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Muslim Home Educators in the Time of Prevent

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IAQI Harriet Pattison¹



Abstract

Following the implementation of the Prevent strategy in the United Kingdom and the public linking of Muslim home education with radicalization, this research explores the perspectives of Muslim home educators. Using the concept of moral panics (Cohen, 2002. *Folk devils and moral panics*), this paper synthesizes work on Muslim identity (Awan, 2012. “I Am a Muslim Not an Extremist”: How the prevent strategy has constructed a “suspect” community. *Politics & Policy*, 40(6), 1158–1185) with that of folk devil reactions to stigmatization (Breakwell, 2010. Resisting representations and identity processes; Bueker, 2017. Resources for resistance: The role of dominant and nondominant forms of cultural capital in resistance among young women of color in a predominantly white public high school; Griffiths, 2010. The gothic folk devils strike back! Theorizing folk devil reaction in the post-Columbine era. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(3), 403–422). Data are drawn from three case study families via questionnaires and interviews and analyzed thematically within a symbolic interactionist framework, using an adaptation of Griffiths (2010. The gothic folk devils strike back! Theorizing folk devil reaction in the post-Columbine era. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(3), 403–422) “folk devil reaction model” as an interpretative guide. Following an exploration of participants’ reflective self-appraisals, two categories of response are identified: retreat and resistance. Both of these are further subdivided, respectively, into reactions of blending in and withdrawing and reactions of drawing on resources and contestation. The paper argues that a legal and increasingly popular educational choice has been co-opted from being an individual family decision into a political narrative of danger, radicalization, and security implications (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2009. Pre-mediating guilt: Radicalisation and mediality in British news. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 2(1), 81–93). In a climate where prejudice about home education and Islam already abundantly exist, such a narrative

¹Liverpool Hope University, Hope Park, UK

Corresponding Author:

Harriet Pattison, Liverpool Hope University, Hope Park, Liverpool L16 9JD, UK.

Email: pattish@hope.ac.uk

may contribute to an increasingly intolerant society. Recognition of the situation of Muslim home educators may go some way toward tempering this [AQ2].

Keywords

home education, radicalization, moral panic, Muslim identity, folk devils

Introduction

[AQ3][AQ4] This paper considers the impact of the Prevent [AQ5] strategy, including the introduction of Fundamental British Values (FBV) to the school curriculum, for Muslim home educators in the United Kingdom. “Prevent” is a strand of the U.K. government counter terrorism strategy and was launched in its current form in 2007, specifically aimed at thwarting “home grown terror” by preventing radicalization and the recruitment of terrorists from within the U.K. population. Part of the Prevent strategy includes the promulgation in schools of “Fundamental British Values” named specifically as, “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (Department for Education and Lord Nash, 2014, online, no pagination). From 2014, State sponsored schools and early years provision in the United Kingdom have a duty not only to promote, but also to demonstrably embed within their teaching and practice, these four values. Success in achieving this is now part of the English inspection and grading regime for educational establishments (details of evaluation vary in other parts of the United Kingdom) and is carried out by the inspection unit OFSTED (2018a, 2018b). However, not all educational provision is subject to OFSTED inspection or obliged to follow the statutory curriculum. Among the exceptions in this area is home education, a growing phenomenon in the United Kingdom (Issimdar, 2018).

In one sense, home education can be considered as circumventing state initiatives, such as Prevent, in ways that threaten the potential success of such enterprises. In another way, and the way which I explore here, such initiatives can lead to an unexpected inversion of consequences as particular sectors of the community find themselves cut off and compromised by initiatives which, at face value, do not appear to affect them. This paper explores the borders of protection and persecution, the transposal of intent and consequence within the arena of home education. To do so, I draw on the work of Cohen (2002) and others on moral panics and in particular, consider the creation and situation of “folk devils” within the framework of moral panic.

Background—Home Education as a Site of Moral Panic

Despite the rise in home education now being a worldwide phenomenon (Kunzman, 2016), national histories of home education appear to be more driven by local circumstance than global considerations. Among the many factors shaping differing trajectories of emergence and practice are the nature and motivations of those adopting this

form of education and the degree of regulation and conformity which different countries demand. Unlike the United States, where the subset of religiously motivated home educators is a large and politically important force (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013), the United Kingdom does not have a politically visible religious home education community. This means that while the United States has been grappling with the relationships between religion, fundamentalism, and home education for some time (Kunzman, 2010), it is a debate only just beginning to emerge in the United Kingdom. Both countries, however, share in a dearth of demographic information about home education. While regulatory requirements vary from state to state in the United States (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013), statutory regulation in the United Kingdom is nonexistent although Local Authorities do have remit to intervene where there are doubts over the suitability of a child's education. The result is that, in both countries, there is no comprehensive knowledge of who is home educating and this lack of accurate statistical knowledge has, certainly in the United Kingdom, played into concerns about home education since the modern phenomenon first came to public light.

British home education has grown exponentially since the 1970s but absolute numbers remained low through the early years of the 1970s and 1980s (Fortune-Wood, 2009; Meighan, 1997). By the 1990s, however, it was beginning to come to more general attention and to provide fodder for media interest. This first wave of interest signified the beginning of a series of popular and political misgivings which have marked home education history in the United Kingdom. Such has been the nature of the contentions around home education that it is possible to view repeated responses to it as a series of moral panics.

At first, the danger seemed to lurk in children's educational and social lives—parents could not possibly do an equivalent, let alone a better, job of educating their children than trained professionals. Children not in school would not be learning adequately and were also likely to lack proper opportunities for socialization, to be isolated from mainstream society, and to have their worldviews curtailed by eccentric parents. Such assessments made eye-catching news headlines (e.g., Hastings, 1998), and the perception of misfits and tree huggers has continued to linger in the public imagination (Morton, 2010). By the 2000s, however, worries about home education were moving, along with prevailing policy concerns, toward safeguarding.

In child protection terms, the millennium turned on ground altering events. Victoria Climbié, an 8-year-old immigrant from the Ivory Coast living in London, was brutally tortured to death by her guardians. The early months of 2000 saw waves of horror shock the public and State alike as the awful details of the case unfolded. The subsequent inquiry made wide reaching recommendations for alterations to child protection services (Laming, 2003). Additionally, in the aftermath, a new government policy aimed at children and children's services, *Every Child Matters*, was launched. This was followed by the *Children Act, 2004* which brought in important reforms for the safeguarding services. The mantra of the British government became, and in 2018 continues to be (HM Government, 2018), that safeguarding is the concern of all who have contact with children.

In 2008, and still in this atmosphere of heightened concern, another appalling case of child cruelty hits the headlines. Khyra Ishaq, a 7-year-old girl from Birmingham died of starvation in the care of her mother and mother's partner. She had been badly neglected and subjected to abusive treatment (Radford, 2010). Six months before her death, Khyra had been withdrawn from school, and while she was known to social services and on the "at risk" register, this was seen by many to be a warning about home education (Rothermel, 2015). In 2009, Baroness Morgan, then Parliamentary under Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, expressed her concerns that "Home education could be used as a cover for abuse" (Morgan cited in Rothermel, 2015, p. 194); abuse that might include physical violence, neglect, sexual abuse, forced marriage, slavery, and human trafficking. This kind of speculation led to the Labor government review of home education commonly known as the Badman Review (Badman, 2009). Graham Badman, a former Director of Children's Services for Kent County Council and the author of the report, made far reaching recommendations concerning the monitoring and regulation of home education which, although accepted by the Labour party, were never put into action due to the 2010 General Election and subsequent change of government.

Much criticized in terms of both methodology and conclusions (Stafford, 2012) and seen by many as simply unworkable, the Badman recommendations were nevertheless highly popular in some quarters. Despite the House of Commons Children's, Schools and Families Committee (2009) themselves assessing Badman's findings as "unsafe", the Review remains surprisingly quoted as relevant research (e.g., Bhopal & Myers, 2016). But perhaps the most pertinent lesson to take forward in the present climate is the judgment issued on it by Professor James Conway of the University of Glasgow. In a memorandum submitted to the Children's Schools and Families Committee in which he condemned the report as "slap dash, panic driven, and nakedly and naively populist," Conway pointed out that "Of course anything could be a shelter for anything else – to say so is to say nothing." What is needed, he went on, is substantial empirical evidence rather than "hearsay and vague generalisation" (Conway, 2009, no pagination). These are words we might do well to remember as the "dangers" of home education take on a new shape in the 2010s. Unfortunately, however, the short history of home education seems to provide an example of the "historical amnesia" which Pickering (2001, p. 186) associates with moral panics. Certainly, the current wave of anxiety appears to be immune from the experiences of the past. Any lessons which might have been taken forward from the Badman Review are conspicuous in the present situation only by their absence.

In 2014, before FBV were named and displayed on the policy agenda, Labour MP Barry Sheerman was already hinting at the perceived dangers of mixing home education and religion. He told the House of Commons:

I am really worried about home schooling. ... the ease with which people can say a child is being home schooled is dangerous territory. When it was confined to a small number of

middle-class families who thought their child might be bullied at school and needed that home support, it was perhaps something we could tolerate ...

I am also worried that people from a strong faith background are choosing to use home schooling. I see it going on in my own community and know it is going on in other communities.

Sheerman, (2014)

Sheerman's words, outlining a particular sector of the population, fulfill Pantazis and Pemberton's criteria for the defining of a "suspect" community as a subgroup singled out for state attention as being "problematic" (Pantazis and Pemberton cited by Awan, 2012, p. 1166). This identification is not by virtue of any wrong doing; Sheerman (2014) does not cite his evidence, even when challenged to do so but simply by membership of a group located at the intersection of class, faith, and educational choice.

By 2017, Sheerman was far from alone in his concerns as increasing connections went on to be made, solidifying the nature of the suspect community. In September 2017, under the title "Home schooling is blamed for rise of extremist Islam," The Times on-line (and many other media outlets) reported on a statement made by Metropolitan Police deputy assistant commissioner, Neil Basu, at a police superintendents' conference in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Unregulated education including home schooling and the segregation of some communities are helping to create extremists and future terrorists, the national police counterterrorism co-ordinator warned.

Neil Basu, a deputy assistant commissioner at the Metropolitan Police, said that some "disenfranchised" members of society feel that the government fails to understand their religion and see "no future in the West". He added: "Segregated, isolated communities, unregulated education and home schooling are a breeding ground for extremists and future terrorists."

(Simpson, 2017, online, no pagination)

Shortly afterward, the same cited dangers became the basis for a Private Members Bill, tabled by Lord Soley, which proposed the registration and monitoring of home educated children. Addressing the House of Lords, Soley put his case:

Children are now known to have disappeared and been abused, radicalised or put into extremist situations. We have to deal with that. We cannot ignore it, for the sake of both the child and society as a whole.

On radicalisation alone, I would simply say that as more cases come to light, as they are, media interest in and public pressure on this issue will grow.

Soley, (2017, no pagination)

Remembering Conroy's words of 2009, it is pertinent to ask what substantial empirical evidence supports these assertions and calls for action. Unfortunately, and despite the force with which the arguments are put and despite the certainty of the rhetoric, precisely what is being talked about here is not clear. In the only attempt that appears to have been seriously made to unravel the postulated connection between home education and radicalization, Charles-Warner (2017) cites a letter sent by Sir Michael Wilshaw, then Chief Inspector of Schools in England and head of Ofsted, to Nicky Morgan MP, then Secretary of State for Education, about possible abuse and radicalization of children attending illegal and unregulated faith schools. Among his concerns, Wilshaw stated that these schools might be using the freedoms afforded to home educators to cover their activities. This concern was then reported by the BBC as a clear connection between such schools and home education. Thus, the fire was stoked and, as in the case of home education and safeguarding a decade earlier, the rhetorical panic has quickly been able to engulf the lack of substance.

In fact, and still in the only current research on the issue, of all 152 English Local Authorities approached through Freedom of Information requests by Charles-Warner, 146 filed nil returns when asked to submit any recorded case in which a home educated child had been radicalized (Charles-Warner, 2017). The remaining six Authorities refused to respond. Nor was Charles-Warner able to extract any evidential basis for subsequent remarks made by Nicky Morgan about the connection between home education and radicalization. A Freedom of Information request submitted by Katarzyna Sinclair in 2018 requesting the evidence on which Basu's comments had been based was refused on grounds of cost, although the reply contained an excerpt from a letter in which Basu claimed that his quoted words had been taken out of context (*What Do They Know*, 2018). In short, no evidence to support the link between home education and radicalization is forthcoming. Yet if Soley, as he suggests in his statement above, does consider media interest and public pressure suitable vehicles to drive the issue forward, then the lack of substantiation and a deficiency of careful consideration are as unlikely to be impediments to either oration or action, as they were during the course of the Badman Review (Stafford, 2012).

Home Education, Radicalization, and the Creation of a Moral Panic

Cohen (2002), writing about the creation of folk devils and moral panics in the 1970s, argued that such exaggerated panics ensue from socially credentialed experts, supported by the media and backed by the police, becoming involved in labeling certain individuals and/or behaviors as problematically deviant. The cited deviance is presented as sufficiently troubling to constitute a "perceived threat to social order" (JAQ6 Krinsky (2013) quoted by Hindess, 2015, p. 50) both in terms of its immediate consequences and as a symptom of deeper malaise within society. As outlined above, home education has a history of being treated as deviant. The immediate concern is generally voiced as being the potential harm to children who do not

receive adequate state oversight in terms of their education, socialization, and physical wellbeing. The deeper malaise is perhaps not so obvious. While it may feel right that children should be in school (Pattison, 2014), what does it really say about society if they are not? One attempt to flush out the underlying disquiet has been articulated as a breakdown of the principles of social democracy in which neo-liberal individualism trumps the collective aims and goods of education for all (e.g., see Lubienski & Brewer, 2015). The argument is an ideological one that pertains not just to home education but to any deliberately sought educational advantage and perhaps its pursuit signifies too deep and potentially painful an excursion into society's soul. Certainly, it has not gained much public traction in debating the rights and wrongs of home education. However, in the case of the current panic, the postulated deeper issue is much plainer to see and feeds on much more immediate relevance and much more imminent fear.

As Hindess (2015) argues the anxiety over radicalization and home grown terror now typifies a period in Western political history. Since the London bombings of 2005, master minded by home grown terrorists, the fear of a "fifth column" attacking from within has flourished (Croft & Moore, 2010). With security levels consistently standing at severe or critical over recent years (Security Service MI5, 2019a), the threat of home-grown Jihadist terror remains a primary concern of the security services with "several thousand individuals in the United Kingdom who support violent extremism or are engaged in Islamist extremist activity" (Security Service MI5, 2019b, online, no pagination). Of all the possible guises of terrorism, home grown terror might be said to occupy a position in which the greatest fear is intertwined with the greatest possibility for successful intervention. There is perhaps very little that can effectively or easily be done to close the terror training camps of Afghanistan and Pakistan, but surely we can take more decisive action toward those who grow up and live in the midst of our own society?

The Prevent strategy is precisely aimed at this window of opportunity with its program of combating radicalization through rooting out the earliest indications of extremism. Introduced in 2003 and revised several times since, Prevent identifies the young as particularly vulnerable and education is one of the crucial sectors with which it engages (Home Office HM Government, 2011). There are two key aspects to this which have particular saliency for the impact on Muslim home educators. The first is that engaging with the young about issues to do with terrorism and radicalization is entirely focused on schooling. Prevent deems schools to be "the best environment in which to discuss terrorism" (Home Office HM Government, 2011, p. 70), an opinion backed by a 2008 U.K. Youth Parliament survey which showed 94% of young people to agree with this. Perhaps the other 6% were home educated, or perhaps the existence of the tens of thousands of children who do not go to school in the United Kingdom was simply ignored (Pattison, 2018). The decision that schools are the right place to carry out the work of Prevent, bears with it the inevitable division of normalcy and deviance which allows home educated children to automatically be considered "disadvantaged," "out of reach," or "at risk."

The second factor is that Prevent and the promulgation of FBVs which form part of it can be seen itself to be instrumental in creating the categories through which radicalization is understood and approached (Heath-Kelly, 2013). The promotion of FBV, since 2014, has become a statutory part of both school and preschool curriculums (OFSTED, 2018a, 2018b). This means that children from the age of 2 through to young adults of 18 come under the remit of Prevent, with the inference that any member of this population may fall foul to radicalization. At the same time, and without further clarification, “extremism” is designated as dangerous and unacceptable; “The Government is clear that there is no place for extremists in any school” (Home Office HM Government, 2011, p. 70). However, and despite calls within the document for proportionality, there is no accompanying definition of extremism. Indeed, there is a general vagueness surrounding Prevent and FBV and the language and ideas which it employs (Dudenhoefer, 2018; Ramsay, 2017). This ambiguity makes Prevent’s aim of identifying extremism an imprecise and subjective enterprise at best (Richards, 2011).

Given this, it is clear that the identification of extremism in any particular case cannot, by itself, be endowed with a linear relationship to an individual’s development as a terrorist. Not only may interpretations of extremism vary, but, as Fischbacher-Smith and O’Neill (2013) argue, the processes of terrorism are complex; motivation, radicalization, know-how, training, and opportunity need to come together to ultimately produce a “successful” act of terror. Broadly, capability and visibility proceed together in terrorist biographies. The optimal intervention point, as calculated by Fischbacher-Smith and O’Neill, lies well up the capability/visibility curve. By contrast, Prevent pitches itself at an unknown starting position, well below the calculated precision of Fischbacher-Smith and O’Neill’s intervention point, where potential or actual extremism must be extrapolated without other confirmatory coordinates.

So, Prevent presides as a top down program, seeking to identify a fuzzy concept in a population determined simply by its age bracket. In order to make practical sense for those seeking to implement Prevent, some kind of sorting process within this population and of the target concept must take place. Indeed, Prevent has been categorized as a program of risk management and, as such, categories of risk must begin to emerge as a means of coming to know and ordering degrees of danger (Heath-Kelly, 2013). In this ordering, the language of “Fundamental British Values,” promoted as a key tool to resisting extremism, underlines that certain parts of the school population (i.e., those perceived as non-British) may be deemed as a higher risk category than others. Given the lack of direction within Prevent and the broader environment in which Islamic radicalization is recognized as the primary security threat (Security Service MI5, 2019b), it is then unsurprising that there is a disproportionate concentration on Muslim children (Dudenhoefer, 2018).

So the Prevent program marginalizes home educators on the one hand, while abetting in the creation of “Muslim” as a suspect community on the other. The combination creates a new and narrower focus of suspicion. Without the need for any supporting evidence but purely from the intersection of categories, a folk devil position can be seen to emerge as a logical inevitability. Muslim home education is drawn into the

spotlight with, as in the case of previous home education alarms, both the fate of the children and the motivations of the families fueling the rising panic.

As Cohen (2002) points out, the objects of moral panics are not necessarily illusory. The demons of our times; the specters of radicalization and home grown terror, the consequences and carnage of terrorist attacks are real fears and real shapers of real lives and real pain. But moral panics, while they may seem to offer simple ways to confront complex problems, also work in the other direction as well, creating more victims, more costs. Behind the folk devils painted by Soley, Basu, Sheerman, and their ilk, the popular portrayal of the terrorist-parent using their own children for their hateful and destructive ends, exist real people or “all too human individuals who conduct themselves in ways that can be represented as deviant” (Hindess, 2015, p. 50[AQ7]). This is the current position of Muslim home educators as they experience the media interest and public pressure Soley talks of and indeed as they experience the political rhetoric of Soley and his supporters; as they find themselves positioned as the folk devils at the new heart of the latest wave of home education panic.

Griffiths (2010) points out that there has not been much exploration of moral panics from the perspective of the folk devils which they create; Hayle (2013) regards the concept of the folk devil as under theorized. The starting point offered by Cohen (2002) is the construction of the folk devil through a soft target, “easily denounced, with little power” (Cohen, 2002, p. xii). The Muslim home educator at the intersection of two suspicious minorities is easy prey to becoming a public image of misgiving and mistrust and on which to concentrate the fear and apprehension of home grown terror.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to explore the experiences of Muslim home educators in the current U.K. security environment. The data for this paper are drawn from three case studies involving questionnaires and interviews with three Muslim home educating mothers. A larger sample had been hoped for yet despite a plethora of anecdote and interest, finding participants for this study proved difficult. Even using a number of home educating contacts, including minority home educators, and despite trawling widely through home educating groups and forums, very few Muslim home educators volunteered to take part in the research, and of these, a number dropped out following initial contact. Home educators are a traditionally “hard to reach” research group (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013) and the low number attracted to participation here may simply reflect this. On the other hand, it is also possible that the current situation is one in which people see remaining silent as a safer option than speaking out.

The three mothers identified as British Muslims. Their home educated children were between the ages of 4 and 13 with a total of 5 children (3 girls and 2 boys) over the three families. One family had further children in school. Pseudonyms are used when referring to participants as part of an assurance of anonymity.

Initial questionnaires provided background knowledge about the family situation and the educational histories of the home educated children. Participants were asked about reasons for home educating and about current experiences. Questionnaires were followed up by telephone interviews which were then transcribed. These transcribed copies were returned to participants for approval and adjustment. The interviews extended the themes raised by the questionnaires and aimed to give participants the opportunity to speak freely about how they understood, and were experiencing, their current situation.

Data were subjected to a thematic analysis influenced by the “folk devil reaction model” through which Griffiths (2010) analyzes the response of Goths to vilification of Goth subculture following the Columbine High School massacre in 1999. Griffiths divides Goth reactions into private and public categories; private being reactions that Goths made to one another within the confines of the Goth community and public being outward facing reactions which Goths presented to the rest of the world. In this analysis, I have drawn on Griffith’s ideas but have categorized the nature of the reactions rather than their orientation.

The current analysis begins with the investigation of identity awareness among the Muslim home educators and their understandings of their current position. This is followed by the analysis of reactions to this understanding, divided into two main categories: retreat and resistance. Retreat is further broken down into acts of blending in and acts of withdrawing; resistance into drawing on resources and contesting folk devil positioning.

The Construction of Muslim Home Educator as a Problematic Identity

The contextual exploration above shows how two legitimate categories of identity (Muslim and home educator) have been brought together in the public imagination through political rhetoric, the media and socially credited sources, to create a problematic identity of Muslim home educator marked by “negative symbolic value” (Pickering, 2001, p. 183). Symbolic interactionist theories suggest stigmatized individuals will react by interpreting and responding to, as well as possibly refuting, the imposed identity (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). This process begins through “reflected appraisals” in which individuals explore their perceptions of how others perceive them.

The dissonance between the mothers’ own understanding of themselves as home educators and their reflected appraisal of how they were seen by, and depicted in, wider society showed an uncomfortably large gap. The three mothers cited their reasons for home educating in terms familiar and common to other studies of home education (e.g., Thomas, 1998; Thomas & Pattison, 2007): dissatisfaction with the philosophy, practices and lived experiences of school, the attractions of a home educating lifestyle, and the chance to do something they saw as being different and better for their child.

Tabinda: The main reason I favour home education is because I can provide a tailor made and relevant curriculum for my children. I find that the way schools are structured do not bring out the best in every child.

Sarah: Home education as a lifestyle also suits us and enables us to spend more time with our children.

Aisha: Basically we were having some issues with the school. ... How could we send our children to a place that we don't trust?

However, the mothers were also aware that their educational choice was likely to be interpreted differently by those outside their immediate circle.

Sarah: I am very aware that people see my headscarf and when they find you home educate they do sort of assume that you want to either insulate your kids from mixing with people of other faiths, which couldn't be further from the truth.

Aisha: When they look at someone and see that they are covered and stuff like that; then they make assumptions about them – assumptions about their education level and what they do with their children and things like that.

Tabinda: When I was visited by the local education officer one of them, the first thing he asked me was 'do you follow a faith based curriculum?' And I said, 'no I don't actually'. ... I think there might be this assumption that we home educate because we want to ostracise ourselves off from the rest of society and you know and there might be some kind of suspicion that we are like this fifth column of people

This general feeling of hostility and mistrust became much more concentrated in specific encounters with authority figures through whom Prevent is enacted.

Aisha: Like when you go to the doctors, stuff like that, that's when it comes up and you feel that you have to explain yourself. .. Because people do think about it obviously because that's what's been in the media – stuff about radicalisation and people home educating so their children don't have to learn about values and things like that.

Sarah: The Prevent policy is fundamentally flawed and makes me wary in dealings with public services generally (when the Health Visitor came to visit I scanned through my bookshelf trying to imagine if any of the titles might cause an ignorant or prejudiced person to perceive us as at risk of 'radicalising' our kids!).

This kind of reflective appraisal led to considerable anxiety:

Sarah: The idea of these people with no training and their own potentially Daily Mail reading prejudices coming into my home and assessing us and having us on their radar; "let's see if these guys are radicalising their kids" just scares the heck out of me.

Tabinda: I have two who are at home and two who are in school and I think that's been more of a worry for me, just worrying that my kids might say something out of turn particularly with the whole thing about questioning children and the Prevent Strategy...

In turn, this anxiety over their problematic identity led to particular responses and coping strategies. Individuals who face stigmatization may deploy a range of such strategies (Kunst et al., 2011) which may include elements of incorporation, negotiation, and contestation (Chapman, 2016). The coping strategies discussed here fall into two categories demonstrating the mixed nature of responses to which Chapman

refers. These categories are described as responses of retreat and responses of resistance.

Retreat

Reactions categorized as retreat took two forms. First, the mothers described attempts to blend into mainstream society by suppressing the markers of their difference and adopting what they perceived to be mainstream characteristics (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Second, a physical withdrawal in which they elected to stay within the safety and acceptance of their own communities; again a noted tactic of stigmatized individuals (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). These are now discussed in turn.

Blending In

Goffman (1963) argues that the main issue confronting the stigmatized individual is that of finding social acceptance. He sees the spoiled identity of the stigmatized individual as emanating from two categories: that which is not immediately noticeable or discreditable and that which is immediately noticeable or discredited. As Muslims, the mothers found their identity to be obviously recognizable through their dress and all commented on this. Tabinda described an incident of hostile discrimination based on her attire that would fall into Goffman's discredited **IAQ8** category.

We were at the park and sitting on the swings and [this girl] her friend needed a swing as well and I was sitting with my two year old son swinging and she told her friend, 'tell her to get off the swing because this is a British park for British people'. So we just ignored her but she kept going on and on and eventually once we had had our swing we walked past and she spat at my son who was only 2 at the time and obviously I thought that was going too far and so I said, 'what's the problem?' and she said, 'you shouldn't be here, this is a British park for British people' and she started making comments about my head scarf and so I said 'what's that got to do with being British? Whether you wear a head-scarf hasn't got anything to do with whether you are British or not.'

By contrast, the mothers were able to handle the discreditable aspects of their identity differently by not drawing attention to or even deliberately hiding aspects of their identities. This is a tactic described as "passing" by Kaufman and Johnson (2004) and which consists of tempering behavior in order to blend into the wider population. Sarah described how she had curtailed the expression of her opinions in order to comply with perceived expectations. Her daughter's nursery school had celebrated Armistice Day, and while her own reaction had been one of discomfort, Sarah decided not to say anything:

I remember thinking in my head, should I say, well it is really nice that you have talked about this but it would be good to acknowledge that actually some people wear white

poppies because they don't like war being promoted and some people are pretty uncomfortable about the way that the mainstream poppy campaign seems to kind of glorify recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and a huge proportion of the Muslim community are hugely opposed to that.

However, despite these thoughts and the legitimacy of her position, she decided not to speak out.

But then actually no, with this in the current climate of Prevent and everyone having to go through Prevent training and much as I trust the people at nursery school and they are nice people, but I don't want to have that conversation. It is not worth it.

Tabinda advised her children to follow the blending in strategy; to be very careful in choosing their words and subjects matters in front of "outsiders," specifically authority figures who could be seen as threats to the family security.

My boys like to joke around a lot and sometimes they might joke about something that everybody else is joking about too but because they are Muslim they might be perceived as saying something inappropriate and that could be seen as a problem because you know sometimes they do hear about things like current affairs, so obviously when they do hear about things like current affairs and when they do hear things they are young and they hear other people joking about it so they might repeat it and then that might be a bit inappropriate and I say, 'I hope you are not saying that in school. If the teachers hear you they might think it's not appropriate.'

In this description, Goffman (1963); that what is acceptable for the "normal" will not be tolerated or will be understood differently if a member of the stigmatized population enacts it. Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2009) also refer to this as they explore British media reporting on radicalization. As a result, the stigmatized identity needs to be self-consciously managed in a way which is not demanded of the normal citizen (Goffman, 1963).

Ostensibly, blending in tactics work to bring together the minority and majority populations by smoothing over the differences between them. Thus in a situation which could highlight difference, the reaction of the stigmatized group works to play down difference (Kunst et al., 2011). However, because it involves the repression rather than the acceptance of difference, the tolerance achieved is restricted to surface appearances. Rather, blending in tactics can be seen as a way of deepening separation by dividing the population into who it is acceptable to "be oneself" in front of and who must be presented with a tailored account of identity.

Withdrawing

Given the stress associated with managing speech, behavior, and identity in the “outside” world, it is unsurprising that the other strategy of retreat comprised a physical withdrawal into the safe and supportive community of fellow Muslim home educators.

Aisha: Home education is accepted and common in the Muslim community many of the people that I socialise with will be other people, other Muslims who are home educating, because it is quite common amongst the community and not seen as something odd.

Sarah: Now we have this kind of retreat inwards where again I think a lot of Muslims feel nervous about stepping outside their own circles and feeling quite misunderstood.

Withdrawal has been noted among other examples of stigmatization, including home educators (Pattison, 2018), and, as well as offering a social haven, can also be seen to enhance group identity (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). This in turn plays into Cohen (2002) that the conferring of folk devil identity may intensify the perceived deviant behavior. While retreat is taken as a self-defence measure, it also has the effect of reinforcing separation, deepening the impression of a group increasingly isolated and therefore increasingly deviant. Pickering (2001) calls this a spiral of amplification, and in this way, Prevent and mainstream reactions to Muslim home education can be understood as contributors to Muslim alienation and therefore to be adding to the problem which it was designed to address (Richards, 2011).

Sarah, offering an inside view on the situation, reversed the common conception. She described how withdrawal opened up rather than constricted her life. While the media and popular image is of a closed off, narrow-minded community; the kind of segregated, isolated world described by Neil Basu, Sarah portrayed her home educating and religious community as offering a diversity and openness that wider society with its censure and judgment no longer afforded.

I feel like I live in two weirdly incompatible worlds because we are lucky in that both our local community and our home ed especially is incredibly diverse and vibrant, open and yet we are in this enormously divided post-Brexit country where there is this whole other world out there which doesn't accept us and does want to restrict us and you turn on the media and see what's going on there and you become aware of that, so it is almost kind of bizarre – you don't know what Britain you are living in and what part of it you are going to have to face.

This kind of reversal of understanding is one which Chapman (2016) notes in her work on the stigmatization of veiling. Among the Muslim women she spoke to the veil, far from being a symbol of oppression and passivity as is commonly represented, was regarded by its wearers as a liberating political tool which they could use in framing their social identity in opposition to the prevailing mainstream discourse about

them. Here, a similar kind of opportunity can be seen to exist as the mainstream world is cast as the repressive environment in which words and actions have to be carefully calculated against the prevailing intolerances, as opposed to the freedoms of expression offered by the Muslim and home education communities.

As Sarah points out, this dichotomy is echoed by the context of Brexit; widely seen as both reflecting and creating a society sharply divided by economic, social, and political (if not moral) issues. In the fault lines around the Brexit debate, the usual overriding concern of economics has been displaced to cultural issues, particularly where these relate to immigration and multi-ethnic, multireligious societies and their divisions (Goodhart, 2016). It is a context in which a niche issue, such as Muslim home education, may easily take on a saliency and symbolism which stretches well beyond the immediate questions.

Resistance

In addition to retreating, the Muslim mothers also resisted their folk devil stigmatization. While behaviors of retreat suggest a powerlessness of the stigmatized group, resistance illustrates the opposite (Bueker, 2017). In acts of resistance, not only are negative stereotypes being rejected but a constructive restructuring of identity is taking place (Breakwell, 2010); such as that which Griffiths (2010) describes among the Goth community as they fought off the post-Columbine negative image imposed on them. Resistance appeared in two strategies. First, the mothers drew on forms of cultural capital to reassert their identities. Second, they contested stepping into the space assigned to them through authoritative political gesturing in the wake of terrorist atrocities.

Drawing on Resources

Bueker (2017) argues that resistance demonstrates an agentic deployment of power, whether economic, political, or cultural. The mothers showed how they drew on all these forms to combat and manage their stigmatized position. For example, Sarah states:

I feel like an exception for being a qualified teacher and having an education but also knowing that we can afford a lawyer.

She thereby notes the cultural capital of education and qualifications; symbolic possessions that underlie a particular approved status in society. That she is a teacher signifies not just her professional status but has particular bearing on perceptions of home education. Such cultural capital has been noted before as a strategy of legitimating home educators against public disapproval (Pattison, 2014). Sarah points to the dominant status of such capital by remarking simultaneously on its unequal spread and indicating that unequal possession of cultural capital may lead to unequal treatment.

The invocation of cultural capital opens up the issues of social class (Bourdieu, 1986), linking legitimacy of home education to institutionalized networks of recognition and “credit” (Bhopal & Myers, 2016; Myers & Bhopal, 2018). Sarah’s words point to the significance of this capital as its capacity to override the stigma of Muslim home education. While such capital may color views on home education, home grown terrorism is more complicated with, as Modood (2006) points out, it is being well noted that those joining international terrorist networks are as likely to be students, graduates, or professionals as they are to come from a Muslim underclass. Mohammed Siddiqui Khan, mastermind of the London 7/7 bombings, was just such an example. Once again, it is the appearances, rather than the realities of the situation which seem to dictate attitudes.

Sarah’s final assertion of economic capital, being able to afford a lawyer, is a further demonstration that she can resist what is happening to her through the channels of the dominant culture. Economic capital allows access to resources, such as defence in law, through which her family’s educational choices can be legitimated.

In a different display of resources, Tabinda illustrated how her superior knowledge of home education law gave her a means of resistance:

I have just had you know like Health Visitors you know asking, ‘why aren’t your kids in school?’ and I said, ‘they are home educated’ and they look surprised and said ‘does school know about this?’ and I said, ‘well it’s not really the schools decision. In this country the law says that it is parents who are responsible for educating their children so it is not really a school decision; it’s a parental decision’.

Here, the resource of her legal knowledge is a form of dominant cultural capital which can defend her choices and reverse the authority of the health visitor in a way which repositions Tabinda as a powerful agent in this particular encounter.

Displays of resistance such as these align home educators with the dominant culture through economic, cultural, and political resources. The danger, however, is the implication that those in possession of such capital may be legitimated in their choice to home educate while others, as Sarah notes, are less able to resist. This is the line of argument taken up by Barry Sheerman MP, quoted earlier, in which he argues that middle class home education might be considered tolerable. Cultural capital is presented as forming a seal of legitimacy over a choice which is legally open to all parents. The same argument of membership of the dominant culture expressed through cultural capital may, at least potentially, be similarly invoked as a determining factor in who should be placed under the radicalization spotlight.

Contestation

One of the hallmarks of moral panics noted by Cohen (2002) is the disproportionality of responses to the perceived threat. Thus, it has been possible for accusations against Muslim home educators to gain high level traction even in the absence of evidence.

When media and politicians turn to scapegoat a particular group upon whom public suspicion can easily be directed, an obvious form of resistance is for the stigmatized group to contest the image being foisted on them through public denial. McRobbie and Thornton (1995) argue that such denunciations form a way of resisting folk devil labels and that others may also come to the defence—they cite the example of unmarried mothers in the 1980s whose defenders found media outlets for counter opinions to the government line of welfare liabilities.

In the case of Muslim distancing from terrorist atrocities, the calls for public refutation can now be seen as an integral part of the handling of events. Following terrorist activity, publicly expressed abhorrence has been invited (if not demanded) from Muslims by political figures, perhaps most notably when, following the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham, in which schools in Birmingham were believed to have been taken over by groups of extremists, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that it was “time for the Muslim ‘silent majority’ to stand up and tackle Islamist extremism in *their* communities” (Whitehead, 2015, n.p., emphasis added). Despite the work of a 19-year-old girl in compiling a 712-page Google document listing such condemnations (Mahdawi, 2017), the message that British Muslims should be more vocal in their rejection of radicalization and terrorism and more forthright in distancing themselves from it is oft repeated. Yet these calls themselves carry a message.

Cameron’s telling use of the word “their” rather than “our” society speaks of an important distinction that divides Muslims from the mainstream. Paul Collier, writing in the *Spectator* plays further on this vital demarcation arguing that “Only Muslims can stop more terror attacks.” He goes on to outline a particular responsibility linked to a particular failure and all enclosed by the idea of a distinct and separate community; “Europe’s Muslim communities have manifestly failed to build sufficiently powerful cultural restraints ... By failing to act unprompted with sufficient vigour to suppress the norms and narratives of violence that circulate on the fringes, Muslims have allowed their culture to be twisted.” and have thus allowed terrorism to flourish (Collier, 2015, no pagination). Muslims, all Muslims, are thereby positioned as being implicated in terrorism and having a responsibility in counter-terrorist action. Yet as Tabinda points out, the argument is an insidious one with far reaching and hurtful implications:

This whole thing about ISIS and terrorism is for them you know, completely foreign to us because it is so far removed from anything that we have experienced or that we have learned and to have that kind of behaviour associated with our religion and ourselves is awful because it is just not something that we have grown up with and that to have it, you know to be accused that this is what your religion stands for is just horrifying.

Sarah contested not just the implications of the argument but also the line it threads from religion to community to failure to responsibility and thereon to guilt:

You have to prove that you are mixing your kids with people from all different backgrounds. You have to prove that you are not teaching them prejudice about people outside their own religion, you have to prove that and right back to you have to prove that you are not telling them that it is a good thing to go out and murder people. It is like the whole atmosphere and a few years ago you had Cameron making that speech about too many Muslims are silently condoning ISIS and that seems to be the point. Unless you are shouting from the roof tops, waving your 'not in my name' flag then no one demands that other people, no one assumes that the guy whose van was taken and murdered someone in Finsbury Park. No one has said to white people or asked a white person, 'do you condemn what he did?' And I find it offensive to question whether I do or not.

Murray (2018) argues that one of the hallmarks of contemporary Europe is an obsession with guilt. Similarly, Blatz et al. (2009) note that government apologies for past transgressions have been a growing feature of Western and other governments over recent decades; in the United Kingdom, apologies include for the Slave trade and the seizure of Maori lands. Present day governments and, by implication national populations, have apologized, and therefore taken on a level of responsibility, for events and ideologies long passed and in which they cannot be personally implicated. Asking Muslims who have not committed atrocities and who have nothing to do with such atrocities can be seen as a continuation of this trend yet one which has removed the volition of the apology.

Asking Muslims to condemn and distance themselves from terrorism may feel to be asking little when Muslims are as appalled as anyone else by such acts. Yet if the argument of Muslim implication is not accepted, then Muslim apology may do more to hurt the givers than stop the offenders. Murray charting the causes and consequences of national apologies for historical wrongs points out that constant apology may finally manifest as "a special cause for guilt" (Murray, 2018, p. 165). Shadowing Murray's argument, the Muslim duty to continually condemn terrorism to gain a legitimate political space in society rests on taking up a demeanor of "perpetual remorse" (Murray, 2018, p. 166). The danger is that this remorse goes on to become an integral part of British Muslim identity and even self-identity. Both Sarah and Tabinda are contesting this by refusing to allow themselves to be positioned as apologists. Their act of resistance can also be seen as a more creative response to reframing their identity and moving toward greater mutual understanding:

Tabinda: It is hard to know where to begin a conversation and try to deconstruct that [the association between Islam and terrorism]. I know that people are fearful and you just want to reassure people but at the same time you don't want to be too apologetic for things because then I think that something is blatantly wrong, I think it should be corrected so it is hard to know, especially for people who you don't know.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the history of home education in the United Kingdom can be seen as a series of moral panics. In this environment, it may not be the factual accuracy of specific statements which gives them their political saliency but rather their integration into an existing world view which makes them plausible (Musolff, 2017). While home education is consistently portrayed as a dubious practice the nature of suspicion surrounding it is malleable, a vehicle for society's wider fears and emotions. In such an environment, it does not matter that every example of British home grown terror to date has been to school and that we can lay our hands on no examples of home educated radicalization.

The effect of the fear, as Critcher (2011) points out, is that the real problem is mis-recognized in favor of a simple solution which, while providing an emotional outlet, may ultimately worsen the situation. In this case, a perfectly legal and increasingly popular educational choice has been co-opted from being an individual family doing their best for their child into a political narrative of danger, radicalization, and security implications (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2009). Such a narrative draws with it a simple solution—the regulation of (Muslim) home education, tangentially through Prevent and later perhaps through changes to the law, as Lord Soley hopes to achieve. While attention is thus focused, the bigger questions and the more complex understanding go unaddressed:

We don't know—nor, it appears, are we ever likely to know—why some young men resort to violent extremism and others do not. Nor, it seems, has there been any consistent notion of what is meant by 'radicalization', with the last five years providing a legacy of confusion as to what forms of 'radicalization' should be the focus of a counterterrorism strategy.

(Richards, 2011, p. 143)

Those situated as the folk devil in this current panic have to come to terms with a new social identity. The management of this may invoke responses of retreat and resistance as explored here. The personal costs of this may be great, but it has social and political implications as well. In the panic surrounding Muslim home education, instead of seeking solutions to extremism and radicalization, and instead of saving children and young people from real risk, we may be inadvertently stoking divisions, adding new grievances to old ones, muddling up the actual issues with those of our imaginings, and increasing tensions rather than dispelling them. And the consequences may yet spill wider, a rejection from both sides of the divide and an increasingly riven and intolerant society where, as Sarah puts it, what is really demanded "is a kind of conformity rather than a mutual respect."

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Author Biography

Harriet Pattison II