
Original Article

Divorced but still co-habiting? Britain's Prevent/community cohesion policy tension

Paul Thomas

School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH UK.

Abstract The relationship between Britain's Prevent programme and wider multiculturalist policies of community cohesion has provoked much discussion but there has been less focus on how this relationship has been experienced at the local operational level. This article utilises available empirical data to analyse the nature of this policy relationship, arguing that Prevent has progressively side-lined and 'crowded out' cohesion practice at both the local and national level to the detriment of both counter-terrorism and community relations. Although questioning the need for Prevent, local authorities reluctantly operationalised it through a 'marriage' with an initially equally resourced cohesion programme but the conceptual flaws and political weight of Prevent generated a perception and reality of enhanced securitisation and the side-lining of cohesion. The political solution of the 2011 Prevent Review was an organisational 'divorce' between the two policies and the government departments responsible for them. The article argues, however, that such separation was never possible at the local level and that they continue to co-habit in an unequal and loveless relationship. Despite some positive aspects, the 2011 Review has led to an increasingly securitised and still flawed Prevent, while community cohesion has officially been disowned by the Coalition government.

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Introduction

The shocking 2013 murder of soldier Lee Rigby by two Islamist extremists in Woolwich, south London, highlighted the continuing reality of a domestic terror threat for Britain. This was amplified by the concurrent trial of six young Muslims from Birmingham who had planned violent attacks on an English Defence League rally held in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, in 2012 (BBC News, 2013). It also renewed political and media focus on 'Prevent', Britain's terrorism prevention policy within



the wider CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy (Home Office, 2003a). Hastily initiated in 2007 by the then-Labour government in response to the 7/7 London bombings of July 2005, Prevent (DCLG, 2007a, b; Husband and Alam, 2011) proved increasingly controversial as it was implemented. Controversy particularly focussed on the problematic and blurred relationship between Prevent and the wider multiculturalist policy agenda of community cohesion, leading to the allegation that Prevent had 'securitised multiculturalism' (Ragazzi, 2012). In response, the new Coalition government's June 2011 Prevent Review made significant changes to the organisation and scale of Prevent. Those organisational changes were widely interpreted as having positively addressed Prevent's problematic relationship with cohesion. They involved removing the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) from any involvement in Prevent, so ending its programme of Prevent funding to local authorities for community-based work, and instructing DCLG to focus solely on cohesion, while the Home Office and its Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) led on Prevent. This certainly succeeded in taking Prevent out of the public and media eye until the Woolwich murder. For instance, the University of Bristol's 'Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance Project' final report describes a key Muslim advisor to national government as saying, prior to Woolwich, that 'the more limited and lower profile Prevent strategy pursued under the Coalition government has been a positive development' (O'Toole *et al*, 2013a, p. 63).

This article draws on existing empirical data to focus on the relationship at the local, operational level between Prevent and the pre-existing policy agenda of community cohesion. It examines how this relationship, or policy 'marriage', has been experienced within local implementation and what this suggests about the impact and effectiveness of the Prevent programme. It particularly addresses the formal separation, indeed 'divorce', of the two policies heralded in the 2011 Prevent Review, examining the motivations for this and analysing the reality of this divorce at ground level. The article argues that such a divorce within local policy implementation was never feasible and that the two policies continue to co-habit within an unequal, problematic and arguably loveless relationship. Here, the claimed divorce and the associated downsizing of Prevent initiated by the 2011 Review have merely obscured, rather than solved, the conceptual problems of Prevent while seeing a further withering of the community cohesion agenda.

To do this, the article draws on and analyses the available empirical evidence around Prevent's local implementation and its relationship with community cohesion, discussing how this policy relationship – through marriage, divorce and unhealthy continued co-habitation – has been understood, experienced and mediated (for example, Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; Husband and Alam, 2011; Iacopini *et al*, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012; O'Toole *et al*, 2013a; Cante and Thomas, 2014; Lewis and Craig, 2014). This focus on local policy mediation and enactment is particularly important because British multiculturalism has historically been significantly developed from below through local campaigning, local authority

policy development and professional practice, as much as through national-level legislation and policy making (Solomos, 2003). Both community cohesion and Prevent should be seen within this field of multiculturalist policy making, for good or ill, because of the way they have characterised and sought to engage with essentialised minority ethnic communities, especially Muslims (Thomas, 2012). Similarly, national-level multiculturalist policy initiatives have often been significantly mediated and positively adapted at the local level (something even true for the early phase of Prevent; see Husband and Alam, 2011). This highlights the importance of examining situated ‘policy enactment’ (Braun *et al.*, 2010). It also suggests that, while Prevent has undoubtedly represented an attempt by national government to securitise its relationship with British Muslims, the ‘state’ itself has been divided and conflicted over its implementation, primarily on a national/local basis, but also between different departments of national government.

It is the contention of this article that Prevent has always contained significant conceptual flaws that cannot be ‘solved’ by organisational changes alone. Addressing these conceptual problems would involve questioning whether Prevent, as it has been developed and operationalised to date, has any useful function as a terrorism prevention policy or is instead both ineffective and counter-productive on its own terms. Here, the developing community cohesion practice offered the possibility of a non-stigmatising and significantly less securitised approach to addressing extremist ideologies and attractions at the community level. However, the formal divorce of the Prevent Review was largely superficial, leaving a continuing reality of an unequal policy relationship that contributes little to preventing extremism (Browne, 2013; O’Toole *et al.*, 2013a, b).

In developing this argument, the article will first briefly analyse the post-2001 policy context of community cohesion and its operational reality at ground level before discussing what the article characterises as Prevent’s inherent conceptual flaws. It will then analyse Prevent’s operational relationship with cohesion (or ‘Integration’ as the post-2010 Coalition government has preferred to name it; DCLG, 2012). This will be done in two parts. First the article will discuss what it characterises as the marital tensions with cohesion in policy operation within the initial 2007–2010 Labour iteration of ‘Prevent 1’; it will then analyse the extent to which these flaws and tensions have continued under ‘Prevent 2’, despite the divorce initiated by the Coalition’s 2011 Review and suggest that unequal policy co-habitation has continued.

Community Cohesion – A New Direction for Multiculturalism?

The impact of Prevent cannot be analysed without consideration of the wider British policy context of multiculturalism and its post-2001 move towards ‘community cohesion’. Prompted by the 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the north



of England, but representing a policy direction that the then-Labour Government wanted to travel in anyway (Thomas, 2011), the adoption of community cohesion as a policy priority was highly controversial, with allegations of a shift back to assimilationism (Cantle, 2001; Kundnani, 2002; Alexander, 2004; Thomas, 2011). Here, the discursive shift from multiculturalism to community cohesion was understood by some as a rejection, even the 'death', of multiculturalism itself. It is certainly true that the post-riot Cantle Report urged an emphasis on commonality and shared values and experiences, rather than on continued reification of distinct ethnic and faith identities. Cantle's concern with 'parallel lives' was less about physical segregation and more about how separate identities, potentially antagonistic to 'others', could harden in such monocultural situations. Here, there was a focus on agency, both as a partial cause of 'parallel lives' and as integral to the solution to it, that was consistent with the wider 'third way' social policy approach of the Labour government (Levitas, 2005).

There was also an explicit critique of the previous policy phase of 'political multiculturalism' (Solomos, 2003). That approach, initiated in the wake of an earlier phase of inner-city rioting in the early 1980s, had sought to address Britain's gross ethnic inequalities and the blatant racism of the time through active policies deploying 'strategic essentialism' (Law, 1996) to improve the situation of, and facilities for, specific minority ethnic groups. While contributing to substantial economic and social improvements for many minority ethnic citizens, this policy approach had clear downsides, particularly in hardening and foregrounding distinct and separate ethnic identities (Malik, 2009). This, and the associated provision of ethnic-specific community facilities, arguably undermined commonality and limited opportunities for cross-community social interaction. Racialised resentment and false claims about ethnic favouritism in public funding by sections of white communities were a significant contributory factor to the 2001 riots in the north of England, while ethnically essentialised policy approaches to tackling inequality increasingly failed to acknowledge the varied economic experiences between and even within specific minority ethnic communities (Modood *et al*, 1997).

Such a focus on commonality, rather than difference, and unhelpful concurrent political attacks on 'multiculturalism' itself (Phillips, 2005; Cameron, 2011), and on Muslim communities specifically (Travis, 2001), fed perceptions of community cohesion as assimilationism. However, as earlier suggested, the meaning of multiculturalist measures such as the community cohesion policy agenda can only be understood by considering how they have actually been understood and practised. Evidence from how youth work agencies in Oldham, Great Manchester had operationalised cohesion (Thomas, 2007, 2011) showed that, rather than denying ethnic differences, cohesion practice at ground level was acknowledging and even celebrating specific ethnic and faith youth identifications but was also prioritising commonality. They did this through programmes that brought young people of different ethnic and social backgrounds together in processes employing 'contact

theory' (Hewstone *et al.*, 2007), a social psychology approach to long-term prejudice reduction. Here, cohesion was not seeking to replace distinct identifications but augment them with stronger forms of commonality through two-stage processes, so helping to de-racialise perceptions of structural economic experiences. This situated cross-community 'contact' work with young people in Oldham mirrored the community cohesion efforts to promote contact and cross-community partnerships by local authorities elsewhere. Early central government-funded cohesion work did not just focus on such work between different ethnic communities but also supported inter-generational contact and projects bringing settled and travelling communities together (Home Office, 2003b). This was consistent with the more intersectional and 'cooler' conceptions of identity and experience that were implicit within Labour government policy approaches (McGhee, 2006).

Wider evidence indicates that this approach of rebalancing, rather than rejecting, multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2009) was enthusiastically received by local policymakers and practitioners nationally (Monro *et al.*, 2010; Lewis and Craig, 2014), with community cohesion clearly embedded within a wider race equality government strategy (Home Office, 2005). The later blanket call for ending all 'single group' funding (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007) was seen by such local practitioners as unhelpful to the 'two-stage' cohesion process, but this empirical evidence did highlight support for local funding and programmes that focussed on commonalities and contact rather than ethnic-specific needs.

Prevent 1: Forced Marriage?

It was within this context that Prevent was launched in 2007 (DCLG, 2007a, b). Originally identified in the Home Office (2003a) CONTEST strategy, Prevent was entirely undeveloped until the visceral shock of the 7/7 London bombings, as British security services had not expected domestic terrorism from Islamist extremists and were largely unprepared (Hewitt, 2008). The result was that Prevent was conceived and operationalised rapidly, a problem that has dogged it ever since.

The refreshed CONTEST strategy (Home Office, 2009) outlined the shape of the resulting Prevent 1 agenda that involved a Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) element working with local authorities, a Police Prevent strategy involving over 300 dedicated posts and newly established Counter Terrorism Units (CTUs), and the 'Channel' Project focussed on work with individuals viewed as vulnerable to 'radicalisation' (itself a highly contested concept, see Kundnani, 2012). The initial 'Pathfinder' year of work by local authorities commenced in April 2007, with the DCLG saying: 'security measures can protect us from the most immediate threats. But our long-term safety surely lies in winning hearts and minds' (2007a, p. 1).



Funding went to 70 local authorities through the rather crude measure of them having 5 per cent or more of their population being ‘Muslim’ (using old data around religious identification and ethnic origin from the 2001 Census), with this being extended to all areas with 2 per cent or more in the subsequent 2008–2011 expansion. This local authority Prevent work was to run parallel to similar nationally funded community cohesion work in a supposedly complementary marriage. Alongside that local authority Prevent activity, mainly involving direct work with Muslim youth and community organisations by the local authorities themselves, or by Muslim community organisations that they passed funding on to, came the development of Prevent work with young offenders and in adult prisons. In contrast to such direct, education-based work, Prevent activity with Universities and Further Education Colleges (DIUS, 2008; HMG, 2011) did not largely involve direct work with students, but rather enhanced liaison between the educational institutions and CTUs to ensure greater scrutiny of Muslim student group activity on and around campuses.

The Conceptual Problems of Prevent

Two inter-related conceptual problems within Prevent were rapidly identified both by academic critics and by the local policy makers and practitioners charged with implementing it. The first was a monocultural focus on Muslims only, so ignoring others types of extremism and re-enforcing, rather than questioning, the belief that Islamist extremism was a problem within essentialised ‘Muslim’ community life and religious belief. While community cohesion questioned simplistic and essentialised understandings of identification and experience and sought to engage with communities on a different, broader basis, Prevent identified and worked with simplistic, reified notions of essentialised Muslim identity and ‘communities’. It did this on a large scale, with the government boasting of having worked with almost 50 000 young Muslims in the initial ‘Pathfinder’ (or PVE) year (DCLG, 2008), often through very mundane but Muslim-only youth activities. Very considerable funding went to national Muslim bodies and to local Muslim groups via local authorities for civil society capacity building, again money for Muslims only and from an explicitly anti-terrorism fund. At the national level there were explicit attempts by government to promote different and ‘moderate’ forms of Islamic theological interpretation (Thomas, 2012). Here, a ‘conveyor belt’ model of radicalisation (Kundnani, 2012) seemed to be employed that portrayed terrorism as a virus that young Muslims could catch from anyone with particular theological or political perspectives (Gupta, 2008). However, the Prevent response was to create even more ‘Muslim-only’ spaces and places, rather than to challenge barriers preventing young Muslims from participating in wider British society. This very considerable state funding for British Muslims inevitably re-ignited ‘virulent envy’ from non-Muslim communities while deepening the sense of persecution among Muslims (Birt, 2009).

Alongside this large-scale, monocultural state focus on Muslims as a response to terrorist acts by a small number of individuals came an explicit securitisation of the state's relationship with British Muslims through both the scale and nature of Prevent (Noxolo and Huysmans, 2009). Here, the increasing Police/CTU prominence in directing Prevent locally and even getting involved in direct engagement with Muslim youth and their communities (Knight, 2010) quickly fuelled fears about Prevent being cover for spying and large-scale surveillance of British Muslims (Kundnani, 2009). Such questioning of Prevent's real motives was also driven by Prevent's blatant attempts to engineer different and arguably more polyphonic forms of representation of Muslims at a national level through the development of 'Advisory Groups' for Muslim youth and women, as well as promotion of 'moderate' forms of religious interpretation (Birt, 2009).

The Prevent 1/Community Cohesion Relationship in Practice

This clear and unequivocal, large-scale monocultural focus on Muslims was immediately seen as highly problematic by local authorities (Husband and Alam, 2011). This was not only because it was blatantly contradictory to the community cohesion policy agenda of more intersectional understandings of identity (McGhee, 2006) and greater commonality they were being asked to implement by the same government department, but also because they very much supported the underlying analysis of that cohesion agenda – the tensions they identified were conceptual, not just organisational. Here, local policymakers and practitioners had accepted that the strategic essentialism (Law, 1996) of the previous 'political multiculturalism' policy phase was both increasingly problematic in terms of the reaction from some white majority communities (mirrored in other European states, such as the Netherlands: Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2009) and increasingly crude in relation to the complex inequalities and experiences within minority communities. The five local authorities in West Yorkshire – home of the 7/7 bombers and site of the 2001 Bradford riot – made it clear that they appreciated the terror threat but did not see a new and separate 'counter-terrorism' engagement programme as helpful. Husband and Alam's study of policy implementation in the five West Yorkshire local authorities identified: 'the significant hostility that was generated by the introduction of Prevent and the extent to which implementing it at local state level constituted a personal and organisational challenge' (2011, p. 130).

These West Yorkshire local policymakers and their practitioners saw the community cohesion programmes they were already enthusiastically developing as the best and most effective response to the threat of extremism within and between communities. As was shown by the report of a 'good practice' event organised by their West Yorkshire Community Cohesion Project Board during the initial Prevent 'Pathfinder' year of 2007/8: 'participants felt that a number of aspects of the



Government's approach to the PVE agenda have made it difficult for local government and other partners to engage with local communities' (AWYA, 2008a, p. 2).

This unease was not just about Prevent's lurch back to single ethnic community funding programmes but the counter-productive, stigmatising effects of approaching entire Muslim communities through an explicitly anti-terrorism programme – this was simply not a helpful basis for encouraging communities to honestly identify internal problems and to cooperate with others in challenging them. This was highlighted by the refusal of Bradford Council (then Conservative-led) to take Prevent funding on the basis offered because of its likely negative impact on community cohesion (O'Toole *et al.*, 2013a, b, p. 58). Rochdale was another northern authority that initially refused participation until the compromise of positive research and development activity with young people of *all* ethnic backgrounds was reached (Thomas and Sanderson, 2011), while other local authorities simply passed all Prevent funding on to Muslim community organisations to avoid perceptions of 'picking favourites' (Kundnani, 2009).

The umbrella Association of West Yorkshire Authorities developed a 'Response to the PVE agenda' annex as part of their wider 'Cohesion in West Yorkshire' statement, identifying that violent extremism undermines cohesion, so: 'our main response to the threat of violent extremism, therefore must be to pursue the integrated and cohesive community described in the main part of this statement' (AWYA, 2008b, p. 5).

Such feelings were shared by local authorities nationally, as identified by a 2009 report by think-tank the New Local Government Network, which helped prompt the CLG Select Committee Inquiry: 'The Prevent agenda and community cohesion should support and foster one another. Many in local government feel that this is currently not the case' (Turley, 2009, p. 11).

However, that report also acknowledged that the Labour government had, as part of their response to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007), allocated a further £50 million funding in support of local authority community cohesion work, so making the spend on cohesion comparable to the £51 million for local authority Prevent work between 2007 and 2011. This was arguably a genuine twin-track policy approach, representing an equal marriage. Indeed, this strategy of asking local authorities to operationalise Prevent alongside the continuation of their developing community cohesion work was a deliberate national policy approach. Here, a programme channelling money towards work with Muslim communities through the DCLG, the department also concerned with local authorities, equality and community cohesion, could be seen as a progressive, partnership-based approach to working with Muslim communities rather than carrying out surveillance upon them (McGhee, 2010). That was certainly the view of Sir David Omand, the author of Prevent and the overall CONTEST strategy, who saw the split of Prevent work between the security-focused Home Office and the DCLG, as vital: 'There was a deliberate attempt to get the Local Government Department to lead this, and to try and do it in a way that is based on the locality and not the ethnicity' (APPGHS, 2011, p. 106).

However, the Muslim-only focus of Prevent and the increasing Police/CTU control of the programme at local and national level (Lamb, 2012) meant that this was a rose-tinted view, at best, and a deliberate obscuration of a securitised agenda at worst.

Initially, though, the DCLG funding for local authority Prevent work did allow significant latitude for local decision making. Many re-named the programme, using opaque titles like 'Pathfinder' during the pilot year (Thomas, 2008), or less provocative labels such as Leicester's 'Mainstreaming Moderation' (House of Commons, 2010) as the programme developed. They also used it to pursue broader and pre-existing community development goals (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010) around strengthening civic society organisations and the local state's relationship with them (Lewis and Craig, 2014). The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is one example where the initial iteration of Prevent enabled a greater local engagement with newer ethnic communities and with the Muslim faith sector generally:

Prevent has given access to projects, people and organisations that would have not normally accessed this funding. This includes less-established community organisations and/or those that work with different target groups (in particular the Somali community). (Iacopini *et al.*, 2011, p. 6)

Here, Prevent arguably provided a timely and opportunistic vehicle to create more polyphonic engagement with Muslim faith groups, part of Labour's third way approach of acknowledging faith identity at the same time as also developing community cohesion strategies implicitly built around promotion of greater commonality and 'cooler', more intersectional forms of specific identification within a framework of individual 'human rights' (McGhee, 2006).

However, the contradiction between this monoculturally focussed Prevent and community cohesion remained stark for local authorities charged with enacting both policies. A case study of multiculturalist policy enactment in Sheffield, South Yorkshire during this period suggested that:

The result for local actors is a dual, conflicting process: community cohesion de-emphasises 'race', while ethnic and religious differences are accentuated in security and immigration discourses. (Lewis and Craig, 2014, p. 22)

While local authorities were initially able to exploit policy space to avoid the language and exclusionary focus of Prevent and still taking funding, they quickly came under pressure via the Prevent 'NI (National Indicator) 35' local government monitoring and reporting mechanism, as an extract from the 2008 Local Government Association (LGA) briefing document 'Strategic Issues: Preventing Violent Extremism' shows:

The Home Office (HO) believe that local authorities that do not select NI: 35 are not prioritising Prevent and concluding that little or no Prevent work is being undertaken. To persuade local authorities to select NI: 35, the HO is



applying pressure via the Police, and senior officials during Local Area Agreement negotiations which has had only limited success. (LGA, 2008)

Alongside this increasing pressure to operationalise Prevent programmes that were clearly contradictory to community cohesion in terms of their conceptual focus and philosophy came an associated pressure on local authorities to establish and run the local Prevent multi-agency coordination groups known as ‘Gold’, ‘Silver’ and ‘Bronze’. These two demands from national government fell on the same local policy officers and practitioners charged with devising and implementing community cohesion programmes, and the evidence from a case study of how the two policy agendas were developed in two key West Yorkshire local authorities was that emerging community cohesion structures and practice was inevitably marginalised and side-lined by the national prioritisation of Prevent (Monro *et al*, 2010; Thomas, 2012). This is endorsed by a thoughtful further study of how the two policy agendas had played out across the five West Yorkshire authorities: ‘the data provides substantive support for the concerns that have been expressed elsewhere regarding the damaging impact of Prevent on community cohesion initiatives’ (Husband and Alam, 2011, p. 189).

This local experience was mirrored at the national government level, where Prevent squeezed DCLG-led community cohesion to the policy margins through its OSCT-led money and power, as admitted by a senior civil servant: ‘so what happened was Prevent took over cohesion’ (O’Toole *et al*, 2013a, b, p. 57). Within Prevent itself, a similar ‘crowding out’ process took place, as the Police and Security Services quickly became the dominant partners. Here, local authorities at ground level were ill-equipped in terms of both resources and experience to lead Prevent, given its conceptual, securitised focus on ‘threats’, ‘heat maps’ and intelligence about them, leaving the door open for Police/CTU to dominate programmes supposedly encompassing education and community engagement. This is highlighted in an empirical study of the role played by West Midlands CTU and its officers in Prevent:

The Police seem to have been given the responsibility of delivering Prevent because other local bodies did not possess the organisational capability to successfully implement, manage and adapt a programme ... despite Prevent being proposed as a multi-organisational programme, the Police in the West Midlands are the central organisation and undertake the majority of the work relating to Prevent. (Lamb, 2012, p. 91)

Some of this was deliberate and structural, as shown by the fact that the DCLG had no permanent seat on the cross-departmental Joint Intelligence Committee that directed OSCT and counter-terrorism, despite the emollient language of Sir David Omand about the vital role of DCLG and its experience of community engagement (Turley, 2009). Alongside this was the conceptual problem of Prevent – Omand

and the OSCT talked warmly of the need to involve DCLG and local authorities in community engagement-based Prevent work but, as highlighted above, local authorities simply didn't understand how such an overtly securitised counter-terrorism programme, separate and distinct from community cohesion, was actually meant to work in community settings. This confusion was shared by civil servants nationally at the DCLG, as incoming DCLG Minister John Denham identified: 'I found in the DCLG, after some very rigorous examinations with officials that there was no understood model of how Prevent was meant to work' (O'Toole *et al.*, 2013a, p. 57).

This helps explain the characterisation of Prevent as a 'crime prevention' programme that Denham (DCLG, 2009) then put forward, an assertion that didn't stand up when the scale and approach of Prevent was considered, and his attempt to focus on white extremism through the 'Connecting Communities' programme. Both initiatives can be understood as attempts to answer the growing criticisms of Prevent by a Minister and a department clearly unconvinced themselves by the Home Office-driven policy agenda.

A Marriage on the Rocks?

The inherent, conceptual problems of Prevent and the 'marital tensions' with cohesion outlined above quickly led Prevent to a crisis point in 2009. Here political, operational and academic critiques all contributed to a very public assault on the assumptions and impacts of Prevent and to specific recommendations for a radical policy overhaul.

Central here was the 'Spooked' report (Kundnani, 2009) that crystallised and developed the widely held concern that Prevent was a large-scale surveillance project directed at British Muslim communities. Drawing on a solid evidential basis, 'Spooked' developed a detailed case around the increasing dominance of Police/CTU personnel at all levels of Prevent operation and the apparent blurring of appropriate roles and responsibilities resulting from this dominance. This evidence included the 'embedding' of CTU officers within local authority processes of grant assessment and decision making regarding local youth projects and Muslim community organisations, with such decision-making processes rather opaque despite the significant budgets involved and apparently arbitrary judgments made by such CTU personnel regarding the suitability of Muslim groups and individuals. A *Financial Times* investigation into Prevent (Knight, 2010) observed CTU staff directly delivering internet awareness sessions to Muslim parents, something that community workers would normally do, while Husband and Alam (2011) identified the 'chilling effect' on local Muslim professionals as they were both expected to provide access to 'their' Muslim communities but were also scrutinised around their trustworthiness as Muslims.



To a certain extent, government was up front about this securitised scrutiny on Muslim communities within Prevent. Sir David Omand commented to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homeland Security in 2010 that:

you can't divide government in two, into those people that go around spying on the population, and there are another lot of people going round to the population and they just don't talk to each other. It just simply doesn't work like that. (APPGHS, 2011, p. 107)

Omand was even blunter in an interview given to the *Financial Times* weeks before that (Knight, 2010), when he suggested that it would be naïve of the state to not use any intelligence from community-based Prevent activities, in the face of a very serious terrorist threat. Such a relaxed interpretation of a policy agenda supposedly about community-based engagement and education was not shared by sections of the media (Dodd, 2009) or the CLG Select Committee, who were gravely worried about the Prevent role that the DCLG was being required to enact (House of Commons, 2010). This was also fuelled by a growing academic critique of Prevent's conceptual problems (Birt, 2009; Thomas, 2009) and a carefully argued report from the New Local Government Network think-tank, which questioned the need for a continuing and separate Prevent programme, stating that: 'it is time to review whether the separation of the PVE approach from wider community cohesion is still relevant' (Turley, 2009, p. 13).

Such critiques were aired at length during the Select Committee's oral evidence sessions. The varied evidence put forward suggested that Prevent was indeed 'between two stools' (Thomas, 2008) and 'failed and friendless' (Thomas, 2010) in that no one was satisfied with Prevent's reality. Amplifying the critiques outlined above, Leicester City Council highlighted how Prevent had undermined their nationally renowned cohesion work (House of Commons, 2010, p. 58), while Peacemaker, a charity doing real cohesion work with young people long before 2001, alleged that Prevent's focus had undermined both cohesion and race equality work through its monocultural focus and in ironically giving funding to exactly the sort of older, conservative 'community leaders' seen as a block to those agendas. Evidence from local authorities and their umbrella bodies clearly identified tensions between, and inconsistent advice from, the two national government departments directing Prevent, with the LGA saying that:

Tensions between OSCT and CLG on the nature of the focus of Prevent and the activity which should flow from that can be a problem at times. We in local government support John Denham MP's view of Prevent as distinct but necessarily situated within the broader context of community cohesion and equalities. (House of Commons, 2010, p. 57)

The other side of this coin was shown in the evidence presented by the Association of Police Authorities, which complained that much Prevent funding had been



wasted by local authorities through diversion to ‘softer’ community cohesion work:

Much of the PVE funded project work in local areas does not have a specific enough focus upon preventing violent extremism, and many police authorities question whether, in practice, there is any real difference between Prevent and community cohesion. (House of Commons, 2010: Ev.144)

Here, of course, APA was misunderstanding ‘community cohesion’. The Prevent work going on through local authorities was with Muslims only (so being mainstream community development work), but certainly not the cross-community cohesion work that local authorities wanted to operationalise as the best defence against extremism.

The Select Committee reached clear conclusions about both the Prevent cohesion relationship and DCLG’s place within it. They concluded that: ‘CLG should have less of a role in the counter-terrorism agenda and more in the positive work it undertakes in building strong and cohesive communities’ (House of Commons, 2010: Para 171, p. 67), and that ‘we recommend that all interventions, including Channel, which are clearly targeted at crime prevention be brought under the remit of the Home Office’ (Para 173, p. 68).

This could be seen, and was subsequently understood as such by many, as agreeing that the cohesion/Prevent problem was organisational and would be solved by a clear departmental split. However, the conceptual critique of Prevent by the Committee could also be seen: ‘The government needs to acknowledge community cohesion work—particularly that focussed on tackling exclusion – as a much sharper tool in the long-term fight against violent extremism’ (Para 165, p. 66), and that: ‘Funding for cohesion work in all communities should be increased. That work should be done on a thematic basis and not on a monocultural or individual community basis ... Without adequate funding for community cohesion and tackling exclusion, breeding grounds for extremism become stronger’ (Para 170, p. 67).

These recommendations and the actions of Minister John Denham above can be seen as going as far as politically possible towards the questioning of the need for a distinct Prevent policy. This conceptual, rather than just organisational, critique of Prevent was apparently accepted by the two main opposition parties, soon to become the Coalition government after the May 2010 election. During the Inquiry process, Conservative shadow minister Dame Pauline Neville-Jones (2009) said that ‘Labour continues to treat people according to ethnicity and creed. They see Muslims as people who need special attention and special funds ... Prevent should be aimed at bringing citizens and communities together’. For the Liberal Democrats, Chris Huhne commented that: ‘The Prevent programme alienates and marginalises Muslim communities, and exacerbates racist bias and ignorant views’ (Dodd, 2010). Such a clear conceptual critique of the Prevent/community cohesion relationship was, however, not to be employed when in government.



Prevent 2: Conceptual Problems Remain?

Immediately suspending local authority Prevent work when elected in May 2010, the Coalition government's subsequent Prevent Review of June 2011 (HMG, 2011) seemingly accepted some of the Select Committee's key recommendations in that it removed DCLG from involvement in Prevent and transferred sole control for Prevent to the Home Office's OSCT: 'The Prevent programme we inherited from the last government was flawed. It confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism' (HMG, 2011, p. 1).

Here, in a policy 'divorce', the DCLG were now to concentrate exclusively on cohesion. This, and the associated downsizing in the scale and breadth of the new Prevent to just 28 local authority areas, identified and funded on an intelligence basis, did succeed in winning broad support. This was arguably because no one was actually satisfied with Prevent 1, albeit for significantly different reasons (Thomas, 2009, 2010). Immediate political and media responses to the revised strategy were mixed (Cavanagh, 2011) but even critics suggested that: 'Yesterday's sensible decision to separate out community cohesion programmes – whose inclusion in earlier Prevent packages had led to accusations of spy networks – is welcome' (*The Guardian*, 8 June 2011).

However, in a number of ways Prevent 2 continued, or even deepened, the conceptual problems of Prevent. Firstly, Prevent funding for local authorities was greatly reduced but the list of funded areas still resembled the areas with the biggest Muslim populations (O'Toole *et al*, 2012). A Freedom of Information request (HM Treasury, 2012) revealed that these areas have together received £3 million per annum since 2011 to carry out Prevent activity. Such funding is not guaranteed and to carry out educational work in communities, local authorities must bid directly to the security-focussed OSCT against set criteria, so severely curtailing local autonomy. However: 'Despite the tightening up and closer regulation of Prevent that was ushered in by the 2011 strategy, that picture of local variation has continued' (O'Toole *et al*, 2013b). An example of this is Leicester, which after the 2011 Review again refused to implement Prevent as national government demanded, or accept a Home Office-funded Prevent officer in the Council. Instead, Prevent, as it is in Leicester, is delivered via an inter-faith centre, which also runs the DCLG's Near Neighbours programme (*ibid.*).

Even if not Prevent-funded, local authorities are required to maintain Prevent programmes alongside multi-agency coordination arrangements and tension-monitoring processes, while some have also had to deal with the very significant costs and public order threats associated with rallies by far-right groups such as the English Defence League that can be understood as part of an ongoing cycle of 'cumulative extremism' (Eatwell, 2006). National government's concern that this is not being done was highlighted in the report of the Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism (TREFOR) (HMG, 2013), established following the Woolwich murder.

The report threatened to make implementation of the Prevent strategy a legal requirement, asserting that they would: ‘take steps to intervene where local authorities are not taking the problem seriously’, and that ‘it is not always the case’ that practitioners have the support of these employers (HMG, 2013, p. 6).

These somewhat astonishing national government assertions, coupled with the increased centralisation of the reduced Prevent programme and the Leicester tensions highlighted above, indicated that significant national/local tensions continue to exist within the revised Prevent strategy.

Coming just a few weeks before far-right terrorist Anders Breivik carried out his massacre in Norway, the Review did hold open the possibility of Prevent engaging with different types of extremism (HMG, 2011, p. 23) but suggested that far-right racist violence was much ‘less widespread, systematic or organised’ (ibid, p. 15), and re-iterated the overwhelming need to continuing focussing on Islamist violence. This possibility of a broader Prevent focus on all types of extremism was a key factor in positive political and media responses but there is little or no evidence available to date that such work is developing in a meaningful way. An exception here is Wales. Despite Prevent being a ‘reserved power’ and so controlled by the Westminster government, The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and its local authority and Police partners have identified far-right extremism as a significant threat within Prevent:

the emerging threat appears to be from extreme right-wing groups ... so naturally the focus is on that ... this is borne out by our number of referrals where probably the majority are extreme right-wing. (South Wales Police Prevent Officer cited in Cante and Thomas, 2014, p. 15)

This has enabled official support and encouragement for imaginative anti-far right extremism work (ibid.) but the fact that Swansea is not a Prevent-funded area means that this work is funded by the Big Lottery Fund charity, *not* the OSCT.

That OSCT, staffed by Counter-Terrorism Police and Security Service Officers, now scrutinises and approves all bids for local Prevent activity via local authorities. While national Prevent funding to local authorities has been greatly reduced and strictly nationally controlled, Prevent funding for dedicated Police posts seems to be undiminished. Together, these developments suggest a further and significant securitisation within Prevent. The diminution of local authority Prevent funding and the loss of autonomy over it has significantly reduced (but not eliminated: O’Toole *et al*, 2013b) the ability to react to local circumstances and space for Muslim community organisations to demonstrate ‘responsibility’ (McGhee, 2010) and counter-terrorism leadership. Similarly, there is now a clear reluctance to support empowerment work with Muslim women and young people under Prevent 2 (Browne, 2013). Therefore, it was not surprising that, in the wake of the Woolwich murder, former Labour ministers closely connected to Prevent 1 criticised this loss of local funding and direction under Prevent 2 (Boffey and Doward, 2013).



That larger-scale Prevent 1 programme had been based on a pragmatic, ‘means-based’ (Birt, 2009) approach of funding for and engagement with a variety of Muslim community organisations with influence over vulnerable young Muslims. However, the 2011 Review was significantly delayed by disputes within the Coalition (both between and within the two constituent parties; Thomas, 2012) over the extent to which the new iteration would take a ‘values-based’ approach (Birt, 2009) reflecting Prime Minister Cameron’s (2011) ‘muscular liberalism’ speech to the Munich Security Conference. That speech explicitly criticised attitudes and dispositions within British Muslim communities on the very day that the Islamophobic English Defence League marched through London (Thomas, 2012). The speech claimed that ‘multiculturalism’ had led to toleration of people who rejected ‘our values’ and that: ‘Move along the spectrum, and you find people who may reject violence, but who accept various parts of the extremist world-view including real hostility towards western democracy and liberal values’ (Cameron, 2011).

This led to the withdrawal of Prevent funding from a number of Muslim organisations, viewed as antagonistic to ‘our values’, even before the 2011 Review announced that: ‘preventing terrorism will mean challenging extremist (and non-violent) ideas that are also part of a terrorist ideology’ (HMG, 2011, p. 6).

Divorced ... but still Co-Habiting?

The withdrawal of the DCLG from involvement in Prevent was portrayed as good for both community cohesion and Prevent by addressing their supposed overlap and confusion, so strengthening both. However, this was hardly a case of all speed ahead for community cohesion. Prior to 2011, the national prioritisation and compulsory local enactment of Prevent had already side-lined the development of community cohesion policy and practice (Munro *et al.*, 2010; Thomas, 2012), while post-crash austerity increasingly squeezed budgets for cohesion work seen as less nationally vital than Prevent. Having criticised Prevent in opposition for approaching and funding entire Muslim communities only as Muslims, not as British citizens (Neville-Jones, 2009), the dominant Conservative element of the Coalition might have been expected to prioritise cohesion or ‘integration’, but instead they visibly washed their hands of any concern with it. Delayed even longer than the Prevent review, the eventual Coalition policy document on ‘Integration’ (DCLG, 2012), deployed as part of a deliberate attempt to avoid Labour’s language of ‘community cohesion’, was a flimsy and woefully brief document. Rejecting any notion of national targets or monitoring, it portrayed Integration as entirely a local matter that national government would offer no comment on: ‘We are committed to re-balancing activity from centrally-led to locally-led action and from the public to the voluntary and private sectors’ (DCLG, 2012, p. 2).



It confirmed the ending of all national policy direction (including the disappearance of the DCLG's dedicated Race Equality team), and funding on cohesion/integration while failing to use the terms 'racism' or 'equalities' (Runnymede Trust, 2012) at all. This can be seen as a part of a wider disinterest in the Equalities agenda that has included scrapping Equality Impact Assessments and the regime of Comprehensive Area Assessments/Local Area Agreements which drove progress on equalities, while even questioning the future of the National Census that provides the data essential to identifying structural ethnic inequalities (Ratcliffe, 2012). The claim that this dismantling of cohesion/integration work was simply driven by the wider, and very deep, cuts in overall public spending (which have fallen disproportionately on local authorities serving multicultural urban areas) was undermined by the fact that the only national funding identified for integration work was modest support for the Church of England's Near Neighbours programme and the Scout Association (DCLG, 2012), both largely white and 'establishment' organisations. The ideological direction this represents was consistent with the stress on 'values' in the Prevent Review.

While community cohesion/integration has been largely side-lined and undermined as a policy agenda (in England) and British local authorities have undergone very significant spending cuts as a whole, all those local authorities have been forced to continue focussing on Prevent-related activity, as discussed above. In almost all cases, these responses have to come from the same local authority officers and practitioners charged with continuing to work on cohesion and integration (O'Toole *et al*, 2012), so giving the lie to the supposed demarcation of the Prevent Review. Indeed, the 'Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance' project identifies that: 'our data suggests that actors charged with the delivery of Prevent are sceptical about this separation' (O'Toole *et al*, 2013a, b, p. 61) and quotes one local Police Prevent coordinator as saying: 'It's virtually the same individuals who are involved in the cohesion bit that are predominantly involved in the Prevent' (*ibid.*).

Here, the Prevent activity that has continued in the 28 funded areas is organised through local authorities. Key local authority staff (national government funds a Prevent coordinator in the 28 funded areas but they inevitably sit and operate within wider community safety and engagement departments and teams) have to develop proposals and bid for funding, while local authority practitioners lead and implement much of the funded programmes. In both cases, these are largely the same local authority staff responsible for continuing to develop cohesion and integration activity despite the absence of national government funding or interest. The national policy and departmental distinction between Prevent and cohesion/integration supposedly implemented by the Prevent Review simply doesn't, and can't, exist on the ground. The failure of elite political actors to recognise this continuing ground-level reality was highlighted by one of the



conclusions within the Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry Report into ‘The Roots of Violent Radicalisation’:

Witnesses tended to broadly welcome the outcome of the Prevent Review, following the clearer split between counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation work, the separation out of activity between the Home Office, focussing on violent extremism and the DCLG focussing on non-violent extremism. (House of Commons, 2012, p. 19)

This claimed distinction was not and is not recognisable at the ground operational level, and again highlights the national/local state tensions and ‘disconnect’ over Prevent. The Welsh Assembly Government Prevent prioritisation of far-right extremist threats was discussed above. This Welsh model of Prevent has been developed within a close and arguably equal relationship with community cohesion. The Labour-controlled WAG not only still uses the term ‘community cohesion’ but also has an activist policy approach of funding local authority cohesion coordinators and genuinely educational preventative work (Cantle and Thomas, 2014). This indicates that state tensions over both the nature of Prevent and its relationship with community cohesion are within the increasingly devolved national state, as well as on a local/national basis. It also suggests that the Labour Party continues to support the Prevent 1 model of distinct but equally supported policy programmes. Contrastingly, the Coalition’s Prevent 2, in England at least, represents the triumph of Prevent over community cohesion and the dominance of the securitisation-focussed OSCT/Home Office over the DCLG.

Conclusion

The relationship between Britain’s Prevent programme and the parallel policy priority of community cohesion/integration has been both problematic and controversial throughout Prevent’s life. The nature of this relationship has been central to the persistent allegation that Prevent is little more than a large-scale surveillance programme aimed at British Muslims (Kundnani, 2009). This article has suggested that the very need for a distinct Prevent programme was questioned by local authorities, but that they then reluctantly operationalised it alongside the community cohesion programmes they had enthusiastically developed. The fundamental problem here was that Prevent, with its monocultural and large-scale focus on essentialised ‘Muslim’ communities and its highly questionable model of ‘radicalisation’ (Kundnani, 2012), was flatly contradictory to the policy approach of cohesion. Evidence of this policy relationship, or marriage, in operation during Prevent 1 shows that Prevent progressively side-lined and undermined local cohesion policy and practice, leading to an enhanced securitisation of community relations. These local policy tensions mirrored tensions within the national state itself.

The analysis of the 2011 Prevent Review was that the relationship was organisationally flawed and that this could be solved through ‘divorce’, by removing the DCLG from Prevent. This would supposedly create a structural divide between Prevent and cohesion/integration, Home Office and DCLG, which would be mutually beneficial to both policy agendas. This article has argued that this analysis is both superficial and inaccurate, because such a policy demarcation is simply not possible at the local, operational level. The justification for the clumsy policy ‘marriage’ between Prevent 1 and cohesion was that the two policy agendas were equally resourced and regarded by the national state. This claim was already questionable by 2009 and is now completely discredited under the Coalition.

Therefore, the Prevent/community cohesion relationship being operationalised in England now arguably represents the worst scenario possible. Any national direction and support for cohesion/integration has disappeared while the same policy officers and practitioners charged with attempting to take cohesion forward locally are still facing Prevent demands from OSCT nationally. Since the Prevent Review, autonomy over the direction and content of Prevent activity has very significantly reduced, but local authorities are still expected to organise and deliver the work. The Prevent-funded local authority areas now have to apply for funding to the OSCT at six-monthly intervals against OSCT-determined criteria, with many applications going as far as Ministers themselves before being approved. Detailed scrutiny and approval is by the OSCT staff of Police and Security Service personnel. It can be seen here that the Prevent Review of 2011 represents a less wide but deeper securitisation of local Prevent activity and hence of the local state’s relationship with Muslim communities. This further securitised Prevent agenda is still delivered and coordinated by local authorities, despite the removal of DCLG from the policy agenda. Meanwhile cohesion/integration policy work has progressively slipped off the national agenda.

The ‘problem’ with Prevent has never been organisational and cannot be solved by the policy ‘divorce’, as empirical evidence on local policy relationships demonstrates. Instead, the fundamental conceptual problems of Prevent 1 – the monocultural and securitised focus on Muslims and the questionable model of radicalisation based on the need for ‘moderate’ Muslim communities and theology – have continued in Prevent 2. These problems are less visible and less widespread in their impact, but they have been deepened by the enhanced, securitised focus on ‘values’ (HMG, 2013). We now have the worst of all worlds – a flawed, centralised and increasingly securitised Prevent programme and a side-lined cohesion/integration agenda, with a loveless and profoundly unequal policy co-habitation continuing at the local level. The article has highlighted significant local/national and intra-national state tensions during this process, and the experiences of Leicester and Wales show that different policy directions are possible.



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