

# Parallel Policies and Contradictory Practices: The Case of Social Cohesion and Counter-Terrorism in the United Kingdom

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*This paper explores the intersection between the construction of a growing Islamophobic framing of Muslim communities in Britain, as self-segregated and alien to 'British life and culture; and as a potential source of a terrorist threat to the security of all British citizens. It tracks the development of two independent central government policies, community cohesion and counter-terrorism, and demonstrates the damaging contradictions that result from implementing these two policies in parallel within local communities.*

## Introduction

This paper provides an account of the development of social cohesion and counter-terrorism policies in the United Kingdom from 2001. It draws upon empirical qualitative research undertaken in five metropolitan authorities which revealed the unfortunate contradictory consequences of policies developed within different ministries in central government having negative effects when implemented at the level of the local state (Husband and Alam 2011). In tracking the development and implementation of both of these policies this analysis will reveal the consequences of both policies being specifically targeted at Muslim communities in Britain, where they contributed to the stigmatization of these communities, and to the pervasive rise of Islamophobic sentiments in the country. Following major civil disturbances in three Northern English cities in 2001, which involved established Muslim communities, the central government rapidly developed a *community cohesion* policy that was intended to address the perceived crisis in Muslim-majority

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relations in inner-city Britain. Thus, from the outset this policy initiative was actively focused upon the Muslim population of Britain. This focus was echoed some years later following the terrorist bombings in London on 7th July 2005, when the generic anxiety that had followed 9/11 in New York was given immediate national relevance by the loss of life in central London; and resulted in the rapid introduction of new counter-terrorism policies. Local authorities in Britain from that time found themselves simultaneously implementing two distinct policies, both of which were expressly targeted at Britain's Muslim populations.

At the level of the local authority it became very apparent that these two policies, when implemented in parallel within the same wards of particular townships, were inevitably heavily interactive: so much so that the counter-terrorism policies seriously jeopardized the credibility of those implementing social cohesion policies. This scenario had serious consequences for many of the staff committed to implementing these policies who found their personal integrity and professional standing put under strain.

### **In the Beginning – The Emergence of Social Cohesion as a National Strategy**

The United Kingdom has a very long history of immigration, (Winder 2004), and it is one of the ironies of contemporary xenophobic nationalism that it is very often expressed in relation to an anguished call to protect Anglo-Saxon British culture from new migrant inflows. This Xeno-Racist sentiment (Fekete 2009) reveals no awkwardness in the face of the reality that the Angles and Saxons were themselves invading forces from fifth and sixth century Northern Europe. The British relation with Islam also has a long and diverse history (Ansari 2009; Cannadine 2002; Kabbani 1994); but the story to be told here revolves significantly around the presence of Muslims in Britain who have predominantly arrived since the Second World War. In the post war struggle to rebuild the British economy the deliberate recruitment of labour from the British Empire was a core element of the national economic strategy. Drawn to service those areas of the economy that had become unattractive to the indigenous white labour force, migrant labour found itself dispersed to those areas of Britain that were the location for labour intensive industrial production. Thus in the major cities of Britain there are to be found very substantial concentrations of Muslims, typically located in inner city areas. These clusters also represent the residue of distinctive patterns of migration; such that although they may be Muslim they will also be members of distinct ethno-national communities whose settlement led them to develop ethnic communities that possessed the critical mass that could sustain an infrastructure of resources to meet their dietary, cultural and religious needs (Werbner 2002; Back 1996). From the outset discrimination in the labour and housing markets provided external

pressure that shaped these communities (Deakin 1970; Hiro 1973; Solomos 2003), whilst the ongoing need for a supportive cultural community infrastructure, and for a sense of safety and protection from racist harassment, provided a continuing internal momentum toward concentration (Phillips et al. 2007). Thus in Tower Hamlets in London, in Alum Rock in Birmingham and in inner-city parts of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in the North of England there are to be found communities that are, for example, of Bangladeshi, or Pakistani heritage, and from quite particular areas within these countries.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s the shared faith of these communities was not significant to their perception by the majority population. For example, the 1970s racist assaults upon these communities was popularly termed 'paki-bashing'. However, over the past three decades there have been a number of international and national events that have made faith, and Islam in particular, a salient criterion for inter-group competition and tension. The *Rushdie Affair* in 1989 over the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was a major international phenomenon (Akhtar 1989; Ruthven 1991). In Britain it had a major impact in both making newly salient the presence of Muslims in British cities; but just as importantly it was critical in re-siting the Muslim faith in the self perception of many members of Britain's Muslim communities. Not least it revealed the fact that Muslims could not rely on liberal anti-racists to share their sense of religious offence. It was a break point in the British unified 'Black Struggle'; and saw the emergence of a new politicized Islamic identity in Britain (Modood 1998, 2005). Future international events were to further expose the Muslim communities to a hostile majority gaze; and this hostility itself then fed the continuing vitality of an Islamic sensibility within the context of British ethnic relations. The first Gulf War in 1992 (Saeed 2007) resulted in British Muslims being challenged in the media, and by political opinion, to prove their commitment to Britain. The rise of Islamophobia within British life became a virtually self-fuelling activity that came to be placed into the British political arena with the 1997 Runnymede Trust report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. This report was pivotal in explicitly identifying the extent to which anti-Muslim sentiment, and direct hostility toward Muslims, had become deeply rooted in Britain. The brief period of national soul searching that was occasioned by the publication of this report became eclipsed by the radical repositioning of anti-Muslimism following the outrages of 9/11 in New York in 2001. At the time this analysis begins with the formation and roll out of the community cohesion programme, Muslims in Britain were subject to a public level of scrutiny and hostility that made them both vulnerable and defensive.

## Civil Disturbance and Community Cohesion

Concern with inter-ethnic relations in Britain has a long history, but the impetus to the rapid development of the contemporary British concern with 'Community cohesion' came with the *riots* in the cities of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in Northern England in 2001. These disturbances were located preponderantly within inner city areas where there were large settled Muslim communities. In accounting for these disturbances the official reports that sought to explain these events produced a discourse within which the perverse characteristics of the Muslim communities themselves figured heavily in explaining the eruption of civil disturbances. Specifically these Muslim communities were depicted as being characterized by patterns of *self-segregation*, and were accused of living in *parallel cultures* (see Burnley Task Force 2001; Oldham Independent Panel Review 2001; Ouseley 2001 and the Community Cohesion Independent Review Team [the Cattle report] 2001). This focus upon the supposed dysfunctional characteristics of the minority population in explaining the breakdown of civil relations between the majority and minority populations has a history in British political discourse and was widely employed in accounting for civil disturbances involving African-Caribbean communities in the 1970s-80s (Gilroy 1987). Finding the 'problem' within the minority ethnic communities very conveniently displaced the focus from the structural reproduction of inequalities, and from the role of racism, which may implicate the majority population in creating the circumstances in which civil unrest becomes a realistic occurrence. Nor was such thinking unique to accounting for stresses in ethnic relations, as Levitas' (2005) account of New Labour's policy and philosophy surrounding social exclusion and citizenship reveals. In particular the moral underclass *discourse* she identified as focusing upon the moral and behavioural delinquency of the excluded themselves points to a generic 'blaming-the-victim' discourse which allows the majority community to rehearse their own virtues whilst stigmatizing the excluded. The 2001 focus upon the '*self-segregation*' of British Muslims provided just such a convenient explanatory account that displaced any focus from the failures of state policies.

The riots of 2001 provided an opportunity for a period of political reflection on the trajectory of British multiculturalism. Across Europe a process of retreat from an optimistic commitment to a variety of forms of progressive multiculturalism was already underway, and the events of 2001 provided an opportunity for the hegemonic elite to rehearse their established credentials for decency and tolerance (Husband, 2005, 2011), in the context of their perceived betrayal by the supposedly unassimilable inner city Muslim youth who had become the focus of concern following the riots. The exceptionally punitive sentences that were handed out to the convicted rioters (see Bagguley and Hussein 2008) were themselves indicative of the sense of aggrieved outrage felt by the 'benevolent' majority. The response to

the riots of 2001 must be set in the context of what had by then been five decades of the development of British multiculturalism.

## Tolerance / Rights and Policy

Since the initial post war migration of 'coloured immigrants' into Britain, successive British governments have developed a complementary spiral of policies which have generated on the one hand increasingly draconian immigration policies, with the attendant stigmatization of immigrants and asylum seekers, and on the other the development of a cumulative body of anti-discriminatory legislation which has established a pervasive infrastructure of routine anti-discriminatory practice throughout local authority practice and in areas of public life (Husband 2005). The populist politics of anti-immigrant policy has been a central plank in party political competition for electoral advantage by appealing to the Xenophobic and racist sentiments that are deeply entrenched in the British social imaginary (Back et al. 2002; Fekete 2009). The importance of this process has been the normalization of anti-immigrant sentiment within the mainstream parties of British politics. The far right movements of the National Front, the British National Party or more recently the English Defence League have provided a convenient 'extreme racist' fringe against which the majority of the population, and the major centrist parties in Government (Labour and Conservative), have been able to rehearse their own moderation and tolerance. The orchestrated celebration of British tolerance has in this context been a key trope in the construction of a positive national self image which has provided a supportive framework for the defence of British multiculturalism. A critical discursive strategy that has been facilitated by this self image has been the deployment of what Bloomaert and Verschuren (1998) called the '*limits of tolerance*' discourse wherein, in the name of preserving our national capacity for tolerance, we must of necessity have strict border policies and limit the claims made by immigrants (see Husband 2010). A multicultural policy developed on the basis of a commitment to tolerance must of necessity create a skewed orientation to a commitment to minority ethnic rights. For those to be tolerated, by definition have some stigma that must be tolerated and are being given access to resources to which they have no absolute right. Consequently it is reasonable for the tolerant to expect the tolerated to be grateful for the largesse that has been accorded them (see Husband 1994 and also Brown 2006).

The development of British anti-discriminatory legislation and policy has, however, been progressively built upon a foundational commitment to human rights principles. Thus policies that seek to guarantee the substantive citizenship rights of minority ethnic residents, who are preponderantly British citizens, does not need to invoke majority tolerance: it is based upon a claim to a common basket of rights available to all. Consequently minority ethnic citizens should feel no pressure to

be grateful for being granted the privileges that they have as of right as British citizens. Additionally in the context of an epoch where the 'politics of difference' (Taylor 1992) have become routinely expressed as interest groups seek to claim their collective rights; then minority activism in support of legitimate rights (whether in terms of gender, sexual preference, faith or ethnicity), has challenged the benign self image of the tolerant majority.

Over the last 60 years the United Kingdom has developed a *de facto* infrastructure of routinised anti-discriminatory policy that has been embedded in local authority and business practice. Whilst the language of 'political correctness' clearly identifies the recurrent resistance to this state of affairs (Husband 2010), it is nevertheless the case that British politicians have felt, with some justification, that compared to many other European countries Britain has a credible record in addressing the challenge of diversity within its population. At the same time NGOs and minority ethnic organizations have sustained a prolonged critique of the failures of this practice. High profile public enquiries such as the MacPherson Report (1999) into the police handling of the murder of a Black young man, and the Runnymede Trust Report (1997) into the growth of Islamophobia in Britain, have maintained a nervous defensiveness amongst Government departments about their virtue in delivering an equitable multicultural service.

Thus the tension between a self congratulatory tolerance and a troubled principled commitment to delivering anti-discriminatory services to all has been played out against a cumulative normalization of anti-immigrant sentiment as a core element of party political rhetoric. Consequently it is in this context that the perceived 'self segregation' of Muslim communities and their pursuit of 'parallel lives' has its discursive power. Their perceived unwillingness to become properly British is seen as an insulting rejection of the tolerant commitment of the majority society in seeking to address their needs. The very visible resistance to anti-discriminatory practices in the tabloid press, with their rehearsal of the *lunacy of political correctness*, has been nurtured over the last decade by the national press coverage of the extensive retreat from earlier forms of multiculturalism in other European countries. The reasonableness of other countries strictures on the cultural practices of *their immigrants* are compared with the continuing abuse of *our tolerance* as Britain sustains a commitment to minority rights. In this discursive environment the riots of 2011 were seen as a provocative challenge to the extant policies of British multiculturalism and became an additional trigger in pushing British policy into a more assertively assimilationist direction. Again this pressure toward conformity was not unique to the domain of inter-ethnic relations. As Flint (2009) pointed out, the 'colonising of civility' by the government, that was integral to the development of Community Cohesion, was part of a longer trajectory of the state seeking to domesticate the behavior of its citizenry.



The Community Cohesion policy that was developed by the Government in response to the riots of 2001 were specifically targeted at Britain's Muslim communities because of their 'self segregation', and was from the outset seen as being distinct from the more generic issue of *social cohesion* that had wide policy visibility in Europe and the United States. In the words of Cantle, who was central in developing this policy:

'social cohesion' has tended to be used more broadly and aligned particularly with general socioeconomic factors, whereas 'community cohesion' has emerged as a more specific term to describe the societal features which are based on identifiable communities defined by faith or ethnicity, rather than social class. (Cantle 2008, 50.)

Thus in its formulation community cohesion was a policy initiative that directly responded to the wide popular and political concern that followed upon the 2001 riots (Hussain and Bagguley 2005; Bagguley and Hussain 2008). In this context the policy was from the outset 'racialized' (Murji and Solomos 2005) and focused specifically upon the faith; and problematic implications of these communities' commitment to their culture and identity. It should also be remembered that the development of the community cohesion policies in the United Kingdom took place in the context of a world radically transformed by the events of 9/11 in the United States. The salience of Islam as marker of difference had taken on a significance that invoked notions of threat and inalienable difference that changed the resonance of Islam in the political and popular understanding of diversity (Modood 2005). The concerns with the 'self segregation' of Muslim communities was therefore already coloured by the ubiquitous fetid suspicions channeled through Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis (1993, 1996) and the post 9/11 'war on terror'. Not only was the continued reproduction of distinctly Muslim communities a perceived insult to British multicultural openness, but additionally what they might be doing in their communities became part of a wider anxiety.

The core of the policy agenda of community cohesion was an essentially assimilationist drive to make *them* more British<sup>1</sup>. The focus upon the cultural and behavioral practices of Britain's Muslim communities, particularly in the inner city concentrations, provided a potential repertoire of interventions that would reassert Britain's tolerant credentials in seeking to accommodate difference (by eradicating it). At the same time, this focus drew a convenient veil over those structural processes that reproduced the social exclusion of Muslim communities, on the bases of class and race, that were the bedrock on which community defensive boundary maintenance were likely to be both necessary and legitimate. As McGhee (2003, 393) noted:

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1 Of course in the process of rolling out this policy one of the perverse consequences was the revelation that there exists no coherent normative definition of what it means to be British (see also Flint 2009)

By focusing in the main on opening up channels of communication, on generating a culture of respect through attempting to encourage commonality – in place of division, what is observable in community cohesion discourses and programmes is a partial repression of ‘conflict’ achieved through discursively placing unwanted characteristics outside of the debate.

Wrapped in the broader mantle of New Labour’s flirtation with communitarianism, and shaped by New Labour’s commitment to equality of opportunity rather than substantive equality, community cohesion as a policy was an explicit critique of the current articulation of Muslim communities with wider British life which unambiguously placed the responsibility for change at the door of the Muslim community. Specifically drawing upon the language of social capital, which whilst intellectually contested, held vogue status as policy discourse (Field 2003) it was the bad *bonding capital* of these communities that had to be replaced by more acceptable *bridging capital*. At the level of the local state the rollout of community cohesion policies essentially involved drawing upon traditional community work skills in engaging with Muslim communities.

## Counter-terrorism: Contest and Prevent

If the riots of 2001 were the trigger for the development of community cohesion policies in the United Kingdom then undoubtedly it was the bombings in London of July 2005 which acted as the trigger for the urgent development of Britain’s anti-terrorism policies. The generic concerns with Islam and terrorism that had become articulated with a significantly robust British capacity for Islamophobia (Runnymede Trust 1997; Smith et al. 2004) was given a quantum shift with the emergence of *home grown bombers*. The essence of terrorism is that anyone can be a potential target; and the perceived reality of Islamisist radicalization was that any Muslim could be the next bomber. This was a perception given some credence by the ‘normality’ of the individuals who came to be convicted of terrorist offences. In the populist anxieties of the time the sentiment was likely to be that ‘We know who the Muslims are and where they live’; but, ‘We cannot know which individual is the *radicalized* enemy we should fear.’ This was the perfect scenario for the development of paranoia and for the seemingly reasonable scapegoating of all Muslims. Something of the psychology of the time is sketched explicitly in the Government White Paper of 2006: *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom’s Strategy*, which stated that:

The Government assesses that the current threat in the UK from Islamist terrorism is serious and sustained. British citizens also face the threat of terrorist attacks when abroad. Overall we judge that the scale of the threat is potentially still increasing and is not likely to diminish significantly for some years... as the tragic attacks of 7th July,



2005 have shown, it is not possible to eliminate completely the threat of terrorist attacks in this country. (H.M. Government 2006, 8).

This explicitly frank assertion of the states' limited ability to guarantee the safety of its citizens was by no means purely an exceptional burst of honesty by a government ministry, for an inherent feature of counter-terrorism strategies is that the general public must be persuaded to accept the intrusion into their civil liberties and freedoms that is attendant upon the development of intrusive surveillance strategies. Thus it is an intrinsic element of counter-terrorism that the public should be made self-consciously aware of their continuing vulnerability to terrorist attack in order to persuade them to support the counter-terrorist strategies developed in the name of their safety. Indeed following the bombings of 7th July 2005, the security services sustained a practice of keeping the public sense of threat at a high level: often on the basis of evidence that questionably supported the risk level that was declared. As the House of Lords/House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights noted in their report of March 2010:

Since September 11th 2001 the Government has continuously justified many of its counter-terrorism measures on the basis that there is a public emergency threatening the life of the nation. We question whether the country has been in such a state for more than eight years. This permanent state of emergency inevitably has a deleterious effect on public debate about the justification for counter-terrorism measures (JCHR 2010, 3).

In pursuing this aim of sustaining a popular sense of threat the government were amply assisted by the media in what Moring (2012, in this issue) has called 'an incestuous spiral of mutual interest'. Terrorism is highly dependent upon publicity to achieve its impact, namely the contagious spread of fear amongst a large population; the government has an interest in sustaining an awareness of threat in order to legitimate its intrusive counter-terrorism strategies; and the media has a fascination with the terrorist and with terrorism because they have such a close fit with news values, the sensationalism of infotainment, and the casting and reproduction of spectacle (Taylor and Harris 2008).

The extensive reach of counter-terrorism strategies into the fabric of daily life that followed the July 7th bombings did not emerge from a policy vacuum. The United Kingdom had a history of counter-terrorism policy that had been extensively refined during 'the troubles' with the IRA in Northern Ireland; including the Provisional IRA bombing in Birmingham in November 1974 which resulted in 24 deaths and injuries to nearly 200 persons. Following this outrage the then Home Secretary rushed through Parliament a Prevention of Terrorism Bill which he admitted included provisions 'which had now become acceptable although they would not hitherto have been so' (Jenkins 1991, 393). A similar process followed the events of 9/11/2001 when an extensive Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act was rapidly passed through

Parliament; elements of which were in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights. Indeed, in the wake of 9/11 there has been a progressive retreat from an unambiguous commitment to human rights principles across democratic governments; with human rights becoming negotiable in relation to the pragmatic interests of security. (Wilson 2005; Gearty 2007; Bonney 2008). Thus, for example, a 2010 Report of the House of Lords/House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights provided a distressing account of the struggle of the British judiciary to counter the British Government's attempts to circumvent international human rights principles. Hennessy (2007, 6) in talking of the development in Britain of a '*new protective state*' of intelligence and security noted that

Parliament, public and the press have to yet to appreciate fully its scope and magnitude-in-the round or its long-term significance to our systems of government and the kind of country we are.

The development of counter-terrorism policies and practice throughout the United Kingdom following 9/11 and 7/7/2005 in London have been marked by an erosion of commitment to human rights principles and by a pragmatic prioritization of security over civil liberties. A key element of the analysis below will be to demonstrate the intrusive impact of counter-terrorism policies upon the attempts to roll out the parallel policy of community cohesion. First it is necessary to sketch the elements of the counter-terrorism policy developed post 7/7.

Whilst anti-terrorist legislation continues to evolve, the core structure was clearly laid out in *Countering International Terrorism* (2006). The Government's counter-terrorism strategy, outlined in that document, was called CONTEST, and had a structure with four elements at its heart: prevention, pursuit, protection and preparation.

The 'four P's' provided a distribution of responsibilities for addressing the differing issues that are real and potential in the context of contemporary international terrorism. As the updated policy of CONTEST II (Home Office 2009, 13) succinctly phrased it:

CONTEST is intended to be a comprehensive strategy: Work on *Pursue* and *Prevent* reduces the threat from terrorism: work on *Protect* and *Prepare* reduces the UK's vulnerability to attack.

'*Prepare*' addresses the challenge of ensuring an adequate organisational and resource capacity to be able to address the consequences of a terrorist attack. This is an agenda that was given particular emphasis by the inadequate response capability that was fulsomely demonstrated in the case of the 'triple whammy' of the British state's lack of preparedness for dealing with the flooding and fuel crises of 2000, and the foot and mouth crisis of 2001. Needless to say an adequate

preparation for terrorist assault is contingent upon an accurate understanding of the potential nature and scale of the terrorist attacks and their immediate and long-term consequences. Thus intelligence gathering is an essential foundation for adequate preparation and planning.

*'Protect'* addresses the protection of the public, key national services and British overseas interests. As we have noted above the long history of responding to Irish Republican Terrorism provided a significant basis for the development of current policy and practice: including the use of CCTV cameras and extensive surveillance.

*'Pursue'* addresses the challenge of pursuing terrorists and those who sponsor them. This agenda is highly dependent upon co-operation between intelligence agencies at home and abroad. Not only is 'intelligence' critical to this task, but where, for example, pursuit involves action across different state jurisdictions, diplomatic and legal matters will need to be addressed.

*'Prevent'* is the area of policy that is most central to our concerns here. Although it would be naïve and unhelpful to believe that this agenda can be understood in its operation independently of the other 'three P's', Mottram (2007, 50) provides us with a succinct outline:

The 'Prevent' element of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy identifies three principal strands of effort whose breadth illustrates the extent of the challenge:

1. Tackling disadvantage and supporting reform – addressing structural problems in the UK and overseas, such as inequalities and discrimination.
2. Deterring those who facilitate terrorism and those who encourage others to become terrorists – changing the environment in which seeking to turn others towards extremism and terrorist violence can operate.
3. Engaging in the battle of ideas – challenging the ideologies that extremists believe can justify the use of violence, primarily by helping Muslims who wish to dispute these ideas to do so.

In discussing these three elements of 'Prevent', Mottram<sup>2</sup> argued that tackling disadvantage and supporting reform 'is a huge task with uncertain payback in counter-terrorist terms' (ibid., 50). In justifying this assertion he argued that in the UK those who became drawn into terrorism were not themselves particularly disadvantaged in educational or employment terms. However, whilst this may be true of the individual terrorist, it is hardly true of the communities from which they are drawn; and on whose behalf they may feel aggrieved. Nor does it address the transnational sensitivity of many Muslims who have a sense of affinity with the marginalised and oppressed experiences of their co-religionists elsewhere in the

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<sup>2</sup> Mottram was the previous Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator of TIDO [Terrorism, international Defence and Overseas] Strategy and Delivery, and subsequently Permanent Secretary, Intelligence, Security and Resilience in the Cabinet Office.

world. But whatever the reasoning, the *de facto* expression of *Prevent* in practice, as with community cohesion, focused more particularly on the internal dynamics of Britain's Muslim communities than it did upon their structural situation.

In its initial roll out, and in particular with the funding stream identified with the *Pathfinder* programme of community based initiatives, the *Prevent* agenda experienced strong resistance from Muslim communities and from local authority staff who saw it as Islamophobic and likely to undermine their existing relationship with Muslim communities. As we shall see below these fears were substantially realised by the subsequent events. A key feature of the 'New Preventive State' was the extensive development of inter-agency working: both between government departments and with other organisations in civil society. With the priority on intelligence gathering that lay at the heart of the counter-terrorism strategy, this seamless linkage across departments and agencies came to mean that members of the Muslim communities in Britain could not be sure that any member of a local authority, whether school teacher, community worker, or youth worker was not explicitly or implicitly involved in a process of surveillance. The reach of *CONTEST* was such that there was a widespread expectation upon anyone interacting with members of the Muslim community, that they should monitor the behaviour of the people they met and report any 'unusual or suspicious' behaviour<sup>3</sup>. Indeed it also meant that employees of the local state could not themselves be sure whether information that they routinely gathered as part of their professional practice did not at some point get passed onto the counter intelligence agencies. Thus the securitization of everyday life had been extensively extended through the pervasive reach of the counter-terrorism structure. Significantly this process had been developed within the political discourses of the 'clash of civilisations' and the 'War on Terror' in which Islam and Muslims had been extensively defined as an alien presence in 'the West'; and Muslims specifically were seen as an enemy within. In the British case this specifically included an extensive rehearsal of their collective failure to become 'properly British', and of their 'self segregation' in supposed inner city ghettos. Framing Muslim communities within this script, which rendered them both 'other' and detached from the wider society, provided a context in which the fetid anxieties surrounding potential 'Jihadist' outrages became all too reasonable. This contributed to both the increase in Islamophobia in the majority population, and an increased identification with the Islamic faith within the settled minority ethnic communities in Britain. A highly critical report of the Communities and Local Government Committee of the House of Commons, entitled *Preventing Violent Extremism*, summarised evidence it had taken on the operation of *Prevent* by concluding, amongst other things, that:

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<sup>3</sup> In principle, this was an expectation that also applied to university lecturers in their dealings with students.

the single focus on Muslims in Prevent has been unhelpful. We conclude that any programme which focuses solely on one section of a community is stigmatising, potentially alienating, and fails to address the fact that no section of a population exists in isolation from others (CLGC 2010, 3).

Thus two policies emanating from central government both had placed Britain's Muslim communities as 'the problem' at the heart of each policy. This both fed into and fed off the wider discourse of Islamophobia in Britain that had extensively developed following 9/11.

## **Community Cohesion and Prevent in Practice**

A study carried out to track the roll out of these two policies in tandem within five major local authorities interviewed the senior managers responsible for each policy, the elected councillors who held the brief for these policies, and some of the operational staff responsible for implementing the policies (see Husband and Alam 2011). The findings reported below are drawn from that study and provide an insight into the insidious penetration of counter-terrorism measures into other parts of contemporary urban life in Britain.

### **Political Resistance to the Introduction of Prevent**

The Prevent agenda was, as we have seen above, a rapid and specific response to the bombings in London of 7th July 2005; and had a specific focus upon the Muslim communities in Britain. It was the political and operational implications of this focus which create a strong resistance to it across the five authorities studied. The explicit targeting of the Muslim communities was frequently seen as a form of collective stigmatisation of British Muslims which was unacceptable. Particularly given the ubiquitous ramifications of Prevent in terms of legitimating, and requiring, the extensive surveillance of Muslim communities, local politicians and staff had sound reasons for anticipating the negative effects of this policy on ethnic relations within their area. It was the capacity of the local officers and councillors to have an empathetic understanding of the impact of this policy, and its accompanying rhetoric, on local Muslim communities that fuelled this resistance. As one senior manager phrased it:

If we take the Preventing Violent Extremism agenda, after 7/7 the government was, if we're honest, pretty close to panic; understandably so. All of a sudden we – supposedly – had these potential terrorists all over the place in our communities. And some of the language used was pretty strange to say the least... Something had happened which had shocked Government into needing to react. But that reaction, because of the anxiety and because the information stream the government had at the time was from

the security services and from the police intelligence, it was security based intelligence: we got a very, very narrow view of the approach to preventing violent extremism.

This narrow view was essentially a focus upon the Muslim communities by central government which was supported with a rhetoric and concrete practices which fed popular suspicion of all Muslims following 9/11 in New York and 7/7 in London. It was a blunt policy response which quite directly fed the Islamophobic sentiments that were very salient at the time. Reflecting this reality one senior councillor stated that: 'When the document came out from the Home Office I was aghast. I threw it out. I said we not having this. It was racist. Quite clearly racist.'

Local staff and councillors were sustained in their critique of Prevent by the direct feedback they received from their local communities. As a senior staff member said:

I think that everyone felt uncomfortable with it. We got quite a lot of complaints from members of the community, not just the Muslim community, but community reps who were part of our local area agreement structure.

### **Contradictions between Prevent and Community Cohesion**

It was apparent across the interviews carried out in this study that for many individuals the Prevent agenda was seen as being deeply flawed in its conception and damaging in its implications. The damaging potential of the Prevent agenda at the local level owed a lot to the fact that the inter-agency working that had become normative in local authority practice meant that both community cohesion and the Prevent initiatives were increasingly incapable of being discerned as different by either the staff implementing them and the Muslim communities who were targeted by them. As one manager tellingly commented: *'I could imagine that there's nothing that you can do in social cohesion that can't be perceived as – a front for Prevent.'*

The intrusive nature of counter-terrorist surveillance meant, as was noted above, that the routine access of local authority personnel into peoples' homes and community organisations had become a potential opportunity for intelligence gathering. This lead a senior councillor to assert that:

When you are required as elected representatives to gain the respect ... of the community and drive through values: the values of education, care of the elderly, standards in life – a clean environment – basically promoting and encouraging the greater well-being of the populace; to also be the Big Brother that is actually spying on part of the community – then there is a contradiction.



The contradiction between the empathetic engagement with communities that is at the heart of community development and social cohesion work, and the intrusive and fundamentally suspicious mindset of counter-terrorism work resulted in considerable stress for the staff who were required to implement these policies. Not least because the resentment felt towards the Prevent agenda by very many members of Muslim communities served to undermine the hard won trust between these communities and local authority staff that had been built up of previous years; points revealed by the following quotes:

It's like you're talking with a forked tongue. That's the thing and the community's not stupid. They know what the public agenda is, what the Government agenda is and they know that their Muslim community is under the spotlight: under the heat. (A councillor).

So of course it's a difficult situation: information gathering/collecting – then are we then a reporting centre? Are we then working outside our own remit, you know? And what's somebody going to do with the information? So how much control and confidentiality? All those issues arose. (A member of the fieldwork staff)

The contradictions between implementing social cohesion policies and those of Prevent were felt nowhere more acutely than by Muslim members of staff in these local authorities. Since both community cohesion and Prevent were targeted at Muslim communities, the Muslim staff in these authorities could be seen as possessing a unique competence to act as a bridge between the local state and the Muslim communities in the area. The Muslim staff were acutely aware of this possibility and some of them were very explicit about seeking to limit the extent to which their standing in their local communities might be compromised by 150 fronting for Prevent. As one worker said:

The thing about it is I've been very clear in terms of, you know, where I fit into it. If it means I will lose my reputation, then I will not get involved in it ... and there have been a number of occasions where I have [said], *I'm not attending that meeting...* and I've been criticised by senior management.

Another reflected upon the impact of Prevent upon their working environment:

I think that this is probably the most challenging time that we as officers have ever experienced, or ever perhaps will experience; you know, given the delivery or implementation of Prevent.

While another observed that:

There is going to be that level of suspicion, you know. Anyone who works with communities now, on Community Cohesion or whatever, it all comes back to Prevent.

As this final quote illustrates, some Muslim professionals have responded to the contaminating potential of Prevent work by seeking to exclude themselves from it:

I think that there is a lot of pressure, and to be honest that's why I've shied away from being involved with it; because it's loaded. I can't go straight faced to my community and say, *I'm here to help you*. I know what they want me to do. It's like working as an informant, a spy, at the same time. It goes against my morals to do that.

The experience of the Muslim staff provides a sensitive litmus test to reveal the ways in which the Prevent agenda has become intrusive across a whole range of local authority practice. The essential logics of counter-terrorism follow the inherent purpose of terrorism itself, which is to permeate everyday life with fear of attack, and with its complement; a sustained suspicion of potential terrorists. The scapegoating of the Muslim communities of Britain's inner cities produced a legitimating rhetoric in support of intrusive intelligence gathering and surveillance which was widely supported in the British media. It was not, however, received with the same *sang froid* by the Muslim communities themselves who saw this as a form of collective punishment and a denial of their generic membership of the larger community of British citizens.

## **The Local State and Central Government**

It became apparent in tracking the implementation of the Community Cohesion policy in the five local authorities that there was a considerable dissatisfaction with the way in which central government sought to micro-manage the implementation of the cohesion agenda. The staff responsible for this policy at the level of the local state found themselves to be the target for a positive blizzard of guidance instructions and a succession of consultation documents and other communications from Whitehall. The matter was complicated by the fact that many of the initiatives carried out at the local level under the name of Prevent were very similar to the initiatives being carried out by staff involved in Community Cohesion. They both drew very heavily on traditional community development approaches and often employed colleagues, who in the context of inter-agency working, sometimes found themselves unclear about the boundaries between these two policies. Ironically the overload of central government communications resulted in a situation where the only rational response for the local staff was the exercise of local discretion in making sense of the overload of information with which they were confronted. This exercise of local discretion was facilitated by the existence of a cohort of staff who were confident of their existentially grounded knowledge of the local communities they served, and of their professional competence to address the challenges with which they were presented following the bombings of 7/7 and the rapid escalation of the concern with the terrorist threat. A corollary of this management of the flood

of guidance from central government was the development of a critical voicing of the perceived ignorance of the bureaucrats in Whitehall who were seen as inventing policy in the absence of a grounded knowledge of local situations. This sense of grievance toward the politicians and bureaucrats in Westminster was enhanced by strong resentments following the visits of such persons to the local communities where their comments and interventions were frequently seen as crass, and even damaging to the efforts of local staff to implement the policies for which these visitors were supposedly responsible. Anecdotes of such visits were rehearsed with some relish as means of celebrating both local competence and 152 Southern stupidities.

In coming to an understanding of the development of community cohesion and counter-terrorism policies, and indeed of the wider securitization of urban life in Britain, it will always be important to keep in mind the distinctive role of the local state in interpreting the edicts of central government developed through legislation and rolled out through policy directives. (see Hancock, this issue and Huysmans 2006). As seen above the local states' political response to the initial definition of Prevent was robust and highly critical. This capacity for resistance to central government is a consequence of the vitality of strong local and regional identities, a relatively stable professional work force, and a conviction that both local councillors and local staff have a sound knowledge of their local patch. Such a strong sense of commitment to the locality and pride in their professionalism and local insight provided a strong foundation for the outrage and resistance that was expressed around the introduction of Prevent; where Chief Executives, local councillors and staff formed a strong consensus of opposition to the explicit singling out of the Muslim communities as the problematic target for action.

## Conclusion

The British experience of the simultaneous implementation of social cohesion and counter-terrorism measures may have much about it that is distinctively British: but it also provides a case study which may reasonably be expected to inform the likely dynamics in many other national contexts. Both policies emerged in the context of a long established national predisposition toward ethnic diversity. In the British case this included a long history of 152 coloured thinking which informed a changing , but sustained capacity for racism. (Solomos 2003). To this could be added a Xenophobic response to the arrival of new immigrants which had become a *leitmotif* in party political competition for the popular vote. And, in the last decade Britain had seen a retreat from a well established commitment to its own form of multiculturalism. These are features of national policies and individual sentiments which can be tracked in other European countries; and in multiethnic societies elsewhere. (Fekete 2009 and Lentin and Titley 2011.)

Claims to promote cohesion in nation states typically result in an exercise in rehearsing a sense of the claimed distinctive national identity, and its attendant culture, to which *the Other* is expected to demonstrate not only a sense of affiliation; but also a cultural accommodation. Thus when *Others* become perceived as an alien presence that requires measures to aid their social cohesion into the fabric of society as a whole, it is very often *their difference* which becomes the anvil upon which new policy is beaten out. In the British case following the events of 2001 it was British Muslim's, (who were very preponderantly established British citizens), who became the explicit target for community cohesion policies. Their difference was stridently asserted in the political discourse that claimed to have identified the problem in their self segregation and their tendency to live in parallel cultures. This process was itself framed by the global engagement in the polarising *clash of civilizations* imbroglio, which fed an Islamophobia for which Britain was particularly historically equipped. Other countries have their own history of Orientalism and their own histories of relations with Islam (e.g Marchand 2008), and consequently their own capacity to stereotype and marginalise their Muslim populations.

Terrorism is a challenge in the contemporary world, and states have both a duty and a right to develop policies which will seek to limit the potential threat to their citizens. A key question, however, lies with the proportionality and the reasonableness of the policy response. In the British case Contest and Prevent were developed with the Muslim communities explicitly identified as the principle target of counter-terrorism policies. In the first wave of Prevent majority ethnic far right extremism was barely taken into account; and with the modest subsequent refinements to Prevent the adjustment of focus and rhetoric has not been substantial.

That the same Muslim communities living in specific towns should be so explicitly identified simultaneously within two distinct major areas of policy, as a double threat to the British state, was a lamentable expression of the Orientalism and Islamophobia noted above. Their earlier identification through community cohesion as a cultural threat to the culture and civility of British life provided a most unfortunate framing discourse for the later emergence of their definition as the perceived inevitable sources of Britain's future *home grown bombers*. The logics of community cohesion and of counter-terrorism appeared to emerge from autonomous silos of politicians and Whitehall advisors who self-segregated themselves from each other and lived in parallel institutional cultures. Each policy had its own ministerial imperatives and its own organizational capacity to set performance indicators, establish a hierarchy of management and seek to impose a performance at the local level that matched the political investment made in these policies as political agendas. It was ironic that the highly developed level of interagency working at the local level, that had been developed over the recent years, should have provided such a regrettably fertile organizational context in which the lack of joined up thinking between central government departments should be so dysfunctionally expressed in practice at

the local level. At the level of the local authority the contradictions between the intrusive policies of Prevent and Contest, and the supposedly progressive policies of community cohesion, were readily apparent.

With both community cohesion and counter-terrorism there was an apparent political unwillingness to engage with the structural and attitudinal forces within British life that might have contributed to the demographic structure of British cities, and to the development of an increased commitment to Islamic identities. British foreign policy could not meaningfully be isolated from any understanding of the development of Muslim thinking in Britain; and the structural reproduction of class inequalities could not be erased by developing community cohesion policies which aspired to ignore the intersection of class and ethnicity in determining individuals' life experiences in Britain. The story told above is as much about a political retreat from a concern with equality as it is about a failure of imagination and insight resulting in the damaging introduction of two contradictory policies. Both community cohesion and Prevent were policies essentially designed to address symptoms of different aspects of societal stress; rather than making explicit the underlying causes, and honestly seeking to politically engage with them. That was not an option within the ideology of the times; nor would be it be now.

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