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The political inclusion of British Muslims: From multiculturalism to muscular liberalism

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Multiculturalism, Prevent, British Muslims, Counter Extremism, Civic integration

Introduction

The UK's counter-radicalisation Prevent policy has been in place for almost two decades. It has changed substantially over that time – from a relatively devolved and non-statutory ‘hearts and minds’ community engagement programme in the late 2000s, to a more centralised approach from 2010, to one that, since 2015, places a statutory duty on employees in public sector institutions to ‘have due regard to the need to prevent people being drawn into terrorism’ (Counter Terrorism and Security Act, 2015: Part 5, ch. 1, Para 26 (1)), requiring these employees to undergo radicalisation awareness training and thus embedding security concerns within the everyday practices of public sector workers (Rodrigo Jusué, 2021). In this article, I reflect on the implications of this evolving security agenda for the accommodation of Muslims in British public life. I argue that there has been a gradual ideological retreat over the last two decades from a relatively pluralistic approach to recognising and accommodating minority religions, to a more ‘muscular liberal’ approach, linked particularly to the Counter Extremism agenda, that seeks to defend a particular set of ‘fundamental British values’, and implicitly asserts an identitarian form of Christian majoritarianism that limits the conditions for the political inclusion of British Muslims. This evolving agenda sets back many of the gains of multicultural accommodation that developed under New Labour from 1997, which set out a comparatively pluralistic model of recognition and accommodation of religious

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minorities in public life, notwithstanding its political rhetoric, which was often hostile to multiculturalism (see [Meer and Modood, 2009](#)).

I address some of the implications of the Prevent, and associated Counter Extremism, agendas for Muslim civic and political inclusion in recent years, by examining: modes of governing areas of Muslim settlement; the schooling of British Muslims; the implications of the introduction of forms of *sousveillance* (surveillance from below) of Muslims within public institutions, and the framing of integration, British values and equalities through the Counter Extremism agenda. Before I do this, I consider some contemporary debates and developments on multiculturalism and the accommodation of Muslims in public life within the UK.

Multiculturalism and the Civic turn

The UK has tended to follow a model of pragmatic multiculturalist accommodation of minority religions in the context of established Anglicanism, a model that [Modood \(2010\)](#) has described as ‘moderate secularism’. This model, as with forms of multiculturalism elsewhere, has come under strain: beginning under New Labour, whose policy stance on multiculturalism shifted after 2001, following the disturbances in northern towns and 9/11, when it began to distance itself from multiculturalism and place greater emphasis on community cohesion, shared civic values and Britishness ([Ashcroft and Bevir, 2017](#)). This was followed by a more assertive disavowal of multiculturalism under the Coalition government, with the then Prime Minister, David Cameron in 2011, calling for an end to ‘state multiculturalism’ and for a more ‘muscular liberal’ response to what he presented as a problem of the cultural isolation and mal-integration of young Muslim men, leading to their radicalisation ([Cameron 2011](#)). Subsequent counter terrorism, and associated counter extremism, policies have been driven by claims about the lack of integration of Muslims, which is further related to threats to British security. It has been argued, though, that this political rhetoric under both the New Labour and the Coalition governments belies the more enduring commitments to multicultural accommodation that continued to be expressed in equalities, cohesion and education policies – notwithstanding hostile policy rhetoric on multiculturalism ([Meer and Modood, 2009](#); [Uberoi and Modood, 2013](#)). More recently, however, [Ashcroft and Bevir \(2017\)](#) argue, that British politics has in fact become less ‘Janus-faced’ in relation to multiculturalism – that is, assimilationist in rhetoric but multiculturalist in practice – and increasingly mired in unresolved tensions over identity, diversity and accommodation of difference, in which claims about the successes of British inclusiveness sit alongside an increasingly exclusionary ‘muscular liberal’ approach to governing diversity. Such tensions, I argue, are particularly evident in increasingly exclusionary cultural and civic claims that underpin areas of public life – driven particularly by the Prevent and Counter Extremism agendas.

The UK is not alone in its shifting position on multiculturalism, with similar discourses and tensions evident across Europe. [Mouritsen et al. \(2019\)](#) identify a ‘civic turn’ in integration policies across European states, which they characterise as an ideological approach to integration, that: expands ‘good citizenship’ into personal conduct and values and civic, family and religious life; shifts the responsibility for integration from the state to

individual capacities and willingness to integrate; involves incentives or disciplinary interventions by governments to procure the right mind sets or practises; and is accompanied by a civic nationalist majoritarian (rather than pluralist) conception of membership (2019: 595). This shift, they argue, is predicated on an asymmetric expectation that minorities and migrants express liberal values as a condition of their political inclusion or citizenship (witnessed particularly in the weaponised debates on gender equality and gay rights).

Mouritsen et al. (2019) argue that this civic integration approach is, at heart, directed at migration control, aimed at making rights of entry or settlement dependent on this more moralistic, exclusive conception of citizenship. They suggest that it can apply to Muslim immigrants and their descendants, particularly if their lifestyles and social relations are structured by their religion – leaving room for Muslims to practice religious culture only as heritage, identity or emotional-aesthetic attachment. In framing their core argument that integration philosophies across Europe are both converging (in terms of demands around civic integration) and divergent (in terms of the extent and particular forms that these take), they point out that this more ideological approach to civic integration can be seen across countries with quite different national integration philosophies, although it takes different forms across states. I suggest that in the UK, this civic turn is not only, or even necessarily, primarily directed at immigration control, since the UK's exclusionary immigration policy can be seen to be operating in some respects relatively autonomously from integration concerns. It is rather, one that has particularly focused on Muslims as a post-migration minority. As Uberoi and Saggar (2009) have argued, immigration and integration policies can operate, and indeed have operated, independently of one another, and not necessarily in consistent ways. This is attested to by the Windrush scandal, which saw the arbitrary and racist deportation of highly integrated Caribbean-heritage British citizens, as well as in the restrictive responses to granting citizenship to EU nationals who might be seen as holding similar civic or cultural values to the imagined white, Christian, liberal, British majority. Importantly, then, demands around civic integration in the UK have not secured the rights or inclusion of racialised citizens or migrants, but they have operated to limit the political inclusion particularly of Muslims as an exceptional, largely post-migration, and racialised minority – by positioning Muslims *generally* as insufficiently liberal or adhering to 'fundamental British values'. The exclusionary and racialised logics of the civic integration turn in the UK can be traced across a range of policy areas, and involve imposing asymmetric demands on Muslims to perform liberal values, limiting the terms of Muslim political inclusion, underpinned by a conceptually and operationally expansive Counter Extremism agenda that legitimates exceptional and punitive interventions that target British Muslims.

Multiculturalism in the UK

This civic integration turn constitutes a relative departure in the UK's approach to the political inclusion of minorities. In our previous work on Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance (O'Toole et al., 2013), we traced forms of national and local state engagement with Muslim civil society organisations and actors from 1997 onwards.

Our research found that under New Labour there was innovation in the recognition of religion and belief in equalities policies and initiatives and forms of multicultural accommodation, despite the claim (by Blair's Special Advisor) that 'we don't do God', and despite often nervousness and hesitancy about public engagement with religion. There was also a strong role for faith-based organisations in governance, especially in the area of welfare delivery, consonant with New Labour's communitarian Third Way approach to public service provision, as well as in the local strategic partnerships through which local governance became organised. Consequently, in that period, we identified increased state engagement with Muslims – as Muslims rather than as ethnic minority groups – with the proliferation of mechanisms for Muslim representation and inclusion in governance at local and national levels. These developments occurred alongside a preoccupation from 2001 onwards with community cohesion, shared civic values and British identity – expressed in New Labour's focus on a stronger framing of citizenship as entailing 'the right to be different and the duty to integrate' (BBC, 2006), which it sought through the introduction of citizenship education, citizenship tests and emphasis on Britishness.

Although New Labour's policy and rhetoric appeared to shift away from multiculturalism to community cohesion, Meer and Modood (2009) argue that multicultural accommodation continued to characterise equalities policies and institutional practises in this period, and thus argue there was under New Labour in fact significant continuity – rather than a break – with multiculturalism – notwithstanding New Labour's rhetorical pronouncements on multiculturalism.

A more controversial feature of New Labour's engagement with Muslim, however, was the ways in which increased engagement with Muslim representatives and organisations were conducted via the Prevent agenda, and involved increasing government interventions in Muslim civic and theological organisations and practises. The Prevent agenda is one element of the government's Counter Terrorism CONTEST strategy that has been evolving since 2003 in response to the 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks. The Prevent strand of the CONTEST strategy was concerned with developing 'soft-security' measures to counter radicalisation, operating particularly at the level of ideology and community interventions. Re-launched by New Labour in 2007 as a 'Hearts and Minds' community engagement programme, it sought to partner with Muslim communities to counter violent extremism, through four key strands: 'promoting shared values, supporting local solutions, building civic capacity and leadership and strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders' (DCLG, 2007: 5). There was fierce criticism of the forms of engagement and types of interventions that were initiated through Prevent, however, with the charge that state engagement with Muslims through the rubric of Counter Terrorism cast Muslims as suspects rather than as citizens and offered only limited terms of engagement (Birt, 2009; O'Toole et al., 2016). As our research showed, despite the limited and limiting terms of engagement with Muslims through Prevent, the relative autonomy of local authorities to implement Prevent according to local needs and priorities in that period meant there was substantial variation in the ways in which Muslim civil society organisations were engaged with at the local level, often underpinned by distinctive *local* philosophies of integration (O'Toole et al., 2016; Lewicki et al., 2014).

With the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government in 2010, a number of changes took place that shifted this model to a more ‘muscular liberal’ approach that emphasised majoritarian identity framed in terms of national Christianity, based on the claim that ‘state multiculturalism’ had failed. This was expressed in 2011 when the then Prime Minister David Cameron claimed that self-segregating Muslim communities were creating the conditions for radicalisation – a problem he attributed to the excessive ‘passive toleration’ that had 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. Whilst this stance had some continuities with New Labour’s preoccupation with shared values, cohesion and citizenship, it began to steer Prevent in a more centralised way, limiting the scope for local authorities to situate the implementation of Prevent within local structures of community engagement and local philosophies of integration. Notwithstanding the Coalition’s ‘Big Society’ vision of mobilising civil society to engage in the delivery of welfare and public services, and local-level inter-faith initiatives such as Near Neighbours, engagement with faith organisations generally, but Muslim organisations particularly, began to fall away in this period. There was also the assertion of a ‘muscular liberal’ approach to demanding stronger adherence to ‘fundamental British values’, which were initially framed in the government’s Prevent strategy of 2011 as ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’ (Home Office, 2011: 107). That formulation was later adjusted to ‘mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’, with government introducing expectations on schools to teach and promote these fundamental British values (Holmwood and O’Toole, 2017). The Prevent strategy as it developed from 2011 under the Coalition government, and subsequently after 2015 by the Conservative government, was in comparison to earlier approaches a more expansive, pre-emptive, centralised and top-down approach, which shifted away from Muslim community engagement to mobilising front-line personnel in key public sector institutions to spot and report signs of extremism, based on a notably broad notion of extremism, with few and limited mechanisms for engagement with Muslim communities and organisations. I now turn to the implications of this security agenda for Muslim political inclusion.

Prevent and Civic exclusion

One dimension of the shift to a stronger security emphasis, driven by civic integrationist logics, was the ways in which sites of Muslim settlement became subject to increasing surveillance and punitive interventions. The spatial concentration of Muslim populations in the UK is manifested regionally, with populations concentrated in London, the Midlands and the North West, and also within towns and cities, with concentrations in

particular urban neighbourhoods. Sites of urban ethnic minority settlement have long been a focus of racialized anxieties about integration and multiculturalism (Rhodes and Brown, 2018), whilst from 2001 onwards, these focused particularly on problems of claimed self-segregation among Muslims, who were accused of living ‘parallel lives’, which was presented as a cause of the urban disorders that took place in the summer of that year (Cantle, 2001). The interaction between these anxieties about integration and security concerns from the mid-2000s onwards meant that sites of Muslim settlement became increasingly subject to spatially focused, *security-driven* policy interventions (O’Toole, 2021). The origins of this can be seen in the operation of Prevent from 2007 onwards, with New Labour introducing a risk-based approach to counter terrorism that drew on racialised forms of community and neighbourhood profiling – an approach that echoed earlier policy approaches to the governance of inner-city areas of black settlement, which presented these as disorderly areas with unruly, unintegrated populations. Rhodes and Brown recount how the inner-city became ‘territorialised’ as a pathological, racialised space’ in successive UK government policies over the period of the 1970s and 80s (2018: 3). They go on to suggest that these policy logics are in more recent years being re-configured around ‘more complex spatial formations of race and ethnicity’ (2018: 14), which focus on newly problematic populations, such as Eastern Europeans and 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 now include inner-city areas and post-industrial towns where British Muslims are settled. That focus intensified in the 2010s, with these areas presented as sites of a generalised security risk and where extremist ideas circulated unchecked.

Spatial logics and the governance of sites of Muslim settlement

The 2007 Prevent agenda that developed under New Labour drew on logics of risk and community and spatial profiling, which resulted in the designation of those areas with 5,000 or more Muslims as ‘Prevent Priority Areas’ – logics that treated Muslim presence itself as a security risk. Despite this, the *Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance* project found significant local variation in the implementation of Prevent from 2007–2010, as it came into contact with different *local* philosophies of integration. Thus some cities, such as Leicester, operated with a strong commitment to a locally-inflected faith-based multiculturalism and accommodation of religious minorities (O’Toole et al., 2013). Others such as Birmingham, by contrast, operated with a much stronger security logic that targeted sites of Muslim settlement in the city for enhanced forms of surveillance (O’Toole et al., 2016; O’Toole, 2021).

Birmingham was one of the areas identified as a Prevent Priority Area in 2007, as a consequence of the number of Muslims living in the city. 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 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. According to the 2011 Census, 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%).

The spatial logics underpinning the identification of Prevent Priority Areas from 2007 were further refined by the local authority in Birmingham, which identified 11 Prevent Priority Neighbourhoods. 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 [Preventing Violent Extremism] agenda. This is because Muslim communities are most vulnerable to radicalisation. (SBP, 2009: 8)

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

Such assumptions about the riskiness of sites of Muslim settlement – justifying special interventions – were exemplified in the events surrounding Project Champion in 2010, which built on the framing of areas of Muslim settlement as risky areas as the justification for the introduction of targeted surveillance that was introduced with minimal and flawed community consultation or democratic control. Project Champion was a project that was led by West Midlands Counter Terrorism police in 2010 and involved installing 216 overt and covert CCTV and ANPR cameras around two sites of Muslim settlement in Birmingham (Sparkbrook and Washwood Heath), in effect creating a surveillance ring around these areas (BCC, 2010). Importantly, the project was launched with little consultation, and local communities in the affected areas were misleadingly told that the project was a crime safety initiative intended to catch drug dealers and car thieves in these areas, and its counter-terrorism purpose was concealed. A campaign by local residents, Muslim groups and civil liberties campaigners exposed the true purpose of the cameras, forcing a public apology from West Midlands Police and the eventual hooding and dismantling of the cameras. The use of overt and covert surveillance in Birmingham was based on and made possible by longstanding narratives of these areas as risky areas, justifying extraordinary policing measures, as well as by the civic invisibility of those who resided in them – processes that were amplified by the security agenda (O'Toole, 2021). This became clear in the ways in which the consultation processes with local communities were conducted. A report into the project conducted by Thames Valley Police (2010) found evidence there had been a deliberate strategy of concealing the Counter Terrorism funding source of the project and withholding the West Midlands Counter Terrorism Unit logo from the project documentation – despite the fact they were leading it. Not only were communities deliberately misled about the purposes of the scheme, but as the Thames Valley Police report found, the decisions about the scheme had already been taken *prior* to the community consultation taking place:

At the start of the wider consultation process, on 29 April 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. (Thames Valley Police, 2010: 31–32)

That report also found that the claimed community benefits of the cameras – to curtail local crime – could not be realised because the data that were collected by the cameras were streamed directly to the Counter Terrorism Unit with no mechanism in place for sharing the data with local crime prevention police to combat crime, despite this being the stated purpose of the cameras (Thames Valley Police, 2010: 31).

Project Champion exemplifies the ways in which discourses on security and risk underpinned the profiling of, and coercive interventions in, areas of Muslim settlement, in which any expectations about Muslim political or civic inclusion, representation or accountability were set aside. In Birmingham, the political and civic exclusion of Muslim communities was further extended by the Trojan Horse affair in 2014, which had implications for Muslim communities in other towns and cities, as well as for Muslim presence in public sector institutions, as I discuss below.

Schooling Muslim children

The territorial stigmatisation and application of securitised spatial logics in areas of Muslim settlement were both manifested and extended in the responses to the allegations of a ‘Trojan Horse plot’ in Birmingham that emerged in 2014, where assessments of the threat to schools focused on sites of Muslim presence, and the issues were framed from the outset through the lens of extremism. This case came to be cited by government as the evidence base for the need for a more interventionist approach to tackling extremism and a strengthened counter extremism strategy, and led to further investigations in other areas of Muslim settlement.

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 fragment of a letter purporting to outline a ‘Trojan Horse’ plot. Whilst the letter itself was widely accepted to be a hoax, it nonetheless triggered snap inspections in March–April 2014 by Ofsted of 21 schools in Birmingham, in which five schools at the heart of the affair, were downgraded and assessed as ‘inadequate’. The five schools were placed in ‘special measures’, a number of teachers removed from their posts and the schools’ management replaced.

Several investigations into the schools were commissioned, including by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), Birmingham City Council (BCC) and the Department for Education (DfE). The latter appointed Peter Clarke, a former Counter Terrorism police officer to lead its investigation, imbuing it from the outset with security implications. The Clarke Report concluded that there had been an ‘organised campaign to target certain schools’ to introduce ‘an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos’ (Clarke, 2014: 14). Subsequently, the DfE initiated a series of hearings through the National Centre for

Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) seeking to disbar permanently up to 12 teachers from the schools involved.

The rationale for the selection of the 21 schools that featured in the Trojan Horse investigations isn't clear, but according to Ofsted, 15 schools were inspected at the request of the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, whilst six were inspected due to 'Ofsted's concerns about the effectiveness of safeguarding and leadership and management' (Wilshaw 2014). It is noteworthy that all the schools involved were located in areas of Muslim settlement and had between 90-100% ethnic minority (largely Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage) pupils. Following the inspections, several schools were downgraded from being previously rated as 'Outstanding' or 'Good' to 'Inadequate' – not on the basis of any fall in attainments, but due to the Schools' purported failures to implement Prevent. However, in 2014, the implementation of Prevent in schools was *not* a statutory requirement and there was, in any case, little guidance to schools on how to implement it. In fact Prevent guidance to schools was not published until July 2015 – *after* the Trojan Horse affair. Not only were these schools punitively assessed according to criteria that were not being applied to other schools, they were also penalised for failing to deliver a policy agenda that had not been fully articulated at that point. In the process, the Ofsted regime implicitly identified schools with majority Muslim 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, 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' (Kershaw, 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' (Clarke, 2014: 13).

Holmwood and O'Toole (2017) detail the catalogue of errors and omissions in the Clarke report, which we argue undermine claims that there was a conspiracy to enforce a hardline Islamisation of Birmingham schools, concluding that the claims directed at, and the penalisation of, staff in the schools in fact constituted a serious miscarriage of justice.

The NCTL hearings in 2017 provided the first legal test of the Clarke report's claims. In May 2017, the cases collapsed and were later abandoned by the DfE in July. By that time, however, a dominant narrative that there had been an extremist plot to Islamise Birmingham schools had become firmly established in public discourse and policy.

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 also failed to establish any 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 of 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”. (Home Office, 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.

These interventions in 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 seen as sites of potential contagion – due to the perceived prevalence of conservative, religious, ‘non-British’ values among British Muslims, which were linked to a more generalised security threat.

The implications of the Trojan Horse affair have been far-reaching. Although the NCTL hearings collapsed, the teachers were left in a legal limbo and their teaching careers destroyed (Holmwood and O’Toole, 2017), whilst attainment rates at the school at the heart of the affair (Park View Academy) subsequently declined.¹

Prevent and sousveillance

Projections of the risks of extremist contagion into public institutions that Clarke purported to have uncovered in Birmingham informed the Counter Extremism Strategy that followed and the Prevent Duty that was introduced with the passing of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act in 2015. That Act imposed a statutory duty on public sector institutions including schools (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2016), universities (Scott-Baumann et al., 2020), the health sector (Heath-Kelly and Strausz, 2020), charities and prisons and probation services to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. In so doing, it reflected the aspiration of the 2011 Prevent strategy that ‘there should be no ungoverned spaces’ (Home Office, 2011).

Public sector institutions have been positioned as both vulnerable to extremist entryism and as a potential detection and referral infrastructure. The latter has entailed requiring millions of front-line personnel to undergo Prevent training to enable them to spot and report on signs of radicalisation. The associated statutory guidance that accompanies the Prevent Duty goes further than requiring public authorities to have ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’, to directing them to spot and report on signs of extremism, including non-violent forms of extremism, defined as ‘opposition to fundamental British values’. As a consequence, the Prevent duty has brought into being an extensive system for the ‘sousveillance’ (surveillance from below) of British Muslims by front-line workers across an array of areas of public life, which entails spotting and reporting on very broadly defined signs of extremism. This has been accompanied, and augmented, by the development of a ‘Prevent compliance industry’ that is quasi-autonomous from the Home Office. This compliance industry includes private providers who provide advice kits to public sector institutions in the form of Prevent

guidance, check lists, staff training programmes, self-evaluation toolkits, risk assessments, reporting tools, etc. These often go well beyond the statutory requirements, in effect, promoting ‘hyper-compliance’ with the Prevent Duty (O’Toole, 2020). This is despite the fact that the vast majority of Prevent referrals do not result in a referral to Channel or further action – indicating high levels of ‘false positives’ or inappropriate reporting. The scope for monitoring the efficacy of Prevent furthermore is limited by the lack of democracy accountability to Prevent – existing mechanisms for ongoing review of government’s counter terrorism legislation explicitly excludes review of Prevent – with the remit of the Independent Reviewer of Legislation confined to the other three strands of the government’s CONTEST counter terrorism legislation (Pursue, Prepare and Protect) – but not Prevent.

All of this raises concerns about the discriminatory effects of monitoring for very broadly (often erroneously) defined signs of extremism, with implications for freedom of expression or the right to democratic dissent (for ‘fundamental British values’ in fact), as well as for the inclusion of Muslim pupils, students, patients and public sector employees.

Counter extremism as integration and equalities policy

The expansion of counter extremism across public sector institutions is also reflected in its expansion across policy domains, with integration and equalities policies increasingly aligned with the Counter Extremism agenda. The government-commissioned Casey Review into Opportunity and Integration (Casey, 2016), for instance, approached integration as a solution to the problem of extremism, which she associated particularly with the claimed mal-integration and self-segregation of South Asian communities. This was echoed in the government’s subsequent Integration Strategy Green Paper of 2018, which cited lack of integration as a key risk factor in the spread of extremism, focussing on segregated and ‘isolated’ communities and warning that a ‘lack of meaningful social mixing’ can lead to a scenario where ‘[n]egative cultural norms can take hold, including prejudice, anti-social behaviour and oppression of women, [which] can be exploited by extremists’ (MHCLG, 2018: 12).

The same paper described the establishment of the Commission for Countering Extremism as one of the measures that government had introduced ‘to tackle the most persistent and gravest inequalities’ (2018: 13). Not only is Counter Extremism posited as a strategy for tackling inequalities, it is also presented in the Green Paper as key to the promotion of rights and freedoms. This entails re-framing Counter Extremism as a means of guaranteeing those rights and freedoms that are threatened by extremists, and addressing inequalities experienced by women in minority communities at the hands of conservative men or harmful cultural practises. The mobilising of gender equality as a basis for castigating the illiberalism of Islam, rescuing Muslim women from Muslim men, has a long and dubious history, but has become a key legitimisation in the current expansion of the Counter Extremism agenda.

This more expansive conceptualisation of extremism and its implementation exemplifies Mouritsen et al.’s (2019) account of the characteristics of the civic integration turn, in the ways in which it seeks to shape the personal conduct and values of problematic

citizens defined as ‘vulnerable’ to exploitation by extremists, intervenes to procure the right mind sets and practises through the setting of ‘fundamental British values’, and imposes a compulsory, asymmetric demand on Muslims to adhere to liberal values.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to sketch out the implications of the developing Counter Extremism agenda for the inclusion of Muslims in public and political life. I have argued that this agenda is a key vehicle for the turn towards a more civic integrationist approach to governing diversity in the UK, one that limits the terms of Muslim inclusion, and legitimates certain extraordinary interventions in sites of Muslim settlement, schools and public institutions (through the more generalised Prevent Duty).

Across all these areas, though, it is important to recognise the incomplete nature of civic integration as a governing project, due to the assemblages of different governance actors, professional norms and competing agendas that characterise the fields of governance through which civic integration is implemented. This means I think that it is unlikely to be a fully coherent or fully accomplished project, and of course it regularly encounters opposition, resistance, foot-dragging and non-compliance from those that are its objects (see O’Toole et al., 2016).

Nonetheless, the civic integration turn in the UK, that is underpinned and legitimated by the Counter Extremism agenda, presents a significant ideological constraint on the accommodation of Muslims in British public life, and derives much of its efficacy from the ways in which it aligns itself with ‘safeguarding vulnerable individuals’, defending ‘fundamental British values’ and promoting gender equality, rights and freedoms.

Although operationally it has focused 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 and policy provisions for countering ‘extremism’. What were techniques developed to govern an exceptional minority also provide a basis for the normalisation of a ‘muscular liberal’ approach to governing more generally.

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Note

1. In 2013, the percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C or equivalents including A*-C in both English and mathematics GCSEs at Park View Academy was 75%. By 2016, in the successor school, Rockwood Academy (created following the disbanding of the Park View Educational Trust), that rate had dropped to 43%. <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/school/138386/park-view-academy/secondary/results-over-time>.

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