

Barbarous Custom: discursively deconstructing *The Prevent Duty*

Kate Brooks, Bath Spa University

Email: Kate.Brooks12@Bathspa.ac.uk

Abstract

The contentious anti-terrorism programme for education, The Prevent Duty, designed to enable teachers, lecturers and youth workers to intervene if young people are 'at risk' of radicalisation, remains subject to criticism, most recently that it creates a 'culture of fear' in education. This article offers a critical discourse analysis of The Prevent Duty, arguing that rather than critique it for its 'cultural ignorance', the programme's central failure is its ethnocentric and problematic reworking of new subjectivities from old pathologies. Taking a Foucauldian perspective in order to identify key themes as discursive repertoires, the article notes how similar repertoires appear in markedly similar ways at moments of perceived national instability. Thus, whilst Britain may well be facing new threats as a nation, the ways in which the threats are defined, conceptualised and supposedly tackled through the programme are not new, but examples of recurring, contradictory and paternalist discourses. These discursive repertoires take the form of – at best- ethnocentric benevolence towards an irrational Other, whilst an imagined community of an unproblematic 'us' is set against a reductive and emotive model of radicalisation and risk. Identifying links between British colonial writing and other forms of panoptic, discursive formations, the article concludes with the observation that these repertoires appear to be moving from a paternalist 'politics of pity' to a more punitive perspective.

Keywords

Prevent, critical discourse analysis, radicalisation, risk, discursive repertoires, Britishness, ethnocentricity

Introduction

The Prevent Duty (Dept. for Education, 2015), described as “a staple feature of every UK school, college, nursery or other childcare setting’s safeguarding policy” in its most recent set of guidelines from the Home Office (2018a), has been the subject of controversy since its launch in 2003. As part of the Blair-led Government’s anti-terrorism programme, CONTEST, it was one of four connected strands: ‘*Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare*’ (Home Office 2018b). Its central premise was to tackle ‘radicalisation’ and ‘reduce...support for terrorism’ (Powell 2016:48) through interventions with children and young people. Terrorism itself was somewhat loosely defined as ‘extremism’ but largely understood to mean, al Qaeda- and ISIS-related terrorist and extremist speech and activities, and thus focused on the supposed radicalisation of young Muslims (Heath -Kelly 2013). This is despite the now well-documented ‘surge in support’ for extremist far right movements in the UK and other European nations since *Prevent* was first published (Ellinas 2010). *Prevent* was updated in 2006 and then again in 2011, and has been duty of law since 2015. Schools and other childcare providers such as nurseries, as well as youth clubs, colleges and universities, now have a legal duty to show they are monitoring and demonstrating how they have ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn in to terrorism’, which is closely monitored by Ofsted (schools and nurseries) and HEFCE for Higher Education (Busher *et al* 2017). This year, after ‘long standing pressure from...civil liberties and human rights organisations’ as *The Guardian* reported in January 2019, the *Prevent Duty* is under review (Grierson and Dodd 2019).

Of the four parts of CONTEST, *Prevent* has always been the most contentious (Coppock and McGovern 2014; Wolton 2017; Powell 2016), with its declared aim of preventing young people from being ‘drawn into terrorism’ (*The Prevent Duty* 2015:3). Aimed at lecturers, teachers and childcare providers, the document starts with the assumption that, “it is possible to intervene to prevent vulnerable people being drawn into terrorist-related activity” (ibid.,4) once certain factors are identified which “make people vulnerable to radicalisation” (ibid.,6). Intervention is positioned as “part of wider safeguarding duties’ and in that, is ‘similar in nature to protecting children from other harms (e.g. drugs, gangs, neglect, sexual exploitation)” (ibid.,5).

Since 2003, there have been widespread concerns that *Prevent* creates a 'culture of fear' when it comes to free speech in education, particularly in secondary schools upwards: education professionals had expressed concerns around "increased stigmatisation of Muslim students" (Busher *et al* 2017:7). Its supporters claim in its defence that success is hard to quantify: *The Telegraph* pointed out in response to the controversies, how can we judge how many times something has been effectively prevented? (Graham 2017). Nevertheless, critics continue to point not only to its problematic impact on the Muslim community (Qureshi 2017), but its supposed failure to pick up on those such as the Manchester arena bomber, Salman Abedi (Grierson 2018).

As McCulloch and Pickering note, the programme appears to focus on "rooting out future terrorists rather than...root causes" (McCulloch and Pickering 2009:629). This paper agrees with this stance that 'causes' are not the focus in the current iteration of the document, and agrees with critics such as Powell and others, who are right to suggest the Government needs to more fully understand the more complex and 'multi-faceted path' to radicalisation than that which *Prevent* currently conceptualises (Powell 2016:67). Such criticism also calls for an appreciation and acknowledgement of both the importance of freedom of speech in UK democracy (Wolton 2017), and the contribution of "all its residents" in the often contentious and dramatic making of that democracy (Kundnani 2012).

Coppock and McGovern (2014) start deconstructing the text itself, arguing that whilst it is not made explicit, *Prevent* focuses on young Muslims, who are constituted as 'vulnerable' through the "coupling of vulnerability to radicalisation discourse [and] overarching protectionist discourse" (2014:252) which legitimates and normalises "enhanced state surveillance practices" (2014:252) as a form of safeguarding. They also note how the document does not focus on far right extremism (2014:245). In concluding, Coppock and McGovern call for more understanding of the "impact of broader social and environmental factors" on young British Muslim lives (2014:253). Powell similarly refers to the UK's "cultural ignorance" (Powell 2016:77) as key to the "dysfunctional nature" of *Prevent* (Powell 2016:46), which is echoed in Wolton's suggestion that one solution is to teach the history of activism in Britain, including that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Suffragette movement, which would

thus inform more fully, a ‘contextualisation of [the] grievances’ which contribute to extremism, terrorism and radicalisation (Wolton 2017).

However, these critiques appear to assume that by knowing and acknowledging this ‘ignorance’, ‘we’ can help get *Prevent* ‘right’. Such a perspective, it will be argued here, somewhat limitingly echoes *Prevent*’s assumption that radicalisation is a linear process to which ‘other people’ can still be, as Powell puts it, “drawn in” (Powell 2016:67). It also assumes that *Prevent*’s ‘problem’ is its lack of awareness of both young British Muslim culture, and of the detail of the linear process of their radicalisation. This article suggests that whilst there does indeed need to be more contextual awareness of the ‘grievances’ (and the role Britain continues to play in creating and exacerbating those grievances), there also needs to be more reflective understanding of the ways in which such grievances are discursively constructed and defined in documents such as *Prevent*. It is suggested that it is the historically particular ways of talking about the problematic ‘Other’, rather than cultural ignorance of this ‘new’ threat to ‘British values’, that renders *Prevent* so problematic.

Through a critical discourse analysis of *The Prevent Duty Departmental Advice for Schools and Childcare Providers* (summarised as *Prevent*), this article investigates the document’s own discursive ideological stance. By drawing on Foucault (1977), Fairclough (1992) and Hall (2001a; 2001b), among others, it is argued that whilst Britain may well be facing new threats as a nation, the ways in which those threats are defined and discussed here, are *not* new, but an example of recurring, contradictory and paternalist discourses taking the form of ethnocentric benevolence towards an irrational ‘Other’ (*cf* Hall 2001b). As this article goes on to demonstrate, at key moments in British history (Hall 2001), this ‘Other’ is consistently discursively constructed as both dangerous and to be pitied, both ‘at risk and risky’ (Heath-Kelly 2013).

Methodology

This article uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to deconstruct *Prevent*. CDA is a broad, qualitative analytical approach to texts and language, specifically used for “critically describing, interpreting and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain and legitimise social inequalities” (Mullet 2018: 116). This

approach “rests on the notion that the way we use language is purposeful, regardless of whether discursive choices are conscious or unconscious” (Mullet 2018:116).

When applying CDA to texts such as *Prevent*, one is thus not claiming to uncover the ‘real motivations’ of authors, but instead, aiming to:

“...identify the involvement of the individuals and groups at stake, how they have become normalized in the discourse, and how they take certain assumptions for granted. This does not mean the documents were not written by people, and it does not even mean that they were written by uncreative people. On the contrary, the discourse in question is not static; it develops because individuals consciously and unconsciously adopt discursive themes.” (Johannesson 2010:260)

Whilst Government policies and guidance documents are not, generally, described as ‘creative writing’, the basic foundation of Critical Discourse Analysis is that it challenges the assumptions that “language is a neutral reflection of society and social reality” (Hyatt 2010). Instead, CDA investigates how language is “part of a wider ideological process...active rather than passive” (Hyatt 2010:1), and how it actively impacts on those it labels. Thus, policies such as *Prevent* are not neutral, but can be defined as “an authoritative way of describing” (Foucault cited in Hall 2001a). Foucault argues that “[d]iscourses are spread by specific institutions and divide up the world in specific ways” (Foucault cited in Hyatt 2010:3). Thus, we understand through discourse, who is acceptable/deviant /good/bad/sane/mad and so on. Foucault defines these institutionally sanctioned discourses as “dominant discourses,” reinforced and reproduced by existing systems of power (Foucault 1977).

Foucault (1977) argues that such dominant discourses – of which policies and policy guidelines such as this are prime examples- work to “legitimise and secure dominance” and to “limit and restrict” other interpretations of a topic (1977:73). If groups or networks of texts “share the same style” and “support the common drift” then a discursive formation is created (ibid:78) or a “discursive repertoire” (Saxton 2004). In other words, a powerfully self-legitimizing and taken for granted “particular language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (Hall, 2001a:98).

Whilst Powell suggests *Prevent* cannot be ‘improved’ until more is known about the “motives, the views and the assumptions of the radicals, the extremists, and [the] vulnerable” (Powell 2016:46), this paper asserts that what is also needed to complement and further develop that approach, is an analysis of motives, views and assumptions discursively evident in the document itself. Those assumptions connect interdiscursively with other forms of social reform and ‘guidance,’ occurring at other key moments of national upheaval, including, but certainly not limited to, the UK Suffragette movement at the turn of the last century (Wolton 2017). This, it is suggested, is key to understanding the assumptions, tensions, and disruptions present in this contentious document, and can help make clear why Prevent is widely critiqued as ineffective.

To identify and analyse these discourses, this article will draw on Fairclough’s (1989), Hyatt (2010) and Wodak and Meyer’s (2009) list of linguistic ‘devices’ such as “time, tense, modality, actors and argumentation, word order, coherence, intonation...voice (active or passive) choice of words and interdiscursivity” (Wodak and Meyer 2009). Following Fairclough’s stages and steps of CDA methodology, the document was read and re-read, noting linguistic styles and phrases: for example, the use of ‘we’ to address the reader, the repetition of ‘drawn in’ and ‘pathways’ to construct a particular, linear definition of radicalisation, key recurring phrases such as ‘risk’, ‘vulnerable’ and ‘British values’, and the systematic use of ‘resilience’ as opposing ‘radicalisation’. This enabled the mapping out of key discursive themes (Parker 1992).

Four key themes were identified:

- The way in which the notion of ‘we’ or ‘us’ was discursively constructed and referred to throughout the document
- The constructed form of ‘terrorism’ and ‘extremism’ (what it included, and what it omitted)
- The ways in which the process of ‘radicalisation’ was discursively constructed as linear and linked with other forms of ‘being vulnerable’ and risk,
- The conflation of surveillance and safeguarding in relation to the ‘good’ community.

Finally, drawing on a Foucauldian perspective connecting linguistic analysis with socio-historical analysis (Ball 2013), these themes were then analysed in terms of their “connotations, illusions and implications” (Parker 1992:3) in order to further map out their intertextuality. That is, to look ‘beyond’ the document in terms of its social and historical context, and identify which other ‘genres, discourses and styles are drawn upon’ and how they are then worked into particular articulations (Fairclough 2012: 170).

Looking critically at the document’s discursive connections with other forms thus enabled the identification of how themes worked together as ‘discursive repertoires,’ which could then be matched to similar repertoires at ‘key moments’ in British history (Hall 2001b). Through this, this article started to identify what vocabularies ‘endure’ (Silver 1990:6), demonstrating the ways in which particular ideological perspectives are perpetuated and justified. In doing so, this article followed Silver’s recommendation to take a more historical perspective and to “penetrate...the processes, practices and vocabularies” which documents such as *Prevent* reflect and engender (1990:6).

That is not to say that this is the ‘right’ analysis, or that other critics have misread it or got it ‘wrong’. It is certainly not claiming to be a complete or definitive analysis. Further research, for example, could focus on what kinds of discursive repertoires eclipse or contradict this reading, or focus on the ways in which *Prevent*’s discursive themes are resisted, opposed and critiqued by those it addresses and on whom it impacts, such as Busher *et al.*’s interviews with educationalists (2017) or Qurashi’s ethnographic fieldwork with Muslim community groups (2018). As Jones (2004) writes of Fairclough’s approach: “CDA has an explicit political agenda. It is engaged and committed. It intervenes on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups and openly declares the emancipatory interests that motivate it” (Jones 2004). It is thus acknowledged that the researcher is never ‘neutral’ but part of the ‘story’ of the research itself. As Johannesson suggests,

“...the researcher’s position relative to the research topic is not a methodological disclaimer, as is often maintained, but inherent in the story. The researcher should, therefore, not be expected to be neutral.... If the results of historical discourse analysis are presented as a story, what might then be called transferability of the results? Most important, in my opinion,

is that the story and the contradictions it may reveal can be understood for use in contemporary debates.” (2010:259)

This author’s part of the ‘story’ involves her roles as lecturer and academic researcher, and as a youth mentor, as well as her work as a foster carer for unaccompanied young asylum seekers. As such, she has experienced *Prevent* from a number of perspectives and subsequently believes it problematic, contradictory in its stated purpose, and discriminatory. Thus the author shares Johannesson’s description of their research as ‘a Foucauldian-feminist quest to identify contradictions in the discourses surrounding us’ (2010:252). In doing so, this critical analysis aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about *Prevent*, and complement empirical research such as Qurashi’s (2018) and that of Busher *et al.* (2017) in order to provide further useful insight to the ongoing *Prevent* debates. The four key themes mapped out by this analysis, are set out, below, followed by a broader discussion on how the discourses work together as discursive repertoires.

Unpacking Prevent: four key themes

Theme One: a common sense approach and a unified ‘us’

Firstly, *Prevent*, the title itself is “loaded with meaning” (Jackson *et al* 2001). Government policy documents are often given these linguistic strategies of imperative verbal clauses (Quirk and Greenbaum 1973) presumably to infer a unified approach to whatever the situation demands, rather like how a race official will shout ‘go!’ and assume an immediate, unified action. So we have *Prevent*, *Pursue*, *Protect* and *Prepare* which discursively borrow from wartime exhortations such as *Protect and Survive*, *Do Your Bit*, *Dig for Victory*, *Keep Calm and Carry On* (which shares the Contest strands’ alliterative charm, and has been evoked in recent English Defence League speeches [“Keep Calm, but we can’t Carry On like this’ (EDF 2018)].

Such phrases, Hyatt (2010) argues, are forms of nominalisation, and as such, are ‘lexically dense’ in that they can ‘make a text appear more prestigious...serious’ (2010:10). Not just prestigious but common sense (*cf* Berger and Luckmann, 1984) and obvious: ‘Prevent, protect and prepare’ for example could be as easily applied to helping small children cross the road (‘Stop, Look, Listen’) as it is to combatting the complex causes of risks to national security.

The titles are therefore intertextual, drawing on these wartime discursivities to “...reinforce and legitimate ...the truth-value of the writer’s assertion” (Hyatt 2010:12): in this case, that this is a national emergency, a call to arm the disarmers, as it were. Such interdiscursive (Fairclough 1992) use of this ‘serious’ imperative also implies a shared subject position, a ‘projected construction’ (Hyatt 2010:11) of a united, dutiful nation, for after all, who wouldn’t want ‘everyone’ especially ‘children’ to be safe from ‘harm’? Thus, childcare professionals, teachers and lecturers are subject to both an address of ‘synthetic personalisation’, a unified, unproblematic ‘us’ (Fairclough, as cited in Benwell and Stokoe 1989:180), and a subjectivity that conflates childcare and educational professionals with a national, consensual British identity based on ‘fundamental’ shared values.

This ‘British identity’ is one which represents - as Grosfuguel describes elsewhere, in his analysis of historic Islamophobia - the “European...Christian-centric Capitalist/patriarchal world system” (Grosfuguel 2006:2). In other words, ‘we’ = ‘Britain’ as Fairclough similarly says of his analysis of British political discourse (Fairclough, 1992 cited in Wodak and Meyer 2012:178). Such a consensus is as Fairclough goes on to argue, often a “banal feature of Government discourse,’ one which is frequently invoked to justify UK policy making as in the national interest (Fairclough, 1992 cited in Ball 2016).

The Prevent Duty thus constructs an ‘imagined’ national community (Anderson 2006), in which political differences are suppressed (Fairclough, 1992, in Wodak and Meyer 2012:170). It should be interesting to note here how it is ‘Prevent’ and not ‘Engage’, ‘Listen’ or ‘Understand’. It is not in the national interest for ‘us’ to do *those* things. As Roderick (2016) argues, sometimes the ‘gaps and silences’ in a text can communicate as much as the words themselves, and here the omission of a language inferring dialogue, openness and understanding is significant in how it constructs a reductive and emotive model of radicalisation and risk.

Theme Two: a particular brand of terrorism and a selective version of ‘them’

Secondly, whilst widely assumed to be focusing on young British Muslim males, the document does not state that it is focusing on Muslim communities in particular, other than a single reference to “terrorist organisations such as ISIL” (ibid.,6). ISIL – the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant – is used by the British Government despite pleas

from leading Muslim groups to avoid legitimising the organisation. Most Arabic-speaking media prefer the more pejorative Daesh, to avoid using ISIL and its 'rebrand' to ISIS (swapping the archaic Levant for Syria) (Dearden 2014). However any acknowledgment that such terms need to be carefully used as powerful forms of social practices and representations (*cf* Wetherell and Potter 1988) is glossed over here, ISIL is just "an example" of groups, the risk from which, it does acknowledge, "vary from area to area" (*Prevent* 2015:7). Thus a more complex picture of the dynamics of political tensions and ethnicities is evaded, as any reference to, for example, extremism in the form of Far-Right British groups such as the anti-Islamist English Defence League and Britain First, or campaigners such as Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, popularly known as Tommy Robinson and currently banned from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for promoting racist hate speech (Duncan 2019).

The document's statement of purpose is that it is a guide to how professional childcare and educationalists can intervene, in order to build pupils resilience to radicalisation (from 'groups such as ISIL') by "promoting fundamental British values" (*Prevent* 2015:5). Whilst the phrase 'fundamental British values' is referred to frequently – six times in this ten-page document – it is not defined. However, extremism and radicalisation *are*: as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values" (*ibid.*,5) and "...the process by which a person comes to support ...extremism leading to terrorism" (*ibid.*,4) respectively. Thus the mysterious set of fundamental British values is both *at risk* here from extremism and radicalisation, which seek, simplistically, to oppose it, and yet also *the solution* to extremism and radicalisation, if in the form of intervention.

If the document were to include Far Right extremism such as the EDL and Britain First, this convenient binary construction of extremism vs 'British values' would be problematic. Both the EDL and Britain First (capable of 'violent acts' which the document defines as part of 'terrorism') champion 'fundamental British values' such as, to quote the EDL's own webpage, "...freedom of speech...democracy...to do your duty in defence of our country" (EDL 2018). Yet just as the complexities of the political situations are glossed over, the Far Right are silenced: they are neither the problem, nor part of the solution -this particular 'Britishness' has nothing to do with them. Again, omission is significant: the omission of Far Right extremism here suggests a troubling sidestepping in *Prevent*. By not appearing to include the Far Right in its definition of

extremism, and constructing a simplistic 'one size fits all' brand of Islamic state terrorism, it is clear the *Prevent* Duty does focus specifically and problematically on "...young British Muslims' (Heath-Kelly 2013, Bonino 2013) whilst leaving its own institutionalised racism unchecked and unacknowledged.

Theme three: agents without agency – conceptualising the process of radicalisation

Thirdly, the stated intention of *Prevent* is to help education and childcare professionals think about what they can do to protect children from the risk of radicalisation' (*Prevent* 2015:4). It states it is 'essential' such professionals "...are able to identify children who may be vulnerable" to that risk, and that such children are supported by "build[ing]... resilience" (ibid.5). Thus a presumed child/childlike vulnerability is positioned as needing support and intervention by a professional who can identify risk, and subsequently work on 'resilience,' as if the process of radicalisation is a straight forward linear model of increasing vulnerability. Set up in contrast, extremism is subsequently the end process of radicalisation which "draws in (the) vulnerable". Young Muslim men are thus constructed as both "at risk" and "at risk of becoming risky' (Heath-Kelly 2013:297).

Dealing with such young people, the document explains, is like protecting them from drugs, gangs, neglect and sexual exploitation (ibid.5). This sets up a problematic subject position (Grossberg 1996) of vulnerable young people without agency, passively helpless and vulnerable. Radicalisation is understood and discussed here in the same way as grooming for sexual exploitation, with markedly similar language to that of the Sexual Offences Act (Home Office 2003), ie.: of 'harm', 'risk; and the linear model of predators' increasingly dangerous hold on the passive, vulnerable child. But terrorism is not paedophilia. Curiously, there is no sense here of who is doing the radicalisation – the other 'Others,' those who lure in the vulnerable, are not mentioned or conceptualised. It is process without agents, imposed on people without agency.

By setting up the potentially radicalised as vulnerable children, helplessly groomed into mindless participants of acts 'our' fundamental values would oppose, the young person is both denied agency, and situated within other institutionalised discourses of childhood vulnerability (Coppock and McGovern 2014:11). Notably, *Prevent* uses 'people,' 'young people' and 'children' interchangeably, inferring that those targeted by

these strategies are either children or child-like. It constructs the questioning of young Muslims as both vulnerable, immature and irrational, deluded by mysterious powerful forces. It connects them with images and discourses of the “vulnerable child...ubiquitous in contemporary society” (Coppock and McGovern 2014:11) inferring an innocence, a “passivity and malleability” that Coppock and McGovern argue, is “hegemonic, ethnocentric and de-contextualised” (2014:11) and powerful in its ability to subsequently reinforce and legitimise “social and political mechanisms that reduce children’s power and...disregard their rights” (Powell and Smith 2009:138). Radicalisation is not understood at any point to be like other forms of political, philosophical or theological debates, nor to include far right forms of extremism, but it *is* like child abuse, something universally immoral, evil, a deliberate, malicious harm intended to exploit the vulnerable – something any ‘normal British’ person would naturally want to prevent.

As with grooming, the victim is constructed as falsely deluded by those who intend to exploit and harm. Delusion is powerfully invoked here to be similar to delirium, as if radicalisation is not just irrational but feverish, a psychosis, needing intervention as a “contagious risk” (Heath-Kelly 2013:402) interdiscursively supported by descriptions of countries such as Syria and Afghanistan, communities, youth groups and mosques as breeding grounds for radicalisation, inferring contagion and disease, for which a bracing dose of Britishness is the cure.

Theme four: surveillance, intervention and ‘the good community’

Finally, *Prevent* advises that “effective engagement” with “open, collaborative” communities is the key to professionals being able to “spot signs” of radicalisation (2015:7). Although these signs are not defined, professionals (and ‘good communities’ working with professionals) are minded to “be aware that children may display different signs” – which again is tautological nonsense (ibid.,7). Despite this vagueness, again there is a discursive correlation with disease: spot the signs (whatever they are) early enough, arrange for intervention, and any child observed as “at risk of radicalisation” – including those of nursery age- may be saved.

So surveillance is discursively reimagined and justified, using the terms ‘intervention’ and ‘support’ with their connotations of medical/educational therapeutic expertise (*cf* Ecclestone and Hayes 2009) and of health and social care. Professionals it is implied,

“engage with families” and communities (ibid.8) in the manner of a social worker or health visitor who can then refer a child to other services. The Government’s Channel Counter-terrorism strategy (HM Government 2015) is thus aligned with therapeutic forms of child protection strategies and interventions.

‘At risk’ communities similarly are aligned with communities involving health risks – the idea that communities can be ‘breeding grounds’ of radicalisation echoes earlier calls for reform in Victorian slums, where concerns about poor health are caught up with constructions of the poor as “morally degenerate...morally weak” (Ball *et al* 2016:136) and there was an ideologically similar drive from middle class reformers to intervene in order to “protect the vulnerable” from potential “injurious consequences” (ibid 128). Indeed, just as the middle-class Victorians championed wholesome pursuits and fresh air for the ‘respectable’ (docile) poor, grants related to the *Prevent* strategy were used to fund cricket, boxing and football clubs as diversions from terrorism – a fact Heath-Kelly (and presumably, and for very different reasons, the EDL) finds “absurd” (2013:404).

This, Coppock and McGovern (2014) argue, is part of an institutional “shift away from the examination of the political context of acts of terrorism towards a search for...psychological factors...a terrorist mind set” (2014:7). This reflects, it has been argued, wider trends in Education, which recast “social and cultural problems as psychological ones” (Furedi 2009). Usefully invoked here, such perspectives focus on the individual’s emotional state, and does not question the root causes of such acts (MCulloch and Pickering 2009:629).

Discursive repertoires: *Prevent’s pathologies & paternalisms*

Having set out four broad ways in which *Prevent* ‘works’ discursively to set out a problematic section of society both “at risk/risky” and therefore making necessary acts of surveillance, this article will now take a broader look at how those discourses work together to reinforce each other ideologically, and have done so historically.

Taking these four strands as constituting a dominant discursive repertoire or formation, an overarching theme at work here is, it could be argued, one of a new subjectivity of ‘good Muslims gone bad’ and a subsequent new penology, which actively tries to induce specific types of conduct from British Muslim communities (Heath-Kelly

2013:296). This theme discursively reworks Beck's notion of 'risk' (1992) to construct a risky and 'suspect' target population who must be tracked and surveyed.

Hall argues that the key moments in which the racialised Other in Western popular culture appears are the early trading wars, the development of the Empire, the slave trade and WW2 migration. These moments "profoundly shape" the discourses around nationality and the Other (2001b). Hall argues that such instability is linked to "fear of the unknown" which "creates a will to knowledge...which when produced constitutes a governable identity" (2001b:408). This article proposes we are now at another 'major moment' in which such discourses are called upon to constitute and justify British Muslim communities as 'governable entities' similar to those subject to the Colonial gaze.

Indeed, the linear model linking vulnerability to radicalisation and finally extremism, assumed by *Prevent* and by a number of its critics arguing for better understanding of this process can be linked back to European Colonialist administrator Sarraut's description of 'Arab tribal' culture. Sarraut's comments some eighty-five years earlier, could have easily formed the foreword to *Prevent* in 2015:

"...without us, without our intervention...these [people] would be abandoned.... corrupt chiefs would...sacrifice them to vicious caprice, their minds would be...degraded by...base superstition and barbarous custom, they would perish." (Sarraut, 1930 in Spurr, 1994:77)

Sarraut echoes Du Buffon, who wrote nearly a century earlier about the "passion and caprice...among savages" in Africa (du Buffon 1812 in Clarke 1999). 'Caprice' is often used in such accounts, not just to signify irrationality but associated with a particularly *female* form of irrationality, emotional, childlike, hysterical. In contrast to dark irrationalities, the white European culture is assumed the rational choice, a paternalist process of civilisation, enlightenment. Similarly, the growth of European missionary work in such spaces developed the discursive repertoire of pity: such writings would exhort the European traveller to regard the Other as piteous, "left in ignorance and barbarism – sentimental rhetoric" (Clarke 1999:178) which drew on lurid signifiers (in Du Buffon's case, the ritualistic killing of children, in the current era, the young suicide bomber) to represent the barbaric violence and justify the intervention, akin to the ways

in which the 'vulnerable' would-be terrorist, particularly if they are young or indeed, female, is subject to what Heath-Kelly terms, 'the politics of pity' (2013:405).

As in the *Prevent* document, there is an ethnocentric paternalist discourse at work. Like 'radicalisation', the young, the vulnerable, the childlike are drawn in to this, it is not a rational choice. There is no mention of being attracted by (suggesting a desire, a need, a want), nor 'being interested in' (suggesting an intellectual response, a curiosity, a political act, even) what constitutes 'extremism'. Notably 'drawn in' - as used or inferred (e.g. 'susceptible to') at least eight times in the document to describe the radicalisation process – has, this paper would argue, connotations of magnetism, unwillingly coerced, of being under a spell: which itself has connotations of course of 'the dark arts', voodoo, witchcraft: again, 'barbarous custom'.

Just as with Foucault's model of the ways in which communities were categorised and ordered- the healthy, docile body versus the problematic, ill, or mad, outcast (Foucault 1977), one can also track links between the piteous/dangerous native needing Colonialist guidance and protection, with *Prevent's* construction of young Muslims as both 'at risk and 'risky' and the discursive construct of a 'good community' – one which is engaging with professionals, "...collaborative...healthy, resilient...subjects able to monitor...their own risk" within their own communities (Heath-Kelly 2013:405). Thus, the 'docile' open community will obediently observe advice and minimise risk.

There are other key moments in addition to those suggested by Hall. As this paper has started to illustrate, what is drawn on here is less of a penal discourse as a therapeutic discourse: implying the vulnerable youth haven't 'gone bad,' but mad, which is not so much a new penology, as a reworking of old pathologies, drawing on both Colonial discourses of an irrational Other (Hall, 2001b) and British policy rhetoric around discourses of the deserving and undeserving poor (Koven 2004). Both such repertoires appear in markedly similar ways at similar moments of national instability, constructing and justifying markedly similar forms of judgement and surveillance.

Prevent's concerns chime with middle class, Victorian reformers' talk of the deserving and undeserving poor: those who are docile and suitably biddable are "more to be pitied and blamed" (Shephard, 1897, in Ball *et al* 2016:198). Dr John Simon, writing about sanitation in the East End slums, refers – sympathetically – to a "pestilential heap of human beings" and critiques the lack of state intervention (Simon 1849 in

Royston Pike, 1967), yet in such commentaries, the undeserving poor are a “race apart”, exhibiting “wilful violence...worse than pagan savageness”, a situation both “morally hideous (and) scattering... seeds..for crime” (Simon, 1854 in Royston Pike, 1967). Again the problematic Other is positioned as both at risk and risky, to be pitied, but labelled as morally and physically diseased and dirty. Widespread public fears about the slums led to much debate and concern as to how best to manage the issues, and whilst radical pioneers such as Booth, Potter, Collet *et al* criticised the limitations of state intervention, “to a remarkable degree” the slums became the focus of “philanthropists (working) in the name of ..civic duty and Christian love” (Koven 2004:5).

Such interventions, Koven has argued, arise from “domestic imperialism that likened the poor to exoticized heathen subjects” (2004:283). Significantly, these discursive repertoires can be understood as enmeshed within what Spurr defines as the Victorian era’s “social evolution ideology” (Spurr 1994) which invites ‘us’ as those with the power to do so, to both “explain, deplore and regulate” the Other (Clarke 1999) and “save” them through ‘the saving knowledge of the truth’ (Koven 2004:95). Just as ‘British values’ are assumed to be consensually both understood and shared by childcare and teaching professionals in *Prevent* (Anderson 2006), there were similarly implicit “shared cultural assumptions” about the middle classes’ Christian duty to the “so-called poor” in Victorian Britain (Koven 2004:10).

Prevent therefore does not simply involve an ethnocentric positioning but one that also encompasses class and gender. In her critique of *Prevent*, Wolton notes how the British Suffragette movement is taught in schools to a neo-liberalist agenda, despite the movement involving activities which would now be labelled as extremist such as bombing and destroying buildings, as well as attacking individuals (Wolton 2017). Wolton thus suggests that the current curriculum can be discursively linked to the Prevent strategy’s tendency to define democracy “...as merely a value which ignores the reality of democracy as the result of “hard won battles” (2017: 138) and that knowledge of the Suffragette movement would help explain how democracy works.

But again, this perspective assumes that ignorance rather than ideology, is the problem. A closer inspection of the dominant discourses critiquing the Suffrage movement illustrates how one can make ideological links with this movement and the

current fears around radicalisation. The early twentieth century's anti-suffrage league's manifesto argued that the women's suffrage movement would "bring disaster upon England", and to *not* take "immediate and effective action" would mean the country would "drift towards a momentous revolution...before it has realised the dangers involved...[A]gitation must be defeated by...steady work and argument" (Marlow 2000:80).

Thus, as with *Prevent*, "reasoned intervention" is necessary to maintain and protect the status quo. The use of 'agitation' suggests both politically revolutionary upheaval and the kind of emotional irrationality conventionally ascribed to women – either way, it could be controlled by 'steady', rational (and presumably, male) action.

Much of the newspapers' fear and fascination with the Suffragettes was the danger that 'they' could be anywhere – with "a hatchet concealed behind...a bunch of chrysanthemum" (*The Daily Chronicle* 1909, in Marlow 2000:99), which again echoes contemporary fears around domestic terrorists, where much is made in the press of their links to British domesticity itself: for example the UK 'shoelace bomber' of 2001 and the 'foster child terrorist' of Parson's Green, in 2018.

One outraged letter to the *Penny Illustrated Paper* (April 13th 1907) calls for all "brawling suffragettes (to) be clipped", so that such women, now "bald as an egg" would not "dream of becoming a hooliganness", both equating women to animals (being 'clipped') and rowdy youth gangs (such as the Hooligan Boys of the late 1800s). Both infer chaotic irrationality and the need for control, as well as suggesting a fear of the power of the Other. The idea that losing hair would mean losing power has long been a powerful symbolic image: Synnott for example notes how long hair from the Bible onwards has symbolised "unrestrained sexuality" and power, and a shaved head symbolises "repentance" (Synnott 1987:381). More practically, shaving heads was routinely carried out in workhouses and asylums, to prevent the spread of contagious diseases such as scabies, scrofula and ringworm (Ball *et al* 2016), again implying dirt and disease.

This was not an unusual sentiment – in 1870, Queen Victoria herself had written she was, "most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad wicked folly of woman's rights, with all its attendant horrors" going on to say that such "unsexed" women would "become the most hateful, heathen and disgusting of

beings” (Marlow 2000:17). These discourses echo the colonialists with their talk of disastrous national disruption and the fear and disgust at ‘heathen’ and somehow unhuman beings. The call for all to “check...this...wicked folly” themselves again finds discursive echoes in *Prevent*’s “imagined consensus” (Anderson 2006) and its call to “build pupils’ resilience” by promoting British values’ (ibid p5).

Such repertoires of deploring and regulating, and fearful paranoia, appear again, interestingly, at the *end* of the Empire during the 1950s and 1960s. In this, media, social workers and policy-makers worried about youth gangs and the ‘neurotic’ youth “cults of violence” such as the Teddy Boys (Cohen 2011) which were seen to “attract certain unstable youths...psychologically disturbed and vulnerable, their minds stuffed with wild tales” (Fyvel, 1963:53). Again, the concern is almost word-for-word the same, as is the solution – that ‘we’ ultimately, know best’.

Concluding remarks

The *Prevent* strategy’s approach to young British Muslims is not, as has been discussed here, a ‘new’ subjectivity, resolvable through a more nuanced understanding of the British Muslim culture (Powell 2016), but a recurring discursive pattern of a ‘risky/at risk’ Other which encompasses class and gender as well as race. The ‘would be terrorist’ is the latest version of the ‘supposed opposites’ to ‘British values’. Such discursive formations are not organised overnight but develop and build, are mediated, and “sedimented” (Ball 1993:11). They are essentially “...connected and historical” (Hyatt 2010:7) in ‘potent’ ideological ways at certain points of British history (Hall 2016, Gibson 2003:186).

The privileged ideas of the Empire helped construct and classify an ‘Other’ as deserving (uncivilised tribes, piteous slumdweller) or undeserving (feral youths; unruly suffragettes). Whoever the Other is, they remain discursively constructed as irrational, childlike, at risk and risky, and the experts’ patriotic duty is to act as panoptic guardians. This discursive repertoire endures, whether we are talking about young members of indigenous cultures in colonial Africa, Victorian urchins, Edwardian activists, 1950s Teddy Boys or young British Muslims today. Indeed, further research could include LGBT+ groups here, given the ways in which Section 28 discursively worked to present young gay teenagers as similarly “...at risk and risky,” and again

constructed this in terms of "...us versus them" (Smith 1994). In *Prevent*, the notion of 'risk' is once again produced in order to enable classificatory and powerful discriminations which are reconstructed as expert, necessary interventions. As with Colonial writings onward, this is less about managing security risks, as it is a performative display of ideological power, a reimagining and a reassertion of a united, rational, national Self. Whilst this is clearly not an exhaustive account of all key points in History, it is pertinent to note the omission of Far Right groups in *Prevent's* discussion, which problematise this notion of patriotic, national cohesion. Further critical attention to this would further unpack *Prevent's* 'potent' ideology.

Whilst completing this article, it has been reported that the newborn son of 'ISIS child bride' Shamima Begum has died of hypothermia in a Syrian refugee camp, after moves to strip Shamima of her British citizenship. This was despite calls for clemency, due to her being only fifteen when she left the UK for Syria (Chulov *et al* 2019). It seems we are moving away from paternalist 'politics of pity,' to something altogether more problematic and more punitive.

In conclusion, then, a closer look at *Prevent* tells us more about how powerful discursive repertoires pathologizing and debasing the dispossessed can become normalised and justified as necessary and common sense, than it can tell anyone anything useful about how and why young people become 'terrorists'. It is very timely that *Prevent* is being reviewed. But in the light of this recent tragedy, one fears the latest review will, at best, simply offer yet more versions of the same.

Ethics Statement

This paper has been assessed as having clearance from the ethical approval requirements process at Bath Spa University.

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