good and a bad thing in terms of the prospects for the newly formed EYST.

Whereas 9/11 was a global game-changer, 7/7 represented a fundamental shift in the focus of national politics in the UK. It also brought about a qualitative change locally, not only to how people thought about, but also how it felt to live within, a multi-cultural society, and how they interpreted their daily lived experiences of difference and diversity. While, from a UK perspective at least, 9/11 was conceived of in macro-security terms as an external threat vaguely from the East against the ‘the West’, 7/7 made the global feel local and turned macro-security into micro-social fears, and the discovery that its perpetrators were individuals born and bred in the UK led to the emergence of the concept of ‘home-grown terrorism’. The term came to prominence soon after the London bombings, and a review of the prevailing literature on the term suggests two key features emerge: one is the idea of individuals being born and raised in the West, and the other is the idea of individuals or groups acting independently without connection to terrorist groups abroad. Although not explicitly stated, both ideas were also implicitly contrasted to the post-9/11 popular understanding of terrorists as being individuals born outside of the country of attack, controlled by or led by terror cells based somewhere in the East, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.
The idea of ‘home-grown terrorists’ therefore represented a fundamental change and challenge to the notion of who could be a terrorist. However, interestingly, the term has been little challenged for its implicit assumptions, and in 2005, and possibly until around 2010, the term was used – within academic, policy and community practice circles – to imply an Islamic and usually non-white, British-born or reared terrorist. Thus the term became implicitly and insidiously racialised, as did the whole debate on terrorism, security and radicalisation. As such global, national and local security policies were all heating up the politics of race, which had previously all appeared to have been dealt with in the anti-apartheid, anti-Nazi-League fighting years. Indeed, as Pantazis and Pemberton pointed out at the time, international and national political discourse, together with counter-terrorist legislation, was now facilitating the construction of Muslims as the new ‘suspect communities’, with Muslims replacing the Irish as the new ‘enemy within’ and the main focus of the government’s security agenda.

Muslims: ‘the enemy within’?

The populist notion that there were potential home-grown terrorists lurking wherever there were sizeable Muslim populations was given formal credence by the 2007 UK government Prevent strategy which allocated funding of £6 million to the 140 local authorities with the highest Muslim populations. Swansea received £50,000 per year for three years under this fund – known in Wales as the Community Cohesion Grant – and the local police contracted EYST to deliver a project on their behalf to achieve the objectives of this grant, which were, ostensibly, to improve community cohesion in the area. With this funding, EYST delivered the Positive Street Project, which, from 2009 to 2012, employed a (Muslim) youth worker and helped to fund the EYST youth centre. Its aim was to increase the resilience of young Muslim males to the possibility of Islamic radicalisation, through increased understanding of Islam and positive diversions away from negative influences. It did this by informally engaging the Muslim youth in the drop-in centre via the youth worker, and through offering regular talks from respected imams and religious leaders to guide young Muslim males towards the ‘right’ interpretation of Islam.

From a community organisation point of view, there were some ethical dilemmas to accepting this grant funding. From a purely pragmatic point of view, the funding enabled us to continue the employment of a much-valued youth worker for three years, as well as contribute around one third of the rental costs of our newly refurbished youth drop-in centre. We also recognised that young Muslim males – like all young people – had many questions, both personal and political, which they needed opportunities to discuss in a safe and stimulating environment. We also knew that some were vulnerable – again, like young people generally – to negative influences and peer group pressure, some of whom used religious ideological frameworks to justify their views. However, we could also see that young Muslims were angry, about many things, but an increasing theme
was the racism and Islamophobia that they were experiencing more and more in their daily lives – in schools, on the streets, in the newspaper headlines, and in government policies. Prevent was one of these, and one of which Muslim communities were highly critical from the very outset. Therefore, accepting the funding could be seen as colluding with and reinforcing the narrative of ‘Muslims as potential extremists and terrorists’. We know of many Muslim and British and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations in other parts of the UK who, for these reasons, ‘stayed away’ from such funding. Yet we accepted it, choosing pragmatism and focusing on the positive contribution the funds would make to the young people we worked with, rather than the political polemic surrounding it. We also made an internal decision that we would make our project low-key, avoiding publicising the source of funding, and treating the project as a general youth-work programme. This was in line with our organisational ethos and founding principle that all young people faced similar challenges, but that BME young people sometimes faced additional barriers to accessing mainstream support to face those challenges, hence the need for targeted support in the form of EYST. This cautious, generalist and low-key approach proved to be an effective one in terms of our ability to engage with the target group, and get our intended message across, and it is one that, due to our long-standing positive relationship with local police, was mostly respected. Nevertheless, there were some tensions between this approach and the more target-driven, outcome-focused one sometimes used by funders and partners.

The EYST Positive Street Project

The Positive Street Project (PSP) is summarised within the Welsh Government’s Community Cohesion Strategy as

a three-year programme of activities focusing on a different theme each year. Year one focuses on tackling ‘Street’ issues including substance misuse, gangs and radicalisation. Year two focuses on ‘Citizenship’ issues, which includes working with schools and colleges. The final year focuses on ‘Positive Expression’ to support Muslim young people to have a positive vision of their place in society and a voice in their local communities.

The overall aim of the project is to engage with ethnic minority young people from the Muslim community living in and around Swansea in order to steer them away from factors linked to radicalisation and violent extremism and towards a positive understanding and expression of their Muslim as well as Welsh/British identity in society.

The project involves a lot of outreach work with young people as well as activities based at EYST’s drop-in centre and will produce a number of resources aimed at the target group including leaflets and a DVD.

The work is delivered by EYST and co-ordinated by the Safer Swansea Prevent Board through partnership agencies, both statutory and non-statutory.
Our experience of delivering the PSP from 2009 to 2012 was a journey along which we learnt many lessons. Operationally it was straightforward: the PSP youth worker would engage with young Muslim males (as he always had done, since his employment with EYST began in 2005); diversionary activities were delivered from the EYST youth centre, and elsewhere, such as weekly football (which again, was pretty much ‘business as usual’ for EYST); and monthly ‘authentic’ (for this was the current term for Islamic religious credibility) Islamic scholars would give talks in the EYST centre debating topics of religious, political and personal significance, with which young Muslim males were encouraged to engage. Perhaps the biggest change for EYST in delivering the PSP project was the explicit focus from the PSP worker in encouraging the young clients to open up and debate – from a religious, political and personal perspective – the hot topics of the time, which included the Iraq War, American and UK foreign policy, the War on Terror and – importantly – what many young people felt was the vilification of Muslims throughout the world.

As a non-Muslim, I retained a critical distance from the content of the religious debate, and, despite accusations that have been voiced more widely that the government or police were heavily vetting Muslim speakers, in our experience there was little interference in which speakers were invited. Those we did engage with were individuals with whom we had long-lasting working relationships, who had credibility within the Muslim community locally and who – on a personal level – were individuals who seemed to me to have the values and ethics of human rights at heart. They were not individuals who had any problems interacting with myself as a non-Muslim female head of an ethnic minority youth organisation. Perhaps this in itself allayed any potential concerns from funders or partners in terms of where we were positioned on the imagined spectrum from extreme to moderate. If there was a privileging of ‘moderate’ Muslim voices over more radical ones within the Prevent strategy, then our experience would confirm this suspicion. However, it is a privileging in which we were fully complicit, and what some would describe as ‘moderate’ concurred with what the Muslims around me viewed as ‘authentic’ and ‘right’; therefore, it was not contested territory, as far as the local Muslim community and youth were concerned.

Strategically, although EYST already had good working relations with the police, the project enabled much closer and more senior-level partnership working between the two organisations than had previously been the case. Thus, EYST had regular and direct access to senior-level police. However, in return, there was the expectation that any ‘concerns’ relating to potential extremist sympathies or ‘signs’ of radicalisation should be communicated immediately and openly to the police. Much has been made of the alleged attempt of the Prevent strategy to turn Muslim organisations into spies on their own communities, as well as the alleged effect of the strategy in turning Muslim communities into ‘suspect communities’. However, for EYST, the former at least was not how we felt. As well-integrated citizens of the UK (as we felt), concerns that threatened the safety and security of our own young clients would always have been passed
onto the proper authorities anyway – as would those that threatened the wider public, either locally or in any part of the UK or the world. However, what did transpire to be a challenge within the partnership were the differing interpretations of what was deemed to be a ‘concern’, from different agencies involved – not only EYST and the police, but others including schools, and so on. Without going into detail, there were instances of primary-school-age children being ‘discussed’ by Prevent partners – in one instance for having drawn a picture of the Twin Tower attacks when asked by their class teacher to draw an example of ‘a great event in history’. The ambiguity of the term ‘great’ in this case was the basis for vastly differing interpretations of this young person’s artwork. It often felt that common sense and a sense of scale, perspective and proportionality were suspended from these debates, and it was striking to consider how many individuals would have taken part in the chain of referrals to come to that point, all with similar conceptions of the risk presented by the young person involved. It was heartening, however, to realise that our part in the discussion enabled such perspectives to be challenged, and that it was better to be part of these discussions than not at all.

As well as differences between us and other partners in how concerns relating to Muslim young people were defined or identified, there were also emerging differences in the focus of our practical work, which for us as least was not confined to the behaviour, views or attitudes of Muslim young people alone. Indeed, there were many occasions when the author had discussions with senior police figures raising concerns about white perpetrators who were ‘terrorising’ individuals and families with racially abusive behaviour; was this not also a very real, actual and potential terrorist threat facing the local population? Although individual cases of racist abuse were dealt with sensitively and appropriately, there was little support (at the time) for the suggestion that racist extremist ideology could be viewed as a comparable threat to that from Islamic extremism. The implied response was that this suggestion was naive, and one explicit response was ‘You can’t do anything about that anyway’. It was also clear to us that being subjected to sustained and sometimes relentless racist abuse was angering some young Muslims to potential boiling point.

These pressure points, it turned out, were mirroring those being felt by other community groups and stakeholders across the UK, and these were brought together and conveyed by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee’s report on the Prevent programme, which was presented to the House of Commons in March 2010. The report concluded, among other things, that ‘the single focus on Muslims in Prevent has been unhelpful’ and that ‘the need to address extremism of all kinds on a cross-community basis, dependent on assessed local risk, is paramount’.17

**Turning point**

Locally, in terms of EYST’s operational delivery, and in terms of the strategic relationship with police and community safety officials, the publication of this
report marked a turning point. If not quite a vindication of what we had been saying, the report offered government-level recognition of the challenges and issues that we had been picking up on at ground level, as well as new directives for how community-level policing should become more sensitive to these needs and the potential pitfalls of too narrow a focus.

As we were just entering the final year of our three-year Positive Street Project, this report helped us to see the challenges that we were facing in their wider context. While we felt confident that we were achieving our project’s objectives of increasing the resilience of young Muslim males to Islamic extremism, from our experience on the ground we were not convinced that the government response was proportionate to the actual level of risk presented. Furthermore, we could not ignore the increasing levels of racism and Islamophobia that were being reported to us by our young and mostly Muslim client group. Whereas our previous attempts to suggest something should be done about this had been dismissed as an unrealistic aspiration, two things were now qualitatively different on the ground. First, we had the experience of having delivered a successful project using educational engagement to increase resilience to extremism. Second, the Prevent review of 2010 had primed police and other government actors in the field to be more prepared to acknowledge that the threat of far-right extremism existed, was growing and could be challenged.

This increasing acknowledgement of the threat from the far right was further underpinned by the reference to far-right extremism within the Welsh Government Community Cohesion Strategy published in late 2009. In the chapter on ‘Preventing Violent Extremism and Strengthening Cohesion’, the report stated that:

In recent years there has been growing concern about the increasing influence of far-right groups in some areas in Wales, who are communicating open messages of racial discrimination and prejudice. Most communities are resilient to these extremist views; however there are some areas where their influence may have increased. The reasons for this are complex but may be related to the experience of poverty and perceptions of unfairness.

However, the Welsh context differs from other parts of the UK in that community cohesion is a devolved area, meaning that it is in under the decision-making power of the National Assembly for Wales, while policing remains under the authority of the London-based UK government. Furthermore, while in other parts of the UK, community cohesion and Prevent are two distinct areas, the Welsh Government approach has been to encompass the prevention of extremism as part of its community cohesion strategy. Nevertheless, this is a potentially problematic coupling as suggested by the Select Committee’s 2011 review of Prevent, with critics suggesting this could lead to either the over-securitisation of community cohesion initiatives, or the softening of Prevent-funded activity. From the perspective of EYST’s work, while the two areas would ideally be completely separate, in practice the whole debate around
Prevent, Muslims and extremism has entered the public consciousness to such an extent that it has become a community cohesion issue. Following a consideration of the Select Committee’s report, the UK Government published their revised Prevent strategy on 7 June 2011. Importantly, this was almost exactly one month after a general election that replaced a Labour-led government with a Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition government, and thus the document opens with a statement that ‘The Prevent programme we inherited from the last government was flawed.’

The revised Prevent strategy did respond to the pressure embedded within the review document to widen its scope to include all forms of terrorism, including the extreme right wing, yet this was qualified with: ‘However, it is clear that Prevent work must be targeted against those forms of terrorism that pose the greatest risk to our national security. Currently, the greatest threat comes from Al Qa’ida, its affiliates and like-minded groups’. Thus, despite this expanded remit, after 2011 the strategy’s focus remained where it had been since 2007 – on the potential for radicalisation of Muslim communities in the UK.

Increasingly, however, even in its revised guise, the strategy was coming under fire from both academic and policy voices for a variety of reasons, but perhaps most devastatingly for potentially being counter-productive. Indeed, this is a question that comes to mind time and time again: has the national and international response to the events of 9/11 and 7/7 actually decreased our national and individual security rather than increased it? Are we more or less safe now? Answering these questions requires a new and better understanding of what security is, of who defines it and of the scales by which it can be measured.

Far-right extremism

The topic of far-right extremism is one that has become an increasing focus of concern for policy makers, politicians and academics in the UK, in particular over the last five years. Prior to that, as already noted, it was more conspicuous by its absence from the domestic and international political discourse, which had, since the terrorist attacks in New York and London of 9/11 and 7/7, focused almost exclusively on Islamic extremism and its security implications. Academic attention had also, arguably, disproportionately focused on the same political agenda with much debate centred around questions of (Islamic) radicalisation, terrorism and extremism.

Events on the ground also underlined the need for this wider focus, with none more starkly illustrating this than the acts of Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik who killed 77 people in a far-right-inspired bomb attack and shooting spree in July 2011. In the UK, support for groups like the English Defence League and the National Front has increased significantly, evidenced both by street-based support, and through public attitude surveys such as Lord Ashcroft’s 2013 report into attitudes to immigration. There is also growing academic if not political recognition of the symbiotic relationship between political extremism from each end of the spectrum, which has variously been called ‘cumulative extremism’ or ‘tit-for-tat’ extremism.
Across Europe, it is now recognised that, since the turn of the millennium, the far right has slowly but surely been experiencing its most successful growth phase of recent times, with these groups enjoying increased political legitimacy, underpinned by a strengthening anti-immigration and anti-Islamic rhetoric. Yet it is the potential for violence arguably inherent within its ideology that makes far-right extremism a political and social threat on a micro and macro scale, and a legitimate target of the government’s Preventing Violent Extremism strategy. Nevertheless, not all commentators agree with this exclusive focus on violent extremism, as for some, there is a relationship between ostensibly non-violent ideologies and the sometimes violent expression of their ideals, even though this relationship is not yet well understood. It remains unknown, even though we may shed some light on it through these case studies presented, why and how generalised attitudes of hostility within a wider population can translate into specific and violent actions of hate committed by a tiny minority, albeit with wider repercussions of fear and community tension.

The Think Project

Apart from the developing strategic context, late 2010 and early 2011 were also critical times in terms of actual events on the ground in Swansea. Two separate demonstrations were organised in Swansea city centre during this time by the Welsh Defence League, a short-lived arm of the more enduring anti-Islamist, street-based, far-right group the English Defence League. News of the first planned event in October 2010 immediately created fear and put the whole city on edge. The local police force took great pains to engage with EYST management and our young ethnic minority clients prior to the event, giving us as much information and reassurance as possible. One question they could not satisfactorily answer was one commonly asked by many of our clients – why was the demonstration being allowed to happen in the first place, and was it not a clear case of inciting racial hatred? Freedom of speech and freedom of assembly principles and laws did not always seem evenly applied.

However, fearing far larger numbers of WDL supporters than actually turned up, EYST advised our young clients to stay away from the city centre on that day, not wishing to risk any injury or abuse to our young clients. When only around 30–50 WDL supporters actually turned up, most of whom were too inebriated to vocalise their feelings or accurately throw a punch, it revealed the real danger of extremist groups – the level of fear that they had created, with the help of the media, police and the reaction of even groups like EYST – was actually completely disproportionate to the level of risk they represented. This was a revelatory moment for EYST and made us realise the similarities between the Islamic and far-right extremists. The counter-demonstration was also far larger with around ten times the number of supporters that the WDL had, and also – perhaps due to the fear of non-whites, or for other reasons – was made up almost entirely of white people. A second planned protest by the WDL in March 2011 was even smaller, and in fact the city was less fearful than the first time.
It happened with less media or community attention than the first. Representatives from EYST attended the counter-demonstration, and on seeing the group assembled, we began to feel sorry for this mostly inebriated and dishevelled collective, and began to recognise their vulnerabilities.

Yet our young clients continued to report increasing levels of racism and Islamophobia, especially those young Muslim females who were visibly Muslim through wearing the hijab (Islamic headscarf). Schools, colleges, the police and youth offending services began to voice their concern that they did not always know what to do in response to the increased racial tensions they were witnessing. They also contrasted the ‘interventions’ available to support and work with young people showing signs of being drawn into Islamic extremism, with what was available to stop young people from being drawn into racism and far-right extremism. As one worker put it, ‘there’s nothing out there for them’. EYST youth workers had many years’ experience of going into schools and doing classroom-based discussions and presentations on race, Islam, diversity and so on. These discussions were nearly always well received and succeeded in changing attitudes, if not radically, at least enough (we felt) to sow the seeds of doubt that everything pupils were reading in the tabloid headlines was definitely true. This success was measured via attitudinal questionnaires, but also from the comments and feedback from pupils and teachers.

In this context, and in this absence of anything similar, EYST set to work to devise a short-term pilot project that could test out our proposed approach to working with young white people who were arguably vulnerable to far-right extremism through a programme of engagement and education to ultimately increase their resilience to far-right ideology and prevent far-right extremism.

The project proposal summarised the project as:

The Think Project is an innovative targeted intervention project using small group workshops to challenge racism and deconstruct racist attitudes amongst disengaged young people in Swansea.

Through the Think Project, EYST will offer young people, who have been identified as either having or being vulnerable to racist or far-right views, the opportunity to take part in a programme of half-day workshops giving young people the facts about race, religion and migration, and using these to challenge racism and to refute myths and stereotypes. By giving young people the facts as well as an opportunity for frank and open discussion, the workshops aim to provoke and inspire young people to think through these difficult issues and to think for themselves.28

At the end of 2010, our bid for £5,000 was approved by the Swansea Community Cohesion Grants Panel that administered this Welsh Government Fund. The Think Project thus began as a three-month pilot project in January 2011 and ran until the end of March 2011. It built on our considerable experience of working with disengaged young people, and relied on our established partnerships for referrals and access to these young people. It was delivered by two
project workers, one ‘white Welsh’ male and one ‘Bangladeshi Muslim’ female. The Think Pilot Project worked with young people who were in local alternative education provision aged 14–16, which is to say they had all been excluded from mainstream education, for various reasons.

Following the three-month pilot project in 2011, the Think Project was awarded three-year funding from the Big Lottery Innovation Fund and commenced its delivery in April 2012. Since then, two project workers have been busy delivering the programme to 13 groups of young people to date with a total of 99 young people completing the programme during the first year of the project. Strategically, the project has also had a good start, with the Think Project Steering Group having excellent representation from 11 relevant agencies with 11 representatives present at the first meeting and 18 at the second meeting. Geographically, the project is also increasing its reach, with agencies involved so far going beyond Swansea, to Llanelli, Neath, Merthyr and Gwent. The project is being externally evaluated by i-works research, and a baseline evaluation report has been completed and disseminated to project partners.

The evaluation suggests that the project is achieving its targets of increasing the understanding of project participants about diversity, Islam, asylum, etc, as well as positively impacting on attitudes towards asylum seekers, Muslims, foreigners, etc. One of the key ways in which this is being achieved is through the positive experience of the project participants of forging a relationship with an ethnic minority youth worker, and from hearing first-hand the stories of asylum seekers or refugees – in short, providing contact with and humanising the ‘other’, rather than alienating and demonising such groups. A second key factor for success is the open way in which the programme is delivered, with young people encouraged to open up about their views and grievances, however politically incorrect or unpalatable, as it is necessary to hear a view before it can be challenged.

**Targetting**

How we defined our target group was the topic of much consideration as we were keen to avoid the familiar trap of negatively labelling young people as potential extremists. Yet experience and instinct told us that there was a certain kind of young person who was more likely to racially abuse their peers or neighbours, and to end up in groups such as the WDL, amid demonstrations such as those we had seen in Swansea. Pragmatism demanded that we find where these certain kinds of young people were – and our partners informed us that many attended their own agencies including youth offending agencies, alternative education providers and so on. Thus, the pragmatic need to work with a captive audience overlapped with our subjective understanding that poverty, offending behaviour and disengagement from mainstream education could amount to ‘vulnerability’ to far-right ideology, or any extremist or exploitative ideology for that matter. Indeed, we sought to apply our experience of what made a young person ‘vulnerable’ to Islamic extremist ideology to this new client group, and worked on the assumption that the vulnerability factors were similar.
However, defining a group of people as ‘vulnerable’ to an extremist ideology is, for some, uncomfortably close to defining them as potential extremists. Yet for EYST, even though the definitions may come very close, our approach aims to be one that sides with the vulnerable individual and seeks to understand the life experiences that have shaped their world view, and to work to stretch and shape this understanding, rather than to condemn, fear or seek to change a person. It is an important yet subtle difference in approach. After all, were we not to adopt this approach, we would be guilty of the same charge of essentialising, labelling and framing a whole group of people – poor young white males – as ‘suspect communities’, as Hillyard and others have described.

Indeed, the whole issue of social class has re-emerged latterly as possibly one of the last socially acceptable forms of bigotry as the whole discourse around ‘chavs’ has emerged as a recurrent theme and way of making fun of the lower working or non-working classes. Owen Jones has argued that the working classes are actually being demonised and in his comprehensive study he shows how media and politics contrive to portray this group of young people as feckless, criminal and ignorant.29 The concept of intersectionality is useful here, as categories of race, class as well as gender interact and intersect with one another, and cannot be understood in isolation.30 As far as the Think Project was concerned, it was important for us in designing and delivering the programme that we kept in mind the class-based reality of the young people we were working with, which was high unemployment, as well as the gender-based expectations such as masculinity and violence, etc that possibly shaped their behaviours. Their race, ethnicity or ‘whiteness’ was just one dimension, and as some authors have since argued, it is possible that the concerns of the far right are actually class-based concerns imagined or acted out as race-based ones.31

However, with most crime surveys showing that racist hate crime is most often (albeit not exclusively) carried out by young uneducated males,32 the familiar problem of ‘profiling’ versus negative labelling or stereotyping comes into play. In the end, the Think Project has sided once again with pragmatism and the gut feeling that working with a targeted and pre-defined group is an effective way of reaching those young people most likely to become racist abusers or offenders. While there is a wealth of literature that investigates the motivations and push factors involved in youth offending,33 much less of it focuses on hate crime offending including racially motivated crime. In their report for the EHRC Scotland, Iganski and Smith argue that the term ‘hate crime’ is actually a misnomer because the available evidence does not suggest that most hate crime perpetrators actually hate their victim.34 Rather, many are ‘generalists’ who are involved in a range of other criminal activity rather than specialising in racist crime, and are motivated by similar impulses including thrill-seeking or peer dynamics, resentment or revenge. Focusing specifically on racist or extremist crime such as that committed by racist skinheads, Simi has noted that underlying grievances are acted upon opportunistically when faced with any everyday confrontation.35 Blazak has also suggested that one particular motivation for some who commit racist crime is what he calls their ‘ethnic envy’ – their perceived
exclusion and lack of opportunity as a white person compared to the ethnic minority person. This is echoed by research more recently presented by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that many white working-class communities feel overlooked and forgotten about. These findings resonate with our experiences in EYST, and they are grievances that we seek to explore through the Think Project. However, as ever, we are concerned not to over-generalise, and feel that these concepts should be carefully explored and sounded out on an empirical and person-by-person basis.

Conclusion
The experiences recounted in this paper have been formative, both personally and professionally, as well as for EYST as an organisation, and perhaps even more widely. Events on the ground have bounced against messages from politicians, to bounce back against communities responding to these messages, which in turn have hit against directives from policy makers, and so on, in a never-ending spiral of action and reaction. Of course, these are all only my own interpretations, and each social actor would have his or her own, which would shape and colour their actions and so on. These points are made to emphasise the socially constructed nature of the study and practice of extremisms. In the academic world, this is not a bold claim, but in the practitioner’s world, it can sometimes be viewed as highly controversial – even radical.

There are many challenges to being a sociologist who is also a community worker, but there are also many opportunities. Indeed, all of the experiences recounted could be viewed as a form of ongoing action research, with each development allowing for the testing and refinement of emerging hypotheses. In this case, a key question that has driven forward the action research has been: ‘Are young Muslims vulnerable to Islamic extremism, and, if so, how and why?’ Following on from this, a further question has emerged: ‘How have young Muslims’ grievances hardened, and what impact has Islamophobia had on this?’ Then: ‘Where is the Islamophobia coming from? How are young white people involved? What are their grievances? Where have these come from?’

Ultimately, what is ‘extreme’ is always, as Coleman and Bartoli point out, a matter of subjective and political interpretation:

Extremism is a complex phenomenon, although its complexity is often hard to see. Most simply, it can be defined as activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) of a character far removed from the ordinary.… However, the labeling of activities, people, and groups as ‘extremist’, and the defining of what is ‘ordinary’ in any setting is always a subjective and political matter.

Acknowledging the above forces the recognition that having delivered two discrete anti-extremism projects means having colluded in the political act of labelling certain activities and views as extreme. Perhaps what I now realise is...
that the focus of EYST’s work is actually the very ordinary lives of young people, whatever their ethnic background, and their very ordinary concerns. There is an element of the emperor’s new clothes in the field of this work, with a temptation to overstate the importance of one’s work. Must the show go on?

Notes


3 The Big Lottery Innovation Fund is a programme of the Big Lottery Fund Wales which seeks to fund ‘new projects that test new ways of tackling emerging and existing social problems’. See www.nof.org.uk/global-content/programmes/wales/big-innovation (accessed 18 November 2013).


7 The term was implicitly and insidiously racialised, such that a five-country report on the subject, presented by the respected think tank Demos in 2010, begins with the words ‘The rise of ‘home-grown’ terrorism, inspired by al-Qaeda, is one of today’s most pressing security concerns’. It then goes on to uncritically equate home-grown terrorism to Islamic terrorism, with no consideration for any other form of terrorism in its 256-page report. Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J. and King, M. (2010). The Edge of Violence. Available online at www.demos.co.uk/files/Edge_of_Violence_-_full_-_web.pdf?1291806916 (accessed 2 August 2013).


Challenging far-right extremism


16 This refers to a system of recording and escalating concerns that is prevalent within UK public sector where one organisation (e.g. school) ‘refers’ concerns about an individual or incident initially to seniors within their own organisation, and, if deemed appropriate, then externally to another organisation (e.g. social services, police) for further investigation or specialist support.

17 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2010), op. cit., p. 3.


19 Welsh Assembly Government (2009), op. cit.


21 Ibid, p. 25.


28 EYST funding application to Swansea Community Cohesion Fund (2010). p. 5. Available on request from EYST.


34 Iganski and Smith (2011), op. cit.


8 Mapping the Muslim community
The politics of counter-radicalisation in Britain

Nadya Ali

Introduction
The concept of ‘radicalisation’ is a constitutive part of Britain’s overall counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST. In the aftermath of the London bombing in July 2005, it emerged as the primary causal explanation for why individuals become terrorists. CONTEST referred to radicalisation as ‘distorted ideas’, alienation and ‘simplistic, but virulent anti-Westernism’ (HM Government, 2006: 10). Academics and practitioners mobilised to investigate this little understood phenomenon and responded with numerous books (Hussain, 2007; Nawaz, 2012), edited volumes (Coolsaet, 2011; Cole and Cole, 2009; Ranstorp, 2010) and journal articles (Borum, 2011; Horgan, 2008; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008) on the matter. This burst of scholarly output also led to the establishment of the King’s College-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, the European Commission’s Radicalisation Awareness Network and consultancies like Centri and Radicalisation Research. Taken together, these developments represent a significant shift in the way terrorism is researched and understood as a product of psychological, sociological and mental deviance – all explanations advanced as part of the radicalisation discourse.

Consider the response to the stabbing of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich, London in May 2013. The perpetrators Michael Adebowale and Michael Adebolajo were both deemed to have been radicalised through a mixture of the pernicious influence of ‘hate’ preachers such as Anjem Choudhary (Whitehead, 2013) and traumatic experiences (Quinn, 2013). As was evident in the cases of Roshonara Choudhry and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Woolwich stabbing underlined the preoccupation of politicians and law enforcement with identifying the sources of radicalisation. What mosques did these individuals attend? What books did they read? Did they follow a particular Islamic scholar, such as Anwar al-Awlaki? Did they attend a university in which radical groups were known to operate? These questions all rear their head following a terrorist incident in Britain and serve as a powerful demonstration of the extent to which radicalisation discourse around terrorism has become so entrenched. However, the concept has attracted increasing scrutiny in recent times. The lack of a stable definition and the proliferation of radicalisation models are some of the
criticisms made of this explanation for, or cause of, terrorism. Marc Sedgwick has noted it is an ill-defined and inherently relative idea that does not satisfactorily explain why people resort to terrorism (Sedgwick, 2010). Anthony Richards has argued that the term should be dropped altogether because of these conceptual problems, as it makes for poor counter-terrorism policy (Richards, 2011). These are valid and necessary criticisms that lend some much-needed balance to the debate on the causes of terrorism. Nonetheless, their conceptual lens does not capture what radicalisation discourse and counter-radicalisation as an approach to terrorism has actually done. This chapter proposes that, rather than looking at what the term really means and how it ‘causes’ violence, the focus should be on how it functions in policy. It will be argued that one of the most important functions of radicalisation discourse has been to identify and in so doing to constitute the ‘Muslim community’ as the site of radicalisation in need of governmental reform.

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault (2007), this chapter adopts a governmentality approach, which helps to explore how this identification has been made possible by mapping numbers of Muslims living in any area of the UK through official census information and other forms of data collection. The central argument is that Britain’s counter-terrorism policies have produced the Muslim community as a governable entity that is subject to intervention and management. To this end, this chapter is structured in three parts. The first looks at current conceptualisations of the Muslim community in the academic literature and in policy. It will focus on how it is a ‘taken-for-granted’ entity in explanations of radicalisation. The second part attempts to re-conceptualise the relationship between governing practices, the production of political spaces and the ‘conduct of conduct’ to illustrate that the Muslim community is not a given but has been constituted through counter-radicalisation practices. Finally, the chapter gives a concrete example of the way in which government has ‘mapped’ Muslims through the use of census information and ‘community’ engagement.

Radicalisation: situating the research

The belief that radicalisation is a process that occurs within the Muslim community has become conventional wisdom. Although some have challenged both the idea of radicalisation and how discussions of it focus exclusively on Muslims, these ideas remain marginal and have not significantly changed policy approaches or the public discourse on terrorism. Terrorism studies literature and counter-terrorism policy itself tend to regard ‘Muslim’ as an unproblematic identity label for a diverse range of British citizens. Conversely, literature from critical terrorism studies (CTS) tends to limit its scrutiny of radicalisation and its relationship with Muslims to the construction of ‘suspect communities’ or the ethics of labelling. Both of these approaches are implicitly or explicitly premised on the notion that the ‘Muslim community’ is in an unproblematic identity label. This is despite the fact that policy initiatives directed at the ‘Muslim community’ in the UK are a recent post-7/7 development. At this stage, it is important to
differentiate between the abstract idea of the Muslim Ummah to which individuals are aligned by virtue of declaring themselves Muslim, and the ‘Muslim community’ in Britain as recipients of government addresses and initiatives. This chapter does not deny the idea of Muslims identifying with other Muslims, but simply points to how ‘communities’ are constituted in different times and places to different ends. The ‘Muslim community’ in Britain is different from the ‘Muslim community’ in the USA, which in turn is different from the ‘Muslim community’ in France, and so forth. In light of this, this next section discusses how the ‘Muslim community’ is currently understood within the academic literature and policy.

Publication titles such as *Radicalisation among Muslims in the UK* (Briggs and Birdwell, 2009) and *Martyrdom: Radicalisation and Terrorist Violence among British Muslims* (Cole and Cole, 2009) reflect the preponderance of research on the idea that radicalisation occurs within the confines of the Muslim community. Toby Archer argues that, ‘British Muslims are British citizens who also identify with the Umma, the worldwide community of the Muslim faithful. As a result their identity and political interests can said to be both internal and external to the UK’ (Archer, 2009: 329). He goes on to compare the Ummah to an ‘imagined community’ that is ‘huge at approximately 1.2 billion people and very diverse ethnically and geographically’ (2009: 332). If Archer had taken Benedict Anderson’s (1991) call to deconstruct the practices which constitute an ‘imagined community’ seriously, no doubt his analysis would have been more fruitful. He states that the Ummah is hugely diverse but this view undermines his primary argument, which is that Muslims derive their identity from their religion. This in turn helps them identify with other Muslims worldwide, thereby creating their interests. Crucially, the nature of these interests is never expanded upon and it is uncritically assumed that being a ‘Muslim’ is explanation enough for individual thought and behaviour. That there are 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide, of diverse regional, national and ethnic groups, surely undermines the notion of a coherent or unified set of interests and preferences.

**The Muslim community in research on radicalisation**

There are also other aspects of the construction of the Muslim community that are pertinent to this discussion. In much of the academic literature on radicalisation in Britain, analysis often begins with the ethnic breakdown of Muslim citizens as well as a profile of their socio-economic make-up. Rachel Briggs and Jonathan Birdwell provide a typical example of this approach: ‘Muslims are the most disadvantaged faith group in the British labour market; they are three times more likely to be unemployed than the majority Christian group (Briggs and Birdwell, 2009: 4). They also add, ‘Muslims constitute some of the most deprived communities in the UK. Almost one-third of Muslims of working age have no qualifications, the highest proportion for any faith group’ (ibid.). It is unsurprising that such statistics are utilised given the historical importance of census information for contemporary methods of knowing and of governing.
Following the census in 2001, the *Guardian* stated that Muslims were the most socially and economically disadvantaged faith group in the country (Carvel, 2004). The socio-economic problems encountered by many Muslims or the particular ‘version’ of Islam they practice is melded together to constitute the various component parts of the Muslim community. It is an entity insofar as it is comprised of various statistics on salaries, educational qualifications and unemployment. This is how it is known that the ‘Muslim community’ exists, because they suffer from common and identifiable social problems.

These statistical ‘facts’ regarding the position of Muslims as a disadvantaged minority with a distinct ethnic heritage are used as a basis for further deriving an account of the ‘British Muslim identity’ and the ‘British Muslim experience’. For instance, Cole and Cole, who draw on similar statistics to Briggs and Birdwell’s study, posit that:

The first generation of British Mirpuris brought the *biradri* system with them and it remains integral to Mirpuri culture in Britain. This is an unwritten law of social conduct revolving around notions of honour where individual interests are subordinated to those of the community, and it is informally administered by community elders, whose authority cannot be challenged.

*(2009: 26–27)*

This leads them to argue that, as a result of the traditional structures of the Muslim community, many young people are becoming dissatisfied and looking elsewhere for guidance:

Family problems are a marked feature in the personal histories of many individuals in British *jihadi* networks. Indeed, there have been suggestions that radical recruiters specifically target such individuals. . . . Estrangement from family is a theme in the lives of several members of our dataset. In several cases, this led to their leaving the family home and its protective influence, after which they appear to have become radicalised.

*(2009: 29)*

It is not a particularly new or controversial view that many younger Muslims are frustrated by what are perceived to be ‘cultural’ constraints on their lives due to their ethnic heritage. However, to embed these accounts within the context of a specific narrative of the ‘Muslim community’ is highly significant and problematic. These explanations effectively weave together a tale of the ‘Muslim’ experience that appears seamless and persuasive and that draws on the experience of such individuals living in the UK. This underlines the importance of creating the community to give it a history rooted in immigrant narratives. This is a particularly pertinent move given that prior to 7/7, minorities in the UK were typically categorised in terms of ethnicity or nationality. Government policies on education, housing, health and other issues were often led by the ‘needs’ of various
ethnic groupings, and religious identity markers assumed a lesser importance. Nonetheless, it has now become easy and obvious to speak of the history of the ‘Muslim community’.

‘Suspect communities’ and the ethics of labelling

Another equally important dimension of this debate is contained within the ‘suspect communities’ literature. Research in this area examines specific constructions of the Muslim community from a largely liberal ethical perspective. The idea that is proposed is that, through its policy initiatives, the government has constructed the Muslim community as a suspect community in which the ‘blame’ for terrorism is projected onto a wider collective. The concept was first advanced by Paddy Hillyard (1993), who focused on counter-terrorism legislation and its impact on the Irish community in England, Wales and Scotland. This particular argument has also been advanced by an ESRC-funded report led by Mary Hickman and colleagues in 2011, which asked ‘to what extent and in what ways Irish communities and Muslim communities were represented as “suspect” in public discourse’ (Hickman et al., 2011: 1). This report emerges from an obvious underlying liberal ethical concern that often permeates criticisms of the government’s counter-terrorism strategy and the impact it is thought to have had on British Muslims. Typically, there is a concern with the language of suspicion that abounds in the Hickman et al. report, and recommendations that the avoidance of ‘extreme language and terminology such as “evil”, “perversion”, “barbaric” and so on . . . would help to diminish the negative impacts of such representations on Muslim communities’ (2011: 6). While the report certainly presents a pertinent critique of the way in which counter-terrorism policy has construed Muslims as a problem community, it still relies upon the idea that this there is a prior community to speak of. There are frequent mentions of the ‘Muslim community’ or the ‘experiences of the Muslim community’ (2011: 17). The effect of this approach has been to reify the idea of pre-existing communities, even if it is with the intention of highlighting the prejudices they face.

Christina Pantazis and Simon Pemberton make similar claims but from a more explicitly liberal framework (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009). They argue that the practices that create the suspect communities have a ‘harmful impact on individuals and communities’ and also ‘[draw] attention to how democratic values and practices were undermined in pursuance of greater security’ (2009: 648). There is an understanding within the ‘suspect communities’ literature that the state is pursuing security at the cost of the liberty of pre-existing individuals and groups. This reflects an understanding of the political and of the state in which individuals and groups must be protected against the arbitrary use of power by governments. As a result, critical analyses of counter-terrorism strategies are limited to looking at their coercive nature and their imposition from ‘above’ on the community. Concerns centre on isolating or demonising Muslims and on the backlash of such a counter-terrorism approach felt by this group. However, this literature fails to go beyond the particular problem of construing
all Muslims as potential suspects. This analysis is also encouraged by the easy comparisons drawn between the Irish and Muslim cases. Although it is inevitable that these historically proximate eras of counter-terrorism are contrasted with one and other, this also leads to somewhat short-sighted conclusions. Heath-Kelly argues that policy and practice within the two eras exhibit different logics; thus, ‘[w]hile the conceptions of prevention displayed within the pre-2005 PTAs bore the moniker of prevention, they do not match the anticipatory logics within CONTEST’ (Heath-Kelly, 2012: 71). In other words, there is a significant divergence in how governments understood and approached the terrorist threat. In the Irish case, legislation was overwhelmingly concerned with the use of sovereign power as embodied in the Criminal Justice Act. In the Muslim case, the focus is on preventive measures, which necessitate a greater range of policy responses that are not just limited to policing, courts and prisons. These measures and their political implications are not commented upon in a meaningful way.

The rationale for engaging with the ‘suspect’ Muslims rather than simply subjecting them to punitive measures is, however, reflective of how radicalisation is conceptualised. It provides a pathway to understanding acts of political violence through a structural narrative contained in the story of the Muslim community, which can be interrupted and corrected. In light of this clear difference in the eras of counter-terrorism policy, it is important to ask why the ‘suspect communities’ idea has become such a popular discourse. This can be attributed to the mostly liberal ethical concerns that dominate understandings of counter-terrorism policy. There is also a broader context in which the concept of ‘Islamophobia’, defined as an irrational prejudice towards Muslims, is seen as motivating policy decisions and causing tensions in the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. By taking a governmentality approach, this chapter strives to show how governing has many guises and that seemingly illiberal state policies such as the use of control orders or detention without charge are part of a wider logic of governing. Liberal ideas do not stand in opposition to the use of sovereign power, but are complicit in these supposedly illiberal practices. So far, insufficient attention has been paid to this aspect of the debate.

**Governmentality meets critical cartography: mapping governable spaces**

Heath-Kelly argues that ‘conceptualisations of the radicalisation discourse as pre-emptive governance are currently absent’ (Heath-Kelly, 2012: 71). Barring her particular contribution, there has been little analysis of the way in which the logic of counter-radicalisation has created certain practices of governing. This chapter is also interested in looking at the instances in which policy attempts to ‘induce specific types of conduct from British Muslim communities’ (Heath-Kelly, 2013: 396). In tying practices of counter-radicalisation much more closely with attempts to foster the conduct of Muslim conduct, this chapter attempts to move away from looking at the use of sovereign powers. This is not to argue that
sovereignty and discipline are not important aspects of counter-terrorism; indeed, they are vital. However, it would be limiting to consider the relationship between government and Muslims as one that is purely negative and in which the powers that be impose upon their subjects. The advantage of looking at governmentality as a form of power that produces the ‘conduct of conduct’ is that another side to governing Muslims is thrown into sharp relief. Foucault states that, ‘What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse’ (Foucault, 1980: 118–119). The Muslim community is not just a site in which sovereign power can be exercised. It is also where the conduct of Muslims is fostered. To this end, this next section looks at how the mapping of the Muslim community forms a part of the governing effort and how this exercise was also the outcome of engagement with prominent Muslim groups and figures.

Making maps: an exercise in inscribing webs of power-knowledge

What does it mean to map the Muslim community? This idea refers to the practices of mapping that are an integral part of the way in which governing occurs. The Muslim community does not exist independently of how it is thought about and acted towards and upon. Mapping the Muslim community is about attending to the concrete practices that have brought this object of pre-emptive governing into being. Before delving into what these are, it is essential to foreground the links between mapping a space and governing. Recalling Foucault, it is important to bear in mind that ‘[s]pace is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power’ (Foucault, 1991: 255). This is something that has been explored by geographers such as Stuart Elden (2013) and Jeremy Crampton and John Krygier (2006). In fact, the emergence of ‘critical cartography’ as a distinct sub-field has enabled a deeper engagement with the geographical aspects of Foucault’s work. A map or the practices of mapping are recognised as being as contingent upon relations of power as any other kind of knowledge production. Crampton and Krygier have noted that this knowledge has a particular significance: ‘Spatial knowledge was ordered and the world made knowable through specific calculations of space for reasons of government and management’ (Crampton and Krygier, 2006: 20). This understanding is reflected in Foucault’s preoccupation with the architecture and form of prisons, asylums and hospitals, which is testament to the central importance of how space is conceived, how it is organised and to what ends. He posits that the ‘police’ rationality of governing led to the construction of cities that ‘can be characterized as a project to create a system of regulation of the general conduct of individuals whereby everything would be controlled to the point of self-sustenance, without the need for intervention’ (Foucault, 1991: 241). It is abundantly clear that the creation of particular types of space is integral in producing particular types of subjects. Critical cartography develops many of these themes and adds a theoretical depth to the spatial aspects of governing (Crampton and Krygier,
N. Ali

2006). For instance, instead of thinking about maps as accurate representations of the world, they have been reconceptualised as inscribing particular knowledge claims and power structures. J. B. Harley contends that a map is simply another mode of representation to be thought of as ‘a cultural text’. By accepting the textuality of maps, we are able to embrace a number of different ‘interpretive possibilities’ (Harley, 1989: 7–8).

These cartographic debates are especially pertinent to this chapter because the prevailing debates regarding maps serve a two-fold purpose. First, they illustrate the inherently political nature of maps. The controversy surrounding the Peters Projection, in which the creator of this new map Arno Peters claimed that the dominant Mercator map was distorted by a Eurocentric perspective, is evidence of this. Second, mapping as a practice is not simply a neutral way of plotting physical terrain but one historically bound up in plotting peoples and worldviews. Harley illustrates how cartography was historically the preserve of intellectual and religious elites. Later, the making of maps became much more closely linked with the state and state formation. He notes:

Mapping soon becomes the business of the state: cartography is early nationalized. The state guards its knowledge carefully…. In all these cases maps are linked to what Foucault called the exercise of ‘juridical power’. The map becomes ‘juridical territory’: it facilitates surveillance and control. (Harley, 1989: 12)

There is a distinct historical shift towards mapping as part of a governing problematic. Demonstrably in the formation of the modern liberal state, the map is part of the exercise of disciplinary power, bringing areas under sovereign control. More specifically, maps were created to make the population governable by making them knowable. Nevertheless, the history of mapping is not simply a history of domination but simultaneously one of the production of political spaces.

**Governing through space**

The constitution of space is distinctly interesting from a liberal governmentality perspective. If the exercise of power is limited by the liberal critique of the ‘police’ rationality, then how is the government of geographically scattered populations possible if not through the sovereign exercise of power? John Allen argues that governing, or exercising authority, necessitates presence and proximity (Allen, 2003). How is this to be achieved? Foucault argues: ‘From the moment that one is to manipulate a society … one must take into account what it is. It becomes necessary to reflect upon it, upon its specific characteristics, its constants, its variables’ (Foucault, 1991: 242). The practices of mapping can be viewed as a way of ‘seeing’ in which populations are rendered visible, classifiable and hence governable. What is ‘seen’ and ‘mapped’ is fundamentally political insofar as these techniques are constitutive of communities and subject to
the gaze of would-be governors. This perspective also provides a sense of how power is decentred. To achieve presence and proximity in the exercise of authority – or to ‘govern at a distance’ – requires the capacity for these efforts to extend across distances. This is why schools, prisons and hospitals take on a distinctly important role in Foucault’s analyses; these are the places in which, and through which, relations of power are established and nurtured. Similarly, a community of people can be conceived as a space in which certain relations of power are established and subjectivities constituted.

To illustrate these abstract theoretical issues, consider Charles Booth’s 1899 Poverty Map of London. It is a useful case study in demonstrating the wider rationale of governing through mapping. There is an interesting historical context to this particular map; it was produced at a time of ‘worsening poverty and unemployment’ and ‘growing public concern with the situation of the poor as well as the threat to social order’ (Vaughan, 2007: 232). Laura Vaughan argues that poverty was very much seen as a problem of morality in which the less well-off were seen to be a social threat due to ‘high concentrations of poverty’ that ‘risked both the moral and physical contamination by the casual poor’ (ibid.: 233). The mapping effort emerges from this context of concern regarding the presence of the indolent poor. The significance of the Booth map was that it compared the wealthy area of Soho to the impoverished East End. Booth, a philanthropist, worked in conjunction with various cartographers and interested parties to investigate levels of poverty in London. He was unhappy with the statistical data available at the time and decided to start his own project. Data was collected from the School Board Visitors who had knowledge of families with children. Rates of employment, earnings and outgoings were all colour-coded onto map poverty, street by street. In the aftermath of the publication of the map, Booth managed to shift the debate on poverty as a problem of morality to a problem of social and political structures, which saw a raft of reforms aimed at managing the problem of poverty. These techniques of mapping and knowing are indispensable to governing. The Booth Poverty Map provides a clear illustration of how the problem of governing poverty emerged and it was rendered intelligible and manageable through mapping practices.

Similarly, the problem of governing Muslims emerged within the War on Terror and from the threat of so-called ‘home-grown terrorism’. Although discourses on radicalisation attributed the causes of terrorism to structural problems, these were to be found within the Muslim community. An immediate problem presented itself: there was no Muslim community, or at least not one that could be subject to governmental reform. There was a Pakistani community, a Bangladeshi community and a Somali community, but not a homogeneous Muslim community as imagined by policy makers. One had to be created and this need coincided with pressure from various Muslim groups for greater group recognition. Therefore, it will be argued that the production of the Muslim community was reliant upon an asymmetrical relationship between state and Muslim subjects. These actors and institutions came together to produce what we now call the Muslim community and it is in this space and through this space that the
conduct of conduct of Muslims subjects was to be fostered. Creating self-contained spaces of subjects, such as religious or ethnic communities, allows for governing at a distance. It is also a very concrete demonstration of the principles of relational governing. It is not the case that subjects simply submit to practices of control or surveillance once they are fixed as a community. Margo Huxley points out that the governmentality literature has a tendency to ‘privilege social control over the productive elements’ of governing techniques that seek to produce self-regulating liberal subjects (Huxley, 2007: 193). It would be a mistake to regard the Muslim community as something that is only subject to policies of control, because it is simultaneously the space from which subjects form counter-demands for their own wellbeing and prosperity. Indeed, it would be better to ask what the conditions of possibility are for the Muslim community to become an object of policy through a dialogical spatial fixation.

**Mapping the Muslim community**

The primary way of mapping anything in the UK has been through statistical information. To this end, censuses are important in understanding how mapping the Muslim community has been enabled. Matthew Hannah argues that a census creates a ‘statistically constituted national social body’ (Hannah, 2000: 44). Therefore, this next section will look at how the censuses of 2001 and 2011 have been the sources from which information about Muslims has been extracted and utilised to form the ‘Muslim community’. The use of statistical information has enabled various discourses on the ‘causes’ of radicalisation, not only by the government but also by Muslim groups, to further the case for Muslim-specific policies and funding to counter-radicalisation.

**The Preventing Violent Extremism agenda**

In the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings, the Labour government launched a series of working groups under the banner ‘Working together to Prevent Violent Extremism’. The resulting report from the initiative states:

> The Government’s initiative, to engage and consult with the Muslim communities, was widely welcomed. . . . There was a general consensus that an analysis of what had happened on those two days in July needed to take place, together with a thorough investigation into how and why those terrible events had occurred. What motivated the four July 7 bombers to kill and maim innocent civilians? What deep underlying issues needed to be addressed?

(HM Government, 2005: 2)

Why did the incumbent government choose to engage with Muslims rather than simply administer punitive measures to eliminate the terrorist threat? The reasons are diverse. The Labour party has a long and established history of
working alongside ethnic minority groups and has been perceived as promoting their interests through legislation such as the Race Relations Act (Messina, 1998). The party has strong ties with ‘community leaders’ and has indeed been criticised for relying on these structures to deliver them the community vote. Furthermore, the characterisation of the problem of radicalisation was partly framed in terms of ‘personal alienation or community disadvantage, arising from socio-economic factors such as discrimination, social exclusion, and lack of opportunity’ (HM Government, 2006: 10). By rooting the causes of radicalisation firmly within the structures of the Muslim community, the answer to the problem of political violence would come in changing these. By engaging with Muslims, the government could come to understand the problems they face and help them be better citizens. In light of the Labour government’s relationship with ethnic minorities, these pre-existing structures, such as working with community leaders, were put to use.

One of these partners was the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB). The MCB was founded in 1997 following advice received by various Muslim groups in the aftermath of protests against Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*. Archer argues that this was an important event in mobilising Britain’s ethnic minorities along religious lines. He states that former Home Secretary Michael Howard ‘requested that the different and often competing Muslim groups who wished to talk to the government form an umbrella organization, and in 1997 the MCB was the result’ (2009: 335). The birth of the MCB was thus located within growing ‘Muslim’ activism but also the result of a direct request from the Home Secretary to make the process of governing easier. On the surface, this appears to be a practical response to the needs of a particular constituency, but it also underlines the way in which government approaches its job. The creation of an umbrella organisation to represent UK Muslims highlights the way in which government seeks to ‘fix’ Muslim subjects so they can be acted upon as a collective. As a result of initiating and presiding over this process of fixing, the MCB acquired a privileged position in representing Muslims in the UK prior to 9/11 and 7/7.

After 9/11, the MCB’s importance was thrown into sharp relief because it was considered to be a government ‘partner’ that would deliver the Muslim constituency’s support for the military operations conducted under the remit of the War on Terror. In exchange, the MCB was promised easy access to the Prime Minister Tony Blair to ‘express concerns’ and make counter-demands of their own (Birt, 2005: 94). The basis of these demands was that the MCB, which has approximately 500 affiliated Muslim organisations, claimed to be speaking on behalf of the ‘Muslim community’ (Peach, 2005). However, the MCB and the government encountered a serious epistemic and institutional challenge when discussing the nature of the Muslim communities’ problems. Minority groups were categorised and governed through ethnic and racial labels, which meant there was a lack of available information specific to Muslims. Ceri Peach considers how the conceptualisation of minorities has changed over time:
British popular discourse has shifted from seeing minorities as an undifferentiated mass to discerning differences within and between Afro and Asian origins; and, within Asians, to differences between Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, and thence between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Religion has emerged as a major social signifier.

(Peach, 2005: 18)

The *Preventing Extremism Together* report reflects on the problem of existing categories and knowledge. The report states that, ‘Currently no accurate data exists for Muslim communities and this needs to be urgently addressed’ (HM Government, 2005: 48). One of the recommendations of the report was to ‘[i]mprove data collection on Muslim communities through faith monitoring’ (ibid.: 6). Therefore, it is not just popular discourses on minorities that have shifted, as Peach argues, but also the way in which they are conceptualised and governed. Counter-radicalisation practices have been central to this. As a result, the MCB has been in a continual drive to gather information on Muslims, and was one of the primary groups to petition for the religious question to be put on the 2001 census (Hussain, 2008). Its subsequent inclusion on the 2001 and 2011 censuses has been hugely controversial but seen by religious groups, especially the MCB, as a vital part of constructing the case for the Muslim community. It is unsurprising that these recommendations were placed in the report given that some of its authors were members of the MCB or closely aligned with it (HM Government, 2005).

**Profiling Muslims**

Serena Hussain’s book *Muslims on the Map: A National Survey of Social Trends in Britain* is a prime example of this attempt to gather information on Muslims (Hussain, 2008). She situates her research as part of the drive to make Muslim communities more visible. Although she acknowledges that ‘identities are in flux’ and that ‘categories essentially create boundaries as well as legitimising communities’, the author does not view this as problematic for her study (Hussain, 2008: xix). This can be attributed to her methodological approach in which she argues that religion can be conceived of as another useful variable through which to understand disadvantages facing minority communities (ibid.). This approach is problematic because it assumes, despite recognising the problem of ‘fixing’ an identity, that such a thing is both possible and desirable. She argues it is possible because there is a ‘common thread’ that can be found within Muslim communities, therefore making them real and identifiable (2008: xvi). It is desirable because only in understanding the distinctly Islamophobic nature of the disadvantage faced by these minorities can the situation change. The Muslim community is assumed to have an essence that can be better understood through the use of statistical information. There is no recognition of the fact that, in speaking of the Muslim community, she is also complicit in its production. Her position as someone who
has ‘received regular inquiries from Muslim organisations, central and local government, the media and academics for statistics and up to date analysis on Muslims’ makes her role more politically significant (Hussain, 2008: vii). She states, ‘This project was initiated by the Muslim Council of Britain, the main Muslim umbrella organisation and pressure group in the United Kingdom’ (ibid.). The importance of statistics and the role of the MCB in gathering them is further illustrated by Hussain’s analysis of the census religion question: ‘By gaining a category in the most comprehensive data collection exercise in the country, Muslims have been firmly put on the map and officially recognised as a community in their own right’ (Hussain, 2008: xiii). The problematisation of existing knowledge about minorities is seen as the primary impetus for having increased statistical information on religious minorities. The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (FNSEM), conducted by the Policy Studies Institute, is illustrative of this shortcoming regarding data on minorities. The survey was designed with the idea of the ‘ethnic minority’ very much in mind. It describes ethnicity as ‘a multi-facet phenomenon based on physical appearance, subjective identification, cultural and religious affiliation, stereotyping and social exclusion’ (Madood, 1997: 13). Religion is one of many identity markers within the ‘ethnic’ conceptualisation of identity, but certainly not the primary one.

Emerging from this mapping of minority communities are discernible differences between minority groups. Muhammad Anwar notes that ‘all socio-economic indicators show that Muslims, particularly those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, are one of the most deprived groups in Britain’ (Anwar, 2005: 31). Statistical information is used to paint a picture of a disadvantaged religious minority group that underachieves in schools, suffers high levels of unemployment and lives in poor housing. By making these patterns of disadvantage visible through mapping, they could be used by Muslims to make political demands:

Many practical examples of how data census will assist in the provision of better services for the Muslim community were provided. In the area of education, the demographic distribution of Muslims will help indicate where provisions should be made for voluntary and single sex schools and where proper recognition should be given to the needs of faith groups in maintained schools.

(Hussain, 2008: 22)

The notion that Muslims face an especially difficult challenge in improving their material conditions has been prevalent for some time. In 1996, the Runnymede Trust – a race equality think-tank – set up the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. The resulting report claimed that it was a ‘major problem … that most researchers and public agencies do not, at present, collect and publish data on religious affiliation or sense of religious identity’ (Runnymede Trust, 1997: 32). Consequently, the report uses information on Pakistani and
Bangladeshi communities to act as ‘proxies’ for the wider Muslim community. It makes a series of recommendations based on the inequalities suffered by Muslims in terms of healthcare, employment, prisons, social housing and political participation. These recommendations call for a greater awareness of the prejudice faced by Muslims in various sectors and for policies that promote ‘good practice’ towards them. Moreover, the 1997 report and the follow-up, *Islamophobia: Issues, Challenges and Action*, maintain a specific concern with gathering data on religious minorities so their situation can be closely monitored (Runnymede Trust, 2004).

Many of these iniquitous conditions faced by the Muslim community also appear in the *Preventing Violent Extremism* report, which argues that ‘British Muslims have suffered significantly from various forms of alienation, discrimination, harassment and violence rooted in misinformed and stereotyped representations and its adherents – the irrational phenomenon we have to come to know as Islamophobia’ (HM Government, 2005: 23). These are highlighted by the authors of the report, who go on to make a series of recommendations on how to prevent radicalisation by attending to these structural problems. There is a significant amount of continuity between these recommendations and those found in pre-9/11 studies on British Muslims. For example, there is a concerted effort to challenge the ideas underpinning Islamophobia by having more ‘faithful’ representations of Islam taught in schools. The report argues, ‘An improved representation and acknowledgement of Islam and its positive contribution to European civilisation … will enhance self-esteem and help reduce substantially the alienation and imbalance that the present lack of such education breeds’ (ibid.).

It is important to note the context in which these recommendations are made and the aims they have. This recommendation is not just aimed at informing non-Muslims about Islam but also about informing Muslims about Islam to prevent radicalisation. CONTEST also makes the claim that ‘terrorists’ version of history and recent events is highly negative and partial in its interpretation of past interactions between Islam and the West’ (HM Government, 2006: 10). Echoing these sentiments, the *Preventing Violent Extremism* report states, ‘We believe that the roots of the problem are multi-faceted, leading to some young people believing that there is a conflict between being British and Muslim’ (HM Government, 2005: 81). They are telling Muslims that this is not the case. This is reflective of the way in which the Muslim community has become co-opted into the fight against terrorism. This understanding of the mutual relationship between government and Muslims in fighting terrorism is at the heart of the *Preventing Violent Extremism* agenda.

**Conclusions**

What the Preventing Violent Extremism programme shows is a convergence of various agendas of governing. Prior to the events of 9/11 and 7/7, some Muslim organisations were pushing for greater recognition and group rights.
They did this by claiming to represent their constituency through the attainment of knowledge about it. Following the start of the War on Terror, the attempt to acquire knowledge about Muslims acquired a new urgency. The government also needed to re-understand its minority communities because their existing approach of ethnic, racial and national categorisation had failed to fully capture and understand the experience of these subjects. Existing knowledge had failed to anticipate the actions of the bombers or to cater to their needs as citizens. Therefore, in concert with the MCB, the government was able to map the Muslim community complete with its own characteristic traits and historical narrative. What was at stake for the government and the MCB was the ability to govern the conduct of British Muslims. In being able to say ‘this is what a Muslim is’ lay the key to being able to understand, represent and therefore act on this constituency. This relational exchange was an attempt to formalise the notion of a coherent community, but was fundamentally an exercise in governing. CONTEST states, ‘The working groups produced 64 recommendations: 27 for the Government to lead on, while the remainder were for communities themselves to work on, supported by the government where necessary’ (HM Government, 2009: 15). Whoever gets to decide what constitutes the Muslim community also decides how they should conduct themselves.

What this analysis illustrates is how dynamic the production of the conduct of conduct is. Governmentality is not the imposition of a way of life onto subjects. In this case, it is demonstrably much more than that; it is a relational exchange between Muslims and government on the very idea of what means to be a Muslim. However, the relationship is one characterised by its power asymmetry. This is reflected in the fact that the government chose to engage with some Muslim partners and not others. The fortunes of the MCB declined sharply once it became clear that that they could not ‘deliver’ the support of the Muslim community for UK foreign policy. From the perspective of the government, one of the primary factors in recognising the Muslim community was to co-opt it into the fight against terrorism. This was to be achieved by engaging the community in the usual democratic and participatory mechanisms so as to standardise and discipline their behaviour. However, simply because government now talked of and acted upon the Muslim community, this did not mean their attempts at ‘moderating’ their attitudes and enlisting them as supporters for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq would be successful. Faz Hakim, the former race relations advisor to Tony Blair’s government, ‘who had been instrumental in promoting the MCB as well as recommending Muslims for the House of Lords, now admitted that this strategy of incorporation had failed’ (Birt, 2005: 97). The MCB had failed in its partnership with the government because it was unable to conduct Muslims to support military action and to help to prevent radicalisation. This meant that government had also failed to a large degree to enlist the support of the Muslim community for its role in the War on Terror. Muslims were seemingly resisting this widespread effort to be conducted in this particular way.
Notes

1 Roshonara Choudhry was responsible for the stabbing of her local MP Stephen Timms over his support for the war in Iraq.

2 Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, otherwise known as the ‘Underpants Bomber’, attempted to detonate explosives concealed in his underwear on a Northwest Airlines flight to Detroit in the USA.

References


9  Policed multiculturalism?

The impact of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization and the ‘end’ of multiculturalism

Francesco Ragazzi

Introduction

If we follow the recent declarations of several European leaders, multiculturalism is supposedly ‘dead’ on the continent. Between the mobility of the labour force and the promotion of plural citizenship on the one hand, and states’ need to assert their sovereignty against home-grown terrorism on the other, the latter has prevailed – or so we are told (Bleich, 2003; Joppke, 2004; Turner, 2007). The February 2011 speech of UK Prime Minister David Cameron illustrated this position rather forcefully:

Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream. We’ve failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong…. This all leaves some young Muslims feeling rootless. And the search for something to belong to and something to believe in can lead them to this extremist ideology.

(Cameron, 2011)

Cameron’s speech on the ‘failure’ of multiculturalism echoed an earlier speech by Germany’s Prime Minister Angela Merkel along similar lines, presented in the midst of a national debate on the issue in October 2010 (BBC, 2010).

The current debate in the UK can be analysed as the climax of a discussion that emerged earlier on – notably after the riots of Oldham, Bradford and Leeds in 2001 – but that intensified after the London bombings of July 2005. After decades of celebrating pluralism and transnational identities, most of the states that officially or de facto embraced ‘multiculturalism’ as a policy of incorporating migrants and minorities – notably, the UK, the Netherlands and Canada – have recently, publicly, announced policy changes. Many others are following suit. Immigrants wishing to acquire citizenship increasingly need to demonstrate their ability to ‘integrate’, primarily through citizenship and language tests (Bleich, 2003; van Houdt, Suvarierol and Schinkel, 2011; Joppke, 2004; Turner, 2007). Practices of transnationalism, including travels ‘back home’, are increasingly monitored as indicators of potential ‘radicalization’ by security services
across Europe (Cameron, 2011; Trevidic, 2011). This shift in the discourse is consistently justified in simple terms: security. The threat of ‘home-grown terrorism’ and ‘Islamic extremism’ is directly attributed to the fact that ‘we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream’ (Cameron, 2011). Merkel’s speech on the failure of ‘living side-by-side’ (BBC, 2010) and Sarkozy’s attacks on the excessive ‘concern about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him’ (France 24, 2011) echoed Cameron’s position.

For Cameron and others, the solution to this purported causal connection between multiculturalism and the risk of home-grown terrorism is a return to a status quo ante, defined as ‘muscular liberalism’. At stake here is the promotion of a conception of homogeneity as security – the very principle which was attributed to the ‘French model’ and publicly derided throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s as intolerant and backwards (Shadid and Van Koningsveld, 2005). While much could be said about the validity of this vision (in particular the fact that it was never enacted in French practices of security) and the usefulness of comparing alleged ‘models’ of integration (Schain, 2004), behind this discourse is the idea that in order to guarantee the security of its citizens, the state needs to stop acknowledging differences.

In this context, since the processes of ‘violent radicalization’ of sections of ‘Muslim communities’ are at the heart of the critical discourse against multiculturalism, one would expect the counter-terrorist policies to work towards the newly established political objectives of ‘integration’ or even ‘assimilation’ of Muslim populations in Europe. Yet, is this really the case, and what is the impact of counter-radicalization policies on practices of multiculturalism?

The main arguments of this chapter can be summarized as follows. First, I argue that, rather than promoting assimilation or other forms of ethnic homogenization, counter-radicalization policies produce and reinforce a division of society into discrete ethno-religious groups. As a large literature has now shown, everyday practices of state identification and their related technologies are crucial for establishing and maintaining social identities (Caplan and Torpey, 2001; Noiriel, 1996; Crettiez and Piazza, 2006). As such, it can be hypothesized that, by routinely operating along ethnic and religious lines, counter-radicalization techniques and technologies reinforce them.

The second argument engages more specifically with the ways in which this divisive effect ought to be conceptualized. It first presents the dominant perception that counter-terrorism policing produces ‘suspect communities’. It then engages with the shortcomings of the suspect community thesis and introduces instead the concept of ‘policed multiculturalism’, understood as the recognition and management of diversity from a security perspective. While the concept of suspect communities presents a static understanding of the effect of counter-radicalization policies, the notion of policed multiculturalism offers a relational and dynamic approach to counter-radicalization policies as a specific way of governing.² The chapter argues indeed that counter-radicalization policies should
above all be understood as a form of management of diversity, which removes fundamental questions about pluralism from political debate in the name of security. This chapter therefore is less concerned with normative questions surrounding multiculturalism, the subject of extensive literature (among many others see Kymlicka, 1996; Taylor and Gutmann, 1994), than with multiculturalism as a set of states’ practices related to the governance of immigrants and ethnic minorities as well as their modes of ethno-religious differences (Kastoryano, 2009; Akan, 2009).

The suspect community thesis

‘Hard’ and ‘soft’ approaches to counter-terrorism

Before discussing the impact of different practices of counter-terrorist policing, it is helpful to situate specific policing techniques within the broader ‘philosophies’ to which they belong. There are certainly more refined ways to discriminate between them, but two distinctions are useful for the purposes of the chapter. The first is between what could be termed ‘reactive’ and ‘preventive’ counter-terrorism. Reactive counter-terrorism focuses on bringing to justice individuals who are suspected of committing criminal offences in regards to the law. Preventive counter-terrorism, the opposite, is geared towards anticipating and preventing the terrorism act from happening. This second type of counter-terrorism is based on the assumption that if the policing net is cast wide enough, information concerning potential plots or activities can be transmitted to the authorities before the act is committed.

Preventive counter-terrorism can itself be divided into two forms of policing. A first approach, which has been defined as ‘hard’, implies the use of the full coercive powers of the state in obtaining information and monitoring the community through all necessary means. A ‘softer’ form relies instead on the idea of a possible collaboration between security forces and communities, and envisages counter-terrorism as the result of consensual collaboration between equal partners. In this second form, trust and mutual respect should ensure a permanent ‘flow of information’ that eventually allows the prevention of acts of terrorism. In the remainder of this section, I discuss the effects of the hard approach to counter-terrorism, while the soft approach is discussed in a subsequent section.

The impact of the hard approach

As in other areas of contemporary policing, the focus of counter-terrorism has been much less on the criminal justice aims of bringing individuals to trial, and much more on pre-emption and disruption. Several provisions of the anti-terror legislation have been pinpointed as constructing a suspect community (among many others see Kymlicka, 1996; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Taylor and
Gutmann, 1994). I discuss here the most salient techniques of hard policing in terms of counter-terrorism, and their effects.

The first technique is ‘stop-and-search powers’. In the UK, Sections 44 (1–2) and 45 of the Terrorism Act (TA) 2000 give police stop-and-search powers within entire geographical areas without the need for reasonable suspicion linked to a specific individual (HM Government, 2000). A similar set of measures was introduced in the Netherlands in 2001, and reinforced in 2004, where the prosecutor can designate an entire area to be submitted to stop-and-search operations for a renewable 12 hours (Boer, 2007, p. 290; van der Leun and van der Woude, 2011, p. 449). In France, the stop-and-search provisions have long been codified in Articles 78.1 to 78.6 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (van der Leun and van der Woude, 2011; Jobard and Lévy, 2009, p. 42), although outside of counter-terrorism concerns. In the UK, the use of these powers increased dramatically after 9/11; the numbers searched grew from 6,400 to 10,200 between the 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 period and reached 50,000 in 2005/2006. A very small proportion (never greater than 1.4 per cent) of all searches actually led to arrests. More importantly, however, black and Asian people are three times more likely to be searched than whites under these powers (Ward, 2010; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009, p. 655). In France, a recent study showed similarly worrying results, where black people are six times more likely to be stopped than whites while the figure is 7.6 for Arabs (Jobard and Lévy, 2009, p. 10).

In addition to stop and search, discretionary powers extended pre-charge and pre-trial detention for suspects of terrorism. In the UK, the period of pre-charge detention has been progressively extended, from 48 hours to seven days by the TA 2000, to 28 days by the TA 2006, and has been brought back to 14 days in 2011 (HM Government, 2003; 2001; 2000). The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (ATCSA) 2001 introduced the power to freeze assets for a period of 28 days (Part II), and the most controversial powers (although since revoked) for the Home Secretary to detain indefinitely non-British citizens suspected of terrorism, even if there was no possibility of deportation (HM Government, 2001). In France, derogatory legal provisions allow a pre-charge detention of 96 hours for terrorism charges (Bonelli, 2008). In the Netherlands, there is no derogatory pre-charge period for acts of terrorism, but the 2007 ‘Act on Expanding the Scope for Investigating and Prosecuting Terrorist Crimes’ extended the pre-trial detention from the regular 90 days to up to two years (Talsma and Ouchan, 2007, p. 6).

The ethnically uneven application of the stop-and-search powers and the detentions without charge has prompted some commentators to speak of ‘racial and ethnic profiling’ (Open Justice Initiative and ENAR, 2009; Harris, 2006). In the UK, this idea was not only promoted by activist organizations, but was partly justified by the government itself. Indeed, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears stated:

The fact that at the moment the threat is most likely to come from those people associated with an extreme form of Islam, all falsely hiding behind
Islam, if you like, in terms of justifying their activities, inevitably means that some of our counter-terrorist powers will be disproportionately experienced by people in the Muslim community. That is the reality of the situation.

(Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009, p. 658)

Profiling, it could be argued, is found in other specific techniques of policing within the preventive (or pre-emptive framework). The logic is one of statistical anticipation and safeguarding against an unknown threat, the belief being that counter-terrorism can identify individuals who might present a security threat on the basis of characteristics (skin colour, age, gender, address, diet) or behaviour (bank transactions, travel, etc.) (Harcourt, 2007).

The suspect community thesis

While some analysts have recorded positive responses to hard counter-terrorism on the side of concerned Muslims – for example, Klausen quotes Maulana Mohammad Reza, executive secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, expressing support for parts of the UK’s agenda (Klausen, 2009, p. 409) – the utility of profiling involving (perceived) race, ethnicity or national origin is widely questioned in combating terrorism (Pickering, McCulloch and Wright-Neville, 2008, p. 98). Not only that, but many point out that hard methods often backfire due to the relational (mimetic) character of violence. Although there is no contemporary equivalent, it is for example well known that the brutal reaction of the British forces in Northern Ireland provided the grounds for the radicalization of the movement and the empowerment of the IRA (Campbell and Connelly, 2003; Hillyard, 1993; Lambert, 2008).

More importantly, many scholars have argued that the effect of these policies has been in fundamental opposition to Cameron’s ideal of a muscular liberal society in which all groups and communities feel integrated and treated on an equal footing. Body-Gendrot (2008), for example, has argued that Muslims as a faith community are considered a group ‘at risk’. Many others have pointed out how Islam is being constructed as ‘the other’ in institutional practices, and therefore how police practices generate Muslim alienation and undermine ‘social cohesion’ – the new policy objective in Britain after the Community Cohesion report by Ted Cantle (Great Britain Home Office and Cantle, 2001; Spalek, 2010, p. 796; Pickering, McCulloch and Wright-Neville, 2008, p. 98; Nickels, Thomas and Hickman, 2009; McGovern and Tobin, 2010). Most representative of this analysis is the suspect community thesis, which draws on the seminal work of Hillyard (1993) regarding the effects of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) 1974 in Britain. For Hillyard, a certain number of aspects of the PTA led to the designation of the Irish as a suspect community: the broad scope of offences created under the PTA, the focused and imbalanced targeting of a single community, the use of police powers to gather intelligence and information, and the creation of a double penal system,
marking a distinction between ‘ordinary decent criminals’, subjected to the rule of law, and ‘terrorists’, subjected to an exceptionalist treatment (Hillyard, 1993; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011). Pantazis and Pemberton argue that Muslims have replaced the Irish as the suspect community in contemporary Britain. For them, a suspect community is

a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being ‘problematic’. Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of suspected wrong doing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, accent, dress, political ideology or any combination of these factors may serve to delineate the sub-group.

(Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009, p. 649)

Given its increasing popularity among scholars and activists, the notion of a suspect community is worth analysing in more detail. For Pantazis and Pemberton, the notion of ‘suspect’ is not merely a legal category, but a broader ‘sociological study of people’s experiences of the law rather than enquiry on the application and misapplication of legal rules’ (2009, p. 648). They envisage suspicion in the form of a pyramid in which, at the top, a minority of formal suspects is targeted by control orders and surveillance; in the middle, informal suspects are targeted by stop-and-search orders; and finally, at the bottom, the ‘whole Muslim community’ is targeted by media, political and civil society discourses (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2011, p. 1057). The suspect community thesis has not, however, gone unchallenged. Steven Greer has argued that the concept is invalid by deploying a mix of utilitarian arguments, scientific positivism and definitional gerrymandering (Greer, 2010). My goal here is not to rehearse exhaustively the debate between Pantazis, Pemberton and Greer, but rather to draw on some important points of this discussion to address the question of the impact of counter-terrorist policies on multiculturalism (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009, 2011; Greer, 2010).

Hillyard, Pantazis and Pemberton oscillate between two meanings of the word ‘community’. At times they mean a group of people that is perceived as being suspect, but they also imply that suspicion generates a social identity, such that the group formed by these policies can be called a community. While the first meaning of ‘community’ implies that the reality of the group exists only in the categories of security professionals, in the second meaning the practices of the police are considered to be altering or reinforcing ethnocultural boundaries. Greer clearly attacked the authors on the second meaning of the term, pointing out that (1) there had been no scientific measure of this phenomenon, (2) there was no way of determining the impact of counter-terrorist policies among a wide variety of other factors (media, work relations, broader societal labelling and categorization, etc.) and (3) rather confusingly, it would be in any case absurd to assume that the Muslim community is a single group, because it is well known that there are a variety of Muslim communities. At the bottom of the suspect
community thesis, whether accepted or refuted, is therefore the broader idea that state practices have social effects on the definition – and one could argue on the production – of social identities or communities, an idea that is supported by a large section of constructivist and critical literature (Loader, 1997, 2006; Noiriel and Borne, 1992).

Entering this debate would surely involve a discussion concerning the exact meaning of social construction, and the extent to which the process of construction of identity can be observed, measured, analysed and even quantified as a solidified ‘thing’. It would therefore open up a series of theoretical and methodological problems that in many ways are often avoided by both constructivists and positivists. Pantazis and Pemberton focus on state programmes or policies and assume that their effects happen through state practices (Caplan and Torpey, 2001; Brubaker, 2007). Yet in so doing, they are not too far from positivists who tend to take these identities for granted (for example Kaufmann, 2005; Posen, 1993) in that the suspect community seems to be a crystalized end product of counter-terrorism. What Pantazis and Pemberton do not address are a certain number of questions that are key to a constructivist approach, namely: Who are the spokespersons of this suspect community? Is there one suspect community, or are there many? What exactly are its borders? And, most importantly, are these borders fixed and accepted as they are drawn by the security agencies? What seems to be missing from the suspect community thesis, therefore, is an analysis of the practices of resistance, and the concrete ways through which social agents develop forms of struggle and counter-narratives, and the modalities through which solidarities are henceforth organized. It somehow takes for granted the appropriation by the suspect community of its new identity without contestation.

A second issue with the suspect community thesis lies in the relation between counter-terrorism and multiculturalism more broadly. While Pantazis and Pemberton do not directly tackle the relation with multiculturalism in the UK, and the different declensions of ‘social cohesion’, ‘community cohesion’ and other broad mantras of the management of diversity (contrary to a burgeoning literature – see for example Thomas, 2012; Kassimeris and Jackson, 2012; Alam and Husband, 2011), the suspect community appears first and foremost as collateral damage: an unintended consequence of the conflict between security and multicultural citizenship in a diverse society such as the UK’s, as exemplified in Hazel Blears’ speech (Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009, p. 658). What is left out, therefore, is the way in which, especially after the July 2005 bombings, the management of diversity and citizenship has been a central part of counter-terrorism policies, as McGhee has demonstrated (McGhee, 2008).

The policed multiculturalism thesis

Rather than taking the production of ‘suspect’, ‘alienated’ or ‘polarized’ communities as an unintended consequence of counter-terrorism policing, the thesis I put forward in the second section of this chapter is the following:
the production and reproduction of distinct communities, far from being an unintended consequence of modern forms of counter-terrorism, is located at the very core of its modus operandi. Instead of working through homogenizing practices targeting the individual or affecting society as a whole, I argue that the current impact of counter-radicalization policies is best described as ‘policed multiculturalism’: practices of the production and management of diversity that remove fundamental questions about pluralism and citizenship from the political debate, casting them instead in the expert, technical and de-politicized language of security. The analysis of counter-radicalization policies’ impact on citizenship in Europe should therefore not take for granted the production of alienation and exclusion; it should instead spell out the ways in which institutionalized mechanisms of differentiation and de-politicization are articulated.

The policed multiculturalism thesis is grounded in a broader analysis of the effects of the introduction of neo-liberal principles on contemporary practices of government and citizenship. Nikolas Rose (1996), drawing on the work of Jacques Donzelot (1994) among others, highlighted 15 years ago the turn to community as a central modality of government. For Rose, this turn is a substitute for territorialized societies, ‘the sum of the bonds and relations between individuals and events … within a more or less bounded territory governed by its own laws’ as the central objects of government (Rose, 1996, p. 328). This change is underpinned not only by modifications in the structure of advanced capitalist economies (which transcends national borders and sets up a large movement of capital and labour, disrupting traditional redistributive logics), but also by a new set of ethical relations between the citizen and the state. The neo-liberal citizen is neither left to his or her own devices, nor made irresponsible by a supposedly paternalistic welfare state. The neo-liberal citizen is instead a deserving and self-governed individual, cast as emotionally bound to a circumscribed ‘network’ of other individuals: the community (Rose, 1996, p. 334). It is in this context that the enactment of policed multiculturalism has to be understood.

A relational and dynamic conceptualization of ‘impact’

In the field of counter-terrorism, the government ‘through community’ has mostly developed through the concept of community policing. While scholars working through the notion of suspect communities highlight important elements of exceptional state practices, they fail to analyse the way in which counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization in particular operate through more benign yet perhaps more pervasive means.

Community policing can be understood as a soft approach to policing and has a much broader scope than counter-terrorism (Klausen, 2009, p. 408; Skogan, 2003; Kappeler and Gaines, 2009; Dölling, 1993; Bonnet, 2011). It is understood as the deployment of ‘soft power’ initiatives, generally with the help of non-police organizations, to ‘build confidence and a spirit of cooperation among
[c]ommunity policing relies upon organizational decentralization and a reo-
rientation of patrol in order to facilitate two-way communication between
police and the public. . . . It also implies a commitment to helping neighbour-
hoods solve crime problems on their own, through community organizations
and crime prevention programmes.

(Skogan and Hartnett, 1999, p. 5; quoted in Spalek, 2010, p. 793)

Community policing is perceived to offer a certain number of advantages
in comparison to hard policing in the context of counter-terrorism. First, it
allows the generation of a flow of information – a ‘community intelligence
feed’ – that stems from the good relations the police entertain with various
community members (Pickering et al., 2008, p. 93). It is therefore expected
that the reporting of clues such as suspicious behaviour, the arrival of
unknown persons in a neighbourhood and the activities of religious youths –
all types of information susceptible to lead to the disruption of a terrorist act
– will quickly ‘trickle up’ from the community to the police. Second, com-
munity members are involved in the very tasks of counter-terrorism. This is
supposed to give minorities a sense of entitlement and partnership in the fight
against terrorism, rather than being only on the receiving end of repressive
measures. Finally, ‘should the bomb go off, the community knows that the
police will forcefully clamp down on any backlash from non-Muslims’ (Paris,
2007, p. 14). The idea is therefore to disrupt the ‘circle of tacit support’ that
terrorists may find in the community, while empowering communities and
involving them in the management of what is presented ultimately as ‘their
problem’ (Klausen, 2009, p. 408).

Community policing has been introduced with a renewed force in the fight
against terrorism after the London bombings of July 2005. The focus on com-
munities has been particularly important in the UK’s Prevent strand of the
CONTEST strategy developed since 2006, and updated in 2009 and 2011 (HM
Government, 2006; 2009; 2011). The Netherlands developed a similar ‘broad-
based’ approach to radicalization emphasizing the local level (The National
Coordinator for Counterterrorism NCTb, 2007). The appeal of the softer
approach in combatting the ‘roots’ of terrorism can also be seen beyond Europe.
The partnership approach is gaining momentum in different cities of the United
States, in particular through the Partnership for Prevention initiative in which the
Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and Customs Enforce-
ment (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as well as Arab, Sikh
and Muslim organizations’ representatives meet regularly on matters of counter-
terrorism (Ramirez, Cohen O’Connell and Zafar, 2004). Similar initiatives exist
in Australia (Babacan and Tahir, 2011; Grabosky, 2009; Pickering et al., 2007)
and are anticipated in the recent Canadian and US strategies to counter terrorism
(Government of Canada, 2011; White House, 2011).
The impact of the soft approach

The concept of policed multiculturalism allows for an analysis of the impact of counter-radicalization along two main lines: the production of a self-managed community and the de-politicizing effects of the language of partnership. In practice, they are often intermeshed.

Despite the ostensibly more benign character of community policing, the language of cooperation and equality between communities and law enforcement masks the unequal relation of power that exists between the designated spokespersons of the communities and the state, which ultimately holds the power to arrest and detain. This does not imply that community policing is a smokescreen deployed only to obtain the ‘feed of information’ – although a recent review of the Prevent strategy for the House of Commons points to the fact that this might be the case (Great Britain Parliament House of Commons, 2010). One should not take the state or police forces as a single entity. In fact, on many occasions hard policing operations have come to interfere with – if not cause considerable damage to – these partnerships of community policing. However, community-policing-based counter-terrorism impinges much more pervasively on the way in which multiculturalism functions as institutionalized government of diversity.

First, in order to function, a community policing approach to counter-terrorism needs to distinguish between the legitimate, authorized spokespersons for the community, and others. This has raised important debates in the UK: should the government deal with leaders who are considered to be extremists, for instance? Here, the UK government has in several instances taken the stance of promoting an acceptable, moderate Islam, a phenomenon that can be found in other countries of Europe, including the supposedly most anti-multicultural France (Akan, 2009). For example, one of the most pre-eminent initiatives has been the Radical Middle Way, an initiative launched in the aftermath of the London bombings, gathering self-defined moderate imams and religious authorities in order to ‘promote a mainstream, moderate understanding of Islam that young people can relate to’ (The Radical Middle Way, n.d.)7 The promotion of an ‘Islam de France’ (French Islam) and the unprecedented constitution of a Muslim representative body via the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM) marks a similar approach in France (Akan, 2009; Godard and Taussig, 2009). Government initiatives may play treacherously with the double legitimacy (towards the government and towards their constituencies) that community representatives have to balance. In the UK, this has been the case in the government’s Preventing Extremism Together initiative of 2005, aimed at involving representatives in the drafting of recommendations to the government.6 When many of the initiatives were not picked up by the government, some representatives felt betrayed (McGhee, 2008, p. 73). As one participant argued, ‘they took personal risks by actively persuading the skeptics among them to participate in Preventing Extremism Together, and, following the hollowness of the exercise, many feel they wasted their hard-earned legitimacy and have undermined their standing within their communities’ (ibid.).
To be fair, some initiatives have taken the opposite direction, and have involved partnering with more radical representatives of political Islam in the UK. Famously publicized by the Metropolitan-Police-officer-turned-scholar Robert Lambert, the Metropolitan Contact Unit (MCU) has claimed some successes based on building relationships with leaders who were considered off-limits by other agencies, in particular amongst the Salafi and Sufi groups (Lambert, 2008; Pantucci, 2010). The re-taking of the Brixton Mosque from the cleric Mustafa Kamel Mustafa (Abu Hamza) under the auspices of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch is considered one of the MCU’s biggest successes (Lambert, 2011, p. 135). Yet the initiative has not gone without encountering resistance – from the government, from sections of the policing field (notably the UK Association of Chief Police Officers) and from authorized spokespersons for the communities. In fact, the MCU initiative and its results were largely ignored by an unsupportive Labour government’s launch of the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda in 2006 (Lambert, 2011, p. 256). Similarly, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain Muhammad Abdul Bari, despite his sympathy for the project, felt that his organization had been sidelined by the ‘small-chip rather than a blue-chip strategy’ of the MCU, which preferred to partner with local associations rather than national representative bodies (Klausen, 2009, pp. 415–416). However, more often than not, the government has tended to promote a ‘moderate’ group of leaders with whom to establish its partnerships, a move that has had the effect of encouraging groups previously considered ‘radical’ to change their description to ‘moderate’ (Klausen, 2009, p. 416). In addition to this positive selection is the negative selection of acceptable spokespersons. Indeed, Section 3 of the TA 2000 allows the Home Secretary to proscribe organizations considered to be ‘concerned in terrorism’ (HM Government, 2000). 47 groups were banned under the TA 2000 and 2006. These are added to the 14 banned in Northern Ireland, adding up to a total of 61 in 2011 (Great Britain Home Office, 2011, p. 1).

In sum, community policing promotes a partnership approach, but while community leaders are necessarily constantly engaged in (at least) a double process of legitimation, in front of their constituencies and in front of the government, state authorities do not have to justify their choices, can choose whom they will partner with, and can set the terms of the partnership. In the process, community partnerships also establish an official hierarchy of acceptable and non-acceptable forms of politics and political Islam, directly influencing ‘the recognition of group difference within the public sphere of law, policies, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity’ (Modood, 2007, p. 2). As Klausen shows, what are acceptable, moderate positions for some security forces might be in absolute contradiction with what other sectors of the government are trying to achieve. For example, the Gender Equality Unit engaged in a campaign against sexist and homophobic discrimination, while the Communities and Local Government Unit applauded the contribution to integration of some conservative groups that actively condemn homosexuality (Klausen, 2009, p. 416). More importantly, what ought to be publicly debated political choices are considerably de-politicized by the purportedly technical nature of the partnerships.
A second important way in which community-based counter-terrorism directly affects the management of diversity is through what Jarvis and Lister call the ‘stakeholder approach’, namely the appeal to communities to be active in the fight against terrorism (2012, p. 174). That communities rather than ‘society’ are called upon to collaborate in the fight against terrorism has much to do with European states’ history of colonialism, of the institutionalization of ethnic and religious differences, as well as with policy choices made in the 1970s and 1980s in order to politically and institutionally accommodate the wave of post-colonial migrants (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2012; Modood, 2007). However, as Rose (1999) shows, community as a specifically active, engaged and responsibilized subject of its own government is a relatively new invention.

In the UK, Driver and Martell locate the emergence of this new active communitarianism in New Labour’s response both to Thatcher’s neo-liberal individualism and the old Marxist and social-democratic tradition of thinking in ‘social’ terms (Driver and Martell, 1997, p. 27). Schinkel, van Houdt and Suvarierol find a similar trend of ‘neo-liberal communitarianism’ in France and the Netherlands (Schinkel and van Houdt, 2010; van Houdt et al., 2011). Grounded in the principles of neo-liberal management, it promotes free choice, social and political entrepreneurship, performance and a moral duty to assist the government in providing services to the public – including security from terrorist attacks – in the most efficient way (Rose, 1999; Donzelot, 1994).

In the context of countering radicalization, the British government clearly stated that it could not tackle the issue alone. Even in 2006, communities were therefore not only asked to contribute to the effort, but were strongly encouraged to do so, with the threat of foregoing their governmental financial support. A system of financial sticks and carrots was therefore established to ensure that ‘targets’ were met, defined as ‘taking a proactive leadership role in tackling extremism and defending our shared values’ (McGhee, 2008, p. 78). The involvement of the community does not limit itself to the community representatives. The UK and the US provide good examples of how community-based counter-radicalization aims at involving actively all citizens, among other things as ‘information foragers and siphons’ as Jarvis and Lister put it (2012, p. 177). The American Highway Watch scheme, which was set up by the US Department of Homeland Security and asked 300,000 members of the American Trucking Association to ‘recognize and report suspicious activity’, is one example among many. Schemes intended for university and high-school professors to report potentially suspicious behaviour are probably the ones pushing the logic to its limit, including one in which ‘school pupils become counter-terrorism officers for the day’, as Greater Manchester Police explained about one such exercise (quoted in Jarvis and Lister, 2012, p. 179). Measures of community surveillance therefore force citizens (and Muslim citizens in particular) to become pro-active in producing the information flow expected by community policing. In this sense, community-policing-based counter-terrorism infiltrates not only different aspects of policing, but becomes diffused throughout interpersonal relations, neighbourhood friendships and ethnic
or religious solidarities. While Jarvis and Lister put forward the idea that counter-terrorism is ‘diffused throughout the social’ (Jarvis and Lister, 2012, p. 180), I would argue that it is more precisely diffused through and reinforces communities. In other words, policed multiculturalism reinforces the production and reproduction of communities in order to function; it is not individuals who are targeted, nor society as a whole, but a specific section of the population defined in ethnic and religious terms. This is a community, represented by spokespersons who have the duty to self-regulate the ones in whose name they are speaking and to provide, among other things, one crucial service to the state: security.

Conclusion

The relationship between multiculturalism and counter-terrorism is more complex than politicians would have us believe. Despite discourses about the promotion of a muscular liberalism, a cursory analysis of the practices of security professionals points in the opposite direction. It is indubitable that hard and soft modalities of policing terrorism and radicalization have generated a sense of alienation and disconnect between certain sections of European societies and their governments. What remains a point of discussion is the way in which this impact ought to be analysed. This chapter has presented the suspect community argument as one of the most diffused working hypotheses for scholars working in the fields of security and citizenship studies. While the notion of a suspect community might be conceptually and politically effective for providing an instant snapshot of the effects of counter-terrorism policies, it also risks obscuring the specific mechanisms through which the policies operate, presenting suspect communities as an unintended consequence – a negative externality, in economic parlance – of counter-terrorism in Europe. I have suggested an alternative, the notion of policed multiculturalism, to highlight the fact that the production of community and the reproduction of difference is at the very core of the counter-terrorist apparatus, at least in the UK, the Netherlands and, to a certain extent, France. Regardless of political rhetoric, which might appeal to mythical ideals of culturally homogeneous and territorially bound societies, contemporary practices of policing are deeply enmeshed in neo-liberal practices of government. And our contemporary societies do not operate anymore through the highly homogenizing institutions born in the early industrialization period, such as the factory or the army, analysed by Michel Foucault (1975) as disciplinary societies. Advanced liberal or neo-liberal citizenship functions primarily through the empowerment of autonomous networks of individuals, categorized by their specific relation to the state (in this case because of their relation to the Muslim faith) and represented by spokespersons with whom the governments can establish ‘partnerships’. What the notion sheds light on, therefore, is the specific mechanisms through which community is produced (empowerment, self-reliance, responsibility) and the de-politicizing effects of the language of partnership. Presented by some as an alternative to the negative
effects of counter-terrorism’s hard policing, soft policing plays on the key notion of ‘winning hearts and minds’. In so doing, it deeply impacts – through fear, intelligence and expertise – the very political decisions about who belongs to the community and how diversity should be legitimately organized.

Notes
1 This chapter is part of a broader project entitled ‘Security and the politics of belonging: Homegrown terrorism, counter-radicalization and the ‘end’ of multiculturalism?’, supported by Marie-Curie Career Integration Grant No. 294152 and NWO Veni Grant No. 451–11–018.
2 To date, a few authors have approached counter-terrorism as a specific modality of government of sections of the population defined as ‘risky’ or ‘at risk’. See, among others, Heath-Kelly (2012, 2013), Jarvis and Lister (2012), Lindekilde (2012) and Mythen (2012).
4 Crimes of Terrorism Act (Wet Terroristische Misdrijven).
5 Between 2001 and 2003, sixteen foreign nationals were detained at Belmarsh. In March 2005, following a Law Lords ruling against the law, the measure was replaced with ‘control orders’ in the new Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) 2005. These have subsequently been replaced by less constraining Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures (TPIMs).
6 The goal was to bring together representatives to provide recommendations to the government in seven areas: tackling extremism and radicalization; engaging with young people; regional and local initiatives; engaging with women; imam training and the role of mosques; meeting Muslim educational needs and security; policing and tackling Islamophobia (Great Britain Home Office, 2005).
7 As well as the other participants of the ESRC-funded project ‘Cultures of Repression’. See www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-181–25–0017/read page (accessed 7 March 2012).

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Policing multiculturalism?


Policing multiculturalism?


Introduction

This chapter examines the UK government’s revised Prevent strategy of 2011 and its conceptualisation of the internet. The chapter begins by outlining the predominant terrorist uses of the internet with a view to showing how heavily integrated the functions of terrorist groups have become with cyberspace. Having established terrorists’ dependency on the internet, it then provides a critique of Prevent’s conceptualisation of the internet, making use of key concepts such as ‘vulnerable people’ and ‘radicalisation’ to argue that Prevent’s understanding of this space as a facilitator of terrorist activity and one of secondary importance fails to correctly reflect the relationship between terrorism and the internet. The subsequent section builds upon this to identify the pertinence of these issues in relation to counter-terrorism measures online, arguing that the online counter-radicalisation strategy outlined in Prevent may be at risk of intensifying the threat of online radicalisation as well as undermining ‘British’ values considered central to preventing radicalisation. This chapter thus argues that the government and Prevent have simultaneously undervalued the internet’s role in radicalisation and enacted an online strategy that compounds the construction of suspect communities through a discourse of vulnerable people that disproportionately focuses on young British Muslims.

Terrorist use of the internet

One of this chapter’s central arguments is that Prevent fails to acknowledge the internet as a standalone space for terrorist activity, instead conceptualising it as a space that merely acts as the catalyst or the facilitator for their actions in physical space. Differentiating between online and offline terrorist activities in this manner is questionable and, by viewing terrorist activity on the internet as of secondary concern, the government, we argue, fails to recognise the extent to which terrorists can utilise cyberspace to achieve their objectives. However, before proceeding to explore this argument, it is first important to provide an overview of how terrorists have made use of cyberspace to date and to establish why online terrorist activity is deserving of equal concern.
Terrorist organisations operate clandestinely, trying to evade the attention of international security and intelligence services while simultaneously attempting to achieve their own objectives. Recruiting new members, planning attacks, financing operations – all of these actions put their members at risk of infiltration, surveillance, arrest, and interrogation. Due to this reality, it is perhaps unsurprising that terrorists were quick to make use of a space that provides anonymity and is notoriously difficult to police due to its multi-jurisdictional nature.

Terrorists make use of the internet to carry out various functions, most prominently: spreading their propaganda, financing their operations, recruiting new members, and providing training.

**Propaganda**

Using the internet to spread propaganda is one of the most common functions exploited by terrorists online. Whereas previously these organisations would have had to get the attention of the mainstream media, something that even if achievable would not guarantee an accurately conveyed message, the internet is different as it provides terrorists with an ‘unprecedented level of direct control over the content of their message(s). . . [It] . . . considerably extends their ability to shape how different target audiences perceive them and to manipulate not only their own image, but also the image of their enemies’ (Conway 2006: 12).

For this reason, many terrorist organisations have a professionally designed and purpose-built website that is regularly updated and maintained. Recurring features of these websites include the organisation’s goals, up-to-date news, and notable past activities. It is often the case that these websites are presented in a manner that is appealing to Western audiences, accentuating aspects such as freedom of expression and moral legitimacy while playing down or ignoring their indiscriminate violence (Tsfati and Weimann 2002: 321–322).

As the internet has penetrated more and more of the globe, terrorist organisations have dedicated greater resources to online propaganda, creating a variety of different types of content and occupying new spaces online to help improve the dissemination of their message. Online publications, videos, video games, and even official Twitter feeds (Gertz 2013) all exist with the sole purpose of drawing in various demographics that may be sympathetic to the particular terrorist organisation’s cause.

**Finance**

The internet has also created an attractive new means for terrorist organisations to raise funds. Financing terrorism online has taken many forms, from simply providing the means for donation anonymously and securely right through to cyber-crime. Terrorists have shown ingenuity in this regard, such as disguising their cause with a fraudulent front, duping unsuspecting individuals to fund them under the pretence of giving money to humanitarian causes (Jacobson 2010: 356).
They have also shown a willingness to develop more proactive and aggressive methods. Infamous ‘cyber-jihadist’ Younis Tsouli, along with Waseem Mughal and Tariq Al-Daour, managed to steal details for 37,000 credit cards, including these cards’ security codes, through a combination of phishing attacks and illegal purchasing via online black markets (Corera 2008).

Groups like al-Qaeda have flexible, extensive, and deep financial networks that allow them to continue their operations (Basile 2004: 171). The internet has greatly diversified these networks and thus has become an integral aspect in their continued existence.

**Recruitment**

Recruiting new members to a terrorist organisation is always fraught with danger regardless of whether it is conducted in cyberspace or physical space. However, recruiting new members in a traditional manner involves physically approaching and then vetting individuals believed to be sympathisers. These actions risk being reported to the security services and open the organisation up to infiltration. However, the internet changes the recruitment process, allowing not only for terrorist organisations to tap into a ‘global pool of potential recruits’ (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2012: 5) but also for the risky business of recruitment to be conducted behind the anonymity granted through cyberspace. Of course, this does not remove the risk entirely, but it certainly provides greater security for both the recruiter and potential recruit especially if, for example, they are operating in different legal jurisdictions.

Online recruitment is a distinct phenomenon that does not simply equate to an additional recruiting platform but a space from which new strategies can be developed and executed. Coupled with online propaganda, potentially sympathetic individuals can be drawn in and then directed towards actual members of the organisation to whom they can speak personally using secure communication software or on message boards, in forums, and in chat rooms (Weimann 2005). These spaces provide a vital human link between the terrorist and potential terrorists that avoids the need for interaction beyond cyberspace: ‘It is the forums, not the images of the passive websites, which are crucial in the process of radicalization. People change their minds through discussion with friends, not by simply reading impersonal stories’ (Sageman 2008: 116).

**Training**

A final and perhaps less obvious use of the internet for terrorists is to provide training for those who are willing to commit terrorist acts. Terrorist organisations make available a multitude of different instructional materials in various formats including manuals, periodicals, and videos. Along with primary material on how to make bombs and use light firearms, many of the instructional videos...
make use of ‘borrowed’ material that was not made by terrorists or for a terrorist audience but nevertheless serves the groups’ purposes. Thus, we see all manner of different training materials covering everything from bombs and light firearms through to how to fly a plane using a flight simulator and guidance on how to properly extract ricin (Stenersen 2008: 220).

This overview of how terrorists use the internet is not exhaustive; however, it does provide a sense of how heavily terrorist functions are now integrated online. Instead of the internet being a useful sideshow for the terrorist main event, the internet provides terrorist organisations with new space within which they can reach a far greater number of people and operate globally and with greater security and anonymity. Of course, terrorist activity online can act as a secondary facilitator, but the danger is that this characterisation ignores the standalone role this space also provides. Why is it that terrorist activity in cyberspace is only considered relevant by Prevent in relation to that in physical space when the extent and effectiveness to which terrorists have utilised the internet can already be seen?

Prevent and the internet

The above overview of terrorist use of the internet demonstrates that cyberspace is used by terrorists in a number of key ways. In the main, the Prevent strategy does show an awareness of the types of activities that terrorists are engaged in online. However, this chapter argues that Prevent has fundamentally misunderstood the major, rather than peripheral, role that the internet plays in shaping terrorist groups and their capabilities today. When considering the above terrorist uses of the internet, Prevent approaches such activities as peripheral to both the same and other activities carried out offline. The remainder of this chapter makes two primary arguments. First, we argue that use of the internet is not merely an extension of terrorist activities that occur in physical space but rather a crucial part of a terrorist group’s strategy that has transformed the way terrorists operate today. Ultimately, one of the main challenges that hinders Prevent from implementing successful counter-terrorist measures online, we argue, is that it misunderstands online activity as peripheral in the same way that schools and hospitals can be seen as having just one part to play in the radicalisation or recruitment process. Second, we go on to argue that the government’s current strategy online may actually be at risk of exacerbating the threat of online radicalisation.

Misunderstanding the role of the internet

Prevent’s understanding of the internet is shaped by the same concepts that are used throughout the strategy and that have already been problematised in other chapters of this volume, including radicalisation, vulnerable people, and suspect communities. Radicalisation is described in the Prevent strategy as ‘the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to
terrorism’ (Home Office 2011: 107). It is seen as being driven by ‘an ideology which sanctions the use of violence; by propagandists for that ideology here and overseas; and by the personal vulnerabilities and specific local factors, which for a range of reasons make that ideology seem both attractive and compelling’ (Home Office 2011: 5). Thus, in the case of al-Qaeda, which is the strategy’s primary focus, radicalisation is approached as:

being driven by: an ideology that sets Muslim against non-Muslim, highlights the alleged oppression of the global Muslim community and which both obliges and legitimises violence in its own defence; a network of influential propagandists for terrorism, in this country and elsewhere, making extensive use of the Internet in particular; and by specific personal vulnerabilities and local factors which make the ideology seem both attractive and compelling.

(Home Office 2011: 18)

The role of radicalisation in the UK’s Prevent strategy has already been criticised within academic literature. Most important to this discussion is the criticism that the concept of radicalisation has a performative factor – enabling preventive counter-terrorism measures that have little or no empirical underpinning. Heath-Kelly notes that radicalisation ‘enables policy-making and scholarly communities to render a linear narrative around the production of terrorism, making it accessible to problem-solving approaches’ (Heath-Kelly 2013: 396). This facilitation of generic responses, rather than actions based on ‘real-life’ scenarios, is one of the main limitations we identify with Prevent’s understanding of the internet. The problem-solving approach is even more challenging when Prevent attempts to describe terrorist activity online. The strategy lists a number of key priority spaces such as schools, hospitals, prisons, charities, and the internet in which individuals may be ‘vulnerable’ to radicalisation (Home Office 2011: 8). ‘Vulnerable people’ are defined in Prevent as those most susceptible to the processes of radicalisation (Home Office 2011: 108). These people are identified by a number of UK statutory organisations including the police, social workers, faith leaders, and teachers (Home Office 2011: 57). Supporting vulnerable people is Objective Two of the strategy, the premise of which is that radicalisation is ‘a process not an event’ (Home Office 2011: 56). The Channel programme (Home Office 2012), which involves the referral of vulnerable people for intervention by particular local authorities and institutions, employs a series of indicators that include:

expressed support for violence and terrorism; possession of violent extremist literature; attempts to access or contribute to violent extremist websites; possession of material regarding weapons and/or explosives; and possession of literature regarding military training, skills and techniques. Under a section entitled ‘personal history’ the guidance proposes that attention be
paid to: claims of involvement in organisations; espousing violent extremist ideology; claims of attendance at training camps; and claims of involvement in combat or violent activity on behalf of extremist groups.

(Home Office 2011: 57)

Once vulnerable people are identified and referred to the Channel programme, Prevent’s goal is to intervene to stop the individual becoming radicalised, with particular organisations, groups, and individuals involved in this process (Home Office 2012: 20).

This notion of vulnerable people is especially interesting in terms of whom, how, and why some individuals are seen as more vulnerable than others, and, crucially for this chapter, how people are or become vulnerable online. Are people vulnerable solely because they are online, or are the same people who are vulnerable in physical space also vulnerable online because of the demographics already identified by the Channel Referral programme – demographics that, despite previous revisions, are still being presented as uniquely vulnerable to radicalisation (de Goede and Simon 2013; Mythen et al. 2009; Cesari 2008)? Prevent favours the latter answer; however, we argue that this is refutable.

Most commentators argue that thinking about potential terrorists as vulnerable people is illogical and case studies can be identified (such as the bombers involved in the 2005 UK attack) in which the perpetrators appear self-motivated, determined, and intent on violence (Richards 2011: 150). However, this chapter is not concerned with debating whether or not radicalisation or vulnerable people are helpful concepts in countering terrorism but rather Prevent’s understanding of radicalisation and vulnerable people in the online environment and whether this reflects real terrorist activity and people’s experiences online.

Our first criticism is that, while the internet is identified as a key priority area by Prevent, and a space in which vulnerable people are at risk of radicalisation, it is seen as peripheral to the radicalisation process as a whole. Where Prevent acknowledges the internet’s role in radicalisation, it focuses on the use of visual material (Home Office 2011: 46), communication with like-minded individuals, recruitment, and the dissemination of messages and narratives (Home Office 2011: 77):

Communications technology has transformed the capability of terrorist groups. The Internet in particular has not only facilitated attack planning but also the distribution of terrorist propaganda and the process of radicalisation and recruitment. Ideological challenge has to use all the communications tools which have been adopted by terrorists and where necessary also intervene in the virtual space to curtail illegal activities.

(Home Office 2011: 44)

As already mentioned, Prevent also constructs the internet as a place in which ‘vulnerable’ users are at ‘risk’ (Home Office 2011: 79). The expansion of the notion of vulnerable people into virtual spaces within Prevent, while unsurprising,
is illuminating. The strategy states that ‘although the Internet has a crucial role to play, the activity of influential and often charismatic propagandists who have covert face-to-face contact with vulnerable people is a key part of the radicalisation process’ (Home Office 2011: 47). While it is evident that radicalisation does and has tended to occur through these kinds of scenarios, Prevent’s use of this evidence to suggest that the internet is solely an extension of this process is flawed. Throughout Prevent, the internet is depicted as a space in which the radicalisation process is positively reinforced; however, it is not a space, according to the strategy, in which radicalisation occurs independently. This notion that the internet solely offers another space to facilitate offline activity (e.g. further steps in the radicalisation process) can be highlighted throughout Prevent, where it argues, for example, that the internet plays a key role in ‘reinforcing ideology and facilitating activity’ (Home Office 2011: 21) and that the internet has changed the way terrorists communicate in a manner that encourages interaction that can lead to the facilitation of recruitment (Home Office 2011: 77).

This understanding of the internet’s role in the radicalisation process may reflect an over-simplification as to how the globalised nature of the internet can create networks and online communities that exist independently and are more complex in nature than relationships in physical space. The internet can be and is used by terrorists in the way that is described by the strategy, but this is not the end of its uses. Beyond this, the internet allows terrorists to completely reinvent themselves for a number of purposes: anonymity, character creation, and to give the illusion of grandeur in order to recruit, e.g. in terms of prophecy, life-fulfilment, and so forth. If we retain this concept of vulnerable people (although remaining aware of the issues surrounding its usage), then we can see that vulnerable people may be even more vulnerable online due to the above further possibilities that it provides. Likewise, perhaps cyberspace makes all people more vulnerable for the same reasons – the internet is a space in which everyone can interact, unlike physical space in which boundaries present themselves, whether they be geographical, social, or otherwise.

The case of Younis Tsouli (known as ‘Irhabi 007’) exemplifies how cyberspace allows for complete character creation, as well as anonymity, which made his presence in the terrorist community infamous. As Al-Lami argues in relation to this case:

Thanks to technology and the Internet, the networking and connection of like-minded people has never been easier. The Internet has made it possible for an individual to be ‘radicalised’ in the solitude of his/her own bedroom through linking and interacting with virtual friends and groups, electronically exchanging militant material, and even acquiring the know-how for terrorist operations through manuals available online.

(2009: 6)

Two important details come out of the Irhabi 007 case. First, it is clear that his interaction with like-minded peers was in the majority conducted via the internet
and the rest of the time through other communication technologies, but most importantly not through face-to-face interaction. For example, when he attracted the attention of Abu Maysara, al-Qaeda’s media representative in Iraq, it was through an online interaction that Maysara delivered his recognition and praise: “In the name of Allah I am please[d] with your presence, my beloved brother. May Allah protect you,” he wrote (Maher 2007: 145). This allowed Irhabi 007 to become and construct himself as the terrorist that he wanted to be, with an elusive name and with the comfort of anonymity: ‘the Internet now allows anyone who wishes to become a terrorist to become one anywhere, anytime’ (Atran 2008: 8). Second, his online presence allowed him not only to broadcast and publicise his views but also to share his technical skills with his ‘online community’ – a community that he was able to market himself to as someone knowledgeable and unstoppable. It would have been near impossible for Younis Tsouli to construct himself as Irhabi 007 or to influence such a following had his actions and self-creation been restricted to physical space. Scott Atran’s article ‘Who Becomes a Terrorist Today’ demonstrates the importance of role models and characters in construction and development of terrorists. He notes the new comic book series ‘of 99 Muslim superheroes, modelled on Marvel comics, which is rapidly catching the imagination of legions of Muslim youth in South-east Asia and now the Middle East’ (Atran 2008: 9). Irhabi 007 was able to create such a character for himself. It is debatable whether his influence would have been on such a large scale, with an impact that continued to be felt in subsequent years (Maher 2007: 145), had he not created such an identity online, but rather in physical space.

Other examples also show how the internet works as more than just a secondary part of the radicalisation process and in some cases may be the only way an individual can be exposed to other potential terrorists or like-minded individuals. In July 2006, five men were convicted for terrorist offences in the UK, one of whom, Mohammed Irfan Raja, was found to have been recruited and radicalised solely through the use of the internet. Raja was introduced to the other four men convicted at the time through an internet chatroom (Maher 2007: 144). Another example is extremist preacher Omar Bakri Mohammed, whose case shows how the internet accelerates recruitment and networking not as an alternative to recruiting in physical space but as a key strategy that allows recruitment on a much larger scale and is a preferred method of terrorist groups and leaders. Omar Bakri continually used the internet to broadcast his views to followers in Lebanon using the internet software Paltalk that offered ‘private chat forums, where access can be restricted’ (Maher 2007: 146). In these cases, the availability of material online not only acted as an enabler for recruitment and radicalisation but, as Al-Lami argues, ‘has made it possible for individuals to become familiar with and influenced by radical ideologies without even socialising with radical groups’, which they would have been unable to do offline (2009: 7).

By continuing to conceptualise the internet as a secondary feature in the activities of a terrorist, Prevent demonstrates a misunderstanding of the relationship between the internet and the capabilities of groups such as al-Qaeda today. For
example, in regards to radicalisation, Prevent’s primary focus is still on mosques, schools, hospitals, and other formal institutions as the spaces in which vulnerable people become radicalised. However, it is not solely mosques but ‘basements, backrooms, bookshops, youth clubs, the internet, and other informal institutions’ in which radicalisation is taking place (Hoffmann et al. 2007: 13) – spaces in which Prevent programmes such as Channel cannot easily identify vulnerable people. Furthermore, by seeing the internet as a space similar to mosques and so on, Prevent misunderstands the differences and further challenges posed by the presence of terrorist groups in an online environment.

This approach to the role of the internet, we argue, also provides evidence to support a broader criticism that Prevent ignores the diverse situations and cases of so-called ‘home-grown’ terrorists in a globalised world. The recent attack on Lee Rigby – a soldier in Woolwich, London – gives further evidence for the increasing significance of the internet in the creation of ‘home-grown’ terrorists. While the motives behind the attack are still under investigation, security services have already suggested that the internet could be responsible for the radicalisation of the two attackers. Speaking after the attack, Baroness Neville-Jones, a former Security Minister, commented, ‘What we shouldn’t forget is that even if there is nobody else behind it one of the things which runs through the scene at the moment is the inspiration that comes from internet hate preaching and jihadist rhetoric and this is a very, very serious problem now’ (Dominiczak 2013). While the concept of radicalisation is not our main focus, this case does provide signs that the phenomenon of ‘home-grown’ terrorism may already be changing. On this basis, we argue that Prevent should take notice of the increasing use of different spaces that are changing the identity and activity of terrorists and of which the internet is the fundamental example.

**Counter-productive counter-radicalisation?**

Having explained why this chapter is critical of the peripheral role Prevent sees the internet as playing in terrorist activity, more broadly, this section now shifts its attention to consider the manner in which Prevent has sought to tackle online radicalisation. This section argues that, further to the criticisms already discussed regarding Prevent’s overall approach to the internet, the strategies it adopts to deal with the internet in respect of radicalisation appear contradictory to the tone that the strategy strikes throughout. The strategies laid out in Prevent are not covered in great detail but appear to promote the straightforward approach of censoring harmful material online. This chapter now goes on to expand upon why these strategies may undermine the overarching goals of Prevent and make preventive counter-terrorism online more, rather than less, difficult.

A distinct body of criticism levelled against the original Prevent strategy concerned the perception that it compounded an approach to Muslim communities as particularly ‘suspect’ (Home Office 2011: 20, 31, 40) and ‘vulnerable’ (Home Office 2011: 43), viewing terrorism as specifically a Muslim problem (Home Office 2011: 40). However, it would be remiss to suggest that Prevent completely ignores
accusations of spying on particular communities, although it finds ‘no evidence of this’ (Home Office 2011: 23). An appreciation of this issue is observable in the reference to a 2009 survey linking alienation with violence, according to which ‘support for violence is associated with a lack of trust in democratic government and with an aspiration to defend Muslims when they appear to be under attack or unjustly treated’ (Home Office 2011: 18). Reassuring the reader that the government is aware of the negative effects that misrepresentation can have, Prevent provides examples of catalysts for such alienation in the form of the disproportionate use of ‘stop-and-search’ powers against Muslims and perceived Islamophobia within the media (Home Office 2011: 18).

This early acknowledgement clearly sets out the government’s position that it is counter-productive for counter-terrorism to engage in discursive practices of any kind that demonise or alienate the Muslim community in the UK. The government must tread a fine line and the authors are at pains to highlight that ‘the ideology of extremism and terrorism is the problem: legitimate religious belief is emphatically not’ (Home Office 2011: 1). However, despite denouncing Islamophobia and the stereotyping of Muslims, Prevent does not shy away from designating al-Qaeda as the biggest threat to the UK (Home Office 2011: 25). It is because of this that Prevent is focused throughout on the Muslim community and in particular on how young Muslim men can be prevented from becoming radicalised through interventions in particular spaces.

Alongside our previous criticism that Prevent seems to focus on formal institutions rather than informal networks, what is striking is that Prevent’s remit to intervene in particular public spaces is very broad. The government believes that training and awareness related to Prevent is required for a number of things including undergraduate students taking health qualifications (Home Office 2011: 84), the training of imams at mosques (Home Office 2011: 29), prayer sessions in prisons (Home Office 2011: 87), and training border police to spot ‘signs of radicalisation’ (Home Office 2011: 49). They are all, according to the strategy, spaces in which potentially vulnerable people can be spotted before or during the radicalisation process and prevented from becoming terrorists.

It is difficult to determine when this qualified ‘focus’ becomes ‘suspicion’. Some of these spaces are either purely ‘Muslim spaces’ (e.g. mosques) or they are looked at almost exclusively in relation to the Muslim community (e.g. prisons). Apart from a scattering of mentions of far-right extremists (Home Office 2011: 14) and Northern Irish terrorism (Home Office 2011: 15), the strategy is heavily focused on al-Qaeda. Despite the government’s attempts to detach Islamic extremism from mainstream Islam, the imbalance of references to Muslims within the strategy could lead to the interpretation that Muslim communities in Britain are uniquely suspicious, as are the particular spaces they occupy.

This chapter has already argued that Prevent, despite claiming the internet is a vital space for countering terrorism, is mistaken in its belief that the internet only serves a secondary function in terrorist activities. Prevent does acknowledge that cyberspace plays a role in enabling extremist ideology to reach a much
larger audience, allowing for further interaction between peers, and facilitating
the recruitment process (Home Office 2011: 77).

To hinder terrorists conducting these activities online, the government has
called for ‘Internet specific measures’ that are necessary to address the internet’s
role in radicalisation specifically (Home Office 2011: 77). These measures
consist of:

• limiting access to harmful content online in specific sectors or premises
  (notably schools, public libraries, and other public buildings);
• ensuring that action is taken to try and remove unlawful and harmful content
  from the internet.

(Home Office 2011: 77)

However, these specific strategies may be counter-productive in preventing
online radicalisation by extending the concept of suspect communities and
spaces into cyberspace and, in so doing, unduly targeting young Muslims online
in a similar vein to botched counter-terrorism operations in physical space (BBC
News 2011), as well as undermining the very values that Prevent argues are vital
to challenging the extremist narrative.

By Prevent’s own admission, support for violent extremism in the UK is ‘sig-
nificantly greater amongst young people’ (Home Office 2011: 13). Research
cited in the document points to young Muslim men in particular as being the
most supportive of violent extremism (Home Office 2011: 19). These findings
correlate with the strategy’s interest in intervention within schools and with
young offenders as well as its endorsement of internet-specific programmes
aimed at ‘promoting the filtering out of harmful content; law enforcement action;
educating users; working with the industry and international engagement’ in
schools, mosques, youth centres, and community groups (Home Office 2011:
79). These spaces are viewed as effective ‘catch-all’ spaces in which ‘vulnerable
young people’ who are at risk of radicalisation can be prevented from going
down this path (Home Office 2011: 76).

The targeting of internet-specific programmes at young people in the physical
spaces they frequently occupy is premised on the understanding that the over-
whelming majority of youth use the internet regularly. The Office for National
Statistics states that 99 per cent of 16–24 year olds have used the internet, with
men being more likely to have used the internet than women (Office for National
Statistics 2013: 3–4). This data would appear to validate Prevent’s evaluation
that the internet could play a vital part in preventing people from becoming radi-
calised. Extremist narratives online are often plain to see, and presented in a
professional and visually striking manner (Tsfati and Weimann 2002; Denning
2010; Stenersen 2008). Given that this presence is coupled with a tendency for
internet users to be young, and for young people to be more likely to support
violence, it seems necessary to incorporate the internet into counter-radicalisation
attempts. However, the government’s chosen strategies, characterised as a ‘filter-
and-remove’ approach, may prove contradictory to the message that is being sent
out within Prevent: that extremist discourse requires direct challenge from British democratic values.

Preventing online radicalisation by restricting the supply of potentially radicalising material reaching vulnerable people is a conventional approach to a relatively new problem. However, one of the characteristics of the struggle to remove ‘harmful’ content online thus far has been that this material ‘finds a way’ to escape censure. The anonymous and global nature of the internet makes it quick and straightforward for anyone to post recently removed material in a different domain (Conway 2002). In an attempt to alleviate this problem, the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, through Prevent, has worked to implement some self-censorship strategies in conjunction with internet service providers to provide standards and regulations. For example, YouTube has created a mechanism for users to report unacceptable videos, adding a ‘promoting terrorism’ referral flag that allows YouTube to remove videos that may breach their terms of use (Home Office 2011: 78).

The ability to quickly circumnavigate filter-and-remove strategies online does not imply that the internet should become an ‘anything goes’ space for extremist content. An inability to prevent 100 per cent of a particular criminal activity does not mean that attempts at prevention should be abandoned. Illegal drugs are bought and sold daily within the UK, and yet the police continue to try to seize this contraband and disrupt drug traffickers’ and dealers’ actions. However, the online radicalisation argument is slightly different to the illegal drug analogy because within Prevent ‘British values’ of free speech are cited as being integral to the prevention of radicalisation. Throughout the Prevent strategy, the requirement for institutions and actors to uphold and promote ‘British values’ (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) is frequently referenced (Home Office 2011: 34). These core values should be used to challenge the extremist and terrorist ideologies that threaten the security and cohesion of the UK (Home Office 2011: 7, 8, 9, 24, 29).

Free speech has its limits. However, Prevent’s emphasis on filtering and removing content, perhaps disproportionately, risks undermining the very values it purports to be vital in tackling online radicalisation. The sheer number of internet users there are across a broad geographical spectrum via a multitude of different devices implies that the attitude amongst the public towards the internet is not primarily one of suspicion (International Telecommunications Union Statistics 2013). However, the ‘force for good or force for evil’ argument has not entirely disappeared and negative aspects of the internet continue to affect users: from large-scale censorship of information or mass surveillance by governments, to non-state threats of hacking and cyber-crime, right down to the personal such as cyber-stalking, cyber-bullying, or trolling. Outside of these threatening actions, and aided by the anonymity granted through the internet, ‘dark corners’ of the web exist, an unsavoury underbelly where paedophiles and racists can associate with others on message boards and in forums. Digging even further, we can uncover a separate internet of sorts, ‘the deep web’ or ‘Tor’, which
requires specific software to access and grants near-total anonymity (Tor website 2013). Websites on Tor, such as The Silk Road, provide illegal goods, primarily drugs (Barrat 2012: 683), in exchange for Bitcoins, an electronic currency with a greater level of anonymity (Bitcoin website 2012).

The existence of these groups and sites is aided by the global, anonymous, and multi-jurisdictional nature of the internet, which makes effectively policing such sites very difficult (Broadhurst 2006: 412). Thus, association and communication between undesirable groups can often continue undisturbed, giving rise to the belief that the internet is an anarchic, ungoverned, and dangerous space (Schmidt and Cohen 2013: 3). Government intervention in particular sections of the internet to filter and remove content runs the risk of fuelling the grievances amongst sections of the Muslim community who feel their freedoms of speech, association, and privacy are being violated. Furthermore, it also risks constructing an increasingly negative conceptualisation of the internet that emphasises its expanding role in facilitating deviant activity, requiring increased government censorship to manage.

With the internet established as an incredibly popular medium for young people, and some of those same young people considered to be vulnerable to radicalisation, Prevent will be required to proceed with caution on these two fronts, ensuring that its intervention online does not reinforce the notions that cyberspace constitutes a suspicious underworld and that interaction between young Muslims, in particular, is being watched.

**Conclusion**

Prevent’s acknowledgement that terrorists use the internet and that cyberspace is vital for counter-terrorism shows that the UK government is in tune with developments that have taken place at the intersection of the social and the technological. However, this chapter has argued that Prevent’s construction and understanding of the internet is detrimental in two respects. First, despite Prevent’s recognition that terrorist groups use the internet for many of the activities highlighted by our overview (Home Office 2011: 40), it is still more comfortable concentrating on physical space and fails to acknowledge the internet as a stand-alone feature of terrorist activity. Second, the internet-specific measures that Prevent does highlight, designed to limit the ability to access harmful extremist material online, are in danger of undermining the British values deemed necessary to challenge and ultimately defeat the extremist narrative that has appeared online, potentially exacerbating the construction of the internet as deviant and groups discussing particular topics as suspicious.

These two criticisms point towards a skewed construction of the internet within Prevent. On the one hand, it is not a primary feature of terrorist activities but, on the other hand, it is sufficiently important that it necessitates the imposition of a filter-and-remove strategy that, if not implemented carefully, could very easily be interpreted as online censorship and surveillance that is disproportionately focused on young Muslims.
References


Prevent and the internet


11 Challenging the separation of
counter-terrorism and community
cohesion in Prevent

The potential threat of the ‘radicalised’
subject

Thomas Martin

Introduction

Prevent’s importance and novelty lies in its promise to reduce the potential of
terrorist violence before the threat has even crystallised within the mind of the
perpetrator. In so doing, it has developed a set of knowledges that articulate,
classify and connect particular subjectivities with the possibilities of future viol-
ence and has designed a series of interventions to act upon them. The argument
of this chapter is that these projections and their related knowledges have prim-
arily focused on the potential dangerousness of an individual through ascriptions
of identity and belonging. Concretely, those who express disassociation from
normalised ‘British’ identities exist in the future as a potential threat that must
be acted upon lest it actualise. This I take to constitute the central logic of the
Prevent policy, governing its implementation and practice.

To make sense of this logic requires a discursive analysis of the conceptuali-
sation of ‘radicalisation’ and the ‘radicalised’ subject within the Prevent docu-
ments. This reading makes visible the assumptions of the policy that sees
vulnerabilities to radicalisation clustered around issues of identity and belonging
ascribable both to the individual subject and to the ‘community’. This positions
a dissociation from ‘Britishness’ as an inherent threat and thus conversely estab-
lishes ‘British values’ as a counter to this radicalisable potential. Thus, intrinsic-
ally, the problems of the coherence and stability of the nation, of cultural,
political and religious otherness – of extremism – come to be implicated in the
problems of, and potentials towards, violence. Yet it is a logic that remains silent
within the Prevent policy and misread by academic commentary and critique.

This omission can be seen in analysis of the Prevent policy that has, since its
inception, been mediated through a perceived tension between its specific
counter-radicalising interventions and the broader shift to community cohesion.
This is true both of the academic literature that has developed around the policy
and also of the internal critique the policy maintains of itself. It is my concern
that through reading the failure of Prevent as a failure to separate counter-
radicalisation and community cohesion, critique has failed to fully account for
the role the policy has played in contemporary political life. What is at stake in
The separation of counter-terrorism and community cohesion

Prevent is the renegotiation of security and identity, embodied in the radicalised subject, who makes both counter-radicalisation and community cohesion possible and necessary. Intervention is required into both the individual who is seen to represent a threat and the milieu out of which such individuals are believed to emerge. The chapter will outline this logic of radicalisation and the radicalised subject through a detailed reading of the Prevent documents, before drawing out the consequences this entails for the current literature, the practice of Prevent work and its relation to contemporary political transformations.

The limitations of radicalisation

Radicalisation forms the foundation of the Prevent policy and is defined as the ‘processes whereby certain experiences and events in a person’s life cause them to become radicalised, to the extent of turning to violence to resolve perceived grievances’ (HO, 2006, p. 9). Central to its success as a concept is the promise it holds for academics, policymakers and practitioners in establishing, if not a causality, then at least a set of identifiable stages through which the process towards violence progresses. This modelling allows security agents to identify where individuals exist on this progression, and more importantly, what particular traits or characteristics are common, or even necessary, within these stages of advancement (see Wiktorowicz, 2005 and Sageman, 2004, 2008 for important examples of such approaches). This has led to the development of an academic literature on radicalisation which is rooted in positivistic epistemology, has focused on testing the validity of isolated variables in terms of the potential of individuals to be radicalised (King and Taylor, 2011; Horgan, 2008). To this extent, the concept of radicalisation places emphasis on the creation of successful identification mechanisms and it sees success in terms of their predictive power. It is a concept that, through mapping the linear progression of an ‘at-risk’ subjectivity towards violence, allows for intervention (Heath-Kelly, 2013; de Goede and Simon, 2013).

There have, increasingly, been contrary voices within the literature. Much attention has focused on the applicability of the methodology, and thus the empirical basis of such claims. The argument is one of over-complexity, that such a plethora of pathways to that end exist that to search for any single ‘cause’ becomes futile, that the process of radicalisation only attains meaning in relation to individual cases (Githens-Mazer, 2010; Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Pisoiu, 2013; Schmid, 2013). Others have highlighted the inadequacy of the term itself. Kundnani (2012) argues it fails to identify when and analyse why violence occurs (see also Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010), and Sedgwick (2010) demonstrates the term’s imprecision, locating three contexts in which it is differentially used (see also Richards, 2011).

My intentions are somewhat different. Rather than focusing on the veracity or utility of the concept, my purpose is to provide a reading of the radicalised subject of Prevent that understands the construction itself to be generative of political constructions of the social. If through Campbell (1998) we can look to
external alterity to comprehend ascriptions of likeness and selfhood, through the work of Prevent, we see how the demands of unthreatening similitude is itself constitutive of the outside, mapped onto and through the bodies of those now deemed potentially threatening. While my concern here is not with the content of this Britishness (although see Croft, 2012; and more broadly, Anderson, 1991), we must recognise the discursive work that is achieved through the ascription of the radical other. It is this radicalised subject that both makes visible and renders certain individuals and communities as governable, and moreover, informs questions regarding which identities are allowed political expression in the UK (Heath-Kelly, 2013).

**The subjectivities of radicalisation**

Reading the radicalised subject through the iterations of Prevent allows us to challenge the continued assertion, within both the policy itself and the literature, that the problems of Prevent can be solved through the separation of counter-radicalisation and community cohesion. Rather, and paradoxically, it reveals a different history, one that ever more closely conflates the problems of the future threat with a disassociation from Britishness.

**Conditions of emergence**

Prevent’s first public iteration provides us with a glimpse of the linguistics of radicalisation that would come to define the policy. Three broad radicalising factors are presented and discussed. First is the ‘development of a sense of grievance and injustice’ arising from a ‘negative and partial’ interpretation of history, and the relationship between the West and Islam (HO, 2006, p. 10). Second is a ‘sense of personal alienation or community disadvantage’, a sentiment of socioeconomic deprivation that may be felt vicariously, nationally and internationally (HO, 2006, p. 10). Third is an exposure to radical ideas, most probably through a local contact, a ‘forceful and inspiring figure, already committed to extremism’ (HO, 2006, p. 10). Accepting that these factors are not conclusive, and that the generation of radicalisation knowledge is still in its infancy, the policy argues that they should be viewed as ‘considerations which may affect radicalisation’ (HO, 2006, p. 10). The government response consists of three parts broadly corresponding to these factors. First, it would contest the battle of ideas through challenging extremist narratives that justify violence. Second, it would tackle economic disadvantage, at home and abroad, particularly through education and employment opportunities, and also through supporting reform within Muslim communities, seeking cohesion, integration, community leadership and capacity building. Lastly, it would deter those who facilitate terrorism through introducing legislation to make commissioning and glorifying terrorism illegal, and working to identify, and intervene into, problematic spaces, such as prisons (HO, 2006).

We do not yet see the targeting of specific individuals; rather, what is at stake are the conditions of emergence from within which radicalisation is understood.
to be made (more) possible. The construction of the potentially emergent radicalised individual legitimates a particular form of response. Importantly, the diagnosis of such individuals as disadvantaged and alienated, as removed from British society – economically, socially, ideologically or politically – sees the explicit conflation of counter-radicalisation with the broader goals of community cohesion (see also Brighton, 2007). While not explicitly referenced, this is a language of differentiation and dislocation intimately connected to that of segregation developed in response to the ‘race riots’ of 2001 (Cantle, 2001; Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion, 2001), demanding integration into and equality within that society in response. We can see this clearly when it is stated that ‘the drive for equality, social inclusion, community cohesion and active citizenship in Britain strengthens society and its resistance to terrorism here in the UK’ (HO, 2006, p. 9). This impulse to pre-emptively intervene into the perceived weaknesses of communities in order to minimise the conditions of emergence of this threat posed by the radicalised subject, while still embryonic, represents a crucial component of the Prevent policy.

**Locating the vulnerable individual**

In the years following the publication of CONTEST 1, there was a major renegotiation of Prevent implementation and responsibilities. Ostensibly, the intention was to ensure the removal of communities work from the Prevent agenda. Whereas much of the original Prevent work, including its focus on shared values and cohesion, had been implemented through the Home Office (HO), it was now stated that it would only lead ‘on protecting those individuals most at risk from violent extremist influences’. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) would be tasked with enabling local communities to be able to challenge extremists seeking to undermine our way of life through ‘the building of strong communities, confident in themselves, open to others, and resilient to violent extremism’ (DCLG, 2007, p. 4). Yet this division is illusionary. Or rather, we must recognise that both institutionally divergent policies are based upon the same potentially problematic subject. Moreover, this is a subject that not only maintains the link between security and identity policies, but radicalises them. This seemingly paradoxical position can be seen in the introduction of a language of ‘vulnerability’, commonplace in the 2009 strategy and ubiquitous in the 2011 revision, allowing the policy to identify and make concretely visible the object of Prevent’s concern. The following section analyses this trend within the policy to the present day.

The subject of radicalisation becomes the individual who is ‘vulnerable to radicalisation’ (HO, 2009, p. 12), ‘vulnerable to recruitment’ (HO, 2009, p. 14) and ‘vulnerable to violent extremist messaging’ (HO, 2009, p. 83). Such properties are located as inherent to the individual, such that ‘radicalisers’ are said to target ‘specific personal vulnerabilities’ (HO, 2011, p. 18). In the revised strategy, the second objective of Prevent is even titled ‘Protecting Vulnerable People’ (HO, 2011, p. 55).
The identification and making visible of the vulnerable individual within Prevent interventions represents a professionalisation of knowledge of the radicalised subject, which allows for a greater focus on the psychological. Where earlier, misperceptions of foreign policy or communal disadvantage were emphasised, the emphasis is now upon the individual’s mental wellbeing. Thus, vulnerability is defined as:

not simply a result of actual or perceived grievances. It may be the result of family or peer pressure, the absence of positive mentors and role models, a crisis of identity, links to criminality including other forms of violence, exposure to traumatic events (here or overseas), or changing circumstances (e.g. a new environment following migration and asylum).

(HO, 2009, p. 89)

And it is stated that:

people are not only vulnerable to radicalisation because of political and economic grievances. A range of social and psychological factors are also important. Radicalisation seems to be related directly to a crisis in identity and, specifically, to a feeling of not being accepted or belonging.

(HO, 2009, p. 44, my emphases)

It is this discursive move, this distancing, that is instrumental to Prevent’s logic, that entrenches its core project. The problem of radicalisation comes to be tied to a notion that the radicalised subject is vulnerable to extremist messages due to their dislocation, their dis-identification from the normalcy of British society. Thus positioned, it becomes those who (are seen to) exist outside of a framework of British norms and behaviours who may potentially threaten the unity of the British state. This is especially relevant given that, as Nickels et al. (2012) argue, the discourse of the ‘British Muslim’ already performs the function of dislocating the identity of such subjects, placing them neither inside nor outside of the ‘West’ (see also Gutkowski, 2011a). To be a Muslim in Britain is to be potentially problematic, necessarily inviting the gaze of security officials within the Prevent framework (Richards, 2011). This vulnerability is also evident at the communal level:

We judge that communities who do not (or, alternatively, cannot) participate in all civic society are more likely to be vulnerable to radicalisation by all kinds of terrorist groups…. A stronger sense of ‘belonging’ and citizenship makes communities more resilient to terrorist ideology and propagandists.

(HO, 2011, p. 27)

As such, it is a language that both unites and classifies the dangers posed by the individual and the communal milieu out of which the individual may emerge.

This increased knowledge, utilising data derived from empirical studies of actual radicalisation, makes possible the identification and targeting of those
deemed to be ‘at risk’ of radicalisation based upon known vulnerabilities. Trained specialists such as the police are now understood to be able to ‘identify places where radicalisers may operate and where vulnerable individuals may be located and provide assistance to them’ (HO, 2009, p. 85). Central here is the establishment of the specialist Channel agency, tasked with identifying and supporting those at risk of radicalisation (HO, 2009, p. 90). Between January 2007 and December 2012, almost 2,500 referrals were made to Channel, utilising a checklist of 22 ‘vulnerability indicators’ to both calculate risk and track the success of interventions, and over 500 people received support (HO, 2013, p. 22).

Beyond identifying what may be seen as problematic, the language of vulnerability also serves to enact a dichotomous ascription of agency and responsibility in the process of radicalisation. This is most apparent in the line drawn between the radicalised and the radicalisers. From its first enunciation in 2006, a distinction has been explicitly made in terms of their ability to think and act meaningfully and purposefully and their subsequent power relations. If the radicalised are vulnerable, it is those radicalising who exploit these vulnerabilities. This differentiation is most explicitly spelled out in the 2009 iteration of Prevent, where it is stated that within terrorist networks, ‘the motivation as well as the background of those in leadership positions differs from those who are not’ (HO, 2009, p. 43). The radicalising subject is understood to play the part of ‘a charismatic role model and ideologue’ and able to ‘exploit and create grievances’ (HO, 2009, p. 44, p. 91). This is played against the language of the vulnerable subject when it is claimed that these individuals need support from ‘being groomed to terrorism by those who claim religious expertise and use what appear to be religious arguments’ (HO, 2011, p. 80) and that radicalisers and the groups they represent seek to ‘manipulate, mislead and take advantage of young people’ (HO, 2011, p. 83).

This division of agency allows us to say something in regards to the radicalising ideology of Prevent. Importantly, we can see how it is constructed in such a way that British values are situated, in and of themselves, as preventive. This construction can be explicitly seen in the attention paid to the spatial dimensions of radicalisation. Throughout the history of Prevent, one of the central concerns has been to deter ‘those who facilitate terrorism . . . changing the environment in which the extremists and those radicalising others can operate’ (HO, 2006, p. 2). It is stated most explicitly in 2011, in the claim that ‘radicalisation tends to occur in places where terrorist ideologies, and those that promote them, go uncontested and are not exposed to free, open and balanced debate and challenge’ (HO, 2011, p. 63). Thus, it is theorised, when confronted with such debates, when challenged by differing arguments, the radicalising ideology cannot but fail. It is vapid, appealing to the vulnerable, but yet unsustainable against reasoned objections. Hence the response must be to generate this debate, to open it up to challenge, to educate. A central task of Prevent is to therefore ensure that such ideologies ‘are subject to civic challenge and debate’ (HO, 2011, p. 83).

Taken as a whole, we can conclude that the construction of vulnerability entails that the radicalising ideology is one that works, and only works, ipso facto
on the radicalised, and that to be at risk of radicalisation is to be alienated and separated from a British identity – both spatially and normatively. Discursively, the implication of a language of vulnerability not only demands rehabilitation, as Richards (2011) highlights, it also implicitly positions British values as an antidote or preventive measure. As Stevens (2009) articulates, for Prevent to make sense, it must assume that the decision to join a violently radical group (or, it might be added, to undertake violent action alone), is due to a ‘lack of exposure to viable alternatives or the capacity to reason appropriately’ (2009, p. 518).

The point is that Prevent positions a failure to identify, cohere and homogenise with a particular vision of British identity as a vulnerability towards potential terrorist violence. It is this core logic that unsettles the possible allegiances that the radicalised are capable of, positioning such a British identity and its concomitant values as capable, in and of themselves, of immunising and securing these vulnerabilities. Prevent thus exists on a wider terrain and as constitutive of a broader reasoning of government than the narrow, technical, counter-radicalising focus through which it identifies itself. The problems of the coherence and stability of the nation, of the ascription of what it is to be culturally, religiously and politically other, come to be implicated within a security analytics focused on potential violence. Action is required both through the targeted and specific precautionary interventions of Channel and through the pre-emptive interventions into radicalisation’s conditions of emergence through community cohesion.¹ We cannot narrativise these understandings, policies and interventions in isolation.

The threat of the extreme

The latest iteration of Prevent (HO, 2011) further extends this logic through a renegotiation of the policy’s relationship with extremism. While the language of extremism has a complex genealogy within contemporary policing and policy-making, its usage within Prevent is instructive, with potentially significant political consequences. Once again, this iteration started with the mission statement that it would be committed to reforming the counter-radicalisation workstream, through ‘separating it much more clearly than before from general communities policy’ (Cabinet Office, 2010, p. 42). Yet once more, the paradox remains that the revised strategy entrenches the relationship between particular identities and potential threats.

The primary change is the perceived necessity to challenge ‘extremist (and non-violent) ideas that are also part of a terrorist ideology’ (HO, 2011, p. 6). Explicitly though, the DCLG is still in charge of programmes dealing with ‘extremism and extremist organisations more widely’, which are no longer be considered Prevent work (HO, 2011, p. 6). Likewise, it is further (re)iterated that integration and cohesion objectives are seen as a necessary condition for a successful Prevent programme, but given their wider importance, they are no longer under Prevent control or receive Prevent funding (HO, 2011, p. 6). The important discursive move is from a language of violent extremism to one of simply
‘extremism’, which, in this context, refers to the, ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’ (HO, 2011, p. 107). The argument is that extremist groups, even those committed to non-violence, provide a theoretical and theological legitimation for certain ideas that may then be used as justifications for violent actions (HO, 2011, p. 5); and that terrorist groups very ‘often draw upon ideologies which have been developed, disseminated and popularised by extremist organisations that appear to be non-violent’ (HO, 2011, p. 19).

It is argued that some groups that received funding to carry out Prevent work in the past would not have done so under these assumptions. The policy recognises that these funding choices were not accidental, but rather rested upon a strategic analysis that positioned explicitly non-violent yet ‘extremist’ groups as most credible to individuals considering using, or prepared to use, violence (HO, 2011, p. 34; see also Bartlett, Birdwell and King, 2010). An important example of this type of organisation would be the Brixton-based STREET programme, run by Salafis and set up to counter the narratives of Abu Hamza, pre-dating Prevent work (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010, p. 897). However, it is judged that ‘insufficient attention’ had been paid as to whether these groups comprehensively subscribed to mainstream British values, that security monitoring of these groups had been insufficient and that, ultimately, Prevent funding had reached ‘a small number of organisations who had expressed (or employed people who had expressed) extremist views’ (HO, 2011, p. 34; p. 35).

Of importance is the way in which extremism is conceptualised in terms of both its relationship to the non-extreme public into whom integration is desired and to the terrorist who finds succour in its expression. In regards to Islamist extremism, Prevent understands it to represent that:

the West is perpetually at war with Islam; there can be no legitimate interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in this country or elsewhere; and that Muslims living here cannot legitimately and/or effectively participate in our democratic society.

(HO, 2011, p. 20)

The Muslim extremist is thus set apart from the normalcy of Britishness in terms of the identities to which they will not subscribe, and intrinsically linked to the problem of potential terrorist violence through this devoid identity. Spaces in which extremism has taken hold are thus established as a dissociative milieu, giving meaning and potential recruits to the terrorist cause, an en masse not-belonging that represents a perpetual potential danger in and of itself. The act of terrorism becomes merely a differentiation of tactics. As such, the policy must be read as positioning the ends of counter-terrorism to be best served by these broader integration and cohesion strategies, that, while nominally under the control of the DCLG and separate from Prevent funding, are ever more closely bound within the theorisation of what counter-radicalisation and
counter-terrorism must be. This formulation is made with clarity in the 2012 annual report, which states that the government has ‘taken a much stronger position on extremism which not only undermines integration and is inconsistent with our British values, but can draw people into terrorist activity’ (HO, 2013, p. 10). This proactive approach can be seen centre-stage in the vision of a ‘muscular liberalism’ outlined in David Cameron’s Munich speech (Cameron, 2011).

Extremism, identity, belonging: this is the terrain of potentially emergent danger upon which Prevent is grounded. Again, and paradoxically, while counter-radicalisation and community cohesion policies are declared ever more institutionally and financially distinct, their core logic that interweaves these perceived affiliations, identifications and values with potential future threats – the project that Prevent has done more to shape than any other in recent years – becomes ever more apparent and entrenched.

The consequences of inseparability

Taken as a whole, this analysis opens up new spaces for critique of the policy, and implores that we view it through a different lens. First, it asks questions of a literature that has, by and large, reproduced government statements of the separability of the counter-radicalisation and the community cohesion work of Prevent, and in so doing, has failed to challenge the core logic that drives it. Second, it allows us to make sense of the ambiguities of Prevent’s implementation, and raises important questions regarding public and political perceptions of the policy. Lastly, in confronting the policy’s internal desire to assert this separation, it requires that we ask questions of the impact of the policy in terms of the modes of governance it enacts and its effects upon politics in the UK.

Prevent literature and the ‘separationist’ paradigm

We must question a literature that has, by and large, been culpable in accepting the inherent separability of the government’s counter-radicalisation and community cohesion policies. While authors in this field do highlight the ways in which security and identity frameworks have become increasingly intertwined within the policy, without the discursive analysis of the radicalised subject made above, such analyses maintain the illusory position that it is possible to separate these two strands. In doing so, the literature merely reifies and reinforces government interpretations of the key problems that inform Prevent work and limits itself to asking questions only of the relationship between the community cohesion and counter-radicalisation strands.

We can see this in the work of Gutkowski (2011b, p. 351), who specifically demarcates the ‘carrots’ of the ‘seemingly beneficial changes’ of community cohesion from the ‘sticks’ of proscription, exclusion and deportation. Likewise, Briggs (2010) argues that building capacity and resilience, tackling grievances and promoting inclusion, while contributing to
counter-radicalisation, should be kept from the security arena. Stevens (2009, p. 518) approvingly references the Labour government’s shift to a community cohesion framework that sought to avoid ‘the entrenching of physical and ethnic segregation’, but, he argues, is now under threat: ‘PVE [Preventing Violent Extremism] clearly – and worryingly – reverses this trend’. Thomas (2010, 2012) argues along similar lines, seeing the Prevent agenda, with its monocultural focus on Muslims and creation of tensions between government departments, as detrimental to a beneficial community cohesion, positioned as the most effective means to prevent violence. Kundnani (2009, p. 6) also praises the ‘many progressive elements within the earlier community cohesion agenda’ yet bemoans the singular focus of Prevent on Muslims that has undermined them, and the increased security presence within, and surveillance of, Muslim communities. The allegation of ‘spying’ as detrimental to community cohesion work is a motif that is also commonplace in a critical report by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2010). In summary, the problem identified in the literature is the proximity of a security agenda understood to be tarnishing the otherwise good, or at least uncritically accepted, work of the communities agenda.

The effect of this approach has been to erect an inadequate ‘separationist’ paradigm, in which the problem of Prevent is its failure to distinguish between the two purportedly separable goals of counter-radicalisation and community cohesion. The effect of this theorisation is that neither counter-radicalisation nor community cohesion are subjected to sustained analysis, and indeed, often, the underlying assumption is that both elements are unproblematic. Moreover, in omitting the discursive analysis outlined throughout this chapter, even strong, ostensibly undermining critiques merely reinforce and reify the policy’s own internal demand for separation. Below are two examples, all the more important as, at first glance, they would seem to recognise the importance of the renegotiations of identity and security in the policy.

Birt (2009) sees the ‘conflict of integration and security’ as resulting from ‘unclear objectives’ and spends time focusing on the concerns and resistances to this framework from local authorities and officials who fear that ‘prioritising counter-terrorism over community cohesion would damage the relationship with local communities’ (2009, p. 54). The central issue identified is the ‘divisive’ single-group funding of Muslims through Preventing Violent Extremism, and the linking of these revenue streams to National Indicator 35, and subsequently Public Service Agreement 26, both of which demand a focus on gathering knowledge of Muslim communities and identifying extremism (Birt, 2009, pp. 54–56). This patchwork approach to funding and financial flows that links Muslim identity, British values, community resilience, information gathering, vulnerability and extremism is thus identified by Birt as the problem. Ultimately, it is concluded that it

needs to be considered whether providing core services on the basis of generic need to all communities from mainstream funding streams, without
the additional security rationale, would in fact be more effective and less divisive. Similarly, our narratives of shared values and national belonging and citizenship should be de-linked from counter-terrorism.

(Birt, 2009, p. 57)

Thus, while Birt recognises the central conceit of Prevent as its renegotiation of security and identity logics that merges the two in important and novel ways, without the analysis of the radicalised subject that makes sense of their conflation, he is left reliant upon a conclusion that sees such an outcome as resulting from ‘unclear objectives’. We should not be so blasé. While the objectives of Prevent may, at times, be muddled, this is not due to poor articulation. Rather, it is reflective of an unspoken, core logic.

Similarly, Richards argues that it is the use of the term ‘radicalisation’ that has facilitated Prevent and has ‘confusingly oscillated between tackling violent extremism in particular and promoting community cohesion and “shared values” more broadly’, advocating that the ‘focus of counterterrorism strategy should be on countering terrorism and not on the broader remit implied by wider conceptions of radicalization’ (Richards, 2011, p. 143, emphasis in original). Through focusing on radicalism, and not violence, certain Muslim voices have been promoted and funded, while others have been politically and financially marginalised. This, Richards argues, may not prove effective in terms of decreasing violence, where radical but non-violent voices may be best placed to intervene and persuade (Richards, 2011, pp. 148–149). Richards clearly locates the focus on Muslim subjectivities as central to the radicalisation discourse, and understands that community cohesion has been seen as integral to counter-radicalisation work. Nevertheless, he fails to grasp how the act of terrorist violence has been theorised within Prevent, since its inception, as contingent upon particular potentials latent in a (disassociation from a) particular identity or values. Prevent relies upon a decisive relationship between what it is to be violent and what it is to be radical. The embodied disassociation of the radicalised subject fuses them both, and thus unites security and identity policy domains in ways that cannot be so easily separated as Richards would like.

Most importantly, in effect, Birt and Richards ask the same questions of the policy as its continual iterations have asked. That is, while ostensibly both approaches seek the renegotiation of the core commitments of Prevent – Birt’s critique of its Muslim focus; Richard’s critique of the obsession with ideas not acts – the effects of these analyses is to continue to see the failings of Prevent as a product of this all-too-close relationship between community cohesion and counter-terrorism. Rather, if we are to contest the Prevent policy, we must recognise that the logic of the radicalised subject (re)inscribes and connects threat to a disassociation from Britishness, demanding both the identification of the potentially dangerous individual and a broader focus on the milieu from within which it is judged such individuals may emerge.
Ambiguities of implementation

This analysis also allows us to make some sense of the ambiguities of Prevent’s implementation. A key narrative that Prevent reiterates is the necessity of separating counter-radicalisation and community cohesion in terms of their professional function. The 2011 iteration, while entrenching a seemingly strict distinction between Prevent work under the HO and community cohesion work within the DCLG, nevertheless admits that the division is porous, recognising that ‘it will not always be possible or desirable to draw clear lines between policies in each of these areas’ although the attempt is to make them ‘clearer than they have been hitherto’ (HO, 2011, p. 25). Moreover, while claiming that an important reason for this division is that communities seeking cohesion funding often had to utilise Prevent funding, which often meant dealing with counter-terrorism personnel, it is then stated that ‘many staff working on Prevent, notably in policing and local authorities, will continue to have cohesion-related functions, something that is more rather than less likely as local authorities look for opportunities to make efficiency savings’ (HO, 2011, p. 30).

Once more, the analysis of the radicalised subject makes the possibility of this desired distinction illusory, a desire that is reified within a literature often content to ask questions of whether the uniform is apt for the assignment, rather than to interrogate the assignment itself. The implicit solution therefore outlined is that if only the right agency, department or institution were in command, there would be no issue. Thus, Pantucci (2010, p. 257) claims that ‘“spooks” and social workers are an awkward mix’. He goes on to question whether such an example of ‘coordinated’ government might produce deleterious side-effects, recounting how local government agents were reaching out to youth workers to ascertain levels of radicalisation and clan structures in their borough. His conclusion is that this role is best left to security professionals. What is not questioned is the legitimacy or utility of such an exercise in itself. Likewise, Spalek and Lambert (2008) recognise that community engagement work for the purposes of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation has also been the location in which debates over citizenship and what sorts of attitude and behaviours should be encouraged have taken place. Their argument is that the government should focus upon ‘developing forms of engagement that are most effective for the purposes of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation rather than allowing for questions about the types of Muslim identities that ought to be encouraged to influence policy here’ (Spalek and Lambert, 2008, p. 261). What is at stake is the legitimacy and professional identification of the agent carrying out the project, not the legitimacy of the project itself. In effect, it is to say that with the clarity of professional distinction, the negative consequences of Prevent work would disappear.

Moreover, beyond concerns of practitioner identity, the analysis of the radicalised subject allows us to situate this ambiguity of professional responsibility as more deeply encoded within the logics of Prevent. The language of vulnerability entails that Prevent work becomes framed around an ethic of care. The
‘duty of care’ inherent to many professional relationships is thus extended to the monitoring of extremist and violent views for the good of the vulnerable subject. This is envisaged as operating in equivalence to existing harm reduction procedures – thus, schools must protect children from radicalisation in the ‘same ways that they help to safeguard children from drugs, gang violence or alcohol’ (HO, 2011, p. 69). The expertise of care is invoked as already existent, and merely requires the making visible of this new domain of threat. It is a pastoral ethic that is invoked and inscribed in the professional relationship of Prevent, and of Channel in particular (Gutkowski, 2011b, see also Foucault, 1982; 2007). The language of vulnerability – and the disassociation that defines it – necessarily disrupts distinctions between social workers and security agents. While there may be financial reasons entailing that Prevent officials take on tasks in these supposedly different domains of intervention, there are also programmatic reasons that cause the conflation of these roles to make sense. Both care and the security gaze are demanded and work towards the same end.

To what politics?

To conclude, it is worth inquiring as to why it is of political importance that these continual assertions are made. In one sense, clearly there is a concern that to formulate counter-radicalisation and community cohesion as explicitly related would cause, at the very least, tensions between Muslim communities and Prevent work. Equally important, though, are the ways through which a focus on institutional divisions allows the policy to avoid critically engaging with its own assumptions. In turn, this affects the broader way in which the policy can be understood by government and projected towards the public. It thus becomes, at least in its expression, a series of narrow interventions within the security domain, rooted in a technical understanding of the radicalised subject, made visible and knowable through vulnerability indicators, and acted upon in the name of their own care.

In demanding the centrality of the amalgam of counter-radicalisation and community cohesion within Prevent, we can position the policy, and the radicalised subject in particular, as demanding the management of potential future threats premised on a disassociation from British normalcy, understood in terms of (a perception of problematic) values, identities and identifications. This demands a pastoral intervention of care into the lives of those seen to be at risk of radicalisation due to these (perceived) vulnerabilities. Yet it also exceeds these confines. It further requires the management of, understanding of, and at times, a more direct intervention into, the milieu that is seen to give rise to such potentially problematic individuals. The demand for cohesion comes to be a demand for British values that might immunise us all against the potential dangers of the extreme.

This in turn raises the question of the political within Prevent. On the one hand, the language of vulnerability, and the dichotomous attribution of agency between radicalised and radicaliser, have the effect of denying the political
The separation of counter-terrorism and community cohesion

actuality of the radicalised subject. Their voice and actions are not their own; they are envisaged as merely a vessel. Simultaneously, the broader, chilling undertones of Prevent, and its wider implications, are that it demarcates the utterances and performances that are no longer allowed to be political. Particular ideas and expressions are deemed to represent a vulnerability indicator, constituting a potential problem of the future that requires action in the present. What is at stake is then the possibility of expressions of difference that are seen to be incompatible with British values.

My concern is that Prevent represents an important cluster of analyses and techniques of government that work towards the de-politicisation of dissent, recoded as both a question of vulnerability, and thus not an actual expression of a political subjectivity, and simultaneously as a potential future threat that must be acted upon lest it actualise in violence. While Prevent has largely concerned itself with the utterances and performances of young Muslims in the UK – and this is clearly a concern – the logic of disassociation from normalised British values that drives it need not be confined to this particular. We must take Prevent seriously when it claims to deal with other forms of extremism.

The hope is that through this reading of the radicalisation discourse and the radicalised subject of Prevent, it is possible to open up new spaces for critical intervention. It implores that we reject the continued assertions of separability made by the policy and reified within the literature, and instead demands that we view the counter-radicalisation and community cohesion logics within Prevent as a broad and coherent approach – an approach that is generative of depoliticising and managerial interventions into identities in the UK, and that, as such, should be of grave concern.

Notes

1 These terms, and their differing forms of anticipatory action, I take from Anderson (2010).
2 Indicators include, for instance: spending time in the company of other suspected extremists; changing one’s style of dress; losing interest in friends not associated with the extremist group, cause or ideology; attempts to recruit others to the group, cause or ideology; using insulting names for another group; and clearly identifying another group as threatening and to blame for all social or political ills (HO, 2012).

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The separation of counter-terrorism and community cohesion


Introduction

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York (September 2001), Madrid (March 2004) and London (July 2005), governments and policy-makers in Europe have been preoccupied with understanding the process of al-Qaeda-inspired radicalisation and how to counter it. In the UK, the government responded to the challenges of violent radicalisation through its counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST. In particular, the UK government’s focus on the Prevent strand in CONTEST, aimed at preventing the long-term causes of violent radicalisation, represented an innovative way of countering terrorism that moved away from traditional coercive models to ‘softer’ approaches. Yet in its effort to win ‘hearts and minds’, the Prevent strategy’s previous promise of community engagement transformed into a conflation and muddle of different strategies: a counter-subversion strategy, a ‘battle of ideas’ strategy and a surveillance and intelligence-gathering strategy (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2009). As it became an all-encompassing counter-terrorism initiative, Prevent was perceived by British Muslims as a way to police ‘thought-crimes’, restrict legitimate dissent and construct models of the ‘good Muslim’ (Kundnani 2009: 39–41).

More recently, a ‘softer’ approach to countering terrorism – de-radicalisation – has become increasingly prevalent in Europe as a strategy for tackling the threat of al-Qaeda-inspired violence/extremism, emerging as a new buzzword in relation to the formulation of counter-terrorism policies. However, de-radicalisation programmes in the UK have developed differently to similar programmes in the Middle East (ME) and South East Asia (SEA). For example, UK de-radicalisation emanates from the second (‘Protecting vulnerable people’) and third (‘Supporting sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation’) strands of Prevent and is embodied through the police-run Channel Project (Home Office 2011: 59–71), which is primarily aimed at Muslim youths who are non-violent and have yet to commit a crime but are still deemed ‘extremist’ by Channel assessment panels. On the one hand, de-radicalisation has been presented as a positive development to counter-radicalisation initiatives because it supposedly mitigates the wide-net approach associated with the Prevent
Prevent 2011 and counter-radicalisation

initiative. On the other hand, these programmes are delivered externally in prisons and through civil society organisations, in some cases in partnership with local government. As a result, UK de-radicalisation carries wider ethical, political and social implications than programmes in other parts of the world, notwithstanding wider debates that accompany the discourse on de-radicalisation, which raise issues involving identity, multiculturalism and the place of Muslims in the UK. Despite the new prominence of de-radicalisation in counter-terrorism policy, little continues to be known about these programmes and about what de-radicalisation as a concept actually means.

Using empirical data from fieldwork conducted in the form of interviews with key policy-makers and practitioners working in the field of de-radicalisation, the following analysis will argue that de-radicalisation as a conceptual framework in the UK counter-terrorism strategy is confusing and misleading, resulting in multiple understandings of de-radicalisation. In the first section, I will provide a cursory overview of de-radicalisation programmes as well as the literature on de-radicalisation in order to provide context to this investigation. In the second section, I will highlight some brief findings from the empirical field data and assess some of the salient implications for conceptual understanding of de-radicalisation. I will then briefly situate the findings of my research within the broader literature on de-radicalisation, making the case that my data sheds new light empirically on what we currently know on de-radicalisation in the UK. I conclude by suggesting that a deeper examination of policy-makers’ understanding of de-radicalisation and its relationship to counter-radicalisation indicates wider challenges for the field of counter-terrorism moving forwards.

The development of de-radicalisation as an instrument of counter-terrorism

A number of programmes emerged in many countries in the ME, SEA and Europe in the late 1990s, but particularly post-9/11, with the overarching objective of getting individuals and groups to move away from terrorism (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009). These programmes or interventions have been targeted at all types of violent/extremist groups and individuals, from the left-wing guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), to right-wing extremists in Europe, and to takfiri jihadist militants in the ME and SEA. These programmes have been guided by different strategies and vary in type from individual to collective de-radicalisation, and state- and/or NGO-run programmes. The delivery of these programmes has been implemented and expressed through a number of diverse and related activities that include counselling, dialogue, counter-ideology, state repressions, family involvement and aftercare. Interventions are also predominantly prison-based programmes, whereas European programmes mainly target individuals outside of prison environments.

European programmes are broadly voluntary-based and target non-violent extremist. In the UK, programmes that deal with de-radicalisation actually sit within the Prevent strategy, which is a counter-terrorism strategy that takes more
preventive approaches to tackling the perceived problem of Muslim radicalisa-
tion. On the one hand, de-radicalisation is generally posited as a rehabilitative
model targeted at individuals who have already crossed the line and pose a
threat. It is thus underscored by the notion that ‘we are going to make you good
and/or better’. On the other hand, de-radicalisation sits within Prevent, whose
underlying logic is ‘prevention is better than cure’ and suggests that ‘we are here
to stop you from becoming bad’. The notion of prevention therefore deals with a
long-term condition whereas de-radicalisation is situated further up the spectrum
of intervention. Examples of de-radicalisation intervention providers in the UK
include the Strategy to Reach, Empower and Educate (STREET), which was run
by a community and grassroots group based in Brixton, south London, and the
Active Change Foundation (ACF), which is a grassroots organisation based in
East London. These interventions were administered through the Channel
Project, which is the UK’s official de-radicalisation programme and is run by the
police in conjunction with the intervention providers named above. Similar pro-
grammes exist in mainland Europe, including the EXIT programmes in Sweden
and Norway, which target far-right extremism (these programmes interestingly
emphasise non-ideological factors, such as belonging to a group, in explanations
of pathways towards far-right extremism), and the Violence Prevention Network
in Germany, which expanded its previous remit to include religiously radicalised
individuals. In Amsterdam, a programme called Information House targeted rad-
icalised Muslims, but due to concerns about privacy had to be closed in Decem-
ber 2009 (Rabasa et al. 2010).

De-radicalisation: a summary of the literature

De-radicalisation is a new area of study and consequently little research has been
undertaken on this concept. Nevertheless, the first major problem in the liter-
ature relates to the question of definition. The definition of de-radicalisation is
vague, usually denoting programmes that are generally directed towards indi-
viduals who have become radical with the aim of re-integrating them into society
or dissuading them from violence (UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task
Force 2008: 5). However, the confusion about the term is compounded in the
literature with the use of other terms that are used in the same context as ‘de-
radicalisation’ but that convey subtle differences in meaning and have sub-
sequent policy ramifications. Terms like ‘rehabilitation’, ‘re-socialisation’,
de-programming’ and ‘dialogue’ are used to refer to de-radicalisation pro-
grammes. De-radicalisation is also employed interchangeably in the discourse
with other terms like ‘disengagement’ and ‘counter-radicalisation’.

The literature on the conceptual dimensions of de-radicalisation primarily
identifies distinctions between cognitive and behavioural change and between
individual and collective de-radicalisation as the core characteristics of the phe-
nomenon of de-radicalisation. There are, however, other characteristics to de-
radicalisation conceptually speaking, namely the distinctions between voluntary
and involuntary, between state and non-state programmes, and between
programmes and initiatives (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009: 3). Nevertheless, there has been scant consideration of the conceptual ontology of de-radicalisation in the literature, and what little discussion that has taken place has focused on making distinctions between cognitive and behavioural variables. This is because the literature distinguishes between disengagement (behaviour) on the one hand and de-radicalisation (cognition) on the other as strategies of counter-terrorism. This tension is reflected in the Home Office’s definition of de-radicalisation:

This support is sometimes described as ‘deradicalisation’, a term which is used to refer to cognitive or behavioural change and sometimes to both. There are analogies between this work and other forms of crime prevention. (Home Office 2011: 65)

Meanwhile, the only real attempts academically at conceptualising de-radicalisation have been made by John Horgan (Horgan 2008, 2009; Bjorgo and Horgan 2009) and Omar Ashour (2008). According to Horgan, current understandings of de-radicalisation fail to distinguish between cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Horgan states that de-radicalisation is predicated on the reorientation of ‘worldview’ and cognitive shift of detainees taking part in such programmes (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009: 5). However, one aim of de-radicalisation is to get armed Islamist groups to renounce violence, which is in fact a behavioural change, also known as ‘disengagement’ (Horgan 2008). Unlike de-radicalisation, disengagement does not require a change of ideals or views but only the renunciation of violence. Therefore, the most significant problem with current assumptions about de-radicalisation conceptually is the failure to divorce the behavioural and cognitive dimensions of the term. In other words, it is based on the misleading assumption that ‘radical views predict radical behaviour’ (Horgan 2009: 5). Instead, Horgan argues that the relationship between behaviour and cognition and how they interact is more complex than previously understood. Contrary to misconceptions, research demonstrates that, more often than not, extremist views are acquired after an individual joins a group, and not before (Horgan 2009: 5). Based on the principle that behavioural changes can and do occur before changes to the views of militant individuals, Horgan emphasises the need to focus on disengagement. As a result, he prefers to use the phrase ‘risk reduction initiatives’ rather than the term ‘de-radicalisation’, because deeper scrutiny of such programmes actually reveals that de-radicalisation is about reducing the risk for ‘engagement (and/or re-engagement) in terrorism and illicit activity’ (Horgan 2009).

In contrast, Omar Ashour’s conceptual understanding of de-radicalisation uses a different methodological approach that situates it as a process of relative change that occurs at the collective level within Islamist movements (Ashour 2009: 5). Thus, it does not address the strict conceptual separation between behavioural and cognitive variables as a process at an individual level. Instead, Ashour distinguishes three different levels of de-radicalisation (ibid.: 6):
behavioural: refers to groups abandoning the use of violence; ideological: refers to the de-legitimisation of violence; and organisational: refers to the demobilisation of members and can only occur after the former two levels are achieved.

In addition, Ashour’s conceptualisation encompasses three dimensions (ibid.):

1 pragmatic: refers to behavioural de-radicalisation without ideological change;
2 substantive: encompasses both behavioural and ideological changes; and
3 comprehensive: occurs when de-radicalisation happens at all three levels.

In contrast to Horgan, Ashour is more open about the potential of cognitive change to induce a more ‘substantive’ level of de-radicalisation through the de-legitimisation of violence and counter-ideological provisions. Ashour offers a conception that does not presume a causal relationship between cognitive and behavioural variables at an individual level.

More importantly, both Ashour and Horgan conceptualise de-radicalisation as being about getting violent takfiri jihadists to abandon violence. Ashour explicitly states that de-radicalisation in Egypt is not about changing attitudes towards democracy and other norms and claims that many de-radicalised groups still uphold ‘misogynist, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-democratic views’ (ibid.: 6). Cognitive change, therefore, does not entail the adoption of liberal values and norms. Consequently, Horgan’s and Ashour’s studies of de-radicalisation, as well as the wider field analysis, seem to suggest a disjuncture between de-radicalisation as a notion and actual de-radicalisation as practice.

With regards to the de-radicalisation process, policy-makers and academics are trying to understand these processes with reference to the literature on gangs, social movements and cults (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009: 7–10). However, it is unclear what the process of de-radicalisation looks like from beginning to end in terms of pathways out of radicalisation. Some variables and factors leading to de-radicalisation have been identified: ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors (ibid.: 30–47), rational choice theories, the influence of counter-ideology, the influences of material-based provisions, the influence of charismatic leaders, and state repression and incentives. Notably, Ashour believes that the success of de-radicalisation programmes, like those in Egypt that have achieved the disengagement of the Islamic Group and Islamic Jihad, could be attributed to structural-political reasons: state repression, state inducements over decades, the role of charismatic leadership, and social interaction (Ashour 2009: 102–109). It was not merely counter-ideology. Since de-radicalisation programmes include both material and counter-ideological components, it is difficult to evaluate which factors are the most important (Chowdhury and Hearne 2008: 16). In fact, the literature shows that ideological factors play little or no role in persuading individuals to enter or leave such groups and movements (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009: 36–40). This highlights the disjuncture between the largely ideological
focus of current de-radicalisation programmes and the factors found to motivate individuals’ entry into and exit from terrorist organisations (Morris et al. 2010: 6). It also reveals a poor understanding of the de-radicalisation processes.

In summary, the literature tells us that de-radicalisation is conceptually ambiguous, that no agreement exists on the factors that lead individuals away from violence and that there exist various programmes with different approaches and strategies. Indeed, there appears to be little or no evidence from the literature regarding how you get someone to de-radicalise, let alone what de-radicalisation itself is. Therefore, it does not appear that any empirical basis for the policy development of de-radicalisation programmes exists. However, attempts to understand this new phenomenon have begun. Horgan has asked searching conceptual and definitional questions, while Ashour has provided answers to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ on de-radicalisation. The main question that this investigation will attempt to answer, therefore, is: what is de-radicalisation?

The research study

Given that de-radicalisation as a strategy has been conceived by policy-making elite as one of many instruments of counter-terrorism in the fight against violent radicalisation, this raises an important question as to why no substantial academic work on the subject has been conducted and why there is no empirical evidence about the process of de-radicalisation. This is remarkable in light of the considerable political, financial and emotional capital invested in trying to understand and tackle al-Qaeda-inspired radicalisation. These security concerns have dominated the policy agenda in the UK beyond the narrow scope of counter-terrorism between 2005 and 2011, impacting on and dominating debates on multiculturalism, identity and immigration, among other issues. The lack of conceptual clarity of the meaning of de-radicalisation, therefore, raises the following questions: what is de-radicalisation supposed to tackle if the targets of de-radicalisation are non-violent youths with no links or association to terrorist groups? Is de-radicalisation about tackling the threat of violence? What is the relationship between Prevent, counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation? What is de-radicalisation?

This research is based upon 27 semi-structured interviews that were conducted between November 2011 and May 2013. Participants were identified for their expertise and knowledge on Prevent and de-radicalisation and drawn from a cross-section of bodies and organisations. They included Prevent Engagement Officers, police officers, a de-radicalisation intervention provider, think-tank analysts, academics, researchers, Muslim organisations that received Prevent funding, community activists and a former counter-terrorism officer. I aimed to use the data collated from my field work to disentangle the confusion and assumptions that currently characterise ideas and policies of de-radicalisation and to say something more substantively on it. I was particularly interested in finding out from the interviews the actual meaning of de-radicalisation conceptually and as a strategy of counter-terrorism in a way not captured in the literature and not reflected in policy.
Conceptual framework of de-radicalisation: contested term, contested concept

The data shows that de-radicalisation is a confusing and misleading term. This confusion is encapsulated by the statement below from an academic working on community approaches within Prevent:

I’m going to take a hard line view. For me I think de-radicalisation is about empowerment … what you are trying to do, I guess … well, it’s a good question. I’m just going to say empowerment because you can get into difficult territory otherwise.³

The research data revealed that there were over 28 different ways of referring to de-radicalisation by interviewees, which included: ‘de-legitimise’, ‘disengage’, ‘disaffiliate’, ‘dissuade’, ‘re-educate’, ‘counter-ideology’, ‘brain washing’, ‘counter-brain washing’, ‘counter-radicalisation’, ‘counter-subversion’, ‘rehabilitate’, ‘reintegrate into the mainstream’, ‘de-programming’, ‘re-programming’, ‘re-balancing’, ‘desisting’, ‘empowering’, ‘detox’, ‘thought-control’, ‘behaviour change’, ‘cognitive change’, ‘propaganda’, ‘supporting vulnerabilities’, ‘de-construction’, ‘disaffection’, ‘reversing radicalism’, ‘pacifying’ and ‘de-nazification’. Moreover, during interviews the terms were used interchangeably. For many, the term ‘violence’ was used synonymously with the term ‘terrorism’, as well as other concepts like ‘extremism’, ‘non-violent extremism’ and ‘violent radicalism’. Also interesting was that despite de-radicalisation being an element of counter-terrorism policy, terrorism was only mentioned twice. As a term, therefore, it means different things to different people. This corroborates the findings in the literature review.

Meanwhile, the data provides a more nuanced and complex picture of what de-radicalisation entails conceptually. De-radicalisation is thus comprised conceptually of the following:

1 cognitive change (changing worldview);
2 behavioural change (stopping violence);
3 a process/journey of change experienced by the individual;
4 preventive and rehabilitative policy strategies associated with various policy domains such as crime prevention, probation services and preventive health);
5 expertise and knowledge (refers to education, debate, rational discussion, etc., and includes think-tanks, academia and practitioners);
6 political remit (refers to governmental political objectives);
7 targeted at young people;
8 radicalisation (Prevent policy since 2006 and accompanying discourse on radicalisation). In the UK context, the concept of de-radicalisation is understood in relation to the concept and discourse of radicalisation.

As highlighted above, the data from the field work validates the main focus of the debate in the literature about the relationship between cognitive and
behavioural factors underpinning conceptions of de-radicalisation. However, in addition to the various conceptualisations of de-radicalisation discussed in the literature review, there were other factors that interviewees considered, referred to directly or indirectly, as well as understood, when discussing de-radicalisation. In particular, Points 5 to 8 above are unique and distinctive to the UK understanding of de-radicalisation. There is not sufficient space to elaborate upon each factor in detail; I will therefore provide a cursory overview of the contested nature of de-radicalisation conceptually by touching on the first point, ‘changing worldview’, and its relationship with the second, ‘stopping violence’.

The data shows that over 85 per cent of participants believed that de-radicalisation is about changing the ‘worldview’ of individuals, and over half of the interviewees spoke of cognitive and behavioural change in tandem when discussing de-radicalisation. This might allude to a relationship between thought and action rather than conceptions that separate each variable. The tension between the notion of de-radicalisation as a cognitive change on the one hand and a behavioural change on the other is reflected in the answers provided by the majority of interviewees. In short, for the majority of interviewees, the concept of de-radicalisation entails both cognitive and behavioural changes. However, besides those interviewees who were intervention providers, Prevent Engagement Officers and certain think-tank analysts, it was not possible to infer from the data the extent to which participants actually believed in a causal relationship between ideas and behaviour. Given, however, that there is no criminal liability for possessing a particular state of mind, why is one of the strategies of the UK’s counter-terrorism policy placing particular emphasis on certain ideas?

The assumption underlying cognitive change in conceptions of de-radicalisation is that the justification for violence by militants is sanctioned by a particular ‘worldview’ or ideology, and de-radicalisation is therefore about dislodging the theoretical construct behind it. In other words, ideology and/or a set of particular ideas are a causal factor in pathways towards terrorism.

Ideology is certainly a key factor because a simple narrative such as the West is at war with Islam, that it’s a war between us and them, and that we are soldiers of the caliphate and get ready for jihad – those kinds of powerful Islamist messages which unite grievances and people’s sense of disempowerment into an active membership of a group, you know, that their lives are worth something and its worth getting involved in plots and things. Hence, while de-radicalisation purportedly aims to achieve behavioural change, (i.e. to stop terrorism), behavioural change is considered secondary to cognitive change. It is in this sense that de-radicalisation is presented as a strategy that seeks to tackle the ideas that lead to violence. One of the leading figures behind prison de-radicalisation in the UK explained:

De-radicalisation, to do it, you need to be able to deconstruct the ideas that formed in that person’s mind and give him a better way of understanding.
the proof and evidences that led him to those thoughts. Plus we have to give him an alternative to taking that course of action.\textsuperscript{6}

This of course begs the question: what, according to policy-makers, constitutes radical thinking? What does this threatening ideology look like? According to interventional providers, these ideas are linked primarily to concepts and rulings found in Islamic jurisprudence surrounding, in no particular order:\textsuperscript{7}

1 Jihad (‘struggle’, but in this context violent struggle);
2 Kafir (non-believer or ‘infidel’);
3 Khalafa (political institution akin to a sultanate);
4 Ummah (general community of Muslims);
5 Sharia (Islamic law).

Notably, the majority of interviewees did not go into this much detail. This type of technical language and specialist knowledge highlights the important role that expertise and knowledge plays in constructions of de-radicalisation and the Prevent strategy more generally, an area I cannot address here. Nevertheless, according to the data the five-point theological-political formulation above forms the constitutive block of the ‘worldview’/ideology of al-Qaeda-inspired militants. The Prevent strategy’s conception of de-radicalisation, shared by some of the interviewees, is that this ‘worldview’ causes violence and must consequently be challenged.

However, the data also advances a second understanding of cognitive change. For example, some interviewees suggested that the focus on ideas in conceptions of de-radicalisation opened up a problematic and contested space in the Prevent strategy – a view aptly expressed by an academic and author:

\begin{displayquote}
Is it your views on women? Or your views on democracy? Or your views on foreign policy? Or is it your views on domestic policy? Or is it your views on violence?… They’re saying it’s not just about terrorism and violence, it’s about all these other things that somehow makes you vulnerable to the violent part.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{displayquote}

For this interviewee, as for a number of others, the focus on ideas in conceptions of de-radicalisation was not directly related to terrorism. It was instead understood as a strategy of counter-ideology and therefore part of a wider counter-subversion objective. This was explained by an ex-police officer with decades of experience in counter-terrorism:

\begin{displayquote}
Having said that, it’s equally possible to see de-radicalisation has been part of the process that is not at all concerned about people’s behaviour or about moving people away from violence, whether it’s gang violence or extremist violence, but it’s more about de-radicalising people from this ideology.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{displayquote}
In contrast to the first conception of de-radicalisation, which posits that ideology is a causal factor in the process towards terrorism, an alternative view of this ideology – one that emphasises the political, social and cultural threat of such ideas – was articulated by a number of interviewees. This alternative interpretation suggests that the theological-political framework underpinning ‘violent extremist’ ideology, outlined above, is reframed and represented as the framework underpinning the ideology/’worldview’ of ‘non-violent extremists’.

The Salafis, some of the Brotherhood groups, Hizb ut-Tahrir, basically preached in this country for many years that a good Muslim cannot integrate and be a loyal citizen of this country; cannot serve in the military or the police because that’s allegiance to a kufur system or man-made laws; so a lot of these Islamist ideas are holding back Muslims in this country and also it kind of builds up rage, with an over-emphasis on foreign policy.10

This interpretation of ‘worldview’ is more expansive than the first because it is not only concerned with tackling the threat of violence. It is an interpretation that consequently brought many individuals and groups into the category of ‘extremist’ and thus became ‘radicalised’ subjects. The category ‘extremist/radical’, which is constructed as a threat, thus encompassed ‘non-violent’ individuals who were ‘extremists’, as well as violent individuals on the cusp of radicalisation towards terrorism. Indeed, this new categorisation was introduced with the second revision of Prevent in 2009.11 The underlying principle of Prevent II was that the government would not support groups and individuals who did not subscribe to ‘British values’, despite an acceptance of the experience and knowledge such groups and individuals have in tackling the threat of violent radicalisation. ‘British values’ and ‘non-violent extremism’ thus became categories whereby boundaries of exclusion were ostensibly demarcated. It was not merely violence, therefore, that was problematic, but also issues like ‘integration’, ‘citizenship’ and ‘loyalty’ to Britain. As a result, with this interpretation of ‘worldview’ in mind, it became feasible to conceive of a more substantial conception of de-radicalisation, one preoccupied with the purging of political and social spaces of these theological and political ideas in the UK. An academic expressed this idea in the following way:

It’s almost like mind control, thought control, it’s about your thought, your beliefs, your understanding is wrong and we will put you through something that will actually make you have the correct thoughts. It brings us back to the idea that, is what we are trying to achieve here a version of Islam that is palatable to a British political mindset?12

This understanding of de-radicalisation focuses on changing an individual’s ‘worldview’ in a way that moves the concern of policy-makers beyond violence. It suggests that de-radicalisation in the UK shows a greater concern than in the ME and SEA programmes with the adoption of values and norms by individuals...
undergoing intervention. A closer examination also indicates that this understanding of de-radicalisation is more about the socialisation of individuals, not only into mainstream society, but also towards a politically mainstream view. It is, therefore, a conception that seeks a more substantial transformation in the individual and suggests that, in the UK context, it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to get violent individuals to renounce violence as part of the de-radicalisation process. In other words, a necessary and sufficient condition for de-radicalisation to occur entails both abandoning violence, as well as adopting the values and norms of wider society. This view was encapsulated by a retired police officer who has served on the Prevent Delivery Board:

I think the agenda is to stir disaffected young people into the mainstream viewpoint. Getting them to sign up to those elusive British values we were talking about, getting them to sign up to liberal secularism.\(^\text{13}\)

Meanwhile, another understanding of de-radicalisation perhaps unique to the UK is its preoccupation with the empowerment of youths, in addition to crime prevention strategies. For example, here is a senior Prevent Engagement Officer discussing de-radicalisation in terms of crime rehabilitation:

As police officers ... we’ve begun a process of holding that person’s hand, picking them up and walking with them; to places where they can get voluntary experiences, be mentored, and meet people outside his universe of reference; he’s never met anybody outside his community other than his own and that, and if he was radicalised, well that’s de-radicalisation.\(^\text{14}\)

As indicated in the statement, this view of de-radicalisation has a tenuous link with tackling terrorism and violence at the level of ideas. Another example is also shown below from a community activist, who not only talked in terms of youth empowerment and crime prevention, but also interestingly evoked other phenomena, like extremism and political violence, in her definition of de-radicalisation:

Ideally it’s about making disenfranchised young people make the right choices. De-radicalisation could be about any route. So in this instance it should be about becoming extremist Muslim and going to fight wars abroad and stopping that. But it should be about giving young people choice and money should be pumped out, you know, to help them staying out of gangs.\(^\text{15}\)

Notably, the conception of de-radicalisation that is preoccupied with youth empowerment indicates a greater preoccupation with prevention strategies seen in other policy domains, such as health and crime. For example, in the Prevent strategy, de-radicalisation falls under ‘supporting vulnerable individuals’ and the relationship between preventive approaches to crime and youth empowerment is
evident in the police-run Channel project (HMG 2012), a programme that I did not have space to examine.

In summary, the data shows that no definitional and conceptual agreement existed on de-radicalisation among interviewees. It is also indicates that not all de-radicalisation is the same. There appear to be multiple understandings of de-radicalisation in the UK context: one conception relates to the renunciation, through thought-reform, of violence only; a second conception situates de-radicalisation within the preventive framework of youth empowerment, probation services and crime prevention; and the third conception – which, of the three, represents the most significant challenge to policy-makers – moves the focus beyond the concern for violence and instead emphasises the need to have individuals adopt the political and social values of the country as a sufficient and necessary condition for successful de-radicalisation to occur.

The significance of my research data

It is important to note here some of the methodological limitations of my data set. The first is sample size. I interviewed 27 individuals, which – although a reliable set in order to identify patterns and be able to make coherent interpretations – is nevertheless a small and selective sample size, which makes resounding conclusions challenging to affirm. Mention must also be made of demographic issues. I deliberately chose individuals who were working in the field of counter-terrorism and Prevent, as well as individuals who have specialist knowledge of the field. It could be argued that a more effective data set would have included interviewees who were ex-militants and/or had been through a Channel intervention, in order to capture some of the conceptual threads underpinning their transformation through the de-radicalisation process. However, it was not practically feasible to interview individuals who have been through Channel for the simple reason that the identity and cases of those individuals are classified. With respect to interviewing ex-radicals, I interviewed at least two; however, these individuals spoke about de-radicalisation and Prevent in their capacities as professionals working for organisations rather than as de-radicalised individuals. Perhaps even more sought-after, of course, is data from actual real-life militants, and yet this is problematic for ethical and practical reasons, and access to such high-risk, high-profile interviews seldom happens (Disley et al. 2009: vi). My data does not shed new light on how somebody actually becomes de-radicalised. In part, of course, this is due to the scope of my research, which is more concerned with understanding de-radicalisation ontologically. Finally, it must be stated that my research is, after all, a preliminary ontological investigation into a complex phenomenon. More empirical data is needed with a larger sample of people over a longer time period to fully contextualise some of my findings as well as accentuate their implications further.

Notwithstanding these methodological limitations, my research data represents the only primary data available on de-radicalisation in the UK context. This is significant for the corpus of work on de-radicalisation given the limited
availability or absence of data missing in that literature. It thus offers distinctive insights about de-radicalisation ontologically in a more nuanced and meaningful way than stated in policy and think-tank documents. In particular, the research data illustrates that features such as expertise and knowledge, political remit, young people as targets, and the relationship with radicalisation discourse are explicitly unique to the UK conceptualisation of de-radicalisation in comparison to that which appears in the literature. While there was not space to analyse these conceptual features in more detail, there was room for a brief examination of the tension between cognitive and behavioural variables in conceptions of de-radicalisation, which gets to the heart of the issue. More importantly, the data suggests that de-radicalisation in its current iteration in the UK potentially represents a conflation of agendas: it reflects concerns with the security agenda and with mitigating violence; it reflects concerns with the social and political integration agenda; and it reflects broader concerns relating to personal and national identity. The research conducted in this chapter raises several important questions relating to the concept of de-radicalisation. They include: what do we actually mean by de-radicalisation? Who is/are the subjects of de-radicalisation? And which type of de-radicalisation policy are we talking about? The data thus suggests that another way of understanding de-radicalisation, besides in relation to conventional concerns with terrorism, is perhaps to view it as being concerned with wider political and governmental objectives relating to reconstructions of the state, identity and citizenship.

Conclusion

De-radicalisation is an instrument of counter-terrorism policy that, in theory, is designed to provide the police and policy-makers with a more selective, targeted and structured approach to tackling the threat of terrorism. It is also supposed to do away with the blanket and problematic approach characterising Prevent initiatives between 2006 and 2010. However, a closer examination of the conceptual framework of de-radicalisation using primary data from the fieldwork that was conducted for this study reveals challenges that have significant implications for policymakers. For example, it has been demonstrated that the present conceptualisation of de-radicalisation rests on a weak conceptual and definitional framework. Indeed, in its current iteration de-radicalisation represents a catch-all term and concept for a number of separate agendas, aims and ideas. This includes posing critical questions surrounding national security, national identity and citizenship. Policy-makers are consequently interested in tackling what is perceived to be the most acute peacetime threat in British history (Briggs and Birdwell 2009: 113) with a prescribed solution – de-radicalisation – that has an under-researched conceptual basis and that is characterised by a lack of agreement over its exact meaning. In addition, the conceptual confusion surrounding de-radicalisation has an impact on the way it is implemented in practice, particularly because de-radicalisation targets ‘vulnerable individuals’ and particular communities.
The need for significant and rigorous academic research on de-radicalisation cannot be overstated. Governments in Europe are interested in knowing what can be done to get individuals to abandon violent extremism. It is imperative, therefore, to understand why individuals and groups choose to take up violence, how they come to see it as legitimate and why they choose to abandon it. As such, this chapter has sought to capture what de-radicalisation entails ontologically in a more substantial and rigorous way than represented, specifically, in the Prevent programme and, more broadly, in everyday discourse. The research conducted here suggests that the current conception of de-radicalisation might not be the best way to address the problem in the first place.

Notes

1 There are only four main studies on de-radicalisation: *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists* (Ashour 2009), which is the only detailed and focused case study of de-radicalisation in the field; *Leaving Terrorism Behind* (Bjorgo and Horgan 2009), which is the first attempt in the field to provide a comparative study of the processes and programmes of disengagement and de-radicalisation; *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, published by the RAND Corporation (Rabasa et al. 2010); and *Decline and Disengagement*, published by the Institute for Migration & Ethnic Studies (Demant et al. 2008), which is one of the earliest and most comprehensive reports on de-radicalisation. The non-UK think-tank reports do not advance a conceptual framework for de-radicalisation but only reiterate discussions about cognitive and behavioural dimensions at the individual level. However, both think-tank reports stress the significance of a particular type of cognitive change, one encompassing the adoption of values and norms on issues like democracy and equality. This conception of de-radicalisation is similar to those in the UK. However, it is important to bear in mind the following caveat. I argue in this chapter that the one of the conceptions of de-radicalisation suggests a preoccupation with identity issues and the adoption of the country’s values. I suggest this is unique to the UK merely because my fieldwork is UK-based and therefore I can make empirical inferences more confidently with respect to the UK rather than elsewhere. Also, the UK has the most developed de-radicalisation intervention programme geared towards addressing the threat of Al-Qaeda-inspired radicalisation in Europe (there have been other interventions aimed at the far right, such as in Scandinavia with the Exit programmes, and a number of pilot projects targeting Al-Qaeda-inspired radicalisation in the Netherlands). To this extent, de-radicalisation in the UK remains the most developed and actively functioning intervention programme in Europe. Also, the multitude of conceptions of de-radicalisation in the UK is certainly unique in comparison to the Middle East and South East Asia, whereas identity issues play a limited, if not non-existent, role. The reason for this (hence the importance of understanding de-radicalisation in relation to radicalisation) is that Western conceptions of de-radicalisation (whether in other countries in the EU with Prevent strategies, like the Netherlands and Denmark, or America where a number of think-tank-based counter-terrorism ‘experts’ are investigating de-radicalisation) have been shaped by the radicalisation concept and discourse (employing the same positivist methodologies and the same conceptual assumptions that violence follows ideologically in a linear fashion, etc.), which preceded de-radicalisation. In particular, issues regarding national identity and integration became intertwined with the security threat of domestic home-grown bombers in the conceptualisation of
radicalisation post-2005. Hence the preoccupation with identity issues (and its con-
flation with the security agenda) had made its way into the conceptualisation of de-
radicalisation by Western think-tanks. This conflation of identity and security agenda does not feature in the conception of deradicalisation in the ME and SEA. Despite this, the UK literature on de-radicalisation has mainly been confined to think-tank reports: *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries* (ICSR 2010), which is a best-practice description of prison pro-
grammes; and *The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-
Radicalisation* (ISD 2010), which merely provides a summary of existing programmes. These reports do not add anything to the corpus produced in the four studies above.

The lack of empirical data emerging from reports on programmes is acknowledged in Prevent 2011: ‘There is little empirical evidence underpinning intervention work in this area here in the UK and internationally’ (Home Of-
fi
ce 2011: 66). This conclusion was also presented in a report prepared for the Office for Security and Counter-
Terrorism (OSCT) in the UK Home Office and commissioned to inform policy develop-
ment in relation to the Prevent strand of CONTEST II: ‘The available evidence provides a limited basis for policy development. There are too few studies that look at leaving terrorist groups and a very limited number that look at leaving Al Qa’ida-
influenced groups. The studies that have interviewed individuals who have left ter-
rorist groups are useful starting points, but they provide an insufficient basis for isolating the factors that caused, or were strongly associated with, an individual’s decision to leave’ (Disley *et al.* 2009: vi).

1 The statistics I use are based on calculations from my data set. As part of the data ana-
lysis, I grouped themes and concepts together, collating all references, both direct and indirect, to ideas, worldview and ideology, tallying that figure and dividing it by the total number of categories, to get a percentage of the total.

12 Interview 11, 20 March 2012.
13 Interview 24, 18 February 2013.
14 Interview 22, 5 February 2013.
15 Interview 13, 11 April 2012.
16 According to former Director-General of MI5 Jonathan Evans, home-grown radicali-
sation represented the ‘most immediate and acute peacetime threat in the 98-year history of my service’ (Briggs and Birdwell 2009: 113).

9 Interview 17, 31 May 2013.
11 Up until that point, the Prevent strategy was primarily characterised by an approach that existed before 7/7, particularly through the bottom-up approaches of the Muslim Contact Unit (Lambert 2011). Prevent I, between 2007 and 2009, encouraged Islamist and Salafi groups to tackle the threat of violent radicalisation. It was an approach primarily based on the principle of effectiveness and legitimacy: that Salafi groups, like the Brixton STREET project, and Islamists at the Finsbury Park Mosque had the legitimacy drawn from being members of Muslim communities, as well as the know-
ledge, given that they were theologically aligned (broadly speaking) to Salafi-takfiri ideology, to tackle the ideology. This was the context before the introduction of Prevent 2009 and reorientation towards the notion of British values as an overarching strategy in both the selection of partners in the delivery of Prevent and how it is implemented on the ground in local communities.
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Refocusing Danish counter-radicalisation efforts

An analysis of the (problematic) logic and practice of individual de-radicalisation interventions

Lasse Lindeklide

Introduction

In 2008, Denmark was appointed the European Union’s (EU) ‘lead country’ on de-radicalisation and prevention of violent extremism by the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove (SI 2012a: 1). This position led to the establishment of the EU-sponsored pilot project De-Radicalisation: Targeted Intervention, which ran from 2009 to 2012 and which has been a central element of Danish counter-radicalisation efforts. The pilot project, which was aimed at developing methods and tools of targeted intervention strategies in cases of radicalisation, was coordinated and anchored by the then newly established Office of Democracy and Radicalisation Prevention, first under the Ministry of Integration and then, after the change of government in 2011, under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration. The actual development of strategies of targeted interventions has been a joint venture between the Office of Democracy and Radicalisation Prevention, the model municipalities of the two largest cities in Denmark, Copenhagen and Aarhus, East Jutland Police Force and the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (Thomsen 2012: 4–5).

The pilot project focused on developing tools and concrete methodologies of intervention in three focus areas:

1. a mentoring scheme that targets interventions at individuals who show signs of radicalisation, building on early experiences from the Municipality of Aarhus (see SI 2011b), again heavily inspired by the Wij Amsterdammers programme in Amsterdam;
2. a scheme of training, skills upgrading and counselling to equip frontline workers to recognise signs of radicalisation and alarming behaviour in close contact with young people in the target group;
3. a model of disengagement/exit interventions aimed at individuals who are already radicalised or, for example, imprisoned on terrorist charges/convictions.

In 2009, Denmark announced a national action plan to fight radicalisation and extremism among young people. After a process of public consultation and
dialogue on a draft version, the centre-right government launched its action plan *A Common and Safe Future* in January 2009, to provide a multifaceted and comprehensive approach to counter-radicalisation. The aforementioned focus areas of the Danish pilot project on targeted interventions constituted the backbone of the strategy of direct contact with young people and knowledge/skills development. However, the national action plan contained initiatives in several other policy areas, including measures broadly designed to further community inclusion, anti-discrimination, dialogue between authorities and targeted communities, democratic cohesion, and resilience in vulnerable residential areas and prisons. As well as fighting radicalisation and extremism in society, the action plan also aimed to

maintain and further develop Denmark as a democratic society with freedom, responsibility, equality and opportunities for all. Primarily, because it holds an independent value for society as well as for the individual, but also in order to weaken the growth basis for radicalization of young people and to strengthen society’s resilience to extremism.

(Danish Government 2009: 11)

In addressing radicalisation and extremism in this holistic and comprehensive way, the national action plan aimed to establish a close connection between agendas of community cohesion, integration and equal opportunities on the one hand, and agendas of security and risk assessment on the other. In many ways, this mixing of agendas resembles the logic and underlying assumptions about the causes of radicalisation in the initial British Prevent strategy (see Chapter 2 in this volume; Thomas 2010; Heath-Kelly 2013; Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010). The blurring of boundaries and mixing of policy objectives between such distinctly separated areas as community cohesion building and security was also the target of public criticism in Denmark, but much less than the British strategy was in Britain (Lindekilde and Kühle 2012; Lindekilde 2012; Pram Gad 2012; Sedgwick 2010). The core of the criticism pointed out that the counter-radicalisation plan confuses security and community cohesion concerns and thereby securitises integration (or the lack hereof).¹ The result is a stigmatisation of large segments of, in particular, Muslim minorities, and their identification as ‘suspect communities’ that are at risk in terms of integration, and potentially in terms of security. Furthermore, the unclear and unspecified relation between policy goals, concrete initiatives (e.g. restrictions on renting public housing to immigrants on welfare benefits in vulnerable residential areas) and outcomes in terms of radicalisation prevention were criticised (Lindekilde 2013b).

Following this criticism and the first evaluations of the 2009 action plan (COWI 2010; 2011), the centre-left government that took office in September 2011 has worked to separate the goals of counter-radicalisation from social cohesion building, much like the revised British Prevent strategy of 2011 (Home Office 2011). The new, refocused Danish counter-radicalisation strategy concentrates on individual de-radicalisation and disengagement interventions aimed at
Refocusing Danish counter-radicalisation efforts

identifying and challenging the convictions of ‘vulnerable individuals’ or already radicalised individuals. In short, the new national counter-radicalisation efforts have in many ways returned to or refocused on the core elements of the initial Danish pilot project of targeted interventions presented above.

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: to map and typologise Danish counter-radicalisation efforts in light of the recent revisions, and to provide some critical reflections on the logic and practice of particularly the key initiatives of individual de-radicalisation interventions based on mentoring practices. In terms of data, the analysis builds primarily on a number of practical handbook guides produced by the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration targeted at frontline practitioners working with individual de-radicalisation interventions.

First, the chapter argues that the move from a comprehensive and holistic counter-radicalisation action plan to a much narrower focus on targeted interventions, abandoning elements of ‘battling extremist ideas’ in general and ‘tackling root causes of radicalisation’ (Van Dongen 2010), at least within the context of counter-radicalisation efforts, has been positive in terms of reducing the risk of stigmatisation. Second, the chapter argues that the new, refocused Danish counter-radicalisation strategy harbours significant potential pitfalls and enduring challenges. More concretely, it is argued that the targeted de-radicalisation interventions delivered predominantly by municipality-organised corps of mentors or role models is problematic in at least three ways. First, the considerable variation in what counts as ‘radicalisation’ or ‘signs of radicalisation’ and ‘resilience factors’ across professional groups of frontline workers (e.g. teachers, social workers, police) engaged in de-radicalisation interventions may result in conflicts, miscommunication and ‘false positives’ (interventions when they are not warranted). Assessing ‘signs of radicalisation’ and ‘resilience factors’ is also a central part of the mentor–mentee relationship. Here, the analysis of the mentor role shows that the mentor easily finds himself/herself caught in a dilemma, simultaneously working to actively confront and change views and practices and passively care and facilitate changes from within; build trust and companionship and challenge ideology; be personal and professional, etc. It is argued that this paradoxical role of the mentor reflects an inherent element of neo-liberal governmentality in the mentor programme. Second, exemplary cases of interventions show that the goals of interventions vary hugely in comparable cases – from disengagement via job opportunities, through helping parents cope with their children’s extremism, to empowering individuals to survive in extremist milieus – suggesting disagreement on their actual purpose. Finally, the way that individual de-radicalisation interventions are institutionally layered onto pre-existing programmes of ordinary crime prevention and risk assessment seems at times to be challenged in practice.

Theoretical underpinnings and data

In terms of theory, the chapter is underpinned by three related theoretical currents. First, in making sense of the overall logic of the Danish initiatives of
individual de-radicalisation interventions based on mentoring practices, I will draw upon recent critical scholarship of risk and resilience within studies of counter-terrorism policies (Amoore and de Goede 2008; Lindeklede 2012; Heath-Kelly 2013). Common to this literature is the understanding that ascription of risk factors to individuals and groups as performative rather than objective produces ‘suspect communities’ as the target of governance (see Mythen, Walklate and Khan 2009). In analysing individual de-radicalisation interventions as a particular technique of governance, this theoretical approach will help me to critically evaluate how interventions and the role of the mentor are made possible by the understanding of radicalisation as a linear process in which individuals ‘at risk’ risk ‘becoming risky’, and in which counter-radicalisation interventions become similar to ordinary crime prevention in trying to stop the process.

Second, when discussing the goals of individual interventions and the actual practice of de-radicalisation mentoring, I will draw upon Foucauldian ideas of the centrality of neo-liberal governmentality in modern societies (Dean 1999; Rose 1999). Looked upon in this light, it stands out how the individual de-radicalisation interventions are designed to make the mentee change on their own with support from the mentor. Thus, the interventions are not based on force, but on voluntary participation, and change is to be achieved through partnership and self-regulation. The focus on techniques of neo-liberal governance can help to make sense of the paradoxical role of the de-radicalisation mentor who, according to Danish policy documents, has to simultaneously function as ‘instructor’, ascribing disciplinary values, and ‘observer’, passively lending an ear to the mentee.

Finally, in the analytical discussion of the institutional design and professional anchoring of the de-radicalisation interventions, I will draw inspiration from policy implementation studies, which point towards the importance of professional norms in evaluating relevant ‘signs’ and applying, for example, categories of ‘risk’ and ‘resilience’ (Moncrieffe 2007; Soss 1999). What this literature has shown is that different professional perceptions of particular policy goals and categories may entail obstacles to efficient policy implementation.

The data for the present analysis consist of counter-radicalisation policy documents (public as well as a few internal government documents); the aforementioned practical handbook series, including specific manuals and formulae for organising individual interventions and assessing risk and resilience factors; secondary descriptions of actual cases of targeted interventions; two evaluation studies of targeted intervention practices, based on interviews with practitioners; and the author’s own conversations with counter-radicalisation practitioners in the field and members of target groups. It is my ambition that the diverse empirical data will allow me to present and map current Danish counter-radicalisation efforts in a rich manner, and that the critical analytical approach will cast light on potential pitfalls and enduring challenges of the revised and refocused strategy of targeted, individual de-radicalisation interventions.
Refocusing Danish counter-radicalisation efforts

Mapping Danish counter-radicalisation efforts: from comprehensive counter-radicalisation policies to targeted de-radicalisation interventions

I will start with a brief account of the development of Danish counter-radicalisation efforts since 2008, mapping recent revisions and how they deviate from the original 2009 national action plan. Although a public announcement has not yet been made, a source in the Office of Democracy and Radicalisation Prevention (Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration) states that the 2009 national action plan introduced above is no longer considered the guiding document on counter-radicalisation efforts in Denmark.\(^2\) In practical terms, this means that several key focus areas of the comprehensive 2009 plan, including its (very broad) guiding definition of extremism and radicalisation, have been dropped. However, some of the core measures of the old action plan remain intact.

The new 2011–2012 policy, described orally by the source in the Ministry and described briefly in an internal note (SI 2012b), broadly retains the group of initiatives of the 2009 national action plan, which built on the pilot project on targeted de-radicalisation interventions. Thus, the idea that radicalisation can be countered if individual youngsters who show signs of ‘alarming behaviour’ are supported and challenged directly by trained mentors or role models is maintained. In Vidino and Brandon’s words, the new policy outline continues to put emphasis on targeted interventions ‘aimed at swaying individuals back to “normal life”’ by assigning mentors or role models or by making use of other forms of ‘empowering conversation’, following referrals by teachers, police, parents, etc (2012: 52). However, the new policy abandons the measures categorised by Van Dongen (2010) as a broad ‘battle of ideas’ and designed, for example, to inform youngsters about the possibilities of democratic inclusion and active citizenship, and instead empowers target groups to solve their own problems by enhancing ‘democratic competences’ (see Danish Government 2009: 17–21). The new policy also abandons the objective of fighting ‘root causes of radicalisation’ by, for example, targeting discrimination and ghettoisation.

In short, the overall policy goal to ‘maintain and further develop Denmark as a democratic society with freedom, responsibility, equality and opportunities for all’ has been tacitly dropped. The current policy focuses on preventing the consequences of radicalisation, most importantly the use of violence, leaving aside the earlier measures aimed at preventing extremism and radicalisation from ever occurring. The new plan can be said to consist of three core sets of measures: a mentoring strategy, a counselling/educational strategy and an exit strategy (Thomsen 2012: 5). The two first strategies are predominantly anchored in municipalities with the assistance of the Office of Democracy and Radicalisation Prevention, and the third strategy is coordinated by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (Section on Preventive Security). In concrete terms, the measures and initiatives specified in Table 13.1 will in the future constitute the backbone of the strategy of counter-radicalisation in Denmark.
Table 13.1  The core elements of the revised Danish counter-radicalisation efforts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentoring strategy</th>
<th>Counselling/educational strategy</th>
<th>Exit strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentors in the municipalities. The mentoring schemes targeted at young people affiliated with extremist environments developed in the model municipalities of Copenhagen and Aarhus will be extended to other municipalities. Frontline workers in other parts of the country will be offered similar training, allowing them to function as mentors.</td>
<td>Prevention of extremism through SSP collaboration. Integrating the prevention of extremism and radicalisation within existing crime prevention efforts at the local level. The so-called “School–Social services–Police collaboration” will remain a cornerstone of the strategy. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration will continue to arrange courses for personnel involved in the SSP collaboration, to support them in preventing and tackling problems with extremism.</td>
<td>Disengagement talks. The Danish Security and Intelligence Service (Section on Preventive Security) is leading efforts to develop a scheme of individual exit interventions aimed at individuals who are engaged in violent extremist milieus or charged with/convicted of actual extremist crimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of tools and methodologies in mentoring work. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration will collaborate with the model municipality of Aarhus and affiliated psychologists to develop systematic conversational tools and methods for assessing the basic human life capacities and, thus, radicalisation indicators and resilience factors of individuals.</td>
<td>Counselling and upgrading of skills for other groups of frontline personnel. Up-skilling activities will continue to be offered to, for example, primary and post-secondary school teachers, frontline social workers, youth club and hotspot personnel, and local police, to increase their awareness of alarming signs and ways of addressing problems related to radicalisation and extremism.</td>
<td>Mentors in prisons. With support from the EU, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration has launched the project Back on Track in collaboration with the Prison and Probation Service. The purpose of the project is to train mentors to help prison inmates disengage from extremism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role models. Existing corps of role models from select cities will be up-skilled to be able to enter into dialogue with young people, primarily at a lower and post-secondary school level, when there is concern about polarising and intolerant behaviour and rhetoric.</td>
<td>Dissemination of knowledge and tools through the handbook series Preventing Extremism. As part of the up-skilling and teaching initiatives, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration will continue to develop a handbook series aimed at local actors, which presents a range of concrete methods and tools. This includes guidelines and digital forms to help structure relational work, mentoring, assessment and the development of action plans for individual youths.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents’ networks. As a pilot project, a network is being established in the municipalities of Aarhus and Copenhagen for parents of young people who have given cause for concern about radicalisation. The purpose is to involve the parents as a positive resource in the preventive work, and counsel them on the best ways to help their child.</td>
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Sources of raw data: SI 2012; Thomsen 2012. Author’s own layout and selection of data.
Thus, the new 2011–2012 policy engages with extremism and radicalisation in concrete cases where individuals show signs of alarming behaviour. The focus is on the practical consequences of involvement with extremism here and now, not on extremist or intolerant ideas as potential, future challenges to social cohesion or liberal democracy. The new policy is less concerned with proscribing good democratic citizenship and liberal values, and more focused on preventing violence and other negative consequences of radicalisation in concrete cases. Put differently, the new strategy stops short of the earlier broad ‘battle of ideas’ measures targeting the attitudes and beliefs of entire communities. The focus is now narrowed to individuals who already exhibit some form of extremism. Where the old strategy walked on at least two legs – one focused on citizenship, integration and social cohesion and one focused on security and concern about people’s wellbeing in concrete cases – the new strategy includes only the latter. This does not mean that integration, active citizenship and social cohesion are no longer important political goals in Denmark, but they have been detached from counter-radicalisation efforts. As mentioned, this decoupling of the citizenship and social cohesion agenda from counter-radicalisation efforts mirrors to some degree the recent revisions of the British Prevent strategy (Home Office 2011).

It seems clear that the refocused Danish counter-radicalisation efforts are a positive step forward. My own empirical research on the reception of the 2009 national action plan among Danish Muslims in the target group suggests that the securitisation of integration and the parallel construction of ‘suspect communities’ harboured in the policy initiatives triggered strong feelings of misrecognition among interviewed Muslims (Lindekilde and Kühle 2009; Lindekilde 2010). In the worst case scenario, the broad counter-radicalisation measures targeting entire communities as ‘suspect’ could be counter-productive and backfire in the form of oppositional identity formation and conflictual reactions (see Lindekilde 2013a). By decoupling citizenship, integration and social cohesion concerns from security concerns, the risk of backfire seems reduced. However, as we shall see below, the key, targeted de-radicalisation interventions contain their own pitfalls and challenges.

Targeted de-radicalisation interventions: enduring challenges and pitfalls

In the following section, I will zoom in on the ‘mentoring strategy’ of the revised Danish counter-radicalisation policy. There are at least two reasons for this. First, this part of the policy is currently being expanded from the two model municipalities of Copenhagen and Aarhus to other municipalities. Likewise, the target group of the municipality-based mentoring corps is being expanded from adolescents to include also adults. In many ways, the mentoring strategy is considered the approach to dealing with individual cases of radicalisation in Denmark. Second, the mentoring strategy, and especially the sophisticated risk/resilience assessment techniques – methodologies of systematic conversations between mentors and mentees and formulae to assist assessment – is being
exported to other countries, including Australia. In terms of assigned resources and visibility, the mentoring strategy is thus the most important part of the re-focused Danish counter-radicalisation efforts.

The analysis of the mentoring strategy will offer some critical reflections on the logic and practice of individual de-radicalisation interventions. As indicated, the analysis falls into three parts. The first part looks at the practice of identifying ‘vulnerable individuals’ and mentors’ assessments of individual ‘signs of radicalisation’ on the one hand and ‘resilience factors’ on the other hand. The data for this part is mainly the hands-on guides, tool kits and training manuals developed to fertilise the mentoring work. The second part of the analysis focuses on the delivery of targeted mentor interventions in concrete cases, and on the practical challenges of goal setting and goal achievement. The last part addresses the institutional anchoring of the mentoring strategy as layered onto pre-existing, ordinary crime prevention programmes, and questions the appropriateness of this institutional design. Data includes interviews with target group members.

Identifying ‘vulnerable individuals’: assessing ‘signs of concern’ and ‘resilience factors’

In Danish counter-radicalisation efforts, the first ‘notification of concern’ on an individual is normally made by frontline workers (teachers, youth club employees, street workers, etc.) or persons in the individual’s immediate network (family, friends, colleagues). In the municipality of Aarhus, for example, the initial notification is made through the ‘Information House on Radicalisation’, which is anchored in the East Jutland Police Force. Trained personnel screen notifications and, in cases of concern, pass information on to a steering committee consisting of municipality employees with special training in radicalisation prevention, the local SSP (School–Social services–Police collaboration) coordinator and specially trained police officers, who further investigate the case by, for example, contacting teachers, parents, etc. If the steering committee finds that intervention is called for, the type of intervention is discussed and the individual may be offered a mentor (Thomsen 2012: 22).

As should be clear from this brief description, the initial assessment of notifications of concern and referral of individuals to mentoring programmes include different professional groups. The idea behind this coordinated and diversified assessment strategy is to ensure a detailed and holistic view on individual cases. However, an evaluation study of concrete targeted interventions from 2011 shows that the diversity of professional groups involved in assessing individual cases may also cause problems, because what counts as ‘radicalisation’ or ‘signs of radicalisation’ on the one hand and protective ‘resilience factors’ on the other hand – who qualifies as ‘vulnerable individuals’ – varies considerably across professional groups (Jakobsen and Jensen 2011). The lack of consensus on the concept of radicalisation and on indicators of radicalisation and resilience leaves a relatively large scope for professional judgement. Different professional groups
will pass partly different professional judgements on the same ‘signs’, based on diverging professional norms, experience, knowledge and identities (Jakobsen and Jensen 2011: 9). For example, a school teacher may look upon an instance of religious bullying from the perspective of care and individual well-being, an SSP coordinator will be trained to look at it in terms of overall risk assessment, and a police officer will care mostly about the potential for law-breaking and violence. Although a kind of working consensus seems to exist that the care-based perspective on individual well-being should be dominant, concrete case studies show that the diversity in professional norms may lead to potential conflicts, miscommunication and inconsistency in initial assessments (Jakobsen and Jensen 2011: 6). This constitutes a risk of potential under-reaction (false negatives) and over-reaction (false positives).

When initial screening of a notification of concern leads to assignment of a mentor to the ‘vulnerable individual’, and the individual accepts, the actual phase of intervention begins. The first step is further specification and mapping of the mentee’s individual ‘signs of concern’ and ‘resilience factors’ to form a basis for the individual plan for change (SI 2011c; 2011d). The handbook series and related material recommend that mentors pay attention to four types of ‘concern’: ‘image concerns’, ‘behavioural concerns’, ‘attitudinal concerns’ and ‘relational concerns’. As regards ‘resilience’ or ‘protective’ factors, the material points towards the importance of stable family relations, good social skills, close friends, high self-esteem, empathy and a sense of belonging (Thomsen 2012: 35–37). To aid systematic assessment of ‘signs of concern’ and ‘resilience factors’, forms to be filled out by the mentor in collaboration with the mentee have been developed in collaboration with experienced psychiatrists (see Appendices 2 and 3 in SI 2011d). While systematic assessment procedures will ensure that most relevant factors are brought out and discussed, there is no guarantee that ‘signs’ are interpreted or understood ‘correctly’. For example, should a close relationship to an older brother who is engaged with a radical milieu, but who bars entrance to the milieu for his younger brother (the mentee), be considered a ‘relational concern’ or a ‘protective factor’? The challenge is to identify the mediating and moderating factors that direct individual and collective pathways towards violent radicalisation, as compared to non-radicalised youth crime, non-violent radicalisation, and other, positive, forms of engagement in social and cultural movements, and as compared to other varieties of identity formation.

The next step in the targeted intervention is to formulate a ‘personal plan’ for change, identifying overall goals, intermediate goals, necessary actions, motivations for change, barriers to change, and the mentee’s willingness and capacity to change (SI 2011d: 28–29). The ‘personal plan’ is formulated based on systematic interaction and structured conversations between the mentor and the mentee, explicating potentials for change in different aspects of the mentee’s life, and is meant to function as the mentee’s ‘road map’ away from extremism and back into ‘normal life’. In helping the mentee fulfil his/her personal plan, the mentor is expected to play a multitude of roles, taking on an ‘elaborate mentor role’ (Thomsen 2012: 42–46) as ‘role model’ (showing respect despite
disagreement), ‘supervisor’ (helping formulate goals and plans), ‘coach’ (posing problem-oriented and problem-solving questions) and ‘significant other’ (being present as an important adult in the mentee’s life). I argue that the fundamental logic of the elaborate mentor role is one of neo-liberal governmentality, where change is to be obtained through partnership and self-regulation similar to what Foucault called the ‘conduct of conduct’ (1982: 220–221).

An overview of Danish experiences with targeted de-radicalisation interventions, commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, depicts the mentors’ role and function as shown in Figure 13.1.

As should be clear, the elaborate mentor role is demanding. The span of tasks and roles in the course of the mentor–mentee relationship requires communicative dexterity and a large degree of social understanding and flexibility, and can be difficult to deliver in practice. This raises the question of how the mentors are recruited and trained for the job. So far, the de-radicalisation mentors in Copenhagen and Aarhus come from different professional backgrounds, including social workers, municipality employees with special training in matters of integration, psychiatrists, school teachers, university students and police officers (Thomsen 2012: 22). While this diversity of professional backgrounds and competences is an advantage in collectively assessing individual cases, it may, as indicated above, challenge internal communication. Mentors complete a number of intensive courses focusing on:

- academic knowledge about radicalisation and de-radicalisation;
- theories and techniques of targeted mentoring of young ‘vulnerable individuals’, focusing on familiarising the mentors with assessment techniques and personal plans as mentoring tools; and
- case-based training workshops, including simulated interactions between mentors and mentees (COWI 2010; 2011).

Course contents and specific training manuals are still being developed, but the mentor training is sophisticated, nuanced and practice-oriented. However, the drawback of the structured approach is that it risks becoming too systematic, making the assessment forms and the personal plan straitjackets rather than

![Figure 13.1 Depiction of the multiple functions of the de-radicalisation mentor (source: adapted from Thomsen 2012: 44).](image-url)
Refocusing Danish counter-radicalisation efforts

helpful tools in the mentoring work. Some mentors point out that mentoring in practice requires a large degree of flexibility and context adaptation, which may be challenged by the quest for systematic assessment (Thomsen 2012: 61). Likewise, the use of assessment forms and personal plans may alienate mentees, who cannot distinguish the mentor relationship from the ‘normal’ public social system.

More fundamentally, the diversity of perceived mentor roles and functions as presented in Figure 13.1 raises the question of whether they are all compatible. The mentor seems to be caught in a dilemma of advising, qualifying and creating reflections on the mentee’s engagement with extremist milieus and the consequences of extreme action repertoires on the one hand, and on the other hand sustaining trust and openness in the relationship so that the mentee continues to share thoughts, emotions and dreams of the future. The dilemma contains the delicate balancing of actively prescribing and advancing certain virtues, norms and actions, and more passively ‘lending an adult ear’ to a vulnerable adolescent. An imbalance may mean that change is forced, that the mentee withdraws or that the relationship becomes too ‘unprofessional’, entailing a loss of focus on progression. Either way, the intervention most likely fails in de-radicalising the individual.

**Delivering interventions: goal setting and goal achievement**

The goal of individually targeted mentor interventions is de-radicalisation. Nevertheless, different views exist as to what this means and entails. The systematic assessment tools and the personal plan described above are designed as techniques to facilitate and direct the change process towards de-radicalisation. However, a comparison of concrete cases of de-radicalisation interventions (described in SI 2011a; Thomsen 2012), in which individual mentors have been assigned upon evaluation of the initial notifications of concern, reveals great variance in the actual aims of the interventions and, thus, in the foci and success criteria of the mentor–mentee relationships.3 For example, a young Muslim man who was flirting with radical Islam and under-performing in school was assigned a mentor who focused on supporting the individual in catching up on schoolwork and graduating. The intervention succeeded in distracting the individual from radical Islam (Thomsen 2012: 19). In a second example, a young Muslim man of Somali descent was expressing support of Al-Shabaab and of wanting to engage in jihad. Through the use of poetry, music and literature, the assigned mentor, himself a Somali, worked to moderate the mentee’s religious view and to challenge his view of the particular violent group. A social worker close to the mentee assessed that upon mentoring the individual is ‘not 100% normal, but he has softer opinions today’ (SI 2011a: 19). Finally, in the case of a young girl who was frequenting an extreme-left milieu and skipping school, the mentor intervention focused on reducing absence from school, nuancing her political views, helping her parents accept her political orientation and ‘strengthening the girl’s competences of being in the extreme autonomous milieu’ (SI 2011a: 12–13).
As these examples show, the concrete goals and success criteria of interventions are multiple and vary on several dimensions. In the first example, the focus seems to have been on physical disengagement from radical Islam (offline and online) through intense schoolwork rather than ideological de-radicalisation (the alteration of beliefs), which was part of the focus in the second and third examples. It seems to differ from case to case whether the aim is to reduce risks of violence or to ‘normalise’ attitudes. Often goal setting stops short of any comprehensive de-radicalisation, which is the formal policy goal. Likewise, as in the last example, the focus may at times be to ease the consequences of an individual’s engagement with a radical milieu – here the girl’s conflict with her parents and the risks she faces from frequenting the milieu.

This brief reflection on concrete instances of intervention demonstrates the need to be flexible and pragmatic in terms of the goal, focus and depth of the mentor–mentee relationship. In practice, the purpose of interventions is negotiated and identified on a case-to-case basis, resembling an ‘art of the possible’. This pragmatism is essential in making mentoring work in practice. However, it poses a challenge in a context of increased pressure in all policy areas, including counter-radicalisation, of delivering ‘value-for-money’ and evidence-based policy evaluations (see Lindekilde 2013b for an elaborate discussion of this point). As highlighted by one of the coordinators of the mentoring programme in Aarhus:

We never know what effect an intervention has – that is, did we save him or not? There is a risk that he will meet what some would call a radicalisor, but it could also be that he himself changes his course for the better. It is just a little more likely that he will find this course now that we have assigned him a mentor, and not just left him to navigate on his own.

(SI 2011a: 21)

The quote indicates that often the criterion of success for interventions must be set short of any kind of comprehensive de-radicalisation. This seems reasonable from a pragmatic point of view, but also somewhat at odds with the systematic and comprehensive arsenal of assessment techniques employed by the mentors.

Whatever the goal of the intervention, the mentor–mentee relationship must at some point be terminated, either because the goal is achieved or for other reasons (e.g. the mentee withdraws from the programme). In cases where the mentor–mentee relationship has been less intense, less personal and brief, termination of the relationship will be unproblematic. However, in cases where the elaborate mentor role has been fully performed, and the mentor has become a ‘significant other’ in the life of the mentee, filling a void of adult contact, ending the relationship may be problematic and troublesome to the mentee (Thomsen 2012: 45). The mentee may experience the termination of the relationship as a loss and let-down, which may trigger new negative, unproductive thoughts. This challenge is in no way unique to targeted de-radicalisation interventions, but common to all such targeted interventions with vulnerable adolescents. However, the potential negative feedback may be more severe in these cases.
Refocusing Danish counter-radicalisation efforts

Institutional anchoring of de-radicalisation interventions: ordinary crime prevention?

In terms of institutional anchoring, the mentoring strategy is, in both Copenhagen and Aarhus, closely linked to ordinary crime prevention efforts within the ‘normal system’, more specifically via the integration of counter-radicalisation efforts in the pre-established SSP (School–Social services–Police) collaboration. In Denmark, SSP is a cornerstone of crime prevention among adolescents, traditionally focusing on petty crime, drug abuse, school absence, gangs, etc. With the implementation of the mentoring strategy of de-radicalisation, issues of radicalisation have been layered onto this existing crime prevention programme, making radicalisation yet another ‘parameter of concern’ (Thomsen 2012: 18).

There are several advantages to this institutional anchoring of the mentoring strategy but, as I will suggest below, also pitfalls and challenges. The advantages first: By adding the targeted de-radicalisation interventions to the existing palette of crime prevention initiatives, the mentoring strategy has quickly become a visible option for municipality frontline workers. New projects can be established more quickly. Likewise, anchoring the strategy within the system of ordinary crime prevention has helped accustom frontline workers to the idea that radicalisation and extremism are signs of risk behaviour equal to other parameters of concern when working with adolescents (Thomsen 2012: 20). The institutional anchoring within the ‘normal system’ has thus brought legitimacy to the mentoring strategy. Finally, anchoring the strategy in the ordinary crime prevention system means that referral practice and support options are similar to those of the ‘normal system’. Thus, an initial assessment of notifications of concern may determine that a psychiatrist or social-economic support rather than a de-radicalisation mentor is appropriate. Referral to these ordinary interventions has been made easier by the institutional anchoring.

The advantages of the institutional anchoring of the mentoring strategy may outweigh potential challenges. This is difficult to assess, but the challenges are there. I shall mention two. First, there is a risk that making radicalisation yet another ‘parameter of concern’ in the work with adolescents confuses ordinary crime prevention and risk assessment with something that many see as fundamentally more political and as an area in which intervention is more contested. One could argue that, by lumping together the fight against extremist ideas and drug abuse, we are obscuring the political nature of de-radicalisation work – the attempt to ‘normalise’ and battle political and religious attitudes and practices that are not unlawful as such but that are deemed risky by authorities. Put differently, the institutional anchoring of the mentoring strategy within the SSP collaboration places it firmly within an overall approach of care and focus on individual well-being, which again renders the mentoring interventions ‘non-conflictual’ and ‘post-political’. The exercise of normalising power is delivered through care and under the veil of consensus (Newman 2005).

This leads me to my second and closely related point: when the mentoring strategy is explained to municipality frontline workers and target groups,
analogies to ordinary crime prevention and risk assessment should be made with great care. Although such a strategy may help to legitimise de-radicalisation interventions in the eyes of some frontline workers and target groups, my own research suggests that it may de-legitimise it in the eyes of others. My research on the perception and impact of counter-radicalisation efforts among targeted Muslim communities in Denmark and frontline personnel working with these groups (see Lindekilde and Kühle 2009; Lindekilde and Kühle 2012; Lindekilde 2012), finds that a substantial share does not accept the analogy between ordinary crime prevention and de-radicalisation interventions. This group sees a huge difference between protecting youngsters from crime and drug abuse, and protecting them against certain political and/or religious views. One interviewee who works with young Muslims in the target group put it this way:

I don’t buy the argument that the education of school teachers and interventions on radicalisation is like other preventive measures. Because this is a very political area – everybody has an opinion about it. We all have opinions – so do those involved in SSP collaborations – they are not superhumans. One can also have opinions about drug abusers, but we also have a fundamental sense that they need help. It is different with attitudes towards e.g. immigrants and Muslims and views that they are not doing enough to integrate; these attitudes are more difficult to sidestep and say ‘Oh, we also need to help them’. It haunts me that SSP is asked to work with these issues – they can only fail.

(Muhammad, 29 years)

Another interviewee, a young Muslim man in the target group, elaborates the point:

This is about politics, not social issues or problems. This is about politics and opinions, norms and values. It is not the same thing. Here you are asking people to evaluate if people are dangerous. That is in my opinion something completely different.

(Majid, 18 years)

The quotes challenge the suggested ‘post-political’ nature of targeted de-radicalisation interventions, and highlight how providing care in these cases can easily be politicised.

I do not want to suggest that the institutional anchoring of the mentoring strategy within the normal system of ordinary crime prevention is necessarily a bad thing, only that it is not as uncontroversial and straightforward as it is sometimes presented (see also Thomsen 2012: 52–53). Likewise, I do share the view that de-radicalisation is often best achieved through a caring approach. However, we should be open about the nature of our concern – that it has to do also with particular political and religious views and practices. Thus, mentors should be open about the purpose of their interventions, and also their role as disagreeing
challenger, but should take care to express the purpose in terms of concern rather than accusations. Again, this seems like a delicate balancing act on behalf of the mentor. An element of making mentors better aware of the complex institutional context in which they are embedded, and of the role they play, is also to make explicit the centrality of the radicalisation process to the government rationality that underpins the belief in the necessity of individual de-radicalisation interventions to prevent violence.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have mapped Danish de-radicalisation efforts in the light of recent revisions following the change in government in 2011. I have shown how the new and refocused policy signals a move away from the comprehensive and holistic counter-radicalisation action plan of 2009 towards a much narrower focus on targeted de-radicalisation interventions, giving up on ‘battling extremist ideas’ in general and ‘tackling the root causes of radicalisation’. Following criticism similar to that of the original British Prevent strategy, the current Danish government has worked towards separating the goals of counter-radicalisation from social cohesion-building and integration agendas. I have argued that this development is generally positive as it reduces the risks of stigmatising entire communities as suspect. Likewise, I have argued that the centralised mentoring strategy rests upon the use of sophisticated techniques and tools to assess signs of concern and resilience factors, and to facilitate progressive change, grounded in advanced psychological theories.

In the second part of the chapter, I highlighted a number of enduring challenges and pitfalls in implementing such targeted de-radicalisation interventions. First, I pointed to how the combination of several different professional groups in assessing initial signs of radicalisation and resilience in practice may lead to disagreement, miscommunication and the risk of both ‘false negatives’ and ‘false positives’. Furthermore, I showed how mentors, in their work to specify individual risks and resilience factors using (among other things) the ‘personal plan’ as medium for change, have to fill the very demanding and at times contradictory role of the ‘elaborate mentor’. I highlighted how the goal of de-radicalisation interventions in practice is negotiated and identified on a case-by-case basis, resembling an ‘art of the possible’. While I believe this pragmatism is essential in making mentoring work in practice, it poses a challenge in a context of increased pressure of delivering ‘value-for-money’ and evidence-based policy interventions. Finally, I questioned the institutional anchoring of the mentoring programme within pre-existing ordinary crime prevention programmes, by showing how this institutional design, which renders the targeted de-radicalisation interventions cost-efficient, ‘normal’ and easily accessible, also produces concerns and objections among target groups and frontline workers. Preventing petty crime and drug abuse is not the same as intervening to challenge and transform political or religious convictions and practices; the latter is far more political and controversial in terms of individual freedoms.
This then raises the question of how Danish counter-radicalisation policy should be most accurately conceptualised. Looking at the development of counter-radicalisation efforts in Denmark from the first pilot project in 2008 until today, one could argue that it is a case of institutional and policy learning. In a critical interplay between local, practical experiences with de-radicalisation work (primarily in Aarhus and Copenhagen), changing overall political priorities between governments and internationally diffused policy trends in the area of counter-radicalisation (especially from the Netherlands and the UK), the Danish authorities have developed, evaluated and adapted the strategy. Although the targeted mentor-based de-radicalisation interventions have been central to the Danish efforts from the beginning, there has been a good deal of trial and error around (and within) this element. This can be expected in a newly established policy field, although the tacit abandonment of one of the two fundamental goals of the 2009 action plan with the revisions in the 2011 plan seems more like a change of policy field than of policies as such.

In terms of the specifics of the key mentoring strategy, the Danish case highlights the sophisticated neo-liberal rationale of governing and post-political consensus building in the area of de-radicalisation interventions. A neo-liberal style of governing is contained, I believe, within the contradictory role of the mentor, simultaneously working to actively confront and change views and practices and passively care and facilitate changes from within; build trust and companionship and challenge ideology; be personal and professional; push and not push, etc. This post-political consensus building can be found in the way that the mentoring strategy is anchored within the normal system of crime prevention, establishing extremism and radicalisation as yet another indicator of concern. The political conflict between majority norms and individual perceptions is obscured, leaving it to the mentor to re-establish consensus. Much depends on the social skills and communicational dexterity of the mentors, and the support they receive.

Notes
1 I am using ‘securitisation’ in a merely descriptive fashion here, suggesting only that integration and the lack thereof has been made a new area of risk assessment. My usage is thus different from that of Ole Waever’s concept of ‘securitisation’, which implies much wider theorisation of the process and effects of securitisation (Buzan et al. 1998).
2 Telephone interview conducted by the author, October 2012.
3 The examples of interventions are taken from secondary literature and the Danish Government’s own handbooks on de-radicalisation interventions. Primary data would have been preferable, as the secondary case descriptions may be biased. However, primary data was unobtainable.

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