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# **Governing and contesting marginality: Muslims and urban governance in the UK**

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# **Governing and contesting marginality: Muslims and urban governance in the UK**

## **Abstract**

Sites of Muslim settlement in the UK are frequently portrayed as poorly integrated and governed areas – a situation that is often attributed to the excessive cultural and religious accommodation of Muslim minorities under flawed policies of state multiculturalism. Through a case-study of an English city, Birmingham, home to the UK's largest Muslim population outside of London, I argue that sites of Muslim settlement have, rather, been subject to extraordinary and punitive governing practices. These governing practices moreover rely for their legitimacy on the portrayal of these sites as poorly integrated and governed. Nevertheless, whilst areas of Muslim settlement have been subject to spatially focused, punitive forms of governance, these have not necessarily been fully coherent and they have also been contested.

Keywords: Muslims; governance; multiculturalism, Prevent, securitisation

## **Introduction**

Claims about the failed integration of British Muslims have been a topic of policy debate in the UK for some time. Such concerns were expressed by the Casey Review on integration (2016) and the Conservative government's *Integration Strategy Green Paper* (2018), both of which asserted that segregated Muslim communities were fostering intolerant and extremist attitudes that ran counter to integration and British values. Casey, in particular, claimed that local leaderships had failed to address these problems due to a misplaced fear of being characterised as racist or Islamophobic (2016: 16). These assertions echo earlier contentions made in 2011 by former Prime Minister David Cameron that self-segregated Muslim communities were creating the conditions for radicalisation – a problem he attributed to the excessive ‘passive toleration’ that characterised ‘state multiculturalism’. Policies of state multiculturalism, he claimed had ‘encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream’, leaving ‘some young Muslims feeling rootless’, searching ‘for something to belong to and something to believe’, leading them to ‘extremist ideology’. In response, he argued for the abandonment of state multiculturalism in favour of ‘muscular liberalism’ and a reassertion of ‘fundamental British values’ (Cameron 2011) – a stance that has justified and informed the developing Counter Extremism agenda since.

In many ways, these discourses of mal-integration, incommensurable cultural values and weak governance in sites of Muslim settlement echo earlier discourses on the inner-city. Whilst earlier discourses on the inner city had a shared focus on incompatible cultural values, failed integration of racialized communities and problems of governability in these sites, contemporary discourses have shifted to a preoccupation

with security and extremism, which presents these sites as a potential risk to wider society or capable of contagion. In this article, I argue that although sites of Muslim settlement are often characterised as weakly integrated and governed due to state policies of excessive cultural and religious accommodation, they have rather been subject to extraordinary spatially-focused and punitive governing practices. Crucially, these practices rely for their legitimacy on such characterisations. In so doing, I highlight the importance of considering spatial techniques of governing sites of Muslim settlement for understanding how securitisation has evolved in the UK.

My analysis stresses the incomplete nature of securitisation as a governing project, though, due to the assemblages of different governance actors, professional norms and competing agendas that characterise the fields of governance through which it is implemented. These governing practices, then, have not necessarily been fully coherent, and they have also been contested.

I explore these arguments through a focus on Birmingham: a large English city, situated in the Midlands, the second largest site of Muslim settlement outside of London. Birmingham has frequently been characterised as a site of multiculturalism gone wrong and prone to problems of extremism: indeed it was once apocryphally described by the *Daily Mail* as the ‘jihadi capital of Britain’ (2017). As I will show, such characterisations have been highly consequential for policy interventions in the city, with particularly punitive consequences for those areas where Muslims are concentrated.

The research on which this article is based was carried out within a larger study of Muslims and governance in the UK from 1997 onwards at national level and in three local case study areas of Birmingham, Leicester and Tower Hamlets (O’Toole et al

2013). The fieldwork was largely carried out between 2010 and 2015, and based on document analysis and 112 qualitative interviews with government, policy and Muslim civil society actors at national and local levels. The study of Muslim participation in governance in Birmingham is based on 20 interviews with key informants, participant observations of local governance forums, and analysis of documents produced by Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police, the Local Strategic Partnership and reports of a succession of inquiries into ‘Project Champion’ – an operation by West Midlands Police to create a ‘surveillance ring’ around two areas of Muslim settlement in 2010, and the ‘Trojan Horse’ affair – an alleged plot by Muslim extremists to infiltrate and Islamicise non-faith state schools in Birmingham in 2014.

### **Discourses on Sites of Muslim settlement**

Census data on the locations of Muslim populations in the UK reveal a pattern of geographical and spatial residential concentrations, with most Muslims living in London, the West Midlands and the North West of England, and most often in particular areas of English towns and cities – including, although not exclusively, in inner-city neighbourhoods.

There is a history of writing on inner-city neighbourhoods showing how they have long been characterised as sites of poverty, disorder and entrenched social problems. Writing on urban precarity in inner-city neighbourhoods, outer housing estates or banlieues and dust-belt ghost towns in the USA and France, Loïc Wacquant (2014) argues that their economic and social dispossession is both produced and legitimated by processes of territorial stigmatisation, racialisation and penalisation – processes that serve to present their social and economic marginality as pathological to these sites and their residents. ‘Territorial stigmatisation’, according to Wacquant,

occurs when a ‘blemish of place’ is ‘super-imposed on the already existing stigmata traditionally associated with poverty and ethnic origin or postcolonial immigrant status, to which it is closely linked but not reducible’ (2007: 67), whilst ‘penalisation’ is a method of managing the marginality of declining urban areas through restrictive social and expansive penal policies, manifested in aggressive forms of detection and exclusion (2014: 1696). Importantly, Wacquant suggests:

Once a place is publicly labelled as a ‘lawless zone’ or ‘outlaw estate’, outside the common norm, it is easy for the authorities to justify special measures, deviating from both law and custom, which can have the effect – if not the intention – of destabilizing and further marginalizing their occupants’ (2007: 69).

In the context of the UK, Rhodes and Brown trace how, over the 1970s and 1980s, the inner-city became ‘‘territorialised’ as a pathological, racialised space’ (2018: 3) and subject to particular modes of spatially focused representation and institutional regulation. Indeed, Gilroy has argued that ‘Britain’s ‘race’ politics are quite inconceivable away from the context of the inner-city (1992: 311), which is a focus for anxieties about both race and urban living. Rhodes and Brown argue that in recent times, though, discourses on the inner-city have become more fragmented. Thus, the inner city is being reimagined in terms of ‘more complex spatial formations of race and ethnicity’ (2018: 14), which focus on newly problematic populations, such as Eastern Europeans and particularly Muslims, whilst there has also been a ‘re-spatialisation of anxieties away from urban sites associated with dynamic ‘black cultures’ to those associated with ‘Muslim communities’ (2018: 12) – to include inner-city areas and post-industrial towns where British Muslims are settled.

During the 2000s, these areas of Muslim settlement came to occupy a particular place in policy debates, when they began to be framed as sites of problematic Muslim self-segregation. The self-segregation narrative gained prominence in the early 2000s, following the Cantle report on the disturbances in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001, which presented them as an outcome of ethnic communities living ‘parallel lives’. At that point, the objects of anxiety were Asian and white working class communities. That changed shortly afterwards, in the aftermath of 9/11, when the issue came to be retrospectively viewed as a problem of *Muslim* self-segregation. Following the 7/7 London attacks in 2005, which stoked fears of ‘home-grown terrorism’, Trevor Phillips, then head of the Commission for Racial Equality, claimed that Britain was ‘sleep-walking to segregation’, raising concerns about Muslim residential clustering as a potential wider threat to national security (see Finney and Simpson 2009).

Such claims have endured – notwithstanding research that has undermined the ‘self-segregation’ thesis by finding that Muslims do aspire to live in mixed neighbourhoods (Phillips 2006), or that residential clustering of Muslims is decreasing (Finney and Simpson 2009), or that Muslims do identify with Britain or Britishness – and at higher rates than white British or other minority ethnic groups (Ipsos Mori 2018; Karlsen and Nazroo 2015).

Whilst sites of black settlement have been hypervisible as a focus of racialized anxieties about integration and multiculturalism, the interaction between these anxieties and security concerns since 2001 has meant that sites of Muslim settlement have become increasingly subject to spatially focused security-driven policy interventions. Within this agenda, the residential concentration of Muslims is presented as evidence of not just weak integration but also of a wider security risk – mandating extraordinary



punitive interventions in these neighbourhoods. This was reflected in Cameron's Munich speech in 2011, which blamed state culturalism for permitting the isolation and disconnection of Muslim communities from British values and called for more 'muscular liberal' policies, whilst Dame Louise Casey's (2016) report on integration had an explicit focus on segregated South Asian Muslim communities, which she linked to fears about radicalisation, and called for more direct interventions in these areas.

In what follows, I show the ways in which punitive policy interventions have occurred via Prevent: the element of the government's CONTEST Counter Terrorism policy, which focuses on preventing people from being drawn into terrorism. Prevent, as I will show, particularly in the period 2007-2010, operated with a highly spatial logic that targeted sites of Muslim settlement. This was later reinforced by the use of spatially focused surveillance techniques (exemplified by 'Project Champion') and the normalisation of popular discourses on Muslims as a mal-integrated, self-segregating, extremist minority requiring extraordinary interventions in Muslim areas (as evident in the Trojan Horse affair). I draw attention to how techniques of mapping enabled the application of punitive special policing and governance interventions in these neighbourhoods.

According to Wacquant, techniques of governing marginal areas operate as a strategy of 'punitive containment' that offers 'relief not to the poor but from the poor' (cited Uitermark 2014: 1419). Uitermark argues, however, that 'it is doubtful that 'punitive containment' captures all modes of governing urban marginality' (2014: 1419). He suggests the segregation and stigmatisation of marginal neighbourhoods may provoke fears that such sites undermine the stability of society more generally. Areas of Muslim settlement have come to acquire this significance in public discourses. Where

once they may have been subject to neglect, or patronised by benign but superficial celebratory policies based on thin multiculturalism, they have increasingly been positioned as sites of potential contagion that pose a more generalised security risk, requiring further interventions to combat this.

This is evident in the evolution of the Prevent agenda. When it was introduced in 2007, Prevent operated with a spatial logic that identified areas with 5% or more Muslims as Prevent Priority Areas (DCLG 2007: 4). In so doing, it cast Muslim presence itself as a security risk, stigmatising sites of Muslim settlement. The Coalition Conservative-Liberal Democrat government that formed in 2010 revised the Prevent strategy in 2011, introducing several changes, including the claim that the targeting of Prevent Priority Areas would no longer be based on the numbers of Muslims present in any area, but on assessments of the risk of terrorism (although the Priority Areas remained much the same). The revisions also included abandoning the previous emphasis on engaging with Muslim communities to combat violent extremism. With the passing of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (2015), Prevent was made a statutory duty across the public sector, requiring health, education and probation professionals to identify and report on signs of extremism. This was based on an expansive conceptualisation of extremism that included non-violent extremism – defined as the failure to adhere to ‘fundamental British values’ – and a pre-emptive counter-extremism programme (O’Toole 2015).<sup>1</sup> In the ominous phrase of the 2011 strategy, its aim was that ‘there should be no ungoverned spaces’ (2011: 9).

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Extremism’ is now defined as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance

Whilst this signalled a more expansive approach to Prevent, I argue that the governing practices on which it is based are not necessarily cohesive, and they are subject to variation across governance domains. Wacquant characterises policy making as occurring within a ‘bureaucratic field’, which ‘designates the web of administrative agencies that both collaborate to enforce official identities *and compete* to regulate social activities and enact public authority (2014: 1698, emphasis added). As Wilson notes, ‘Wacquant’s invocation of Bourdieu’s ‘bureaucratic field’ has the virtue of treating the state not as a unified actor, but as a field of contestation susceptible to the efforts of bureaucratic and political entrepreneurs whose intentions and consequences alike may run at cross purposes’ (2014: 1716). Marwell (2016) contends, however, that Wacquant’s work does not realise this ambition, but tends to focus instead on ‘the centralised state pushing out policy mandates that cascade uniformly downstream’ (2016: 1096). Indeed, there is little in Wacquant’s account about how punitive social policy is subject to inter-elite competition or contestation. Similarly, there is a tendency to present a somewhat reified account of a cohesive disciplinary state in much work on securitisation and British Muslims. Thus, much of the literature on Prevent interprets its impact from a reading of its disciplinary intentions – without necessarily attending to how front-line professionals understand or interpret it (for exceptions, see Busher et al 2017, Dudenhoefer 2018).

With colleagues, I have argued elsewhere (O’Toole et al, 2016: 165) that ‘The dispersal of governing functions to a range of governance networks and partnerships

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of different faiths and beliefs.’ HMG (2015) *Channel Duty Guidance* (London: HMSO), p.

3.

over the last two decades [...] has created a highly differentiated governance terrain, with different government departments, networks and levels operating with different practices of governance.’ We concluded, ‘governance is increasingly dispersed and often internally contradictory and contested, requiring study of the range of practices of governing across different governance domains’ (2016: 166). As Bevir’s account of decentred governance asserts, this is true of security governance, just as other policy fields, which reflects ‘the many cultures and traditions through which civil servants, street-level bureaucrats, voluntary sector actors, and citizens interpret and resist joined-up security’ (2016: 227). It is important, then, to avoid reifying the cohesive nature of the disciplinary state. The penalisation and territorial stigmatisation of Muslim neighbourhoods brought about by governing practices have been subject to both incoherence and conflict, and they have been contested by residents of these sites. Thus, a sociology of governance needs to pay attention to both governing practices across governance fields as well as the responses of groups that are subjected to punitive policies.

### **Muslims in Birmingham**

Birmingham is a site of significant Muslim settlement – it is the second largest area of settlement after London. According to the 2011 census, 234,411 or 21.8% of Birmingham’s population are Muslim – which is significantly higher than the England and Wales figure of 4.8%. Muslims in Birmingham are predominantly of Pakistani heritage, but the city is home to ethnically diverse Muslim groups, including Bangladeshis, Indians, and increasingly Somalis, Kurds, Turks and Iranians (DCLG 2009). Muslims are also highly spatially concentrated in the city: according to the 2011 census, 69% of Birmingham’s Muslims live in nine of Birmingham’s 40 wards:

Washwood Heath, Hodge Hill, Nechells, Bordesley Green, Sparkbrook, South Yardley and Springfield to the south-east inner-ring of the city, and Aston and Lozells and East Handsworth to the north-west inner-ring. In three of those wards, Muslims make up over 70% of the population: in Washwood Heath (77.3%), Bordesley Green (73.9%), and Sparkbrook (70.2%) (Census 2011).

Once touted as the ‘workshop of the world’ (Henry et al 2002), by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Birmingham had become a major manufacturing centre, and in the post-war period a key centre of car production. During the period of post-war mass migration to the UK of the 1960s and 1970s, industries in the city attracted migrants from Ireland, the Caribbean and South Asia (especially from the Mirpur region of Pakistan). Indeed, the seminal studies of race, migration and urban settlement produced in Britain of that period – the Rex and Moore (1967) and Rex and Tomlinson (1979) studies – were of respectively Sparkbrook and Handsworth in Birmingham. Drawing on Chicago School theories of urban development, Rex and Moore charted the development of the city as a series of concentric zones, with a central business district (CBD), surrounded by a ‘zone of transition’, that was itself circled by zones of working class public housing estates and home-owning suburbia. Migrants, as a consequence of discriminatory allocation practices in both the public and private housing sectors, had by the 1960s become clustered in the inner city ‘zone of transition’, a zone of multiple occupancy lodging houses that had been ear-marked for redevelopment, but instead were patched and occupied by newly arrived migrants from Pakistan, Ireland and the Caribbean. In Weberian terms, Rex and Moore characterised the ‘zone of transition’ as an ‘illegitimate’ problem area’ (1967: 279) – that is, a stigmatised area from which, they predicted, residents would seek to leave once they had acquired the means. This pattern

of clustering has, though, been remarkably enduring. More than fifty years after Rex and Moore's study, Birmingham's ethnic minority and Muslim populations are still more likely to reside in the 'zone of transition'.

Like other industrial centres in Britain, from the 1970s onwards Birmingham experienced rapid deindustrialisation: between 1971 and 1987 it lost almost one third of its total employment, and by 1981 it had become one of Britain's poorest areas (Barber and Hall 2008). The effects of this were felt particularly in precarious areas and among those groups dependent on the industrial sectors, such as migrant workers and their descendants. Subsequently, areas of Muslim and ethnic minority settlement have been characterised by high levels of unemployment and socio-economic deprivation. In March 2019, the rate of unemployment in Birmingham was relatively high at 8.2% (compared to the UK rate of 3.3%), whilst wards with the highest levels of unemployment were Birchfield (12.1%), Handsworth (11.8%), Lozells (11.7%) and Aston (10.3%) in the north-west inner-ring, and Sparkbrook and Balsall Heath (9.3%), Alum Rock (8.9%), Bordesley Green (8.9%) and Bordesley and Higate (8.3%) in the south-east inner-ring (BCC 2019) – all areas of significant Muslim settlement. In terms of measures of deprivation, Sparkbrook, Aston, Washwood Heath and Nechells are among the most deprived wards in the city (BCC 2015).

From the 1980s, urban multicultural policy in Birmingham took a celebratory approach to the city's ethnic and cultural diversity, marketing areas of ethnic minority settlement as zones of leisure or consumption (such as the 'Balti triangle' in Sparkbrook) (and see Rhodes and Brown 2018). Urban regeneration strategies of that period did little to ameliorate the enduring economic precarity of these neighbourhoods, however. This was true of the urban regeneration programmes that were pursued in the

1990s, which focused on massive investment in service industries and the development of Birmingham's city centre spaces, following a model of Central Business District (CBD)-led urban regeneration (Barber and Hall 2008). Between 1986 and 1992, Birmingham City Council spent around £276 million on flagship projects aimed at regenerating the local economy and the CBD. Birmingham's emergence as an 'entrepreneurial city' was closely tied to the City Council's vision of Birmingham as a 'global city' (Henry et al 2002; Gale and O'Toole 2013). In pursuit of this agenda, successive administrations valorised Birmingham's multicultural diversity, citing its ethnic and cultural minorities as key assets in the city's drive to generate international trade, finance and cultural links (see Parkinson 2007). The benefits of prestige project/CBD-led development and global city strategies were unevenly distributed (Henry et al 2002; Barber and Hall 2008) – the areas circling and adjacent to the CBD, home to a high proportion of the city's Muslim populations, continue to be characterised by very high levels of socio-economic deprivation.

Recent austerity policies and their implications have contributed to the enduring social, ethnic and spatial inequalities in the city. Birmingham has been acutely affected by austerity-driven public spending cuts, with the Council losing progressively half of its budget, and it has had 'to make the largest cuts of any local government ever' (NEF 2016: 20), putting in doubt its capacity to deliver core services. Birmingham's regeneration model and global city imaginary, then, sit alongside the persistence of entrenched inequalities, exacerbated by austerity policies, with the distribution of social economic inequalities mapping on to areas of Muslim settlement.

From the 2000s, celebratory narratives on multicultural Birmingham gave way to claims that Birmingham's diversity and local governance exemplify all that is wrong

with multiculturalism. Birmingham and its Muslim communities have frequently been the focus of lurid media headlines, whether focused on alleged Muslim (self) segregation, or electoral malpractice, with allegations of vote-rigging in the election of Labour councillors in two areas of Muslim settlement in 2005. More recently, these turned to fears about terrorism (e.g. with the exposure of a plot to behead a British Muslim soldier following the police's 'Operation Gamble' in 2007) and extremism – as occurred in 2014, when allegations emerged of a 'Trojan Horse' plot by Muslim teachers and governors to infiltrate several Birmingham schools to impose an extremist agenda. Media narratives, such as the Daily Mail's (2017) claim that Birmingham is 'the jihadi capital of Britain', have tended to blame local policies of excessive multiculturalist accommodation for allowing these problems to grow unchecked.

Rather than being subject to excessive accommodation, however, Muslims in Birmingham have been marginalised in governing structures, practices and policies in the city through spatially organised urban policies that have done little to address the economic precarity of sites of Muslim settlement, whilst sites of Muslim settlement have been subject to extraordinary, punitive interventions. These issues to an extent predate the central government's security agenda, but that agenda has intensified these governing practices. The implementation of Prevent exemplifies these practices.

### ***Prevent: securitisation and territorial stigmatisation***

The Prevent strategy that was launched by the New Labour government in 2007 set out a 'hearts and minds' approach to counter-terrorism, in which engagement and partnership with Muslims were seen as key to addressing (the causes of) violent extremism (DCLG 2007). Prevent came to be widely criticised, with a key charge that it securitised the state's engagement with Muslims. 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' terms of engagement with government (O'Toole et al 2016).

Birmingham was one of the areas identified as a Prevent Priority Area in 2007, as a consequence of the proportion of Muslims living in the city. This spatial logic was further refined by the local authority, which identified 11 Prevent Priority Neighbourhoods.<sup>2</sup> An assessment by the local crime safety delivery body, the Safer Birmingham Partnership (SBP), asserted:

Arguably terrorism affects all the communities across Birmingham, but it is the Muslim communities who will be engaged with regards to the PVE agenda. This is because Muslim communities are most vulnerable to radicalisation' (2009: 8).

Significantly, it drew on demographic data and police intelligence to determine this – echoing the belief that Muslim presence, rather than primarily intelligence, provided the evidence base for identifying and locating security risks.

This focus on areas of Muslim settlement as sites of threat was reflected in interview with West Midlands Police, with one senior counter-terrorism police officer offering the following assessment:

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<sup>2</sup> The 11 Priority Neighbourhoods were: Aston Pride; Lozells; Handsworth; Soho Finger & Gib Heath; Ward End & Pelham; Washwood Heath & Saltley; Bordesley Green; Bordesley Green & Small Heath; Farm Park & Sparkbrook North; Sparkhill North & Central; Balsall Heath.

you have this international terrorism threat in the UK of which London carries 50 percent, Birmingham then carries a half of what's left and it's a very small piece of geography in Birmingham East [i.e. Sparkbrook] that carries that second half or quarter of the UK threat...

This assessment – that half the security threat is focused on London, a quarter on Birmingham, and that quarter is largely focused on Sparkbrook – informed the development and contours of Project Champion (discussed below).

Engagement with Muslim communities was a priority of the 2007 Prevent strategy. This was underpinned by the reporting requirements imposed by National Indicator 35 (NI35) of the government's performance management framework to monitor local authorities' progress in 'building resilience to violent extremism'. These requirements included assessment of local authorities': understanding of and engagement with Muslim communities; knowledge and understanding of the drivers of violent extremism; delivery plan; and mechanisms for oversight and evaluation. In this way, NI35 expressed a key aspect of governing practice, which is that for communities or neighbourhoods to be governable, they must first be legible (Scott 1998; Uitermark 2014). An evaluation of the Council's performance on these criteria by Waterhouse Consulting Group (WCG 2008), suggested patchy performance in this regard: evaluating the Council as having some but not 'regular and reliable mechanisms for frequent contact' and some, rather than 'strong knowledge' 'of the structure of the local Muslim community'. SBP's strategy went on to refine its techniques for achieving legibility of these areas, by drawing on neighbourhood profiling techniques developed by the police, which comprised 'an electronic based system to provide automatic 'neighbourhood profiles' on a yearly basis', which would be 'updated and maintained

by neighbourhood officers’, and would ‘contain information such as historical geography of the neighbourhood, census information, index of multiple deprivation, and ACORN profiles.’ (2009: 8). This legibility was to be underpinned by the development of intelligence-sharing protocols between the Council, SBP and West Midlands Police.

In the early days of Prevent, Birmingham City Council, unlike some other local authorities (such as in Bradford or Leicester, see O’Toole et al 2016), raised few objections to implementing Prevent. It also secured cooperation from some Muslim organisations in the city – at first (WCG 2008). But, suspicion towards Prevent developed soon after its inception, with perceptions that it was promoting securitised Muslim community engagement. The secondment of a counter-terrorism police officer into the Council’s Equalities Division to take the lead on Prevent contributed to such perceptions. As one activist in the city remarked:

Locally we’ve had [...] a controversial issue with a police officer [...] who was seconded into the Council. I can remember clearly very early on, members of the Youth Inclusion Project [...] said that it increased their own suspicions of why he was involved in it. [...] And the very first question they were posing to [him] was, “This is security-led, intelligence-led. Otherwise you wouldn’t be here.”

By 2010, suspicion towards Prevent intensified due to ‘Project Champion’.

### *Project Champion*

Project Champion illustrated the problematic focus on sites of Muslim settlement for enhanced security interventions that was established by Prevent. Project Champion was a scheme that was led by West Midlands Police (WMP) and entailed the installation in 2010 of 216 closed circuit television (CCTV) and Automated Number Plate

Recognition (ANPR) cameras in two areas of Birmingham in which Muslims were concentrated: Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath (with seven other adjacent wards affected): effectively creating a ‘surveillance ring’ around these areas. Initially, the installation of the cameras was presented to local communities as a crime safety initiative aimed at tackling car-theft and drug crime, and launched ostensibly under the auspices of the local body responsible for crime and safety: the Safer Birmingham Partnership (SBP). The scheme was launched with little and flawed community consultation, and its counter-terrorism purpose deliberately concealed. A campaign group of local residents, civil liberties campaigners and Muslim activists, working with local Councillors and journalists, revealed that Project Champion was in fact a counter-terrorism project, and prompted the admission that it had been approved by the Association of Chief Police Officers (Terrorism and Allied Matters) (ACPO (TAM)), which had drawn down £3million from the Home Office to fund it.<sup>3</sup> This led to a public outcry and to then Assistant Chief Constable of WMP issuing a public apology to a meeting of community groups on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2010.<sup>4</sup> The nature and covert purpose of the scheme and the poor consultation with local communities were condemned in two public reports by Birmingham City Council (BCC: 2010) and Thames Valley Police (TVP: 2010). Eventually, the cameras were hooded and then dismantled in 2011.

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<sup>3</sup> WM CTU (2008) *Memorandum: Report to Chief Constable and Chief Executive of Police Authority seeking Delegated authority concerning element of Project Champion*, 3 September 2008. WG401 (11/97): West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit.

<sup>4</sup> Birmingham Mail, 5.7.2010: <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/police-apologise-for-birmingham-spy-camera-127653>

The use of overt and covert surveillance was based on longstanding narratives of these areas as risky areas, and echoed the spatial logics that governed the identification of Prevent Priority Neighbourhoods. This was possible in large part because of the civic invisibility of the affected, predominantly Muslim, communities in those neighbourhoods, which occurred in a variety of ways.

Firstly, although West Midlands Police conducted consultations with local communities, they were ornamental since, as the Thames Valley Police report noted, the final decision regarding the scheme was taken *prior* to the consultations:

At the start of the wider consultation process, on April 29 2009, the system had already been designed and the project team to deliver it was in place. There is no indication that the consultation process had any impact on the objectives or the structure of the programme as originally drafted. (TVP 2010: 31-32)

Secondly, the consultations conducted by West Midlands Police with local communities misleadingly portrayed Project Champion as a scheme for addressing car-thefts, drug crime and anti-social behaviour. The Thames Valley Police report highlighted evidence of a deliberate strategy of concealment of the counter-terrorism purposes of the cameras, by not allowing the West Midlands CTU logo to be included on Project Champion documents (TVP 2010: 17) and withholding information about the funding source.

Thirdly, West Midlands Police continued to claim that Project Champion was primarily a crime safety initiative even after questions about its counter-terrorism purpose were raised. For example, one local councillor – Cllr Salma Yaqoob – in a meeting in 2009 with West Midlands Police, voiced concerns about the location of the

cameras and asked whether the scheme was linked to Prevent. In response, Assistant Chief Constable Hyde stated if he said the cameras ‘would not have any benefit around Counter Terrorism then he would be lying’, but asserted nonetheless that the ‘crime prevention benefits are far greater’ (WMP 2009: 3). This claim was maintained in 2010 even after further concerns were expressed by local residents, with West Midlands Police and Birmingham City Council releasing a joint public leaflet acknowledging that the cameras would be used for the purposes of gathering counter-terrorism intelligence, but continuing to claim:

The cameras will be used to tackle all crime and anti-social behaviour. We will pro-actively target people involved in serious violent crime, which will include terrorism suspects.

Our ultimate aim is to make it difficult for any serious criminals to operate in Birmingham, and this includes organised criminals, violent offenders, drugs dealers and more common criminals, such as burglars and car thieves. (WMP and BCC nd)

However, the Thames Valley Police report revealed that all the data collected by the cameras were streamed directly to the local Counter Terrorism Unit (CTU), with no mechanism in place for sharing that data with local crime prevention officers to combat crime – *its stated purpose*. It concluded:

In simple terms, the CTU built a system to provide them with enhanced operational capability and this privileged position was not matched by a similarly robust structure to ensure the delivery of the community benefits that had been promised to the people of Birmingham; it was a one-sided plan. (TVP 2010: 31)

As I suggested, it is important to recognise the internally contested nature of governance – and this was evident in the planning and operation of Project Champion. Whilst Project Champion was a surveillance and control project, its objectives and implementation were not universally shared by, or necessarily even known among, political professionals and bureaucrats in the city. Indeed, the City Council’s report (2010) alleged that it had not been fully informed about the counter-terrorism purpose of Project Champion – i.e. that it had been misled, whilst Fussey (2013) found significant divergences among the coalition of security professionals involved in Project Champion in terms of their knowledge of and support for the project. He found that key operational aspects of the scheme were withheld from SBP personnel, even though it was badged as an SBP initiative, with a senior SBP member resorting to following contractors from home to work in order to find out where the cameras were being sited.

Kalra and Mehmood (2014) point out that there are tensions between the increasing use of surveillance technologies that target and criminalise the Muslim population as a whole, and the development of human rights regimes that place limits on the use of these technologies. Such tensions between governing strategies were evident in the operation of and responses by different agencies to Project Champion. For example, both the Thames Valley Police and Birmingham City Council reports referred to various breaches of equalities principles and practices in the planning and development of Project Champion: noting, for example, the failure to implement an Equalities Impact Assessment. Both reports were critical of the lack of transparency and accountability in planning and execution, with the Thames Valley Police report noting the failure to consider whether Project Champion complied with the CCTV Code of

Practice, or RIPA,<sup>5</sup> or any other legal framework, concluding that the ‘Project Board’s oversight functions seem limited to delivering a suitable product for the CTU, on time and on budget’ (2010: 43). Similarly, Birmingham City Council’s report criticised West Midlands Police’s failure to engage or comply with its Public Space CCTV Strategy, which lays out principles of transparency for the siting of CCTV cameras in the city. The Thames Valley Police report focused on community engagement as a key policing objective, citing the expectation that stakeholders should be consulted and a view that policing should be by consent. The report concluded that Project Champion had undermined core policing objectives, consequently creating perceptions that Project Champion had ‘caused significant damage to community relations’ (2010: 46). The operation of Project Champion, then, generated a number of conflicts between different governance actors and agendas.

Project Champion was met with resistance by communities in the affected areas, who organised themselves into the group ‘Birmingham Against Spy Cameras’ (BASC) – a coalition of Muslim activists, local residents and civil liberties campaigners – which campaigned successfully for the removal of the cameras. Following the refusal of the Council to answer requests for information about the purpose and location of the cameras, the campaigners drove around the city manually mapping the locations of the cameras themselves, discovering in the process that they formed a ring around two areas

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<sup>5</sup> Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000) that governs the interception, gathering and disclosure of communications data and use of surveillance and intelligence by police and security services.



of Muslim settlement (rather than around crime hot spots): as one BASC activist explained:

I thought, that sounds a bit iffy: we'll make our own map. So I went round with [redacted] and [redacted] because we knew where we thought they would be. By this time, I'd looked at the Birmingham City Council website and they'd got maps produced from the census data and you can see maps of where all the Muslims live or where the highest concentration of Muslims live. And lo and behold, it corresponded.

We later overlaid the maps and it was pretty much exact. So that's what the suspicion was and we drove round to see if it was true and it was like a perimeter going round the whole area so every route in, even the side streets, not just main roads, but little side streets where you wouldn't expect them to be, they were there. They'd designed it so there was no rat line that you could use to get in or out ...

Mapping techniques both enabled insights into the nature of the scheme and provided a strategy of resistance by activists to mobilise support for the campaign against the cameras, as another BASC activist recalled:

Every week we were out there campaigning, every week we were giving out leaflets. Every week we were talking to people. At first they were like 'What's wrong with cameras?' 'We love cameras.' 'We like cameras.' 'Cameras reduce crime.' All that kind of stuff. Once they found out that it was literally... because we showed them the maps and [redacted], god bless him, he printed out huge A3 maps and it showed: this is where the Muslims live [...] and then he put down a map that showed: these are where all the cameras are. You could literally see the ring of where they were. [...] And then we showed it to them, they were like 'Oh,

yeah.’ And then obviously it made a big difference on the impact. Once we told them that, then they were like ‘Okay, why are we being spied on?’ And then like, ‘we have got to take them down.’

Revelation of the true purpose of Project Champion, which was confirmed by the Thames Valley Police report that detailed the scale of the cover-up, had damaging implications for Prevent. The disclosures led to very high levels of suspicion of Prevent, with few Muslim organisations willing to bid for project funding, such that for a time Prevent came to be regarded, in the words of one interviewee, as ‘dead in this city’.

### *Trojan Horse*

The characterisation of areas of Muslim settlement as a security risk was similarly manifest in responses to the allegations of a Trojan Horse plot that emerged in 2014, in which assessments of the threat to the schools focused on sites of Muslim presence (in relation to neighbourhoods, school populations and school governing bodies) and where the issues were framed from the outset through the lens of extremism – both of which extended and amplified already established processes of territorial stigmatisation.

In March 2014, media reports surfaced suggesting that a conspiracy to take over Birmingham schools by a group of Islamists acting as teachers or school governors had been uncovered by the discovery of a letter outlining a ‘Trojan Horse’ plot that purported to include recommendations to Islamists in Bradford on how to infiltrate schools there, based on the claimed success of the plot in several schools in Birmingham. Whilst the letter itself was widely accepted to be a hoax, it nonetheless

triggered snap inspections in March-April 2014 by Ofsted<sup>6</sup> of 21 schools in Birmingham and investigations by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), Birmingham City Council (BCC) and the Department for Education (DfE). These investigations resulted in a series of reports including two by the EFA into the Park View Educational Trust and Oldknow Academy Trust (May 2014), the Kershaw Report for Birmingham City Council (14<sup>th</sup> July 2014), the Trojan Horse Review Group report for Birmingham City Council (18<sup>th</sup> July 2014), and the Clarke Report for the DfE (22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014).<sup>7</sup>

Of the 21 schools inspected by Ofsted, five were subjected to full inspections,<sup>8</sup> and 16 were subjected to relatively lighter touch Section 8 monitoring inspections. Of the five subjected to full inspection, two had previously been rated ‘outstanding’ and one as ‘good’<sup>9</sup> on the basis of the significant increases in pupil attainments they had achieved. After the March-April 2014 inspections, all five schools were downgraded

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<sup>6</sup> Office for Standards in Education – an agency responsible for inspection of schools, reporting to the Department for Education (DfE).

<sup>7</sup> There were a number of subsequent reports including: the DfE *Review into possible warnings to DfE relating to extremism in Birmingham Schools* (January 2015; London: DfE), a House of Commons Education Select Committee report *Extremism in schools; the Trojan Horse affair* (11<sup>th</sup> March 2015; London: House of Commons), and a response by the DfE: *Government Response to the Education Select Committee Report: Extremism in Schools, the Trojan Horse Affair* (July 2015; London: DfE).

<sup>8</sup> These were: Golden Hillock Secondary; Nansen Primary; Oldknow Academy; Park View School; and Saltley School.

<sup>9</sup> Oldknow and Park View’s predecessor were graded ‘outstanding’; Saltley had previously been graded as ‘good’.

and assessed as ‘inadequate’, including Park View Academy, which had previously been graded ‘outstanding’ and invited by the DfE to take over the running of other schools in the area.<sup>10</sup> The five schools were placed in ‘special measures’, and a number of teachers removed from their posts. Subsequently, the DfE initiated a series of hearings through the National Centre for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) seeking to disbar permanently 12 teachers from teaching. As Holmwood and O’Toole (2017) detail, the allegations against the schools and the teachers were based on a series of false premises, and framed from the outset by flawed investigations. The NCTL cases against the teachers provided the first legal test of the allegations. In May 2017, the cases collapsed, and they were later abandoned by the DfE in July. By this time, however, a dominant narrative that there had been an extremist plot to Islamicise Birmingham schools had become firmly established in public discourse and policy.

The rationale for selection of the 21 schools that were subjected to Ofsted inspections is not clear. According to Ofsted, 15 schools were inspected at the request of the Secretary of State for Education, whilst six were inspected due to ‘Ofsted’s concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding and leadership and management in these schools’.<sup>11</sup> Among the 21 inspected schools, only 14 had had any allegations made

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the reasons cited for the downgrades in April 2014 related to ‘safeguarding’ failures, i.e. the failure to implement Prevent, and not to any fall in pupil performance.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Michael Wilshaw to Michael Gove, 9.6.14: Advice note provided on academies and maintained schools in Birmingham to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, as commissioned by letter dated 27 March 2014.

against them according to the Clarke report. All the schools involved had between 90-100% ethnic minority – in most cases Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage – pupils and they were all located in areas of Muslim settlement.

In his account of penalisation in the US, Wacquant refers to processes of ‘re-lexification’ whereby ‘black’ is equated with ‘criminal’, and ‘urban’ and ‘ghetto’ with ‘terrible places where only blacks reside’ (2005: 129). In the case of Trojan Horse, ‘Muslim’ became equated with ‘Islamism’, ‘extremism’ and ‘security risk’. This was evident in the ways in which the investigations into Trojan Horse were quickly securitised, with the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, appointing a former Counter-Terrorism Police Officer, Peter Clarke, (rather than a lawyer, or an educationalist) to lead the DfE investigation – an appointment that framed the issue from the outset as one with potential security implications. The elision of Trojan Horse with counter-terrorism was also evident in Ofsted’s focus on the schools’ failure to implement Prevent and its criticisms of schools’ lack of awareness of how to identify ‘risk of potential radicalisation and extremism’, leading to the downgrading of several schools on this basis. Yet, in 2014, the implementation of Prevent in schools and nurseries was not a statutory requirement and there was, in any case, little guidance to schools on how to implement this agenda: in fact detailed guidance to schools was not published until July 2015 – *after* the Trojan Horse affair.<sup>12</sup> Not only were these schools punitively assessed according to an assessment criteria that was not at that stage being

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<sup>12</sup> See DfE (1<sup>st</sup> July 2015) *The prevent duty: for schools and childcare providers* (London: DfE): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-children-from-radicalisation-the-prevent-duty#history>

applied to other schools, they were also penalised for failing to deliver a policy agenda that had not been fully articulated (and see Holmwood and O'Toole 2017). In the process, the Ofsted regime implicitly identified schools with Muslim majority pupils as prone – or in the lexicon of Prevent *vulnerable* – to extremism. In so doing, it performed the function of symbolically producing 'Muslim' as synonymous with 'extremism'.

Yet, as reports on the Trojan Horse affair conceded, and notwithstanding their criticisms of various governing and teaching practices, there was no evidence of radicalisation taking place in the schools implicated in the affair. The Kershaw report for Birmingham City Council concluded: 'There is no evidence of a conspiracy to promote an anti-British agenda, violent extremism or radicalisation in schools in East Birmingham' (2014: 4), whilst the Clarke report for the DfE found there was no evidence of 'terrorism, radicalisation or violent extremism' in the schools – rather religious conservatism or a 'hardline strand of Sunni Islam' (2014: 13). Furthermore, the prosecuting counsel for the DfE in the NCTL hearings seeking to disbar a number of the former teachers argued these cases are 'not about an evil plot to indoctrinate young children in extremist ideology or anything like it', rather they are 'about the failure to respect diversity'.<sup>13</sup>

The Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham was rapidly followed by investigations into schools in other areas of Muslim settlement for signs of extremism, including Bradford, Luton and Tower Hamlets – although these failed to establish any further

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/islamic-preacher-who-called-god-10307178>

plots. Nonetheless, the claim that there was a more generalised threat of ‘extremist entryism’ informed subsequent iterations to the government’s counter-extremism policy. The government’s 2015 *Counter-Extremism Strategy* contained measures to prevent extremists entering public sector institutions – citing the conclusions of the Clarke Report on the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham as evidence for the threat:

There is evidence that our institutions are increasingly targeted by extremists, who look to use them to spread their ideology. [...] In April 2014, Peter Clarke, a former senior police officer, was appointed by the Government to investigate allegations that extremists had gained control of several schools in Birmingham – the ‘Trojan Horse’ plot. His detailed report found evidence of “co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action... to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos”. (HM Govt 2015:13)

Accordingly, Trojan Horse was used to define and provide evidence of the problem of ‘extremist entryism’ and to justify the proposed strategy to contain it.

As in the case of Project Champion, responses to Trojan Horse were not based on a consensual understanding of the problem across government agencies, and the Trojan Horse controversy revealed a number of tensions between governing agencies and agendas. Aside from a public spat of mutual blaming between the Home Office and the DfE over who should be regarded as responsible for the claimed problems in Birmingham,<sup>14</sup> the affair highlighted tensions between central and local government

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<sup>14</sup> See ‘Furious Cameron slaps down Gove and May over ‘Islamic extremism’ row’, *The Guardian*, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2014:

arising from the government's academisation policy, since many of the schools were academies and not subject to Local Education Authority (LEA) control, instead they were authorised by and accountable to the DfE. In the ensuing reports and debates in the city, Birmingham City Council was heavily criticised by the DfE for having failed in its duties to intervene in these schools – despite the fact that its LEA did not control eight of the 21 inspected schools, or four of the five schools at the heart of the investigations.<sup>15</sup> In turn, a report for Birmingham City Council was heavily critical of Ofsted's conflation of narrow faith-based ideology with radicalisation (Trojan Horse Review Group 2014: 11). Finally, tensions between the government's academisation and counter-extremism agendas arose in relation to parental support for the schools, which was at odds with many of the criticisms of the schools by Ofsted and the Clarke report. A key justification for the government's academies policies, was its insistence that they increased parental power. Yet, many of the practices in the schools had met with parents' approval, such as the emphasis on attainment in maths and English (which had been blamed for a narrowing of the curricula in the schools), or the holding of Islamic assemblies. Thus, there were tensions between the government's parental choice ideology and support for the schools by many parents.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jun/07/cameron-gove-may-extremism-row>

<sup>15</sup> One of the five schools, Saltley School, at the time of the Ofsted inspections was not an academy, but was due to become one in March 2015.



## **Conclusion**

In this article, I examined practices of urban governance that target whole populations in neighbourhoods of Muslim settlement. Both the civic invisibility of Muslims in Birmingham and the territorial stigmatisation of sites of Muslim settlement enabled punitive measures such as the overt and covert surveillance of neighbourhoods through Project Champion, and the stigmatisation of schools with significant numbers of Muslim pupils as potential sites of extremism – as occurred during the Trojan Horse affair.

These techniques of governing sites of Muslim settlement in many ways reflect established patterns of governing inner-cities, but in the context of the developing security agenda they also show how they were also governed as sites of potential contagion – due to the perceived prevalence of conservative, religious, ‘non-British’ values, which were linked to a more generalised security threat. This was used to justify the expansion of Counter Extremism powers, with the presumed facts of the Trojan Horse case in Birmingham cited in the 2015 Counter Extremism strategy as evidence underpinning the need to introduce new powers to prevent ‘extremist entryism’ in public sector institutions more generally.

Consequently, whilst in its post-2007 incarnation, Prevent made Muslims the object of intervention and reform, operationalised through local intervention policies that targeted sites of Muslim settlement, the government’s evolving Prevent strategy since 2011 seeks to achieve something much more extensive: the normalisation of vigilance against extremism across a very wide range of areas of public life – particularly with the introduction of the Prevent Duty in 2015. So far, this has involved requiring a million public sector personnel to undergo extremism awareness training,

and generated over 8,000 referrals to Channel<sup>16</sup> – the police-led de-radicalisation programme – and proposals to tackle ‘extremist entryism’ in public institutions. One consequence of this is that Muslim presence, or the expression of religious or dissenting views, in public sector institutions have attracted suspicion and surveillance (see OSJI 2016).

I also argued that although processes of penalisation and territorial stigmatisation are mutually reinforcing, they do not emanate necessarily from a fully cohesive governing project. The penalisation that occurred through Project Champion and Trojan Horse was enabled by the stigmatisation of Muslim sites and the civic invisibility of their populations, but it was also in tension with a number of other governing agendas, and in both cases there were struggles among and between political and administrative professionals. Both Project Champion and Trojan Horse were challenged and resisted by a range of civil society actors – with activists utilising mapping technologies created by the state to expose the concealed rationale of Project Champion and to mobilise opposition to the scheme. Similarly, the government’s evolving Prevent policy is contested – not least because its expansion brings it into tension with other existing public-sector duties. Thus, teachers have argued that Prevent is not compatible with the understanding of safeguarding among teaching

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<sup>16</sup> Based on ACPO figures of 3,934 referrals between 2006 and 2014, and 3,955 referrals between January and December 2015. See:

<http://www.npcc.police.uk/FreedomofInformation/NationalChannelReferralFigures.aspx> and <http://www.npcc.police.uk/Publication/NPCC%20FOI/CT/02616ChannelReferrals.pdf>

professionals,<sup>17</sup> health sector workers have raised concerns about potential breaches of medical ethics that arise in relation to the requirements of Prevent (Summerfield 2016), and universities and student bodies have criticised the implications of Prevent for universities' statutory duty to protect freedom of expression (Scott-Baumann 2017). In this respect, the analysis presents a corrective to the tendency in much of the literature on Prevent to reify the disciplinary state and overlook the more contested nature of its implementation.

Whilst Prevent has focused primarily on Muslims, its remit potentially includes anyone who opposes the government's definition of 'fundamental British values'. Thus, a very wide range of attitudes, behaviours and ideologies potentially fall within the statutory provisions for countering 'extremism'. What were techniques developed to govern marginalised neighbourhoods and populations are becoming the basis for the normalisation of a 'muscular liberal' approach to governing more generally.

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<sup>17</sup> See NUT 2016 Conference Motion 10 on the Prevent Strategy and OSJI (2016) *Eroding Trust*, 17-18.

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