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21. Schools, Religion and Extremism

Introduction

Since the attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001, political, educational and civil society organisations have engaged with the question of extremism in ways that represent radical change in the relationship between states and their publics. Challenging questions for civic and moral educators around freedom and surveillance, identity and plurality, sustainability and progress, and the normative resources with which to address them have been refracted through a securitised lens (Conroy 2003). At the same time, education systems globally have been subject to pressures from increasing marketization, rapid policy change, intersecting with rapid population changes brought about by the refugee crisis. These conditions of confusion and complexity, characterised by Sardar (2010) as ‘post-normality’, provide a context in which information gaps can quickly give way to moral panics (Cohen 1987), and be interpreted as security gaps (Lundie 2022).

Drawing on wider global trends in the complex ways that religion and secularity are enmeshed in corporate, political and surveillance trends, this chapter identifies two broad approaches to counter-extremism in education. The first approach, ‘preventing violent extremism’ (PVE) focuses on providing young people with skills and dispositions of critical enquiry suitable to navigate this complexity, while the second, ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE) employs more targeted interventions against those deemed at risk of radicalisation. Drawing on an example from Australia, some key principles of PVE can be identified. The example of Zimbabwe highlights the complex ways these concepts can be problematized when religious institutions and state surveillance are positioned as enablers of regimes that do not respect the rights of their citizens, including the right to freedom of belief. An in-depth empirical study of the interpretation and enactment of the *Prevent* duty in England’s schools, which is ambiguous in relation to a PVE/CVE orientation, highlights the role of a globalised media in reinterpreting and recontextualising policy. Examples from Quebec and other Canadian provinces highlight the ways that such recontextualisation and the implicit norms they draw upon can further alienate and reinforce negative presentations of suspect communities.

In the past decade, two stories may be told about secularism, religion and extremism in the contemporary world. In Northern Iraq since 2014, over 10,000 people have converted from Islam to follow the ancient Zoroastrian religion indigenous to the region (Bruneau &

Omar, 2020). While this represents a tiny fraction of the population, its significance should not be underestimated. The secularisation thesis popular among sociologists in the 1980s became widely, but not universally, discredited in the early years of the 21st century. The focus of Western states' security apparatus on Islamist extremism which followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and on the role played by Evangelical Christianity in the political rhetoric of the Bush administration in the USA, combined with the continued growth of Pentecostal Christianity in Africa and myriad new religious movements in China, led many in the first decade of the 21st century to conclude that secularisation was a peculiarly European phenomenon, and the consequence of white European elites viewing the world from their own limited perspectives (c.f. Davie et al. 2016). While religious rhetoric continues to be a force in global politics, the existence of sites of contestation in the midst of what was often deemed by the West to be a deeply religiously cohesive part of the world – designations of Sunni and Shi'a majority areas by Western powers played a significant role in the brokering of power following the defeat of Saddam Hussein in the Iraq War of 2005 – represents a significant indicator of global change. Conversions to reconstructed pre-Abrahamic faiths are unremarkable in the West, where the secularisation thesis had long been accepted (Heelas & Woodhead, 2008). These conversions in Iraqi Kurdistan are unprecedented, however, and are further attributable to the atrocities committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and here again a degradation of religious narrative may be observed – while previous Islamist political figures had attempted to win the favour of devout Muslims raised in counter-cultural environments, ISIS quite deliberately courted those with histories of criminality and those with limited knowledge of Islamic scholarship. A similar degradation of the religious narrative has been criticised by Christian scholars in relation to the appropriation of 'Evangelical' as a political identity by the Trump administration in the United States (Galli, 2019). Secularisation, it seems, is back on the map.

The other story of secularisation and the contemporary world is a story of religious growth, at least in material terms – of the 12 largest church buildings in the world, 9 have been built since 1989, all of them in the Global South. In the same timescale, 5 out of the 10 largest Orthodox churches have been built, 11 out of the 20 largest Mosques (not counting Mecca and Medina) and 8 of the 10 largest statues of the Buddha. Understanding these architectural projects of hyper-visibility requires a deeper engagement with the complex ways that politics, capital and religion have become enmeshed in the 21st century. Such projects of scale require a shifting away from the 'we identities' of societal, common religion, toward

official framings of religion, for example in relation to the standardising of *azan* by the Egyptian Ministry of Religious Endowment, broadcasting a single voice across Cairo, in place of the uncoordinated call to prayer by each mosque across the ‘city of a thousand minarets’ (Nelson, 2010). Such framings rely on the institutional logics of other sectors, in the Egyptian case both state control and the technological actors required for simultaneous broadcast are involved; in the cases of many African mega-churches, theology interacts with international networks of capital with interest in political influence. In relation to these two stories, it can no longer be said that the world is simply becoming more secular, as sociologists in the late 20th century believed, nor that there is a ‘return’ of religion, as theorised by many of their critics in the first decade of the 21st. Rather, religion finds itself reframed by logics of power operating beyond the traditional, communal domain of religion.

A third factor in the present moment is the attention increasingly drawn to ‘non-religious worldviews’. From the climate strikes which saw millions of school children around the globe walk out in a show of support for radical change to the economy and its deleterious effects on the planet, to the ruling that ethical veganism constitutes a philosophical belief worthy of the same protection as religious beliefs under the Equalities Act 2010 in the UK (Casamitjana Costa v League Against Cruel Sports, 2020), non-religious belief has asserted itself in new ways. This is a factor distinct from secularisation, understood as a falling away from traditional forms of institutional religion. Although secularisation continues, with an 11.6% drop in people identifying as Christian between the 2001 and 2011 UK census, and an 11.3% increase in those identifying with no religion (ONS Census, 2012), and the growing representation of non-religion in schools is reflected in UK rulings that Humanism ought to be represented in schemes of work about religion and belief (R (Fox) v Secretary of State for Education, 2015), the attention I wish to draw to non-religious worldviews is distinct from merely recognising the religious categories of atheism and Humanism. While many of the beliefs held by posthumanist, transhumanist, ethical vegan and environmental campaigners could be regarded as ‘religious’ in the sense that many anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers of religion have defined it in the past, the refusal of the label is deliberate on the part of the holders of these beliefs, and understandable in the light of the foregoing analysis. In his *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1966, p. 55) argues that religious beliefs can be demonstrated “not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by

regulating for all in [the believer's] life". This is very similar to the test on which ethical veganism was deemed a "philosophical belief to be protected under the [Equalities] Act:

- It must be genuinely held;
- It must be a belief and not an opinion or view point based on the present state of information available;
- It must be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour;
- It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance; and finally
- It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others" (Casamitjana Costa v League Against Cruel Sports, 2020, p. 2)

The reluctance of holders of such beliefs to label them 'religious', however, represents a site of resistance against the separations of religion from materiality, and from fundamental values, common in 'secular' Western polities. Such a refusal is illustrated by the climate strikes and the actions of groups such as Extinction Rebellion, which do not seek to be accommodated within an existing liberal pluralism, but to effect radical systemic change. This has led to the labelling of such groups as 'extremist' (BBC News, 2020), and to government pronouncements that schools should not engage with material from groups with a stated desire to abolish capitalism (DfE, 2020).

These complex multi-religious and multi-secular conditions set the scene for a governmentality in which information gaps can quickly give way to moral panics, and be recontextualised as security gaps. In Canada, for example, media discourse around minorities often characterises ordinary parental requests through a lens that problematises religious identities (Stonebanks 2019). In the UK, the *Prevent* duty in schools often lends a similarly securitised lens to teachers' interpretations (Faure Walker 2019) and media representations (Lundie 2019) of minority pupils' speech and actions. This environment of panic and risk aversion provides fertile ground for the percolating of techniques of inspection and management derived from policing and security into the education sector, in evidence around the world (Miah 2013; Nguyen 2017).

Two broad responses to extremism can be noted in the literature: those which emphasise civic education, learning about others, developing critical and intercultural competences, and challenging exclusive or supremacist narratives (Halafoff 2019); and interventionist approaches focused on desistance and deradicalization (Sjøen & Jore 2019). This chapter explores several case studies in the implementation of these approaches – from Australia, Zimbabwe, the UK and Canada.. It identifies challenges in the identification of ‘extremism’, as these can in some contexts be defined too closely with reference to politically defined and exclusionary norms. The nature of transnational and global norms is also explored – as Western countries’ concerns were drawn to forms of religious and cultural life which are problematised for their apparent incompatibility with a liberal rights-based order, so the Global South often finds itself importing patterns of surveillance from Western policing into non-rights-based regimes. The global interconnectedness of religion, extremism and education was illustrated by one police officer in my research who identified the challenge of being called to a gang-fight on a housing estate in an English city, only to find the cause of that fight to be social media communications about tribal conflict between the extended families of the gangs in Somalia.

Religion in an Age of Extremisms

Research into the ‘education-extremism nexus’ (Sjøen & Jore 2019) has grown exponentially in proportion as the role of education in preventing radicalisation has become a global focus. There are few evaluations, however, of the impact and efficacy of education on preventing violent extremism (Aly et al. 2014; Davies 2014; Gielen 2017). Most research on the impact of education on radicalisation has been “small scale and qualitative, concentrated upon small and/or local cohorts of participants over relatively short periods of time, or has focused upon getting a snapshot of attitudes, rather than attempting to measure attitudinal change” (Doney & Wegerif 2017, p.10). Research into extremism itself suffers from the problem that “predicting very rare events is extremely difficult. No tools have been developed that can reliably identify people who have been radicalised, who are at risk of radicalisation or who are likely to carry out a terrorist attack” (Royal College of Psychiatry 2016).

Radicalisation, understood as a process or processes that can lead seemingly non-radical individuals towards violent extremism and terrorism (Sedgwick 2010), can itself be understood as a form or perversion of education. It has implications for the ways children

ontologise themselves, their relation to society and their plan of life. Education has been considered a contributor to societal harmony and a bulwark against political violence since antiquity (Østby & Urdal 2010), but the contemporary securitising move in education is particularly associated with developments since 9/11 and the global war on terror (Gearon 2019). Policy definitions often imply a causal inference between radical thinking and extreme behaviours, yet this inference is debatable (Bjørngo and Horgan 2009). Imprecise conceptualisations of the radicalisation process do not improve our understanding of the issues, and can be counter-productive (Lindekilde 2012; Kundnani 2009). Debate within counter-extremism sometimes focuses on this distinction between orientation and capability, attitude and action. While radicalisation is a contested term, it is still a popular one (Borum 2011), although one that raises particular questions in relation to religion. The implication that ‘radical’ or ‘extreme’ interpretations of religion are to blame for violent actions, or that the desired alternative is more ‘moderate’ forms of religiosity, can itself contribute to prejudice (Warsi 2011). Some scholars conclude that there is no straightforward link between education and violent extremism due to cultural variation (Zeiger 2014) and different definitions of extremism (Davies 2016).

The terms ‘preventing violent extremism’ (PVE) denotes non-specific prevention that focuses on building resilience against extremist narratives and commitments across a wide audience, while ‘countering violent extremism’ (CVE) represents a more specific, targeted intervention for those at most risk of, or already engaged in, radicalisation and extremism. In a systematic literature review of educational interventions, Sjøen and Jore (2019) found a preponderance of PVE strategies, focusing on encouraging all students to develop resilience. Another review carried out by Nasser-Eddine et al. (2011), however, found that a lack of universally accepted terms and definitions, making it difficult to classify programmes clearly into the PVE/CVE binary. This often involves the construction of political value base that supports human rights, tolerance of viewpoint diversity and non-violence. Their review suggests that effective PVE approaches involve building resilience through student-centred pedagogy, socialisation into democratic values and norms, and establishing inclusive educational spaces.

In some cases, however, PVE initiatives can lead to widespread policing of mainly Muslim youth (Thomas 2016) – this was seen in the UK and Canadian case studies that follow. The support of the target audience and surrounding community is vital to success. Student-centred pedagogics cannot function in a space of suspicion, but need to enable pupils

to reflectively explore and compare viewpoints and perspectives if they are to facilitate critical awareness (Aly et al. 2014; Ghosh et al. 2017). Nonetheless, many efforts to strengthen resilience through critical thinking are based on instructivist educational assumptions with predetermined ends (Davies 2018; Mattsson & Säljö 2018; Taylor & Soni 2017). Such approaches focus on transmission of ‘right’ forms of thinking and values. While these approaches seem to be directed toward the end of preventing extremism, their educational rationales are problematic, as they attempt to instruct students in what to think, rather than helping them to make appropriately(?) informed decisions (O’Donnell 2016), thus leaving young people with little rationale or robustness for their beliefs, and thus potentially open to their being replaced by more radical ideologies. Negative implications have been found for instructivist PVE approaches in studies by Cockburn (2007), Ezekiel (2002) and van San et al. (2013).

Education about diverse religions has a long history in the UK and Europe, but these programmes have only begun to attract significant interest among UN and EU agencies as part of broader social cohesion and peacebuilding strategies since the September 11 terrorist attacks and framing of the global ‘war on terror’ (Halafoff 2015; Jackson 2014; Miah 2017). Critical education about diverse religious and non-religious worldviews can help address religious discrimination, stereotypes and inter-community tensions, and with the inclusion of young people from socially marginalised religious communities (Bouma & Halafoff 2009). Nonetheless, a perceived technocratic focus on marginalised communities defined exclusively in religious terms (Panjwani 2017) can have the effect of increasing stigma, making minority students feel unsafe and increasingly surveilled in schooling (Thomas 2016). Grossman et al (2016) recommend PVE programmes should befriend rather than condemn vulnerable young people and build on their agency and capacities, recognising the existential desire for meaning and purpose in life which extremist narratives often seek to satisfy, and recommending that programmes address these with respect and dignity.

Instructivist Cosmopolitan Religious Education for PVE in Australia

In Australia, Monash University’s Global Terrorism Research Centre has been conducting research on religion, education and extremism since the mid-2000s (Bouma & Halafoff 2009). The Monash approach focuses on building community resilience through multi-actor networks of civil society (Halafoff 2013). Global tensions played an important role in the decision in the Australian territory of Victoria to introduce teaching about diverse

religions in what had previously been a secular school system following the 2006 Education and Training Reform Act (Halafoff et al. 2019). Low levels of religious literacy had been problematised as a threat to societal cohesion in the context of changing demographics and rising intolerance (Byrne 2014). Espousing an explicit cosmopolitan disposition, welcoming cultural and religious diversity, including non-religious worldviews, valuing the rights of minorities, an ethic of care, and a concern with moving beyond tolerance to appreciation of diversity, the curriculum reforms could be identified as falling into an instructivist model.

Halafoff and colleagues identify seven principles for religious education if it is to challenge extremism (2019, p.390):

- religious and interreligious literacy are invaluable skills in an increasingly mobile and interconnected world and should be developed among all students;
- education about diverse religions, spiritualities and nonreligious worldviews should be included as part of PVE strategies in all government and faith-based schools to increase religious literacy, to reduce misinformation and negative stereotypes about religion, and to promote interreligious understanding;
- this education should be critical, and highlight religion's ambivalent role in both creating and perpetuating cultures of direct and structural violence and in peacebuilding;
- exclusive narratives and ideologies, be they religious or political, which promote one worldview over and above others, and denigrate and dehumanise people with different beliefs and orientations, are potentially dangerous and can play a role in radicalisation, and therefore possibly violent extremism. Students should be made aware of this and critical thinking should be encouraged to question such narratives;
- teachers need to be trained in not only religious and interreligious literacy but also in conflict resolution skills to navigate sensitive and difficult discussions pertaining to religion, violence and peacebuilding;
- in contexts such as faith-based schools, or religious societies, education about diverse religions and worldviews can complement existing RI programmes. The former need not always replace the latter;

- more research needs to be conducted on the benefits and limitations of educational programmes about diverse worldviews to continually critique and refine them as part of effective PVE and broader cosmopolitan peacebuilding strategies.

Religion, Education and ‘Regime Enablers’ in Postcolonial Contexts - Zimbabwe

The rise and recognition of new religious movements and pluralism in sub-Saharan Africa (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010) has led to complex challenges for postcolonial states, in many of which religious governance or ethno-religious conflict was used as a tool of colonial control (Matemba 2021). The role of religious leaders in the liberation struggles of Zimbabwe (Herstad 2009) notwithstanding, such resistance comes at great cost, while religious institutions also play a role in legitimating, sustaining and justifying an oppressive political context (Zimunya & Gwara 2013) which includes torture, corruption and extra-judicial killing.

The ‘Family and Religious Studies’ curriculum in Zimbabwe embodies this duality, at once seeking to decolonise a formerly confessional, Christocentric curriculum derived from the Western colonial/missionary origins of the country’s schools, while retaining a concern with “moral responsibility and behaviour, capacity for discipline, a sense of sound ethical norms, values and goals” (Dube 2021). Embracing religious pluralism, indigenous African religions and philosophy, the new curriculum has still been criticised for failing to provide young people with skills of critical evaluation. This approach, Dube argues (2021) leaves young people at risk from certain religious leaders who act as regime enablers through:

- Personal gain at the expense of the general public, trading in dubious economic projects and networks of favours;
- Offering false hope by normalising conditions of inequality and extreme deprivation;
- Ignoring issues of justice and equality by offering ideological support of the regime and encouraging passivity in the face of injustice in the hope of attaining reward in the afterlife.

Within such a context, the Family and Religious Studies curriculum can be seen as contributing to similar constructions of ‘extremism’ as the critique of Western practices. While it contributes to a religious and inter-religious literacy which accommodates Black-led and indigenous forms of religiosity, the absence of a critical component, highlighting the ambivalent role of religion, including indigenous religion, in perpetuating inequalities and

injustices, raises the risk that more liberation-focused expressions of religiosity will be identified as suspect by the regime.

Underpinning the critique that such a curriculum is “still functionally Christocentric” (Marashe et al. 2009) is the deeper colonial assumption that religion is essential to the moral formation of young people, and that religion(s) make an uncritically positive contribution to that moral formation, particularly when they operate through forms of preaching and authority focused on individual, rather than structural, self-betterment. Under this assumption, the inclusion of indigenous and non-Christian belief systems within the Family and Religious Studies curriculum does not in itself resolve the critique. Within a context where senior figures in the regime are frequent visitors to the churches of various ‘enabler’ pastors (Dube 2021) and where these pastors thus enjoy a symbiotic relationship with the state, the ability of a critical religious studies curriculum to both challenge extremism and to challenge the state’s construction of extremism is lacking.

Policing Extremism, Policing Religion, and Policing Schools in England

In the UK, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015 placed new statutory duties on all public bodies, including schools, to engage with the Home Office *Prevent* counter-terrorism strategy. One of four alliterative strands of the *Contest* policy, *Prevent* was concerned with engaging potential extremists at a ‘pre-criminal’ level, connecting them to desistance programmes through the *Channel* programme. This policy change came at the same time as a renewed focus on a ‘narrow, fixed, uncritical and intolerant’ (Breslin, Rowe & Thornton 2006, p.21) conception of social and moral education under the ‘nativist’ (Smith 2016) rubric of promoting ‘fundamental British values’ – values which were themselves derived from the same *Contest* policy (DfE 2012; Miah 2017). *Prevent* has been subject to extensive criticism due to perceptions that it unfairly targets the Muslim community (Kundnani 2009; Miller & Sabir 2012), as well as due to nebulous definitions of extremism (Awan & Blackmore 2013) and perceived lack of transparency (Armstrong et al. 2016; Sansbury 2017). A focus on religion has been criticised as obscuring other important factors such as poverty, with 82% of offenses related to Muslim perpetrators committed by individuals from the 30% most deprived areas in the UK (Stuart 2017). While Muslims constitute around 4.4% of the UK population, 56% of *Channel* referrals to 2014 related to Muslims (NPCC 2016). Further, while *Channel* referrals for Muslim perpetrators often focused on religion, engaging those at risk of extremism with Islamic scholars within the

community who could provide more mainstream interpretations of religious teachings, referrals for Far Right and other ideological extremism tended to focus on inter-cultural mixing, for example through sports clubs.

This new duty on the education sector to engage directly with a security agenda opened new avenues of multi-professional practice at the same time as school governance and accountability were undergoing radical reform under the Academisation programme in England. From the level of central government (DfE 2015; Home Office 2015) down to the incongruent jurisdictions of England's 119 Local Authorities, responsible for education, and 44 regional police forces, gaps in institutional structures created opportunities for the emergence of a new inter-professional workforce supporting schools in implementing the *Prevent* duty. While there were later attempts to address these information and accountability gaps through the creation of Prevent Education Officers in the 30 *Prevent* priority areas in England in 2018, these early inter-professional encounters set the tone for the way many schools and teachers were introduced to *Prevent* and their duties under it. Professionals from security and education backgrounds brought moral prototypes and institutional logics from prior experience to bear in reinterpreting the policy.

Prevent represented a significant departure from its predecessor, the *Community Cohesion* agenda in schools. This came to prominence following race riots in Oldham and Bradford (Thomas 2012; Lundie 2017), and encouraged schools to engage with local community mentors, who were often faith group representatives (Miller 2013). While such community-led approaches have been criticised for silencing voices within communities (Bhopal 2010; Shannahan 2010), and for contributing to 'religification' – the foregrounding of religious identity to the detriment of racial, economic, cultural, local and other factors, particularly among Muslim youth (Francis & McKenna 2017; Panjwani 2017), these critiques largely point to the need for more inclusive, intersectional and democratic forms of community self-representation. Culturally responsive, community-based strategies have been remarked on as prerequisites for effective counter-extremism work (McNair & Frank 2017; Tiflati 2016; Wilner & Dubouloz 2010). While some have gone as far as to suggest that *Prevent* constitutes an 'anti-cohesion' agenda through its construction of favoured and suspect minorities (Miah 2017), findings among newly emerged *Prevent* professionals suggest they view their role as a continuity with previous *Community Cohesion* work, and encourage schools and teachers to do the same.

A number of critical incidents, framed by media moral panics around the perceived failings of *Prevent*, subtly reframed these professional identities, coalescing around a post-institutional consensus, often without apparent awareness of shifts in professional moral codes. To understand how these fractured and reconstituted professional identities are influenced by critical incidents, the concept of moral prototypes interacts with institutional logics. Institutions and experienced professionals within them replicate paths taken in the past even when circumstances change (Pierson 2000), eventually forming deeply embedded organisational norms and culture (Scott 2001). This institutional path dependency becomes a part of the narrative concept of the self, providing individuals with a language in which to structure and justify their moral decisions and to narratively reinscribe their intuitions and affective reactions to eliciting situations. Institutional logics may also frame ideal processes of moral reasoning; aptly, Monin, Pizarro and Beer (2007) identify the models of the ‘philosopher’, who thinks deeply and rationally about all possibilities in a moral dilemma, and the ‘sheriff’, who must make split-second affect-laden judgments appropriately in the heat of the moment.

The importance of imitation or mimesis to moral thinking has a long history (Spinoza 1999; Kojève 1969) but has seen something of a revival in recent years thanks to the moral psychology of Jesse Prinz. For Prinz, moral thoughts have an emotional component (2006) which is influenced by situationally dependent prototype moral reasons (2009). This rescues mimetic approaches to moral thinking from a Wittgensteinian folk-psychology approach which assumes we have a communicable mental representation of the prototype guiding our moral thinking (Stickney 2008; Park 2013). In Prinz’s moral prototypes, thoughts are not propositionally structured representations, rather, different levels of thinking intrude on one another (2011). Moral prototypes can thus be regarded as more basic than the conscious definitions we give to them (Hampton 1993; Fischman et al. 2012). Over time, through selective pressures of institutional framing (Churchland 1995) individuals construct moral prototypes by abstracting salient properties of concrete exemplars within a social context (Larson 2017).

This prototype theory of moral thinking can be distinguished from moral exemplars, of the kind used in Aristotelian virtue ethics, in that it posits a series of concepts, categories or features of moral situations, drawn from examples of particular morally praiseworthy or blameworthy acts, as the basis of moral concepts, rather than the exemplars of morally praiseworthy individuals (Park 2013). For this reason, it fits closely with an understanding of

institutional factors, which can lend prominence to a particular category or narrative construction of decision making, providing insight into why individuals recognise or prioritise competing moral claims (Hart 1998). For example, by framing *Prevent* as an instance of ‘safeguarding’ policy in schools, the institutional logic primes professionals to prioritise the moral prototype of ‘keeping children safe’, extrapolating from previous examples of keeping children safe from other harms such as sexual exploitation. A different framing, in terms of fulfilling more intellectually-focused curriculum aims of evaluating truth claims, for example, might lead individuals to foreground different narrative justifications for their actions.

To understand the impact of professional self-narratives (Reimer et al. 2009) on the *Prevent* duty in schools, a qualitative case study approach employed semi-structured elite interviews with 14 key professionals, representing a range of mid-level policy enactors (Singh, Thomas & Harris 2013) engaged in the mediation of *Prevent* policy into school practice in two mid-sized cities in England. In each interview, participants were asked about their understanding of the policy and its operation, the sources of their understanding, including the networks of individuals with whom they work to develop and disseminate their understanding. Interviews took place in 2016, the year that the second revision of the Home Office Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP-II) training was implemented, and a conference was held in July 2017 making use of the Delphi technique (Lundie 2018) to enable practitioners to verify the draft conclusions of the project, aiding analytic authenticity (Lincoln & Guba 1986). Drawing on elite interview methodology (Neal & McLaughlin 2009; Ostrander 1993; Williams 2012), the study departed from a concern with policy ‘making’, towards an understanding of policy-recontextualisation (Bernstein 2004). Recent historical change is particularly amenable to elite interviews (Hochschild 2009) as elites often act as gatekeepers and mediators to policy interpretation (Lilleker 2003).

The largest group identified by the snowball sampling approach within each case study site were independent consultants or representatives of small voluntary or third sector bodies (n=7), followed by civil service and local government employees (n=4); other participants included police, university teacher educators and school inspectors. Precarity, complexity and multiple roles were a recurring theme among participants, six of whom had retired from institutional roles, in many cases not being replaced or seeing institutions such as QCDA dissolved. This led to complex post-institutional identities. For some participants, involvement with Religious Education had brought a deepening specialism in work that had

once been the domain of *Community Cohesion*, but was now deemed to fall within the remit of *Prevent*.

Participants were keen to frame *Prevent* work as a continuity with previous, *Community Cohesion* policy agendas. The dominant moral prototype of this kind of work involved ongoing strengthening of relationships between communities, enabling spaces for more authentic dialogue to take place (Lundie & Conroy 2015) and for the development of critical capacities (Jerome & Elwick 2017). This was contrasted with a focus on responding to risk. The moral prototypes of these two approaches could be summarised as a ‘cup of tea’ approach, and a ‘knock on the door’ approach, based on two passages from different interviewees:

Without tea-and-cake foundation-building, you’re not going to get that engagement. You’ve got to be able to build trust and build relationships... If [my colleague] goes out and pops into the mosque and has a cup of tea for half an hour, an hour once a week... she might not have been talking about *Prevent* but... when something happens and you can pick up the phone and talk to those people [Local Authority employee, Riverton].

In the ‘cup of tea’ moral prototype, professionals narrate their moral identities as relationship builders, focused on a wider understanding of shared problems, working alongside communities.

When I go home from here today, my fifteen-year-old will be online. I don’t know exactly what he’s doing, but I’m pretty sure that he’s not planning on going to Syria to fight a holy war. Can you be as certain as I am of that fact when you go home from here? No. So I think there is a thing about being transparent, and lets you, y’know, do some tough love stuff because one of the other things that the Prevent teams quite often get to do is go and knock on people’s doors and tell them, ‘You know your son who you haven’t seen for a few months?’ You know, and we’ll go and get the toothbrush for the DNA and those kind of things [Police officer, National].

The ‘knock on the door’ moral prototype begins from a position of elite knowledge, with professionals positioning themselves as experts. The covert nature of much *Prevent* policing work is remarked upon as one of the challenges in communicating the programme’s successes, in contrast to its high profile failings. The ‘knock on the door’ moral prototype highlights the hardened security end of the *Prevent* programme.

These moral prototypes had a significant impact on the kind of training these professionals offered. In all cases, professionals supplemented the WRAP-II training with examples from their own practice. Given how unlikely it was for individual teachers to encounter violent extremism, these practical examples had an important effect in providing a vicarious moral prototype of *Prevent* work. In Beachtown, the cases of Nicky Reilly and Andrew Ibrahim, both white converts to Islam with complex mental health needs who carried out, or attempted, acts of terrorism were frequently cited. A cycle of media reporting of terrorist and extremist incidents was reinscribed and reinterpreted by these professionals, contributing to a ‘mythic feedback loop’ (Haw 2009) which functions as a connective structure between professionals’ moral narratives of the wider world of *Prevent* work and their prototypes for professional moral action (Schostak & Schostak 2009).

Those professionals who advocated a harder, ‘knock on the door’ understanding of *Prevent* work in education tended to emphasise thresholds for reporting, with an emphasis on ‘knowing the signs’, the nature of *Prevent* and *Channel* as a ‘pre-criminal’ space. This narrower, securitised framing of counter-extremism education. Many of these threshold-focused approaches were subject to criticism by educators because of the possibility that they criminalise the liminal transformations which are normal in adolescence (Merten 2005) such as changes in dress, friendship groups, degree of religiosity. Those in the policing and security sector often wished to locate *Prevent* as a safeguarding concern, with a focus on identifying and referring the small number of young people who may become drawn into violent extremism.

Intervening in extremism was framed as a safeguarding issue, extending beyond the promotion of student learning, development and socialisation, by also focusing on mitigating the risk factors of antisocial behaviour or environmental factors. This focus on those who are ‘at risk’ (Quartermaine 2014) rests on an understanding of ‘vulnerability’, in contrast to resilience, which risks pathologizing communities (Durodié 2016). Throughout the interviews, instances of the ‘non-naming’ of the Muslim community could be observed:

I think what did concern me was the negative impact that [*Prevent*] was having on certain communities, which felt that they were peculiarly surveilled... (Independent consultant, Beachtown).

The role of Far Right referrals was a common counterfoil to the accusation of excessive focus on Muslim communities.

If you look nationally... in urban areas anyway, round about 17-20% of *Channel* referrals are to do with the Far Right (Independent consultant, Beachtown).

25% of the people nationally on *Channel* programmes are from the extreme Far Right (Police lead, National).

By emphasising the number of Far Right referrals (in numbers which ranged, depending on participants, from the 17-20% quoted above to “about two thirds”), participants sought to highlight that the *Prevent* duty was not exclusively representing Muslim young people as vulnerable to extremism.

In contrast, professionals whose previous experience had been conditioned by *Community Cohesion* work in education tended to emphasise a broader pastoral and curricular focus for *Prevent* in schools. While the relationship between *Prevent* and the curriculum was stressed by all the participants in the Delphi conference, the locus of *Prevent* work remained contested. Many participants from an educational background, were keen to stress curricular justifications for successful *Prevent* work, developing critical dispositions, inquiry skills, opportunities for intercultural encounter, and heightened social, emotional, political and digital literacy which effective *Prevent* work in the curriculum could deliver for all students, not merely for the few who were most at immediate risk.

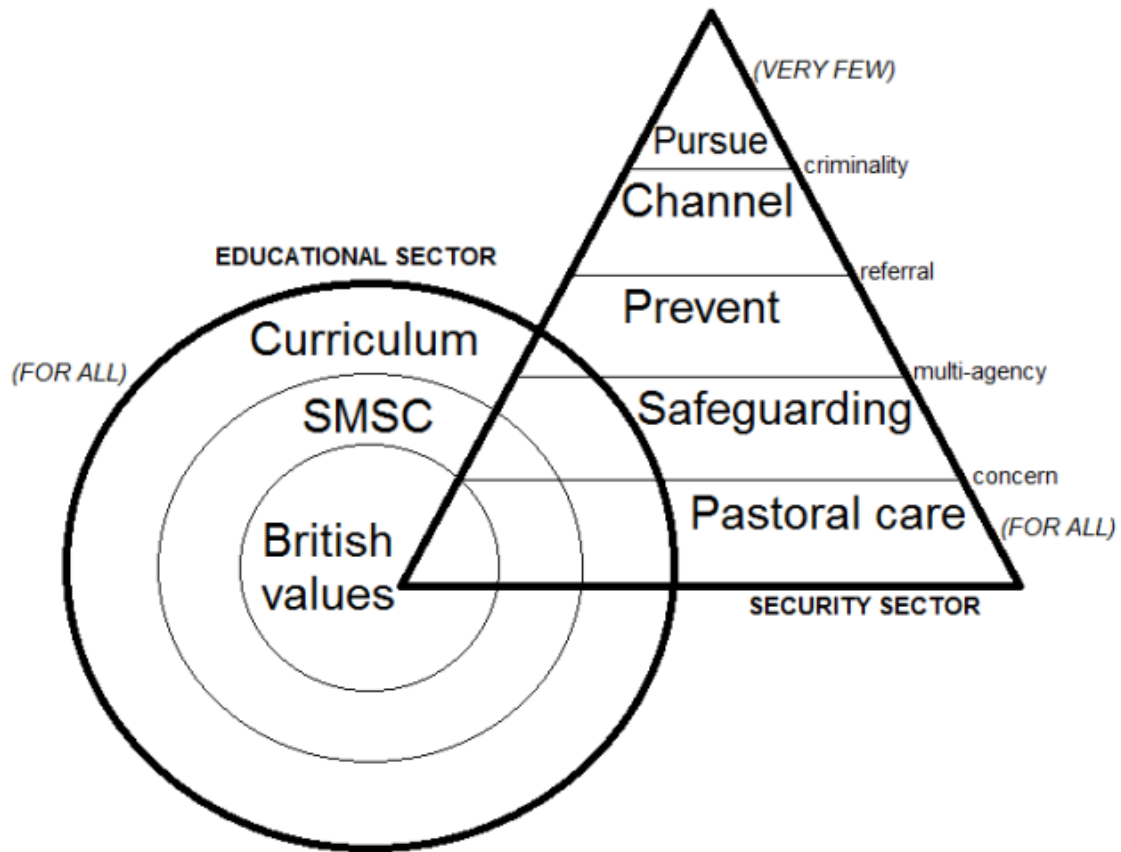


Figure 1. Curricular and security models of Prevent work in schools.

By treating *Prevent* as a curriculum issue in civic and/or religious education, rather than as a ‘threshold’ issue only for those students causing concern, professionals hoped to enable teachers to provide all young people with a valuable set of skills and dispositions. The ‘knock at the door’ model, however, potentially operated as a barrier to such developments, by having a chilling effect on what pupils were willing to say in the classroom.

Each of these moral prototypes of *Prevent* work problematised different aspects of the policy. While many of the educators operating according to the ‘cups of tea’ model contiguous with *Community Cohesion* found the concept of ‘pre-criminal’ space problematic, and the concept of ‘pre-crime’ has been critiqued in the educational literature (Bryan, Revell & Elton-Chalcraft 2022), the problem of consent was highlighted as a problem by some of the police professionals making use of the ‘knock at the door’ model. Essential to UK policing, the principle of policing by consent presumes that the public consent to the measures and legislation police are asked to enforce. In introducing challenging topics in the classroom, police professionals were aware that teachers had a power to elicit beliefs and

statements from pupils in compulsory schooling in a way that professionals in other public sector roles do not, and this creates an ethical challenge for the dual role of educating against extremism and reporting potential at-risk pupils to the *Channel* programme. If teachers are to provide a space in which extremist narratives can be challenged, and pupils brought into an appreciative encounter with counter-narratives, it is then problematic for pupils to risk the sanction of the security state for engaging authentically with this pedagogy.

The Role of Religion in Schools - Canada

The interaction between religion and citizenship is an important aspect of PVE. While a civic or citizenship approach has been evident in Northern Ireland (McCully 2006), Sweden (Mattsson & Säljö 2018), Canada (Mitchell 2016) and Russia (Davydov 2015), among others, UK policy has tended to focus on religious education as a site for countering extremism. Central to these differences are particular focuses on models of secularism in different nations. Due to particular historical features of the legal and cultural landscape that surrounds schooling, opportunities to encounter difference, learn respectful dialogue, explore moral issues and questions of identity are sometimes addressed through civics, as in the USA (Hess & McAvoy 2014), and sometimes through religious education, as in the UK. The relationship between the religious and the civic in education is dependent on a range of constitutional and cultural constraints. In the deeply secularist Chinese context, for example, learning about religions in schools(?) often has an openly critical component (Ye & Law 2017), for example presenting them as superstitious, pre-modern and anti-scientific (Zhao 2018), whereas the two are framed together as ‘moral and civic education’ in the Hong Kong context (Cheung et al. 2018). In Greek Cyprus, confessional Greek Orthodox religious education plays a key role in political identity formation (Zembylas & Loukaidis 2018), whereas in Lutheran Norway, confessional religious education has undergone a transition toward accommodating plurality in the civic as well as the religious realm (Skeie 2006). The intersection between the civic and the religious in schooling can produce unorthodox responses and expressions of both religious and secular values among young people (Iversen 2019) and approaches to PVE in schools require a response which takes seriously these divergent perspectives, providing young people with the intellectual resources to challenge extremist narratives.

One factor in the relationship between the religious and the civic within schools is the wider public discourse around religion in the context of the state. Calls for scrutiny, surveillance and control of people in the Canadian province of Quebec, for example, have

followed a ‘white worrier’ strategy (Bilge 2013) in which the *laïque* status quo is maintained through seeming common-sense questioning of the reasonableness of ‘reasonable accommodations’ in the public space. The framing of Quebec’s Bill-62, banning face coverings such as the niqab, draws on such a strategy, explicitly framed in terms of “ensur[ing] quality communication between persons and allow[ing] their identity to be verified” (Stonebanks 2019, p.305), and of religious neutrality after the francophone tradition (Taylor 2014). In the UK too, Crawford (2017, p.197) argues, *Prevent* has served to “decivilize Muslim lifestyles and identities; construct ‘white British’ norms and mores as culturally superior; portray young Muslims as pre-disposed to extremist views and violent behaviours; and force... teachers to take up roles as instruments of surveillance and defenders of the white hegemonic order”. By framing the demands of communities in religious terms, the state can delegitimise the ability of minority communities to argue publicly for recognition of central aspects of their identity. This can further lead to a silencing of views, or an unwillingness among pupils to discuss and debate concerns with adults, as they begin to be perceived as agents of a hostile agenda (Faure Walker 2019).

The role and definition of ‘extremism’ as a tool of control of minority communities is illustrated by a number of high profile cases. In 2004 in the UK, the High Court, Court of Appeal and House of Lords heard the case of Shabina Begum, who attended Denbigh High School in Luton. With a majority of its pupils drawn from the local Muslim community, the school had consulted widely with local mosques and community governors in the design and approval of a uniform for girls which was acceptable to religious standards of modesty observed within the community (Idriss 2005). Two years in to her time at the school, Begum insisted on wearing a jilbab – a full length baggy cloak covering the whole body except for the hands and face – which the school refused to compromise, on the basis that it had already consulted with the parents and religious leaders of the local Muslim community. The Court of Appeal, finding in Begum’s favour, held that the manner in which the decision was taken “had approached the issue from an entirely wrong direction” (Thio 2007, p.123), because it had assumed the right to religious expression belonged in some collective sense to ‘the Muslim community’ as expressed through this consultation, thus failing to attribute to Begum’s beliefs the weight they deserved. In response, the school later claimed that it had concerns about having visibly manifest tiers of religiosity among its Muslim pupils, about coercion, and about Begum’s brother having possible links to an extremist organisation (Lundie 2022). Here the role of extremism functions as a form of containment, setting the

boundaries for religious expression within the consensus of a community. Similar expectations that pupils will accept the mainstream consensus of their parental community do not apply in other areas of civic life in the West, where the right to an open future (Feinberg 2015), if not outright teenage rebellion, is an accepted part of the child's educational journey.

The very fact of the high profile reporting of the Begum v. Denbigh case should also be highlighted. In the case of religious extremism, the media, as well as policy-makers, play an important role in the construction of religious extremist identities. This often happens through the high profile reporting of over-zealous applications of counter-extremism policies, such as the case of Ahmed Mohamed, a teenager arrested at his Texas public school in 2015 when he brought a home-made clock as a science project that teachers thought looked like a bomb (Blad 2015). In an analysis of the recurring references made to media coverage of a case in Lancashire, UK, where a 10-year-old pupil was allegedly referred to police after writing that he lived in a 'terrorist house' instead of 'terraced house', I found that this case functioned as a litmus test, enabling professionals to position their own PVE work in relation to what aspect of this case they found most problematic (Lundie 2019). For some, it was an example of over-zealous and possibly Islamophobic teachers, for others of distorted and exaggerated media reporting and the influence of problematic pressure groups. What connects both analyses of this case is a recognition that more teachers are likely to encounter extremism through media reporting of cases, whether false-positives such as the 'terrorist house' or clock bomb, or the few rare cases where a young person had carried out, or been arrested for planning, a terrorist act. A relationship exists between the media reporting of such events, rises in the reporting of Islamophobic acts, and rises in reporting of Islamist extremism, a feedback loop which can further distort and exaggerate perceptions of religious extremism.

Given how thankfully rare acts of violent extremism are in most societies, the reality of CVE in the classroom is very often mediated through these high profile media events, and the fear of sudden, unexpected media scrutiny, and satisfaction of duties to the school inspectorate, featured more highly in many professionals' motivations for engaging with the *Prevent* duty, at times out of proportion to the real risk of students becoming radicalised (Lundie 2019). Given its importance, religious literacy has a key role to play in challenging or improving such media reporting. Internationally, however, as the Zimbabwean case illustrates, religious literacy also requires a critical attentiveness to the lived realities, and how these may differ from state-curricular constructions, of religious life and teachings.

Conclusion

The separation of ‘religious’ forms of reasoning from public debate, which is often taken to characterise the secular state (Taylor 2014) poses particular problems for educating about, and against, extremism. On the one hand, this separation can lead to a presumption that it is impossible to challenge extremist narratives through rational enquiry, when all the evidence suggests that the opposite is the case. Incidents where out-of-the-norm behaviours are characterised as ‘extremist’, either because, as in the case of Quebec’s niqab ban, they go against white secular norms, or because, as in the case of R (Begum) v. Denbigh High School, they go against religious ‘community’ norms, can serve to further alienate young people. Representations of religious communities as particularly at risk from violent extremism, combined with a securitised lens for enquiry and referral, can be polarising and counter-productive, and media narratives can further exacerbate the problem. In contrast, approaches that consider religious literacy, intercultural encounter, the critical capacity to challenge counter-narratives (particularly online) and culturally-sensitive, student-centred pedagogy as an essential aim for education for all pupils, not merely the few who may be at risk of radicalisation, offer a promising future for learning about religious and non-religious beliefs in an age of extremisms.

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