Critical Social Policy

Article

A conceptual critique of Prevent: Can Prevent be saved? No, but…

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Abstract

The UK's Prevent policy continues to fail in its fundamental purpose to prevent extremism and has at times even created spaces where extremism flourishes. This article goes beyond the mechanism of implementation providing a conceptual understanding of how Prevent maintains the neoliberal status quo. The promotion of the neoliberal status quo, depoliticisation and a lack of focus on root causes continue to undermine Prevent. Any policy aimed at preventing extremism and terrorism must be well integrated into the government's wider social policies, shifting away from securitisation and towards improving society. Reducing extremism becomes a by-product of a much broader attempt at changing society, focusing on policies that address racism, gender and socio-economic inequality. These policies, we argue, must encourage political engagement with all groups, especially marginalised ones. Creating a healthier democracy will reduce risks of extremism and will negate the need for a Prevent policy based on discrimination and securitisation.

Key words

extremism, neoliberalism, political ideology, prevention, terrorism

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Introduction

In this article we explore why Prevent continues to fail in its fundamental purpose to prevent extremism and terrorism. This article goes beyond the mechanism of implementation and provides a conceptual understanding of the Prevent policy and how it maintains the neoliberal status quo and depoliticises socio-economic issues rather than tackling the real issues that lead to extremism and terrorism. Throughout, we focus on politicisation and /or politics in its broadest sense, which includes the issue of foreign policy – a powerful political motivator.

Prevent has been criticised widely by the media, some politicians and civil society organisations. The *Together Against Prevent* website (2015) lists a wide variety of organisations which have pledged not to cooperate with Prevent. Organisations such as the National Union of Teachers, the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Muslim Council of Britain have all expressed concern about the policy (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2016; National Education Union, 2017). Such is the volume of criticism that Prevent has become a 'toxic brand'. Much of this criticism centres on the accusations that Prevent has become an extension of the surveillance state, that it is illiberal, and that it unfairly targets and stigmatises Muslim communities in the UK. Academics have highlighted the lack of an evidence base for the policy, the ambiguity of the assessment criteria used to determine vulnerability to radicalisation, and the fluid notion of 'extremism' which accompanied the 2015 counter-extremism strategy (Beatley, 2015; Mythen, Walklate and Peatfield, 2017; Martin, 2018). Despite this, Prevent remains central to the government's counter-terrorism efforts.

It is somewhat of an oddity that a policy supposedly enacted to prevent 'extremism', especially in the context of a centrist, liberal-democratic state, should be so consistently accused of violating the very principles it seeks to protect. Prevent's intrusions into the private sphere have been understood by many to be profoundly *illiberal* (Heath-Kelly, 2016). This comes despite David Cameron's call for liberalism to be defended with 'muscle' (Jose, 2015) and Theresa May's defence of the superiority of "Western values of freedom, democracy and human rights" (May, 2017). The liberal principle of "leaving it to individuals' private action … to decide what was good to do or think" (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 70) is violated when Prevent intervenes to discipline individuals and groups who are deemed to be engaging in extremist – but not necessarily illegal – thought or behaviour.

This article argues that a lot of the criticism directed at Prevent can be attributed to the loose conceptualisations of extremism and radicalisation that are central to the policy. The looseness of these concepts allows the policy to be implemented selectively and arbitrarily, and draws on and strengthens

ideas of the 'Other' already existing in society. This article, however, also argues that the looseness of these concepts within the policy is exactly the reason that it has survived, as they allow 'dangerous' ideas and the individuals who might hold them to be either brought into the fold of the British state or excluded from the body politic. This strategy should be seen as part of the mission to create neoliberal subjects, who internalise specific ideas about democracy, participation, the market and the individual while rejecting more radical ideas or critiques of the state. As such, a critique of Prevent should not be limited just to its current policy agenda but must include a debate about socio-economic and political issues which lead individuals to extremism and terrorism and how these can be prevented.

Prevent – a brief overview

Prevent, one of the four Ps (Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare), forms part of the wider and more holistic UK counter-terrorism strategy CONTEST. The inclusion of Prevent into the broader counter-terrorism strategy should be considered innovative, although Prevent remains problematic (Skoczylis, 2015). For a more detailed overview of CONTEST examine the government strategy (HM Government, 2018). Bartolucci and Skoczylis (2017) also provide a broad overview of the strategy's context. The overall objectives of the policy are to:

- Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism.
- Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support.
- Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate. (HM Government, 2018: 31)

Following the 2011 Prevent strategy, the 2018 Prevent seeks to achieve these objectives through a focus on institutional partnerships and early interventions. These include a range of interventions such as local programmes, which seek to transform the culture and politics of targeted communities in order to increase 'resilience' to extremist ideas; CHANNEL interventions, a programme which works with individuals reported to be showing signs of radicalisation; and the introduction of a statutory duty upon public institutions to report individuals to Prevent who are showing 'signs of radicalisation' (HM Government, 2015a; Mastroe, 2016). An overarching focus of the policy is, as the name implies, prevention. Much of what Prevent is concerned with in this regard is not criminal behaviour, and therefore most of the interventions done under Prevent are voluntary.

Radicalisation and extremism in Prevent

Prevent aims to tackle radicalisation leading to terrorism or the supporting of terrorism more broadly and is designed to be flexible. In practice, Prevent targets groups that pose the greatest threat to the state order, which is ideologically neoliberal. Muslim communities have been the primary target of Prevent, due to the perceived link with jihadi extremism, but more recently, some far-right movements and environmental activists have also become targets of Prevent. It should be noted that the latter two groups have not been targeted to the same extent as Muslim communities. These groups are a threat to the state in that they offer alternative subject positions *vis* the British neoliberal subject, or alternative political models that challenge the democratic neoliberal state. The Islamist movement can be understood as a particular threat in that it offers both a subject position and a political model that actively contest parliamentary democracy, British nationalism and the neoliberal subject (Rudy, 2004).

At the core of the policy is the government's conceptualisation of extremism and radicalisation – both of which it links to the rejections of *British Values* (HM Government, 2011: 107–108). Since the killing of Lee Rigby in 2013, the government has created a firmer link between radicalisation and extremism (Cabinet Office, 2013). While there is a degree of symbiosis between radicalisation and extremism in the policy, each concept, however, remains unique. There is an ongoing debate within social science about this relationship.

The government's definition of extremism is outlined in the 2011 Prevent policy, and reiterated in its 2015 *Counter-Extremism Strategy*:

> Extremism is the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of our armed forces as extremist. (HM Government, 2015b: 9)

Numerous commentators have raised issues with the above definition, pointing out that the lines between extremism and 'acceptable' political activism are fluid and contested, even within the most stable of societies, and that one person's understanding of a concept like 'democracy' might be radically different from another's (Jose, 2015). It is, therefore, unclear where the dividing line between extremism and moderate/acceptable behaviour lies. This difficulty has prevented a legal definition of extremism from being developed (Townsend, 2017). The notion of British Values included in the definition provides an additional stumbling block, as it frames extremism in opposition to the nation state. Given the recent and historical attitudes to race and immigration in British state and society, including an idea of 'Britishness' in

a definition of extremism opens up questions about identity and belonging which can be exclusive. It "may well affect how talk of 'our' values are received by minority groups" (Vincent and Hunter-Henin, 2018).

The concept of radicalisation in the 2011 Prevent strategy is defined simply as "the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism" (HM Government, 2011: 108). In the 2015 *Counter-Extremism Strategy* it is similarly defined as the process where "a vulnerable person will be introduced to an extremist ideology by a radicalising influencer (typically an extremist individual) who in the absence of protective factors, such as a supportive network of family and friends, or a fulfilling job, draws the vulnerable individual ever closer to extremism" (HM Government, 2015b: 21). Although practitioners insist that Prevent recognises the complexity of radicalisation, the current government policy prioritises ideology, with the understanding of an overarching framework within which radical thought presupposes radical action (Elshimi, 2015). The other factors and fractures that an individual might experience as part of radicalisation are understood in this framework as vulnerabilities that allow for the intervention of the extremist ideology upon the subject. British Values are framed as a counterpoint to the distorting influences of extreme ideologies. There is the belief, as outlined in Prevent, that British Values are supposed to ingrain "a stronger sense of 'belonging' and citizenship [which will make] communities more resilient to extremist ideologies and propagandists" (HM Government, 2011: 27).

Looking at the Prevent policy's understanding of radicalisation and extremism helps us to understand that it is ideology that the government is most concerned about. This is most clear in the *Counter-Extremism Strategy* 2015, which states that "terrorism is really a symptom; ideology is the root cause" (HM Government, 2015b: 5). This point is reiterated further in the Joint Committee on Human Rights report (2017), stating that the target of Prevent and the proposed 2015 Counter-Extremism Bill was preventing the promotion of extremist ideologies. This relentless focus on ideology means that the most salient factor for Prevent interventions is either the removal or the countering of extremist ideological influences, or the strengthening of personal, social or political factors within a person that might make them less vulnerable/more resilient to extremist ideologies (Edwards, 2015). At its core, this ideology-centred radicalisation model emphasises the individual, a persuasive ideology, and the salience of ideologies being increased by social networks (Heath-Kelly, 2013). Hence, while practitioners are able to espouse their understanding of the many factors that might lead to radicalisation, interventions in communities tend to focus more on their 'world-view' in order to promote liberal ideas or increase resilience to extremist ideas. Individual interventions dealing with material factors appear in CHANNEL (Weeks, 2018).

A further result of this is that ideology being the cause of terrorism is now "considered as natural and evident by the majority" (Germond, McEnery and Marchi, 2016: 150). However, this view is questioned by a number of scholars who understand that while ideology provides coherence and legitimacy, it is only one of the many drivers of extremism and terrorism and that such a narrow focus is unlikely to see success (Caiani, Della Porta and Wagemann, 2012; Kundnani, 2015). The focus on ideology has also failed to stem the far-right attitudes that have become partially legitimatised and have filtered into the mainstream political discourse as part of a broader authoritarian and nationalistic surge in the past decade (Gaston, 2017), a normalisation which has connected far-right ideologies with mainstream groups and ideas (Klandermans and Mayer, 2005). A question remains, then, as to what the efficacy is of keeping the ideological focus when it is unable to prevent radicalisation related to jihadism on the one hand, while allowing radicalisation on the far-right to slip through the net so thoroughly.

Instead of seeing Prevent as a simple counter-terrorism policy, we should understand its role as part of the state's ideological apparatus, fulfilling a mission of creating the right kind of subjects (Althusser, 2014). Prevent is part of a wider effort by the state to become the 'regulator of a milieu' (Foucault, Senellart and Burchell, 2009) utilising "technologies" that "encompass the diverse techniques, assessments, and places that go into shaping the self in our contemporary society" (Elshimi, 2015). Such technologies use forms of political rationality and power to attempt to shape subjects. In this context, Prevent is seeking to act upon the circulation of ideas that inform political and communal identities (HM Government, 2009). Prevent's *raison d'être* is the protection and preservation of the current political and economic regime by seeking to govern the behaviour of those who are adopting ideological positions that threaten the 'neoliberal consensus'. It should be acknowledged that it is not about dealing with the concerns of the public, but to maintain power (Brodeur, 2007).

Neoliberalism and governance

Prevent's interventions into civil society seek to reshape the way some people think and act. This opens up Prevent to the criticism of illiberalism, mentioned in the introduction. These interventions have historically targeted Muslim communities, which has further led to accusations of racism and/or the institutionalisation of difference within society. While the latest statistical data from the government cites a growing number of referrals to Prevent being related to the far-right (Home Office, 2018), the 2018 CONTEST strategy reiterates that the threat from ISIS and other Islamist extremist groups remains the focus of the strategy (HM Government, 2018). This government's

inability to define who or what an extremist is, and its nationalistic focus on 'British Values' as the counterpoint to extremism, exacerbates this problem, allowing the policy to be applied selectively and arbitrarily. The lack of an established causal link between extremism and violence evidences this arbitrariness (Heath-Kelly, Jarvis and Baker-Beall, 2015).

Further questions can be asked of the policy around why it sticks so firmly to a model that understands ideology to be central to extremism and radicalisation in the face of an overwhelming lack of evidence. Considering that this model of intervention, where the state intervenes so prominently in such private matters, is what is driving the majority of the criticisms of Prevent, it is worth asking why the government values such an approach so much. Understanding neoliberalism, the current zeitgeist of political thought at the elite level, gives us some insight into the importance of ideology to counter-extremism policy.

Emerging as a global political force in the 1980s, neoliberalism followed an era of political upheaval. David Harvey describes it as "a political project carried out by the corporate capitalist class … intensely threatened both politically and economically" (Risager, 2016). Attempting to make the world safe for capital, neoliberalism circumscribed political power in the economic sphere via "the systematic use of state power under a 'free market' cloak, to transform the material basis of accumulation at five levels: the allocation of resources, international economic integration, the role of the state, ideology, and the reproduction of the working class" (Ayers and Saad-Filho, 2015: 603). Gane, basing his ideas on Bauman's, sees this new society as one which "passes *freedoms* down to the individual but at the same time depoliticises and disempowers them by closing down the *agora* as an active space for political engagement, and by leaving consumers … to their own devices" (Gane, 2012: 624). This *agora* is one of inequality masked as a meritocracy, privatisation, competition, deregulation, and economic insecurity (Cowden and Singh, 2017).

Such a setup is advantageous to capital accumulation as the institution of insecurity allows for a more casualised and flexible labour market (Wark, 2015). Over recent decades there have been strenuous efforts to insulate neoliberal policymaking from the political and democratic processes and pressures, through the introduction of rules and regulations which limit public debates, leaving policy formation to an 'expert' elite cadre (Bruff, 2014; Collier, 2017). Some describe the current approach to economics as "a society in which political goals are defined in terms of their effect on the economy, which is believed to be a distinct system with its own logic that requires experts to manage it" (Earle, Moran and Ward-Perkins, 2016: 7).

Prior to the global financial crisis of 2008, Alan Greenspan even went as far as to say that the president of the United States of America no longer mattered, that "thanks to globalisation, policy decisions in the US have largely been replaced by global market forces. National security aside, it hardly

makes any difference who will be the next president. The world is governed by market forces" (Tooze, 2018). In tandem, penal policies have become ever more punitive to limit the fallout from the ever-growing number of people left behind economically, socially and politically by neoliberalism (Byrne, 2017). Increased surveillance and the targeting of left behind communities by Prevent are yet another sign of this approach.

At the social/individual level, this is an unstable arrangement. It is a "process [that] not only adds to the general insecuritisation … but it is also destructive of social bonds and the conditions for social cohesion" (Lazzarato, 2009). Individualism and the destruction of traditional social safety nets developed by Keynesian models, e.g. working class solidarity, the welfare state and community organisations (Mann, 2017), coupled with a depoliticisation of the market have converged into a system that has led to cultural and racial interpretations of grievance (Winlow, Hall and Treadwell, 2017). The relentlessness of global capitalism has made local communities and people more disposable, or as McDowell (2003) argues *redundant*, in nature – at the workplace and within society in general. The West has seen a loss of jobs traditionally associated with masculinity and a shift towards service sector jobs. "What happens to men's sense of themselves as the masculine when the sort of work associated with masculinity disappears" (McDowell, 2003: 58)? It is not coincidental that extremism is very male-dominated and resides within communities which have been shattered by global capitalism. This can be seen in the 'tribalism' of racism, xenophobia and nationalism which arise as shattered communities come to reform around more 'traditional' and outwardly visible forms of social identity in order to protect their perceived and/or actual interests and survival (Balibar and Wallerstein, 2011; Midlarsky, 2011). As Hobbes once said, "when all the world is overcharged with inhabitants then the last remedy of all is war; which provideth for every man, by victory, or death" (1996: 230). As the economic base has no democratic character, limited resources are instead called upon to be limited to ethnocultural groups. The logic is that the fewer groups there are in the marketplace, the higher the share available to the remaining groups. But as Hobbes acknowledges, those cut out of the marketplace may not leave quietly.

Neoliberalism is, however, more than just an economic doctrine; it is one which assumes a particular mode of governance. Creating the pure market-form requires constant "vigilance, activity and intervention" (Foucault, 2008: 132), and economic ideas about rationality, control and the individual are supplanted more widely into the social sphere. The belief in neoliberalism can easily involve anti-enlightenment dogmas that the populace needs to be swayed to subject themselves to the full forces of the market (Mirowski, 2017). It is in this sphere that ways of thinking are affected, to ensure that the neoliberal ideology is accepted and absorbed into the populace; it is also in this space that 'technologies' are deployed to promote and create such ways

of thinking. It follows that neoliberal policies are typically associated with surveillance, education and information, individual support, and empowerment within a (neo)liberal political system (Lindekilde, 2012). It assumes a certain form of subject – a self-motivated, self-disciplined actor, who is "not only democratic, non-violent, and tolerant but also active, responsible and self-regulating" (Elshimi, 2015: 124) – and hence many neoliberal policies are directed at such a subject, seek to form one, or are a synthesis of both. Achieving the world of neoliberal subjects would result in the "generalization of competition as a behavioural norm and of the enterprise as a model of subjectivation" (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 4), with an acceptance of the depoliticisation of the economic sphere and the ascendency of the market as the final political-economic form (Ayers and Saad-Filho, 2015).

This system – or the imperfect form it currently exists in, at least – is one which has been beset by crises. Socially, the crisis in neoliberal governance that we speak of stems from the dual recognition that inequality is necessary, but also unnatural and likely to generate resistance. As more competition is introduced, and inequality increases, society becomes overall more unstable and generates intergroup conflict over resources. As the social protections which could alleviate some of these social ills have been stripped away, this means that a government will need a way to carefully manage its population and to prevent the overthrow of the system by marginalised individuals and groups (Lazzarato, 2009; Harvey, 2011). Within a true liberal-democratic order, such protection is difficult, as groups can organise to legally change the system. Again, the implanting of a certain ideological way of thinking is necessitated; protection requires proscription, which will "delimit what is possible, and … prevent statements appearing that do not conform to the dominant regime" (Lazzarato, 2009), socialising the subject to give "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative" (Fisher, 2009: 2). As Gramsci stated: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass" (2011: II:33) – including political extremism and political instability.

Prevent in a neoliberal society

Within this framework, the work of Prevent can be understood as a policy both that is profoundly neoliberal in that it promotes the neoliberal status quo and neoliberal ideology, and that is designed to manage the negative effects of neoliberal policies on society. Policies designed to manage the deleterious effects of neoliberalism are not new. Tony Blair and David Cameron following him recognised and attempted to mitigate the possibility of a social breakdown

resulting from neoliberal marketisation by transferring responsibility for the maintenance of social well-being from the state to the populace (Cowden and Singh, 2017). The 'Big Society' and a requirement to promote free speech on university campuses then sit comfortably alongside policies like Prevent, workfare and the privatisation of public services as two sides of the same coin (Cabinet Office, 2010). They exist within the context of each other, and in the wider context of crafting a neoliberal society. Prevent, accordingly, should not simply be understood as an isolated policy, but rather as part of a set of policies embedded within the ideological framework of the state which seeks the maintenance of public order and the status quo (Valeriano, 1982; Brodeur, 2007). It does this through the control of discourse, through education and political empowerment but within the confines of the neoliberal framework; and through disciplinary action against individual errant subjects (Ginsberg, 1986).

Through Prevent, grievances come to be individualised, and dissent removed from its political context. This process is largely mediated through the ideological model of extremism that the government has promoted – where ideology is the single most important causal factor in extremism and terrorism, any political and socio-economic factors are denied. 'Safeguarding' becomes the watchword of policing political matters, with political violence or extremism being pathological behaviour that results from the abuse of 'vulnerable persons'. Within the Prevent policy, "preventing someone from becoming a terrorist or from supporting terrorism is substantially comparable to safeguarding in other areas, including child abuse or domestic abuse" (HM Government, 2011: 83). The government-approved Prevent training noted that challenging government policy might raise safeguarding issues (Jisc, n.d.). The logic of the intervention is then one about identifying the 'other factors' that might contribute to extremism or terrorism, such as social dislocation, peer groups, or drug abuse, and use these to paper over the political cracks. This allows responsibility for terrorism to be refuted by the government and placed solely within the individual, who is constructed as a person who was unable to compete within neoliberal society – a 'loser', who becomes vulnerable to radical ideologies by way of their *personal* failure (Fisher, 2009).

CHANNEL, which is deployed against persons identified as vulnerable to radicalisation, furthers this logic. Interventions come in the form of highly tailored packages delivered by CHANNEL mentors and involve things such as assisting the individual in finding a house, moving them away from peer groups, encouraging self-reflection through poetry and writing, and helping with enrolment on educational programmes (Khan and McMahon, 2016). These interventions individualise responsibility by looking at people as 'vulnerable' rather than 'political' and help those people navigate the neoliberal system rather than critique it. Policies which may have caused widespread misery are no longer seen as political, but rather simply as variables against which the individual responds (Harvey, 2011).

The promotion of this idea is undertaken both within Prevent and in wider society. Prevent projects such as Imams Online, Shanaz and the Radical Middle Way, alongside locally implemented projects, focus on countering ideological and theological positions and socialise people into seeing extremism and terrorism within the frames of a radical/moderate ideological binary while locating radical thinking within the framework of 'vulnerability' rather than politics (O'Toole, 2012; Ganesh, 2015; Shanaz Project, 2017). Such a stance is readily backed up by the media, who consistently frame terrorism within the context of radicalisation and ideology, speculating on ideological motivations for killings rather than investigating wider social, political and historical contexts (Bowe, Fahmy and Wanta, 2013). Government officials feed this narrative by consistently utilising this ideological framework when discussing terrorism, even to the point of minimising actual statements by attackers. When the killer of Lee Rigby, Michael Adebolajo, stated that "The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by [*sic*] British soldiers" (*Telegraph*, 2013), Boris Johnson, then Mayor of London, responded arguing that British foreign policy was not to blame. Rather, "The fault lies wholly and exclusively in the warped and deluded mindset of the people who did it" (*Huffington Post*, 2013).

This is not an isolated incident. Ideology as the cause has become *the* dominant discourse in talking about terrorism, leading the ideological model to "be considered as natural and evident by the majority" (Germond et al., 2016: 150). It is perhaps worth quoting at length the words of Prime Minister Theresa May, addressing the media after the 2017 London Bridge attacks:

> First, while the recent attacks are not connected by common networks, they are connected in one important sense. They are bound together by the single evil ideology of Islamist extremism that preaches hatred, sows division and promotes sectarianism.
>
> It is an ideology that claims our Western values of freedom, democracy and human rights are incompatible with the religion of Islam. It is an ideology that is a perversion of Islam and a perversion of the truth.
>
> Defeating this ideology is one of the great challenges of our time, but it cannot be defeated by military intervention alone. It will not be defeated by the maintenance of a permanent defensive counter-terrorism operation, however skilful its leaders and practitioners.
>
> It will only be defeated when we turn people's minds away from this violence and make them understand that our values – pluralistic British values – are superior to anything offered by the preachers and supporters of hate. (May, 2017)

The centrality of ideology in this speech is typical of British politicians talking about extremism and terrorism. It calls upon the same ideology outlined in

David Cameron's speech of 2015, in which he stated "we must be clear. The root causes of the threat we face is the extremist ideology itself" (2015). This logic penetrates deep into the Prevent policy. Political causes of extremism and terrorism are side-lined and ideologically driven intervention programmes are seen as the solution. Those who question this are readily denounced as being apologists for extremists and terrorists. The ready adoption of the ideological model by wider society, as reflected in increasing Islamophobia, indicates that the government has been successful (Awan and Zempi, 2015), but Prevent has done little to stem the tide of extremism.

The dissemination of the ideological model is strengthened by the government's control over who is deemed an extremist. CHANNEL is utilised by the government to isolate and remove 'extremists' from the body politic, to prevent their ideas from gaining traction. However, the definition of who or what extremism is remains unclear – the vague guidelines given in CHANNEL documents and Prevent training means that law-abiding citizens are caught up in the system with counter-terrorism officers being deployed for minor deviations from mainstream political discourse. Challenging government policy can lead to individuals being reported to the authorities. As Foucault (1991) observes, once the idea of surveillance becomes dominant, there is no need for it to actually take place – "The effect of not knowing whether you will be observed or not produces an introjection of the surveillance apparatus. You constantly act as if you are always about to be observed" (Fisher, 2009: 52). The lack of a legal definition of extremism reinforces this internalisation of surveillance, as one can never know whether one's actions have crossed the boundary for intervention or not. This further narrows the political space for organising against the state by constructing a barrier of uncertainty around 'moderate' and/or dominant positions. Violating this barrier now becomes a significant personal risk. Although this risk cannot be accurately quantified, it has clearly created anxiety in many Muslim communities (Mythen, Walklate and Khan, 2013). These factors intersect and create a disciplinary framework which provides rewards for acting within the system, punishments for acting outside, and delimits what is possible to talk about by implicitly branding dissenters as possible extremists.

The effect, then, of Prevent is to strengthen the neoliberal centre at the expense of debate about real political alternatives. Considering the anti-social effects of capitalism and neoliberalism, it is unsurprising that many who adhere to Islamist, far-left, far-right and environmental 'extremisms' hold in common a belief in the profound immorality of global capitalism and seek its destruction. In creating counter-narratives and bulwarks against violence, Prevent reinforces that wider framework that has increasingly made much political radicalism, especially with regard to resistance to capitalism, questionable. The only viable option becomes incorporation into the system as a 'better' functioning individual. While it has not sought the conversion of

every person within the programme to a full-blown capitalist, it has sought to co-opt and disarm political alternatives (Fisher, 2009: 13). Accordingly, once the fundamentalists have been isolated and stripped away from the body politic, the cynics can be co-opted or incorporated into the liberal democratic system without too much danger. They can continue to believe in the ills of capitalism but have now decoupled cynical thought from radical action. Consensus politics and the individualisation of society mean that the cynics are, in theory, unlikely to make much of an impact once they enter the system. Protest becomes compartmentalised and becomes so focused on single issues that any kind of political solution or systematic reorganisation of society is lost (Fisher, 2009).

It is for this reason that the Prevent policy must be seen as part of a wider system aimed at manufacturing consent. Its effects of depoliticising the ill effects of neoliberal politics while simultaneously shaping neoliberal subjects, and disciplining those who offer a real threat to the order of things, has parallels in other areas, either in part or in whole. In education, for instance, then Prime Minister David Cameron highlighted what the aim of education should be, calling for a culture of values that embody the "typically British, entrepreneurial, buccaneering spirit" (McTague, 2013). Hence, neoliberal subjects are being created through "the diffusion of their [neoliberal] ideas in the media and economics teaching" (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 116). The public then internalises neoliberalism and adopts the social and cultural norms accordingly.

> Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor … Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. (Freire, 2005: 47)

As Ginsberg (1986) argues, the state enforces hegemony through a rigged marketplace of ideas. The role of Prevent then is to intervene and correct 'market failures' in human beings who do not compete in the correct way either by encouraging integration into the system or by their removal from it. In this systemic understanding, schools and state institutions are the vanguard of neoliberalism and Prevent, forming the rear-guard which halts the formation of a fourth column of radicals in society (Lazzarato, 2009).

So, can Prevent be saved? No, but…

Can we save Prevent? We would argue that this is the wrong question. Prevent should not be seen as a single arm of the security state for which a technocratic solution can be found for its illiberal shortcomings. If, as we have argued, Prevent is simply one thread in the neoliberal ideological quilt,

then ending the policy will not fix Islamophobia, it will not stop the march towards an ever more narrow concept of democracy, and it will certainly do little to restore meaning to the freedom and human rights that are supposed to be at the core of Western values.

This article is not then an argument for or against Prevent. As has been pointed out by a number of persons, the manufacturing of consent is something that practically all governments do. Althusser notes that "As Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time that it produced would not last a year" (2012: 100). Rather, it is a call to move out of the restrictive box of analysing policies like Prevent as simple counter-extremism and counter-terrorism policies and to treat them as constituent parts of the ideological apparatus of the state. Prevent, accordingly, should not be understood as simply an isolated policy, but rather as part of a set of policies embedded within the ideological framework of the state which seeks the maintenance of public order and the status quo (Valeriano, 1982; Brodeur, 2007).

Similar issues can be seen in education with the imperative to teach British Values part of the curriculum. This, coupled with the Prevent statutory duty, instils the expectation that teachers are state instruments of surveillance (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2016). Given the importance of education to children's development, Davies notes that "schooling appears to be simultaneously irrelevant to the … global question of security and yet central to the learning of alternative ways to conduct human relations" (2016: 5). Indeed, teaching critical thinking skills and fostering an environment that allows innovation and the challenging of the status quo from a young age, must be part of the repertoire of policies used to challenge extremism.

To reduce political extremism, therefore, *prima facie* we must limit the fallout caused by neoliberal policies, not through penal punitiveness or depoliticisation but through political engagement and addressing socio-economic issues, which is contrary to the core ideas of neoliberalism. Current and past governments, through the Prevent policy, have deliberately failed to acknowledge the wider political and socio-economic context of extremism and terrorism (Sedgwick, 2010). The deeply political nature of extremism and terrorism is also perhaps the aspect that generates obfuscation – no government, or nation for that matter, wants to admit that its own policies may have given birth to violent movements, and so they tend to reject and deny the political nature of the violence. As outlined above, Prevent to a large extent serves as a tool to silence political dissent and attempts to disempower those who challenge the neoliberal status quo. Central to the neoliberal discourse of depoliticisation is the idea of an apolitical marketplace. This depoliticisation leads to a feeling of disempowerment. Individuals, groups and communities who espouse ideologies that challenge the established neoliberal order are categorised as a risk. This means that the socio-economic

and political grievances, real and perceived, are not addressed. Instead, Prevent and the policy of social cohesion are promoted in a way that leaves little space for dealing with injustices such as inequality, political disempowerment and racism (Blee and Creasap, 2010; Manning and Holmes, 2013). Such policies have created a climate in which extremism flourishes, across the political spectrum (Europol, 2016). Using Prevent as a surveillance tool only exacerbates these matters (Skoczylis, 2017). Rebuilding trust between communities and the state and allowing individuals and communities a stake in their own future is the only way of reducing extremism and political violence. On the current trajectory it is, unfortunately, more likely that we will see an increase in extremism.

Scrapping Prevent, as a number of organisations have called for, will not solve the problem of extremism and/or terrorism and the impact it has on communities, neither will it lead to a better treatment of communities affected by Prevent. Rather than removing Prevent, we should concentrate on re-politicising extremism, terrorism, counter-extremism, counter-terrorism and social life in general. As Laclau and Mouffe write, "without conflict and division, a pluralist democratic politics would be impossible" (2014: xvii–xviii). Uncovering the power dynamics beneath such policies and seeing them as embedded in a political framework, rather than as neutral public goods, would be a start to building a political coalition that can look to changing the exploitative nature of society. Unless governments acknowledge and address the real grievances, extremism will continue to flourish, with Prevent being unable to stem the tide. Civil unrest and worse may be coming to the streets of Britain, Europe and the USA.

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