Just get on with it: Implementing the Prevent duty in higher education and the role of academic expertise

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Abstract
The Prevent policy was introduced in 2003 as part of the UK counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) with the aim of preventing the radicalisation of people to terrorism. In 2015, it was given a statutory footing in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act and it became a legal duty for Higher Education Institutions among others. Since then, Higher Education Institutions have been working to ensure their compliance with the legal duty. This article reflects on the implementation of the Prevent duty in one university. It is informed by an engagement with the Prevent group in the university which was created to implement the Prevent duty. The article argues that academic expertise had little impact in shaping the implementation of the Prevent duty at the university because the epistemic stance of counter-terrorism side lines expertise and evidence so that it can maintain its coherence and integrity. Specifically, the impact of academic expertise was limited because critically oriented academic expertise complicates a straightforward implementation of the legal duty, a state-centric orientation in the Prevent group constrained the horizon of discussion, and a crisis of knowledge at the heart of counter-terrorism replaces expertise and evidence with ideology.

Keywords
counter-terrorism, extremism, higher education, Islam, Muslims, Prevent duty, radicalisation

Introduction

This article is a reflection on the role of academic expertise in counter-terrorism, with a specific focus on the implementation of the Prevent duty at one university. Specifically, the article reflects on the limited role of academic expertise in the university Prevent group and argues that it was the product of a counter-terrorism stance which side lines evidence, knowledge and expertise.

The article starts by outlining some of the debates around academic engagement with the state for the purposes of counter-terrorism. On one hand, there are those who view engagement as an exercise in futility (Bazian, 2016; Jackson, 2016), while on the other hand, there are those who see some potential to advance a progressive agenda by taking advantage of small fissures (Toros,

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2016). These debates have acquired a new vitality since the introduction of the Prevent duty, so the next sections set out this context by outlining the Prevent duty responsibilities of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and how the university formulated its approach to the Prevent duty. The article then moves on to analyse the relationship between counter-terrorism and evidence and argues that an insistence on evidence and expertise to guide policymaking undermines the counter-terrorism framework because it points out the fantasy upon which much of the counter-terrorism framework is built (Zulaika, 2012). This tension is resolved by ignoring evidence and expertise in formulating counter-terrorism policies, and I outline three areas in which this happened: the external speaker policy, situating the Prevent duty in the safeguarding paradigm, and training staff to recognise a process of radicalisation. Reflecting on the minimal impact of academic expertise in the implementation of the Prevent duty at the university, I argue it was the product of three factors: first, the impact of a critical academic voice in an environment of pragmatism which complicated a straightforward implementation of the Prevent strategy; second, a state-centric orientation (of the Prevent group) invested in the politics of counter-terrorism that constrained the horizon of discussion; and finally, a crisis of knowledge at the heart of counter-terrorism in which expertise and evidence are replaced with ideology.

The article is informed by my engagement, as an academic expert, with the Prevent group at the university which was created to implement the Prevent duty. Since the key concern of the article is to reflect on, and make sense of, the impact of academic expertise in the implementation of the Prevent duty at the university, the reflective approach is ideal for a number of reasons. First, it lends itself to the task of analysing and making sense of experiences and the broader social, cultural and political forces that produce relations of power which are influential in shaping the impact of academic expertise. Second, it allows for a consideration of different perspectives which provides an opportunity to understand the institutional approach to the implementation of the Prevent duty. Third, it allows for the exploration of the meaning of the experience for future practice and asks, 'Would you do it again?' If so, would you change anything? Finally, given that the article is informed by conversations, some of which are ongoing (with colleagues in meetings of the Prevent group, in meetings of the smaller training group that was charged with producing content for the Prevent awareness training workshop and with colleagues across the university), the reflective approach is ideal for making sense of the different components of the key reflection that came out of my engagement with the Prevent group because at the heart of the perspective is the notion of reflective practice as an ongoing process.

The sensitivity of the article demanded a full consideration be given to some ethical issues arising out of the decision to publish on the work of the Prevent group. To that end, before writing the article, there were a number of meetings with the Chair of the Prevent group (from the Solicitor's Office) and a faculty ethics officer. Although in the first instance these meetings were concerned with seeking the consent and permission to write the article, the later meetings revolved around the framing of the article given that the decision to write the article was made after the Prevent group had concluded much of its work. Ethical concerns about the anonymity and confidentiality of the other members of the Prevent group were managed by discussions of the content of the article and its primary concern of reflecting on the role of academic expertise in informing the implementation of the Prevent duty, as opposed to the specific conduct and contributions of members.

Academic engagement with counter-terrorism

As counter-terrorism increasingly encroaches onto the education sector, both the impact of counter-terrorism objectives in reframing the purpose of education (see Gearon, 2013; O'Donnell, 2016) and the relationship between academics and counter-terrorism have become the subject of

debate. A recent exchange between Jackson (2016) and Toros (2016) exemplifies the latter, and the article is situated within this context: namely, can academics engage with state counter-terrorism in productive ways? Jackson (2016) argues that the trajectory of the war on terror shows that counter-terrorism has become more nebulous as the remit of counter-terrorism processes and practices has expanded to incorporate more parts of society and its reach has extended across the globe. Policymakers do not seem interested in evidence-based counter-terrorism, nor in understanding how to respond more effectively and ethically to terrorism, despite longstanding and widespread criticisms, and alternative suggestions by academic experts. Because of this, Jackson (2016) suggests that trying to balance a commitment to human security and an engagement with policymakers to achieve impact is virtually impossible and infused with assumptions about the benign rational nature of policymaking, when counter-terrorism is 'inherently violent, oppressive, and life-diminishing … deeply anti-emancipatory, anti-human, and regressive' (p. 121). In a similar vein, Bazian (2016) and Giroux (2014) are critical of the relationship between academics (that chase influence and impact and become 'gated intellectuals') and the state (when it seeks a veneer of intellectualism for its agenda) and argue that academic engagement is used by the state in defence of the status quo. Asymmetric power relations mean that engagement is initiated by the state to meet its needs so that academics are used as problem solvers for militarism, racism, and capitalism. Put simply, engagement is futile.

On the other hand, Toros (2016) argues that in her experience of engaging with counter-terrorism practitioners, there are times when tiny fissures emerge which academics can take advantage of for the purposes of furthering a more progressive agenda. In other ways, Gillborn (2008) makes a case for engagement in the context of anti-racist struggles in education. Characterising racism in education as a 'hub and spoke' conspiracy, in which no individual can be held wholly responsible but every individual is important and implicated in the power of the system of racism, he argues it is vital to be involved in anti-racist struggles, if only to disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions saturating the environment and try to prevent new policies from becoming another spoke in the conspiracy. In the context of racism, every policy is important in reproducing and reinforcing racism, and so every policy must be examined. As such, Gillborn (2008) argues it is vital for anti-racists to be involved in conversations about policy in education because 'unless you are actively resisting, the chances are you're just another spoke who routinely reinforces the situation – whether you realize it or not' (p. 195).

Although Gillborn (2008) writes generally about engaging in anti-racist struggles rather than specifically engaging with practitioners and policymakers, what is important here is to note the stance and orientation one takes in any engagement. An anti-racist, emancipatory position in engagements with policymakers and practitioners can potentially introduce new elements onto the table and shift the centre of gravity away from a sole focus on the government agenda. Adopting those positions is difficult when primarily seeking impact and relevance above an ethical commitment to human rights and human security because it can also result in the level of impact dwindling over time. Toros (2016) struggled with such a problem: how to balance continued access and being heard with remaining faithful to research findings that may sometimes highlight the problems of state policy and practice. She found herself modifying language, stumbling and self-censoring to fight off the fear of rejection and come across as a reasonable person.

The Prevent duty in higher education

These questions have acquired a new vigour in Britain, with the introduction of the Prevent duty across a number of institutions, as a wider range of individuals are now engaging with counter-terrorism in the course of their daily work life. In 2015, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act

(CTSA 2015) placed the Prevent strand of the overall UK counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) on a legal footing. This now means that in carrying out their functions, specified authorities, such as HEIs, need to have 'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (HM Government, 2015: 2). In practice, it means that specified authorities are required to create and implement policies and procedures that demonstrate compliance with the Prevent duty. Such procedures and policies include providing Prevent awareness training 'that could help the relevant staff prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and challenge extremist ideas which risk drawing people into terrorism' … [provide] 'an understanding of the factors that make people support terrorist ideologies or engage in terrorist-related activity', and that as a result of this training, 'be able to recognise vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism, and be aware of what action to take in response' (HM Government, 2015: 7); internal and external information sharing procedures; management of prayer rooms and faith-related facilities; management of information technology (IT) facilities (e.g. installing web filters); oversight of security-sensitive research (by, for example, amending ethics review procedures to identify security-sensitive research and dedicating a secure server for researchers to store security-sensitive research); management of (external) speakers and events as a means to 'challenge extremist ideas which risk drawing people into terrorism' (HM Government, 2015: 18) (e.g. by working in advance to identify speakers and subjects that are considered 'controversial'); creating a Prevent risk assessment; and cultivating working relations with external organisations such as the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the police and local authorities, Prevent co-ordinators and community groups.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is the designated monitoring authority and the CTSA 2015 requires all relevant higher education (HE) bodies to submit information to HEFCE (e.g., outlining the policies and procedures that have been created) so that it can monitor compliance with the Prevent duty. HEFCE's role is to assess the information and make judgements about the appropriateness of the policies and procedures to deliver the Prevent duty and decide whether they are fit for purpose. One of the factors taken into consideration includes whether the policies and procedures take account of the topics in the Prevent duty guidance (see HEFCE, 2016).

Although the Prevent duty has prompted a number of concerns in HE, the issue of securitising HE against the threat of extremism has been raised on several occasions over the past decade. In 2006, the then Minister for Higher Education, Bill Rammell, issued guidelines to universities to tackle 'extremism in the name of Islam' (Great Britain Department for Education and Skills, 2006). He was accused of encouraging lecturers to spy on 'Asian-looking' and Muslim students (Dodd, 2006), but claimed that university campuses were being used by Islamic extremists as recruiting grounds. A similar theme was echoed in the 2011 Coalition Government–led Prevent review which stated,

> More than 30% of people convicted for Al Qa'ida-associated terrorist offences in the UK between 1999 and 2009 are known to have attended university or a higher education institution. Another 15% studied or achieved a vocational or further education qualification. About 10% of the sample were students at the time when they were charged or the incident for which they were convicted took place. (HM Government, 2011: 75)[1]

Since then, Prime Ministers David Cameron and subsequently Theresa May have made repeated claims about extremism and radicalisation taking place on campus (see Gov.uk, 2014, 2015). Therefore, there was an air of inevitability to the introduction of the Prevent duty into HE in 2015, not least because since the 2011 Prevent review, universities have already been following government advice on identifying signs of radicalisation among students, are already working in

partnership with security agencies to tackle campus radicalisation and train staff in spotting signs of radicalisation, and have already been liaising with Prevent officers to shape external speaker policies (Saeed and Johnson, 2016).

The university approach to the Prevent duty

In the context of the incoming Prevent duty in HE, which was to be situated in the area of safeguarding, the university was approached by the police at one of its campuses at the start of the 2014–2015 academic year with an offer to deliver staff training that would address a perceived deficit in the existing student safeguarding arrangements. The police training would focus in particular on the vulnerability to radicalisation in the context of an increasingly diverse student population and enhance staff understanding about behaviours and factors that should trigger concerns. The university response was to form a safeguarding group with university-wide representation (invited from the Solicitor's Office, the Chapel, the student support department, the equality and diversity office, the student union, IT directorate and human resources, among others) to make recommendations about safeguarding, radicalisation and the Prevent strategy. A key concern of the safeguarding group was that without consideration the delivery of such training might unintentionally lead to prejudice and stereotyping. I was invited to share my academic expertise with the group about radicalisation and the Prevent strategy and inform the discussions about the potential problems that might arise. In 2015, as the CTSA was being prepared, this safeguarding group was replaced by a university-wide Prevent group responsible for ensuring compliance with the incoming Prevent duty.

With academic insight into the impact and effectiveness of the Prevent strategy, my main concern was to minimise harm as much as that was possible (rather than wanting to be seen in any favourable light, for example). Indeed, those were the terms on which I was initially invited to contribute. I entered the group fully cognisant of the legal and institutional contexts and understood the best that I could do in the situation was to tame some of the excesses of the strategy. I did not engage in impression management and try to cultivate a reasonable persona because, in contrast to some of the situations Toros (2016) may have found herself, the prescriptive nature of the Prevent duty meant there was already a relatively detailed template of counter-terrorism provided by the government which institutions were legally mandated to implement. It was important to remain true to my research findings as the only ethical form of engagement. A 'pedagogy of politeness' only has limited efficacy before it falls into complicity in a situation that requires attentiveness and the courage to dissent against a stifling status quo (Leonardo, 2009).

Initially, as the CTSA was being prepared and early draft guidance was provided to relevant specified authorities, the university position on the Prevent duty was relatively critical. The vice chancellor was a co-signatory to a letter published in *The Times* ('Academic Freedom', 28 January 2015: 31) which called for universities to be exempt from the Prevent duty so that they could ensure academic freedom. This mirrored the university position, as it was concerned that much of the early draft guidance was unworkable, lacked understanding, was vague and unnecessary (as stated earlier, the university was already implementing the Prevent strategy and carrying out risk assessments following the 2011 Prevent review). But once the Prevent duty was introduced, the position shifted towards compliance. For example, in the early discussions in the Prevent group, there were questions about whether it was appropriate to view radicalisation as a safeguarding issue, but after the Prevent duty was introduced this became the prevailing view. The shift occurred because the university was legally bound to implement the Prevent duty, its compliance was being monitored by HEFCE, and ultimately failure to comply could have led to the vice chancellor being held in contempt of court. Given its earlier reservations about the Prevent duty, the university did

caveat its implementation with a commitment to its equality and diversity policy[2] and its mission and values.[3]

Taking this as the starting point, the Prevent group adopted the following overarching framework to some of the key components of the Prevent duty:

Safeguarding

The Prevent group came to view the safeguarding approach as a positive means to facilitate discussions about concerns about individuals. Staff were advised to report concerns internally so that they could be assessed by trained staff, and any student vulnerabilities around radicalisation would be addressed as safeguarding issues, as part of the university care and concern procedures. Only after an internal assessment would an external referral to the Channel programme be made, if it was required.

Staff prevent awareness training

The Prevent group recognised that there might be a need to tailor any training to account for the values of the university. The group did identify some training packages (commercial and government) but decided against using them, instead opting to make use of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE)[4] material with some customisation.

Management of faith spaces

Management of faith spaces and prayer facilities is also a requirement of the Prevent duty. These were to be overseen by the Senior Chaplain who regularly visits all prayer facilities to ensure they are used appropriately and to check any religious material. For any material written in a foreign language, the Senior Chaplain would seek advice from another faith adviser.

The work of the Prevent group was communicated to the wider university community through a web notice, which repeated some of the earlier statements to do with implementation of the Prevent duty within the spirit and ethos of the university values, its commitment to freedom of speech and equality and diversity. This web notice was supplemented with three Prevent forums aimed at staff across the different university campuses. The aim of these forums was to make staff aware of the Prevent duty, the university approach and listen to any feedback. At one of the forums, the response from staff was mixed and there were a range of comments and questions to do with making a distinction between ideas and actions, the importance of protecting academic freedom for staff and students, being conscious of the possibility for bias and prejudice, identifying the correct channels for referrals, whether the Prevent duty also included far right terrorism, and the need to focus more on Muslim terrorism as it was perceived to be the major threat.

'It's about our response': academic expertise and 'worst-case thinking'

An ethical form of engagement with counter-terrorism meant challenging assumptions about (counter)terrorism, radicalisation and extremism. Doing this automatically undermines many of the foundations upon which much of the counter-terrorism strategy is built because it points out the fantasy that characterises much of what is considered 'real' in counter-terrorism. Some of this fantastical thinking included nebulous notions of an ever-present security threat that was never specified, but that could attack for any reason from any direction, which required policies that closed

down opportunities for it to emerge (Zulaika, 2012). Such an approach to counter-terrorism, characterised as 'worst-case thinking', gained traction after the 9/11 attacks and has played a role in numerous policy decisions in the 'war on terror', from shoot-to-kill policies for police forces, to the introduction of control orders for individuals suspected of engagement in terrorism, to the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Suskind, 2006; Price, 2011). What could possibly happen (deployment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by Saddam Hussein in Iraq) was now just as important as what the evidence and intelligence showed was likely to be the case (Iraq had no WMD). This philosophy moved counter-terrorism into the domain of pre-crime and pre-emption and the focus shifted to predicting and preventing major sensationalist style attacks. The Prevent strategy, which aims to prevent people being drawn into terrorism, embodies this pre-emptive approach to counter-terrorism. It focuses on indicators and risk factors in an attempt to govern the unknowable future and deal with potential threats by acting in the present (Pantucci, 2010; Martin, 2014).

Of particular concern here is the implication of this approach for the place of expertise and evidence. Conventionally, to gauge the disparity between an unknowable future and a need to know and predict the future (e.g. for a variety of reasons such as policing, counter-terrorism and insurance), existing knowledge is utilised to create probabilities and risk assessments of an event. With this approach, existing knowledge occupies a central location in predicting the future. However, the shift to pre-crime and pre-emption has decentred the role of knowledge, evidence and analysis in identifying future threats and replaced it with 'possibilities', as the basis for decision-making and action. Speaking about how the United States should respond to the chances of Al-Qaeda acquiring a nuclear weapon from Pakistani scientists, Vice President Dick Cheney urged action over analysis: 'It's not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence … It's about our response' (Suskind, 2006: 62). Suskind claims that the belligerence of this stance towards expertise and evidence meant that leading government analysts and experts saw little purpose in submitting reports up the chain of command because the approach to the war on terror was impervious to expert analysis.

Academic engagement with the Prevent group

It was thus no surprise that insisting on an evidence-based approach to the Prevent duty and trying to ground it in a reality created stumbling blocks for its implementation precisely because of its rootedness in fantasy and potential. The Prevent group had to adopt specific positions to create and implement policies and procedures outlined in the Prevent duty guidance document, as well as being compliant with the requirements of the Prevent awareness training (specifically to enable staff to identify vulnerabilities and challenge extremist ideas that draw people into terrorism). To be able to do this and be compliant in these areas required that academic expertise, knowledge and analysis be side-lined in a number of areas.

External speaker policy

It meant that external speaker policies in HE used the barometer of 'controversial' to control events to prevent the promotion of extremist ideas that could 'brainwash' students for the purposes of terrorism. Yet we know from a number of different disciplines (such as psychology, criminology, international relations and the sociology of religion) that prevailing notions of brainwashing in counter-terrorism policy which view individuals as open containers for all manner of propaganda, and therefore vulnerable, underemphasise human nature and human agency. Often individuals warm towards and reject groups and ideas based on how well they correspond to existing understandings of the world, of how things work and their efficacy in explaining lived experiences. Such

groups and ideas need to continue to be relevant over a prolonged period of time which suggests a level of engagement with ideas rather than passive consumption (Cohen, 1955; Barker, 1984; Beckford, 2003; Blackwood et al., 2016; Durodie, 2016).

Safeguarding and vulnerability

A preoccupation with brainwashing and vulnerability as a driver of terrorism is part of a broader framing of the Prevent duty as a safeguarding issue. The Prevent duty guidance points to a free training package for HEIs provided by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills that covers safeguarding in relation to terrorism, and it also emphasises the importance of the safeguarding approach in the national health service.

The Prevent group opted to situate the Prevent duty within its safeguarding and cause for concern policies as a positive means to enable discussions about concerns about individuals. Yet the safeguarding approach to radicalisation and terrorism ignores the deeply political dimension of these social issues and so serves a depoliticising function. A safeguarding approach characterises radicalisation as being no different from child abuse or domestic violence, and it lends itself to a medicalised language of intervention, isolation, virus and decontamination. It promotes a view of radicalisation and terrorism as the product of professional, charming, extremist recruiters lurking among individuals and (in particular Muslim) communities, invading and contaminating the minds of innocent vulnerable children and young adults with a contagious virus, such as a religious ideology (hence the requirement to have policies and procedures in place for the management of faith spaces and prayer facilities). The solution is to quarantine individuals from the virus or apply an anti-dote in the form of de-radicalisation to those that have been infected and taken over by the virus. In this view, being peer pressured into terrorism is little different from the peer pressure associated with underage drinking and smoking.

Framing radicalisation and terrorism in these terms ignores the potential for human agency and rational decision-making; the resort to violence as resistance, the result of, or revenge for western state violence; and the role of the state in radicalisation. O'Donnell (2016) explains,

> It also serves as a de-legitimating and depoliticising strategy that removes considerations of questions of injustice, politics and violence from the public domain, replacing the language of 'wrongs' with that of 'grievances', and centring analysis on the individual and their 'subjective interpretations', rather than wider, contextual root causes and preconditions for violence, terrorism and war. (p. 62)

To frame radicalisation and terrorism in these terms required the Prevent group to ignore significant research findings from a number of disciplines that point to the psychological normality of terrorists (Silke, 1998), the centrality of specific *political* grievances over religious ideology (Crenshaw, 1981; Esposito, 1999; Munson, 2003; Pape, 2005; Ross, 2009; Pape and Feldman, 2010; Davies, 2016; Ghatak and Prins, 2016) and the importance of a prior acquaintance with violent milieus as a precondition for perpetrating a terrorist attack above and beyond extremist beliefs (Crone, 2016). It meant there was limited discussion about the central role of politics and grievances in terrorism, about why anyone would choose to join terrorist groups, what it is about society that makes terrorist groups an attractive proposition and what makes a terrorist group and its message relevant for people.

The limited discussion mirrors the limited emphasis placed on political grievances as a factor of terrorism in the Prevent strategy, which often relegates grievances to the level of 'purported', 'perceived' and 'imagined'. Downgrading grievances in this way is an attempt to free the state from any responsibility of its actions and instead presents the state as a victim of unjustified criticism

promoted by extremist recruiters. By dismissing political grievances as illegitimate and associating them with the work of extremist recruiters and their rhetoric, dominant radicalisation narratives characterise grievances as symptoms of a dysfunctional, conspiratorial and paranoid style of thinking, particularly in Muslim communities which extremist recruiters take advantage of for their agenda. This framing is the basis on which the state ignores Muslim grievances – because they are not real but imaginary (Aistrope, 2016).

The process of radicalisation

In order to meet the staff training requirements, the Prevent awareness training workshops had to raise awareness about the process of radicalisation so that staff would have an understanding of the signs that would indicate a person was vulnerable to terrorism and required some kind of support and safeguarding. Being vigilant for signs of radicalisation is also a key plank of the LFHE training workshop, which uses an 'iceberg theory of terrorism', to illustrate the idea in the Prevent strategy, of radicalisation as a process. The theory suggests that behind a terrorist attack (the tip of the iceberg) is a process by which a person moves from unhappiness through to committing terrorism and that there are palpable behavioural changes that would indicate a person is on a conveyor belt to terrorism. Raising awareness about a process of radicalisation (as well as countering 'the warped extremist ideology') forms part of a broader approach to counter-extremism (with a central role for universities) which was outlined by the then Prime Minister David Cameron in 2015 (Gov.uk, 2015). To that end, the LFHE training workshop outlined a number of factors that would contribute to a vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism. Some of these include exertion of extremist influences; ideology (recent political or religious conversion, and conflict with family over religious/political beliefs and ideas); symbols (emblems and change in appearance, behaviour and opinions); and peer pressure.

There are two key problems with this material. First, in making connections between radicalisation and terrorism, the Prevent duty assumes a linear process, a conveyor belt, from radicalisation to terrorism. It therefore means the Prevent group had to ignore academic literature which problematises the linear relationships and notions of a conveyor belt to terrorism, and which shows that radicalisation and extremism are not precursors for terrorism (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Githens-Mazer, 2012; Richards, 2010; Sedgwick, 2010; Kundnani, 2014). Furthermore, the nature of UK counter-terrorism legislation means that the 'terrorism' designation is used not only for those involved in some form of violent action but also for speech which glorifies terrorism (s.1 of the Terrorism Act 2006) and for the possession of literature useful for the purposes of terrorism (s.57-58 of the Terrorism Act 2000). In other words, the law also attaches the 'terrorism' label to non-violent acts where the connection to a radicalisation process or extremist ideas and beliefs is even weaker.

Second, an emphasis on monitoring for some kind of change – in attitudes, opinions, values, beliefs and dress code – has often been the basis for a Channel referral resulting in a chilling effect on political discussions and freedom of speech (see Versi, 2015). In the context of counter-terrorism, to assume that such changes should be monitored for signs of radicalisation elevates securitised meanings over a whole range of other meanings associated with symbols, behaviours and opinions. For example, in response to the stigmatising, demonising and criminalising of Islamic symbols (e.g. the beard and hijab) in the war on terror, many young Muslims consciously adopt Islamic practice and symbols as a means to challenge prevailing representations of, and defending, Islam by attempting to reclaim and take charge in the meaningof Islamic symbols by confidently asserting an Islamic identity. Reading these actions as evidence of radicalisation only serves to further stigmatise Islamic practice and symbols. The banning of Islamic head coverings (hijabs,

niqabs, burkinis, etc.) in the public across Europe has been accompanied with claims that sought to justify such action: that the hijab signals allegiance to terrorist movements and is a 'provocation' that supports radicalised Islam (Chrisafis, 2016; Chrisafis and Farrer, 2016).

Having said all this, the Prevent group provided a forum in the early stages for highlighting and raising awareness for the group about how and where the Prevent strategy was reinforcing racism and Islamophobia. In the compliance phase, agreement was reached in the group to include a section on bias (racism and Islamophobia) and racial and religious awareness as part of the Prevent awareness training workshop for staff. Basing my engagement with the group on research findings and an anti-racism stance did create some small openings for a broader discussion about the impacts of the Prevent strategy. It meant that decisions about policy and procedure had to be articulated and defended in relation to their impacts rather than being taken for granted.

But taking stock of these contributions, I would argue I had little overall impact as an academic expert on the implementation of the Prevent duty precisely because of its stance towards expertise and evidence. While there is some scope to accommodate technically oriented expertise that can help in more efficiently implementing the Prevent duty, there is little to no scope for a more critically oriented expertise which might raise questions about some of the key components of the Prevent strategy. As such, it was not surprising that all of the policies were implemented at face value and the final training workshop did not have any content on racial and religious awareness. Although my reservations about racism and Islamophobia were taken seriously in the Prevent group and some space was reserved for a discussion on bias, most of this was contained with a focus on 'unconscious bias' as opposed to 'conscious' institutional bias which more accurately describes the racism and Islamophobia associated with the Prevent strategy. This approach was seen to be sufficient to deal with these problems of the Prevent strategy because it was staffed by 'good people' at the university who could deal with cases of racism and Islamophobia that emerged from the Prevent duty. However, such an approach can only be sufficient for the more obvious, overt and blatant forms of racism and Islamophobia while having little impact on the more everyday institutionalised forms of racism and Islamophobia that abound in counter-terrorism. In part, this approach may have been the product of a compliant attitude – since the Prevent duty has little to say about bias and racial and religious awareness, including these topics in the Prevent awareness training workshop was unnecessary, superfluous and irrelevant for the purposes of achieving compliance.

Accounting for the limited role of academic expertise

There were a number of reasons that accounted for the limited role of academic expertise in the group.

Critical voice

Regularly referring to research findings, which unwittingly undermine official narratives in which many are invested (professionally and psychologically), can marginalise a voice with reference to its relevance and authenticity. Simply having a voice does not translate into power. Writing about the personal experiences of teaching an anti-racism course as a Black Woman, Dlamini (2002) reflects,

> And I remember experiencing a marginalisation of a different kind, one that I see based on the assumption that having a voice is similar to having power. Yet, the reality of the fact was that despite the course title and description, white Canadian students were, at the very least, not ready to hear marginal voices either

in text form or in person. Those students who spoke critically about Eurocentric knowledge and practices were seen by other students as 'troublemakers and were rebuked in, *inter alia*, very sophisticated and intimidating language. (p. 57)

In an environment concerned primarily with the implementation of a legal duty, the value and relevance of a contribution is primarily judged by the extent to which it buys into and reflects the policy discourse and helps to further the policy agenda. A critical voice can be useful when pointing out issues of concern as it may result in charting a different route to meet the legal duty (e.g. customising staff training packages) while balancing it with a commitment to competing policies (e.g. equality and diversity, freedom of speech, and institutional values and principles). But sometimes the contradictions may be too severe to the extent that they cannot be feasibly resolved. For example, there are points at which a commitment to the legal Prevent duty clashes with commitments to competing policies. At these points, the value of a critical voice is less relevant, and more of an inconvenience, because rather than pointing to how compliance can be achieved with a legal duty, it instead suggests that compliance with the legal Prevent duty cannot be achieved if there is to be a continued commitment to other competing policies. In doing so, it points to tensions which can only be resolved by ignoring those contributions. Zulaika (2012) refers to this as the 'passion for ignorance' at the heart of counter-terrorism where *knowns* are made *unknown* in the face of policy decisions.

Perhaps part of this difficulty, as I alluded to earlier, was to do with the legal nature of the Prevent duty, which meant that the university had to adopt certain positions to implement specific policies that would demonstrate compliance. This bred a pragmatic attitude in the group where the main focus was on achieving compliance, a kind of 'just get on with it' attitude. At some of the meetings, there were rumblings about the rate of progress in implementing the legal duty. This kind of pragmatic attitude to quickly implement the Prevent strategy, which bears similarities with the introduction of neoliberal policies over the last several decades, is connected with its new status as a legal duty, which presents the Prevent strategy as the only acceptable means of doing counter-terrorism. The power of the law normalises essentially contested notions of counter-terrorism as uncontroversial, uncontested, natural and common sense; hides the gaps and flaws; and, in doing so, strengthens the power of the legal framing of counter-terrorism as it acquires its own internal circular logic. Once common sense, the prevailing notions of counter-terrorism become depoliticised and the active engineering of a consensus is hidden from view (Peck and Tickell, 2002).

Another way of thinking about this pragmatism is to say that the position of opting for compliance was the more comfortable one in the institution because it placed the reputation of the self and the institution at the centre, where a more forthright engagement would force one to step out from the crowd into less comfortable spaces. Defending the Prevent strategy and the institutional approach to the legal duty is therefore just as much about defending and protecting reputations.

State centric orientation

To that end, the safest and surest way of achieving compliance was by adopting government talking points, advice and positions. A state-centric orientation in relation to understanding the nature of the threat was a second reason that accounted for the limited role of academic expertise in the Prevent group. Perceptions about the threat of extremism and terrorism were aligned with the dominant narrative reproduced in media reporting and political statements, speeches and policy documents. At some meetings, as part of the meeting papers extracts from government policy documents such as the UK counter-extremism strategy and the Prevent duty guidance, extracts from legislation and summaries of key concepts (such as radicalisation, extremism and terrorism)

taken from government policy documents were distributed as starting points for understanding the nature of the threat of extremism and terrorism in HE to aid with the task of compliance with the legal duty. At one meeting, a Prevent co-ordinator was invited to discuss how they could support the university as well as advise the group about appropriate approaches to delivering staff training. In the meeting, we were advised about the availability of a Home Office training workshop named WRAP (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent), about how we should understand radicalisation as a safeguarding issue, identifying behaviours that should indicate vulnerability, the IT arrangements for monitoring because of the psychological trauma and potential for online radicalisation associated with videos on the Internet, and using reports produced by organisations such as the Henry Jackson Society to shape the external speaker policy to identify 'extremist speakers' whose presence should warrant extra vigilance.

The logic of this approach appeared to be informed by a concern for compliance and using government advice as the best means to that end, as well as to support policymaking in this area. Reliance on government guidance did not dull the faculties of others in the group as there was some recognition that government advice was contested. However, in the desire for compliance, using government guidance as a starting point did have the effect of reproducing government talking points and attitudes and constraining the horizon of discussion and possibility by smothering reservations in some of the discussions in the group, particularly where it concerned accurately appraising the threat of extremism and terrorism at the university. It meant that sometimes discussions about extremism and terrorism lacked rigour because government guidance itself was nebulous and made claims about extremism and terrorism that did not meet academic scrutiny. Resorting to government guidance had a strong influence in shaping the group discourse about terrorism, extremism and radicalisation and about what constituted appropriate policymaking to address such issues.

I could sense the power of the state operating in the Prevent group as its narrative about (counter)terrorism was the final reference for all discussion points. The state was asserting its hegemony through the Prevent strategy as a legal duty and therefore buttressing the power of its subjectivities with the threat of legal sanction to discipline those that did not fully comply with the duty. Placing the Prevent duty on a legal footing in the CTSA 2015 was partly informed by a desire to overcome resistance to the strategy, given its politicised framing of the terrorism threat (see Kundnani, 2009; O'Toole et al., 2012), so that governance could be extended to those sectors of society that did not voluntarily fully comply with the strategy. Making the Prevent duty mandatory reproduced state hegemony because the safest and surest way for institutions to achieve compliance was to closely follow government guidance and pay less attention to other positions. It was also aimed at adding a policing function to the role of non-state actors so that they would think and act in the state's interests, above and beyond the competing interests of HE. The legal duty has been a key mechanism by which state subjectivities have become institutionalised and permeated all sectors of society to disseminate knowledge about, and shape common sense understandings of, extremism and terrorism to secure complicity and at the same time limit the possibilities of dissent. Through this dissemination, notions that are highly contested become institutionalised and accepted as universal and considered the norm (McLaren, 1998; Boler and Zemblyas, 2003).

A crisis of knowledge

There was a clear tension between implementing the Prevent strategy and a commitment to academic expertise. To meet the requirements of the legal duty, there was an expectation that a range of policies and procedures based on a particular understanding about (counter)terrorism (e.g. the relationship between extremism and terrorism, and the role of brainwashing) be created for the

purposes of counter-terrorism. Yet these were not informed by established expertise and knowledge and could more accurately be described as ideological interpretations of (counter)terrorism. It is the presence of ideology that accounts for the persistence of this tension, a crisis of knowledge and expertise or what Jackson (2015) calls an epistemological crisis at the heart of counter-terrorism, which undermines commitments to evidence-based-policy making. Jackson situates the epistemological crisis in the 'new terrorism' thesis which posits that terrorism since the end of the Cold War is of a newer more dangerous kind and that there is a need for new counter-terrorism thinking to meet this challenge. The consequence is that all previous knowledge of counter-terrorism is considered irrelevant because it was cultivated in the context of 'old terrorism'. This stance allows security practitioners to ignore existing knowledge and expertise about counter-terrorism. The result, articulated by Zulaika (2012), is the 'know it all' counter-terrorist, who has a unique insight, impervious to expertise, into the evil of the enemy that must be confronted. He just *knows* and so he is right.

Two discussion points from the Prevent group illustrate the presence of this crisis. The first, in the training group, was to do with how case studies should be used. Should they highlight cases, which correctly identified Muslims vulnerable to terrorism and outlined the nature of the threat, as well as highlight how Prevent counter-terrorism was used in cases that had no connection to terrorism (which accounts for the vast majority of Channel referrals; see Mend Advocacy, 2015)? The concern here was that the latter might undermine the Prevent strategy, the government approach to counter-terrorism, and question the state's grasp of the threat (and therefore by extension uncover the epistemological crisis of counter-terrorism). The second was an ongoing discussion about how widely the Prevent awareness training should be delivered in the university – should this include everyone or only 'relevant and appropriate' staff as indicated in the guidance document? If the latter, then what constitutes 'relevant and appropriate'? Should this not include almost everyone or only apply to front-line staff? Overestimates of this kind were the product of 'worst-case thinking' and pre-emption which are hardwired into counter-terrorism and encourage a view of the terror threat as ever-present.

This raises the question of the purpose of academic expertise when the counter-terrorism policy is so resistant to knowledge and expertise. A counter-terrorism strategy that is impervious to expertise and knowledge cannot be shaped by it either. This is one of the reasons that the Prevent strategy has been widely criticised since its inception because its epistemic stance coupled with its orientalist gaze has spawned an exponential culture of vigilance and reporting that is seizing more and more (Muslim) people where there is no evidence of wrongdoing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would argue the value of academic expertise in implementing the legal duty was limited precisely because it made claims to knowledge in a (counter)terrorism policy paradigm that is organised on the basis of side-lining that very same knowledge and expertise. This makes the Prevent duty particularly difficult to implement in an educational context that is built around and emphasises notions of evidence, analysis, evaluation, expertise and knowledge. Having said that, there was some value in engaging with the group and raising awareness about the harms of the strategy and disrupting taken-for-granted meanings and assumptions of the policy discourse. There was recognition within the group of the harms associated with the strategy, and it was clearly understood throughout that the failures existed at the policy level rather than with those charged with implementing the strategy. Adopting an anti-racist emancipatory stance in the group to minimise the harms of the strategy was recognised and had some positive impact. It meant that decisions had to be articulated rather than taken for granted. It was not possible to advocate eradicating

the strategy, even on legitimate grounds (despite the fact that this is a strong argument given that many of the policies are not informed by expertise and evidence), because it exists within the broader political context of, seeks to further, militarised capitalism.

So I would conclude by suggesting that with any form of engagement that involves a state policy agenda, it is important to think about the purpose of engaging, what kind of expertise is required and for what ends. It is clear that with the Prevent duty, academic knowledge and expertise only has value when it can be used to further the aims and objectives of the policy (there is a whole industry which serves this function; see Herman and O'Sullivan, 1989; Burnett and Whyte, 2005; Mueller, 2006; Miller and Mills, 2009, 2010). Perhaps this was another reason that I was initially invited to join the group. If that was the case, then perhaps my usefulness was limited.

Notes

1. These claims ignore the fact that between 1999 and 2012 the average participation rate in higher education (HE) in the United Kingdom was above 40% which undercuts claims of a relationship between university attendance and participation in terrorism (Universities, 2013).
2. We strive to provide a fair environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect. This means sustaining a culture that is free from any form of discrimination. We take a proactive approach to equality and continually review and promote equality and diversity strategies. (Equality & Diversity, 2016)
3. Inspired by our Church of England foundation, the University's mission is to pursue excellence in HE: transforming individuals, creating knowledge, enriching communities and building a sustainable future. We value the development of the whole person, respecting and nurturing the inherent dignity and potential of each individual; the integration of excellent teaching, research and knowledge exchange; the power of HE to enrich individuals, communities and nations; and our friendly, inclusive and professional community of students and staff, preparing individuals to contribute to a just and sustainable future (Our Mission and Values, 2016).
4. https://www.lfhe.ac.uk/

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