Veiled Threats

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Published by Bristol University Press


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Ascribing the violence of one’s adversaries to their culture is self-serving: it goes a long way towards absolving oneself of any responsibility. (Mamdani 2005b:148)

... the cultural fault line that divides the West and the Muslim world is not about democracy but sex. (Inglehart and Norris 2003:63)

Introduction
On 15 January 2009, just before the Bush administration was set to leave the White House, David Miliband, then UK Foreign Secretary, claimed that the use of the term ‘war on terror’ following the September 11 attacks had been a mistake, possibly causing more harm than good. In the UK the term had begun to fall out of favour in the Foreign Office as early as mid-2006; by 2007 the Engaging with the Islamic World Unit in the Foreign Office was advising the rest of the UK government to stop using the term ‘war on terror’. By contrast, in the US there was widespread support for the phrase throughout the duration of Bush’s government. At the most basic level this reflects wider tensions between the US and UK governments in their approaches to global terrorism as well as different levels of public support for the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in each country. Specifically, however, as a Foreign Office spokesman said, the UK government wanted to ‘avoid reinforcing and giving succour to the terrorists’ narrative by using language that, taken out of context, could be counterproductive’ (Burke 2010). Furthermore the shift in language encapsulated the British belief that ‘we cannot win by military means alone, and because this isn’t us against one organized enemy with a clear identity and a coherent set of objectives’.¹

This conscious shift in terminology and the associated discussion acknowledged the importance of language and its ‘potent persuasiveness’ (Steuter and Wills 2008: 4). Despite this acknowledgement, however, this chapter shows how the language used continued to perpetuate a
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discourse of a clash of civilisations (Huntington 1993) even if policy actors shied away from specifically using the term ‘war on terror’.

By definition, the efficacy of a project designed to ‘prevent violent extremism’ is difficult to assess in any meaningful way. There are too many other variables to consider in determining whether such government initiatives have been successful. Even if measuring success were possible, ascertaining the reasons for such success would be little more than speculation. Determining the specific role played by women in this endeavour would be almost impossible. This chapter does not provide any evaluation of the Prevent agenda or Empowering Muslim Women (EMW) initiatives; instead, it considers the ‘work’ done by the discourse or the policy narrative of both. Adopting an intertextual approach, it analyses the symbolic power of the discourse used in relevant policy documentation as well as politicians’ interventions in these and related fields. In doing so it examines the rationale underlying the intelligibility of the initiatives. As previously highlighted, social problems are always problems for someone. It could therefore be argued that social problems and the objects of social policy interventions are constructed through the very process of policy development and implementation itself. The intelligibility of a social problem relies on a shared narrative and a shared understanding of the vocabulary which is used to articulate it. In the case of EMW and Prevent, the policy objective is to ‘prevent violent extremism’ and, while the vocabulary of extremism, radicalisation and terrorism has entered the everyday lexicon of common sense political debate, the meaning given to these terms is neither fixed nor universally agreed upon. Through consideration of specific and associated policy texts, I analyse how we are to understand the rationale of Prevent and the EMW initiatives through contextualising the language used. Specifically, how can we make sense of the idea that these initiatives, allegedly focused on empowering Muslim women, could ‘stop people wanting to become terrorists’?2

The first section focuses on how, despite emphatic disavowals, the Prevent agenda remains inflected with the wider global discourse of Samuel Huntington’s ‘clash of civilisations’. As such it positions the Prevent agenda in terms of global politics, related national policies around terrorism and immigration, and debates around multiculturalism and Britishness. It explores the way in which the concept of ‘culture’ is invoked and implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) defined. For example, I look at the way that both Al Qaida inspired and far-right extremism are discussed in parallel, yet attempts to highlight their similarities only serve to demonise the ‘Muslim community’ more acutely. This
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is partly done through the ‘asymmetric ascription of culture’ (Narayan 1997 cited in Volpp 2001:1190); the causes of far right extremism are not attributed to ‘culture’, whereas Islamist terrorism almost always is. Furthermore, these policy discourses are by their very nature gendered. The risk of terrorist activity is principally located in young disaffected men, yet the bodies and rights of Muslim women are a crucial defining feature in the quest for ‘shared values’ and the much vaunted ‘battle for hearts and minds’.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the articulation of gender within nationalist discourses in the UK by addressing the way in which ‘the Muslim woman’ is constructed in social policy discourses in the post 7/7 era. This process is multi-layered and complex. In the criss-crossing of various social policy initiatives she emerges as a symbol of all that is wrong with Britain’s ill-begotten multicultural experiment, lacking in agency and unable or unwilling to inculcate the right values in her progeny. This section looks at the way in which the involvement of women in the Prevent agenda is made sense of. I consider the role of ‘culture talk’ (Mamdani 2005b) and the explicit way it is gendered in UK social policy discourse and how this is affected by the contemporary geopolitical landscape. I show how emphasising or privileging ahistorical decontextualized ‘culture talk’ allows for the conflation of different phenomena (which are either associated with Muslim communities or attributed to or seen as integral to ‘Islamic’ or ‘Muslim culture’). I analyse how they work to produce a gendered, racialised group within the body politic of the UK at a particular historical juncture.

A clash of civilisations: creating the enemy within

This is the problem with unedifying labels like Islam and the West; they mislead and confuse the mind, which is trying to make sense of a disorderly reality that won’t be pigeonholed or strapped down as easily as all that. (Said 2001)

Huntington’s infamous article ‘The Clash of Civilisations?’ (1993) has been a controversial yet highly influential framing of post-Cold War global politics. In the aftermath of the Cold War Huntington suggested that there would be a ‘revival’ of religion in providing ‘a basis for identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilisations’ (1993: 26) and by implication would pose a threat to national boundaries. Huntington suggested that the fundamental source of conflict in a post-Communist era would be ‘cultural’ rather than
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primarily ideological or economic (1993: 22). Moreover, although he mentions up to eight different civilisations, Huntington’s focus is on Islam as the civilisation against which the West must do principal battle.

The underlying rationale for the Prevent agenda was set out in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) document *Winning Hearts and Minds* (DCLG 2007) and it begins by categorically stating that this ‘is not about a clash of civilisations or a struggle between Islam and “the West”’ (DCLG 2007: 4). Despite frequent and emphatic denials, however, the pervasiveness of Huntington’s discourse can clearly be seen in the UK government’s responses to the 7/7 bombings (and in response to subsequent terrorist threats as I discuss in the epilogue). It can be seen in the following: that religious diversity was deemed responsible for the 7/7 attacks; that Muslims are collectively responsible for the terrorism committed in the name of Islam; that being Muslim is sufficient risk in itself of radicalisation or terrorism; that Islamist terrorism is treated in different ways relative to other types of extremism; and that religious interpretation is emphasised as both an explanation and a solution to Islamist terrorist threats.

**The Muslim problem; creating the enemy within**

At a global level, ‘defending civilisation’ was quickly established at the core of the ‘war on terror’ (Vertigans 2010). For example, in an article entitled ‘A battle for global values’ for the journal *Foreign Affairs* (Blair 2007b), which was published at around the same time as *Winning Hearts and Minds*, Tony Blair sets out his position on what he believes are ‘the roots of extremism’. He characterises the struggle not as a clash of civilisations, rather it is a clash about civilisation. He states: ‘It is an age old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace the modern world and those who reject its existence – between optimism and hope, on the one hand, and pessimism and fear on the other’. This statement is explicitly couched in Orientalist terms which characterise discussions of the West and the rest (Hall 1997). References to ‘an age old battle’ that has been in evidence since time immemorial allude to historical confrontations, such as the Crusades. In this way, Blair echoes Huntington by turning ‘civilisations’ into ‘shut-down, sealed off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and counter currents that animate human history’, thus ignoring histories of ‘exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing’ (Said 2001). The way in which the term ‘difference’ is invoked suggests a static and decontextualized difference where others occupy hermetically
sealed ‘cultures’; it ignores the shifting dynamic understandings of what constitutes difference in different contexts. Such characterisations also ignore the fact that battles between secularism and religion occur within civilisations not just between them (Yuval-Davis 2011), and that there are significant rifts within religions between reformist, orthodox, fundamentalist and progressive strands.

Moreover, despite the clear echoes of Huntington, the rephrasing to suggest that the war on terror is in fact a battle for civilisation itself is more far reaching than Huntington’s thesis, since it suggests that the alternative cannot even be considered civilisation. It is less than civilised; it is barbaric. And as the second section of this chapter will explore, nowhere is this more apparent than in discussions about the position of women in Muslim communities.

The 7/7 bombings were described as ‘….the most horrific manifestation on British soil of a complex Al Qaida inspired threat to our security’ (DCLG 2007:4). The attacks were deemed to be particularly shocking as the perpetrators were British born. Diversity itself was identified as the problem. In Gordon Brown’s keynote speech on ‘The Future of Britishness’ at a Fabian Society conference in 2006, he stated that ‘….terrorism in our midst means that debates …about Britishness and our model of integration clearly now have a new urgency.’ He went on to say that:

...we have to face uncomfortable facts that there were British citizens, British born, apparently integrated into our communities, who were prepared to maim and kill fellow British citizens, irrespective of their religion – and this must lead us to ask how successful we have been in balancing the need for diversity with the obvious requirements of integration in our society. (Brown 2006: 250)

Similarly, Tony Blair (2006) also made an explicit link between terrorism, the alleged failures of multiculturalism and the duty to integrate stating that:

..it [the 7/7/bombings] has thrown into sharp relief, the nature of what we have called, with approval, ‘multicultural Britain’. We like our diversity. But how do we react when that ‘difference’ leads to separation and alienation from the values that define what we hold in common? For the first time in a generation there is an unease, an anxiety, even at points a resentment that our very openness, our willingness
to welcome difference, our pride in being home to many cultures, is being used against us; abused, indeed, in order to harm us.

With its allusions to Frisch’s Firestarters, this passage clearly illustrates a powerful host/guest metaphor which has historically characterised immigration and race relations policy in the UK (Solomos 1993). It suggests that the 7/7 bombers are guests who have abused their hosts’ hospitality, rather than British citizens engaged in acts of (political) violence or criminal activity.

It was not, however, merely the presence of diversity itself; it was the presence of a particular type of diversity that is, religious and cultural diversity as opposed to ethnic diversity. These attacks were conceptualised as the unfortunate outcome of the competing politics of belonging whereby the bombers’ allegiance to Britain was seen as being in conflict with their religious allegiances (Yuval-Davis 2011). So it was as British-born Muslims that they were problematised. Accordingly, just as Huntington isolated Islam as the principal civilisation with which the West must do battle, so too was the Prevent agenda focused on Muslims.

The Prevent agenda is founded on the idea that, ‘…while a security response is vital, it will not, on its own, be enough…winning hearts and minds…is also crucial.’ (DCLG 2007: 4). Tony Blair (2007a: 79) explains how ‘we could have chosen security as the battleground but we did not. We chose values’. He went on to say that ‘you cannot defeat a fanatical ideology just by imprisoning or killing its leaders; you have to defeat its ideas.’ Although clearly ‘imprisoning’ and ‘killing’ are not off the agenda, the priority is a far more righteous endeavour, the battle for values, the battle for hearts and minds. The use of the term ‘hearts and minds’ instils the idea of Muslims’ collective responsibility for terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam. The term itself is an emotive expression with a long and contested history, having been used differently in different historic contexts, for example in relation to the US and UK responses in Vietnam and Malaysia respectively (Dixon 2009). In general, however, the term has been used in relation to counterrevolutionary or counterinsurgency measures rather than counterterrorism. Counterrevolutionary or counterinsurgency measures are invoked when there is perceived to be substantial popular support among the wider population (Dixon 2009). The frequent references to the term ‘hearts and minds’ therefore supports the idea that the Prevent agenda is less about counter terrorism (that is, its more overt security measures) and more about counterinsurgency (that is,
affecting people’s values and by extension their supposed support for terrorism). As such, despite the acknowledgment that radicalisation only refers to a small minority, the Prevent Strategy assumes the entire Muslim community to be a suspect community since it is deemed to be tacitly supportive of violent extremism and terrorist activities. The Prevent strategy therefore symbolised an expression of Huntington’s ‘clash of civilisations’ on ‘home soil’ reflecting his assertion about the revival of religion as a basis for identity which transcends and therefore endangers national boundaries.

The Prevent strategy was not seemingly based on calculated security risks nor on any particular intelligence. The Prevent Strategy literature referred to a figure of potentially 2000 ‘radicalised’ individuals (HMG 2008:5) although the strategy itself included no explicit explanation of what the term ‘radicalised’ meant. Despite such small numbers relative to the numbers of Muslims in the UK, the Prevent strategy was focused on the entire Muslim population and areas with large Muslim populations were automatically seen as being at greater risk and therefore eligible for Prevent funding. The eligible areas mapped almost directly onto those areas which had hitherto been the subject of community cohesion initiatives (Husband and Alam 2011). Furthermore, in response to controversies about potentially engaging with and funding ‘extremist’ groups, the Prevent strategy focused its attention on moderate and non-extremist Muslim community groups and organisations. While possibly an astute decision at a presentational level, these were also the very organisations with the least capacity to effect any influence over anyone who was at risk of ‘radicalisation’ or likely to be involved in terrorism. Not only was such a strategy likely to be ineffective it also was counterproductive in its contribution to demonising an entire ‘community’.

Having isolated and identified all Muslims as potentially suspect, the narrative of the Prevent agenda is also inflected with a strong sense of ‘us and them’, which had been a key theme of George Bush’s framing of the war on terror. It can be seen particularly in the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE or Prevent) policy literature when comparisons are drawn between Islamist extremism and other types of extremism. This juxtaposition of far right extremism and Islamist terrorism supports the idea of the West versus Islam. Far right extremism is positioned as ‘our’ problem; Al Qaida extremism is ‘theirs’. Far right extremism has allegedly been successfully ‘isolated’. This success is attributable to the armaments of ‘the battle for hearts and minds’ which are: promoting shared values; supporting local solutions, building civic capacity and leadership; and strengthening the role of faith institutions and leaders
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(DCLG 2007: 5). The logic suggests that as these mechanisms have successfully been used to help ‘us’ deal with ‘our’ extremism, ‘we’ are going to help you with yours.

Despite the optimistic claims that far right extremism had been isolated, in 2009, two years after the Prevent agenda was introduced, it was in fact expanded to incorporate domestic terrorism from far left, far right and animal extremists. The impetus for this widening was in response to criticism of the Muslim-centric emphasis of Prevent. The inclusion of far right extremism suggests that either far right extremism was not in fact ‘isolated’ as previously suggested, or that the alleged success in isolating it had not worked sufficiently to prevent it re-emerging. More problematically, however, this effort to widen the agenda in fact served to further highlight the differences in the way Islamist extremism and far right extremism in particular are perceived. Even though acknowledging other types of extremism might have been intended to reduce the focus on Muslims, in reality the differential approaches in fact served to achieve the opposite.

This can be seen in a number of ways. For example, far right extremism is not predicated on the idea of a problematic community. If far right extremism and Al Qaida inspired extremism were seen as equivalent, ‘moderate’ racists would have been recruited to assist in its eradication, and women and young people would have been targeted or assisted to develop a stronger voice to counter it. Similarly, when Christians engage in acts of violence in support of these views (for example bombing abortion clinics in the US) this is not homogenised to the global ‘Christian community’.

By contrast, radical or even socially conservative views among Muslims are automatically associated with a terrorist threat and these are extrapolated to the ‘Muslim community’ as a whole, who are seen as responsible by default. This logic is not applied in the case of mass murderers such as Anders Breivik. Indeed they are not even described as ‘terrorists’. Instead responses have been detailed in depth psychological analyses of Breivik’s motivations which focus on him as a ‘Lone Wolf’ (Kellner 2012). There is little discussion of the ideology which underlies these other forms of terrorism and heterosexual, white, nominally Christian men are not seen as potentially susceptible to the same type of extremism. The fact that there are right-wing Christians who are homophobic or anti-abortion, or Christians who are against the ordination of women or gay marriage and civil partnerships, is not seen as an indication of ‘radicalisation’, extremism and therefore an indication of potential terrorist activity.
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The Muslim Solution

Having created a suspect community the response embedded within the Prevent narrative is to focus on Muslim communities collectively and on Islam as a religion for a solution. This logic is reliant on the presumption of a pathologised Muslim community which needs to ‘get its house in order’ and relies on ‘good Muslims’ to assist the state in dealing with the ‘bad Muslims’ (Mamdani 2005). It is evidenced in the following statement: ‘Many individuals and organisations have a role to play in defeating terrorism – but voices from within the Muslim communities and the actions of Muslim organisations can be more powerful than most’. (DCLG 2007: 9)

These ‘voices from within the Muslim communities’ which might be considered ‘more powerful’ are identified as the voices of young people and women. The reasons why this may be the case are not explicitly discussed. They are only inferred. It is possibly that young people are themselves most at risk; that they could be susceptible to the process of being radicalised or may know people who are. (Notably here the fact that it is young men rather than women who are presumed to be most ‘at risk’ is not explicitly acknowledged). Equally, the emphasis on young people may also be a result of the enduring stereotype of Asian youths caught up in a ‘culture clash’, and in particular that young men are rebelling against being represented by ‘elders’ who are out of touch with their realities of unemployment and racism (Burlet and Reid 1998).

By contrast the logic of why women need to be involved is different. Simplistically, the fact that the perpetrators of 7/7 were men, and that women are not widely considered to be potential terrorists means that they are automatically presumed to be moderate or mainstream. Women are seen to be incorruptible and moreover, while youth are potentially corruptible, they can be ‘saved’ as a result of the greater influence of women who will enable greater state surveillance. This logic is flawed, however, in that on the one hand it suggests women and young people are potentially more powerful, and on the other it stresses that they also need the support of the Government to be heard.

The inclusion of women nonetheless remains a powerful symbolic gesture capitalising on gendered Orientalism post 9/11 (Abu-Lughod 2014) which I explore in the second half of the chapter.

Furthermore, while government Ministers and officials were clear not to lay the blame at Islam’s door per se, the fault was instead attributed to a perversion of Islam. Such extremist ideologies were then deemed to be the necessary target of government intervention. Religion is seen
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therefore as both the cause of Islamist terrorism as well as a source of hope for its eradication. For example, the literature states that work needs to be focused more specifically ‘on undermining the distortion of the Islamic faith by violent extremists’ (DCLG 2007: 5). It continues by saying that the government wants to ensure the most effective use of the education system in promoting faith understanding and that, in order to confound those who seek to exploit a lack of understanding of Islam, the government needs to provide access to ‘trusted high quality learning about faith and Islam in Britain today’. The clear goal is to work ‘particularly with Muslim communities to undermine the myths and half-truths being peddled by violent extremists and to equip communities with a counter narrative’ (HM Government 2008: 18). It is argued that these strands of work are important in undermining the ideology of division and conflict.

Positing Islam as a solution can also be seen in the fact that one of the clear objectives of the Prevent agenda was to ‘promote a stronger understanding of faith, culture and history’ through using opportunities in the school curriculum, and in colleges, universities and elsewhere, to convey a deeper understanding of faith, history and culture: ‘We need to develop a stronger understanding of Islam and Islamic culture, society and history across all communities, breaking down the suspicion and misunderstanding that can result from ignorance’ (HM Government 2008: 16).

Although at first glance it might appear that this refers to ‘the suspicion and misunderstanding that can result from ignorance’ among non-Muslims about Islam following the 7/7 bombings, if read in the context of other policy literature, however, it is clear that the focus is not in fact on educating non-Muslims about Islam, but rather it is about educating Muslims themselves. More broadly, the policy discourse emphasises the need to work ‘particularly with the Muslim community to help strengthen religious understanding among young people and in particular support an understanding of citizenship in an Islamic context’ (HM Government 2008: 18) There are calls to broaden the provision of citizenship education in supplementary schools and madrassahs which should be designed to demonstrate how Islamic values are entirely consistent with ‘core British values’ (DCLG 2007: 5). Such references to ‘equipping communities with a counter narrative’ and the frequency with which they are deployed imply that a ‘distorted’ view of theology is of itself a necessary and sufficient condition for acts of terrorist violence. By extrapolation, therefore, promoting the right type of Islam ensures that you can prevent acts of violence committed in its name. This is clearly simplistic. The radicalisation
thesis (Kundnani 2014), which presumes that exposure to extremist ideas is causally related to terrorism, has become a foundational myth in this debate, such that consideration of any other explanatory factors has come to be regarded as ‘apologism’. (I will consider this in more depth in the epilogue). That is not to suggest that people’s religious beliefs and interpretations do not have any role to play in why certain people are drawn to involvement in terrorist activities. Rather, the issue is the emphasis given to this relative to or excluding other factors which may also play a contributory role.

Principally, this emphasis on religious text, interpretation and ideology de-contextualises extremist violence from any political motivations. Such a view ignores that there are a range of other factors which may equally be necessary to instigate such violence (Butler 2004). In addition, it removes any analysis of the causes of radicalisation from material and structural factors. Instead the language perpetuates the idea of a homogenous but wayward community that does not fully understand its own religion and which needs to be brought back into the fold.

The policy response in the UK to concerns about religious belief, as evinced through the Prevent narrative, has not been focused on removing the visibility of religion from civic society, as in France, through a quest for an ideal secular republic. Instead, the debate has centred on promulgating the ‘right type’ of non-radical or progressive Islam. It represents an attempt to codify and fix a particular interpretation of Islam. Historically such initiatives are predated by policies in colonial India which attempted to understand two of the main religions (Islam and Hinduism) in an alleged effort to ensure that ‘native sensibilities’ were not inadvertently offended thus destabilising colonial rule. (Such policies were often connected to uprisings that had taken place, for example, the 1857 rebellion or ‘mutiny’). Furthermore, colonial efforts to codify religion in India relied on narrow interpretations of only small sections of the community and in fact curtailed indigenous syncretism, leaving entrenched fault lines between different religious groups, sects and regions (Misra 2007) in a clear case of divide and rule.

At its most basic level the Prevent agenda is premised on an ‘us and them’ paradigm. This is done through making an imaginary monolithic ‘Muslim community’ simultaneously the primary focus of suspicion as well as responsible for eradicating violent extremism. Religion remains the prism through which the Prevent agenda and violent extremism is understood. What is conspicuous by its absence, however, is the failure to acknowledge foreign policy as a grievance (as opposed to a justification) that might need to be addressed, even though clearly it
too is a factor frequently ‘exploited’ by extremists. As Butler writes, ‘Our own acts of violence do not receive graphic coverage in the press, and so they remain acts that are justified in the name of self defense, but by a noble cause… the rooting out of terrorism’ (2004: 6).

The Prevent narrative is only intelligible through a wider policy discourse in which an imagined Muslim community is pathologised as part of a locally inflected ‘clash of civilisations’. Seen in the context of wider debates on Britishness these debates are clearly racialised. Furthermore, as Yuval Davis and Anthias (1989) make clear, the construction of national boundaries are not only racialised, they are gendered; the threats represented by Muslim women and men are different. While Muslim men are presented as dangerous for their radical ideologies and their potential for political violence arising from disaffection, the Muslim woman, by contrast, as the next section explores, has come to symbolise the dangerous consequences of ‘too much multiculturalism’.

The Funeral Pyre of Multiculturalism

Ongoing critiques of multiculturalism, from a variety of political perspectives, have often centred on Okin’s thesis that multiculturalism is bad for women since it supports cultural relativism in relation to the issue of women’s rights (see Chapter 1 for more detail). Explicit discussion of gender as a variable is absent from the UK’s counterterrorism agenda; women are barely mentioned unless in relation to specific women-only initiatives and gender neutral text implicitly refers to men. Given the interrelatedness of different policy discourses, however, the rationale for EMW initiatives draws on these pre-existing characterisations of the Muslim community as particularly problematic and uniquely patriarchal (Kumar 2012). The discursive production of ‘the Muslim woman’ in the Prevent agenda shows the pathology of the wider Muslim community as a whole through both the patriarchy of Muslim men and the victimhood of Muslim women. The picture is, however, more complex and ambivalent as I will explore. In addition to symbolising all that is wrong with the Muslim community (as victims of its patriarchy and misogyny) Muslim women simultaneously symbolise the alleged separateness or self-segregation of the Muslim community, particularly in relation to veiling.
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**Saving Muslim women**

The association between empowerment and Muslim women has a common sense appeal because of two factors: the perceived status of women in Islam and secondly, given that the majority of Muslims in the UK are of South Asian origin, (post)colonial constructions of the ‘submissive Asian woman’. These powerful discourses support the idea that Muslims constitute a problematic community and that part of their danger comes from being ‘backward’. One expression of this backwardness is the perceived generalised status of women as oppressed or marginalised within Muslim communities. That status alone, that is, marginalisation by Muslim men rather than their status in wider society (by virtue of their ethnicity, class, geographic location, citizenship status), is considered responsible for their social positioning. This generalised patriarchy is most acutely expressed in discussions of what are described as ‘barbaric cultural practices’; the process of pathologisation is complete.

The press release accompanying the launch of NMWAG, in explaining its role stated that: ‘They [that is, NMWAG] will discuss issues and concerns that affect Muslim women, for example education, employment, access for women to mosques and their management committees and cultural barriers including issues around forced marriages’ (my emphasis).

Here, the issues and concerns that ‘affect Muslim women’ are being defined. There are a number of problematic assumptions embedded within this. For example, the only issue which applies exclusively to Muslim women is access to mosques. The document states that ‘Mosques are community hubs’ and that the ‘Government’s dialogue with Muslim women has shown that access to Mosque life is vital for them to engage effectively in the community’ (DCLG 2007: 10). Tony Blair even referred to ‘their [Muslim women’s] frustration at being debarred even from entering certain mosques’ (2006). There have undoubtedly been women-led campaigns about access to mosques (Brown 2008), but the issue of the state’s engagement with Muslim women’s struggles to gain access to mosques is problematic. As Katherine Brown has suggested, ‘the instrumental use of gender by government has had the impact of relegating Muslim women’s political activism to a sideshow’ (2008: 487). More importantly perhaps is that Muslim women’s engagement here is narrowly defined in that it is focused on women’s attendance at mosques. As a result it is Muslim women who attend the mosque who are the Muslim women that the government feel should be engaged with and who can and should have
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a say in community matters. It therefore perpetuates, reifies or ossifies a particular community structure rather than widening the basis, scope or criteria for seeking Muslim women’s engagement. The discourse emulates or reinforces particular characterisations of Muslim women, not one which all Muslim women are necessarily comfortable with (as discussed in Chapter 4).

The statement above also refers to forced marriage as a ‘cultural barrier.’ This is possibly even more concerning in the context of EMW. First, it particularises forced marriage to Muslims despite the fact that such crimes occur among non-Muslims. Second, it is not clear how talking about forced marriage is connected to terrorism, other than if we accept that both are indicators of a ‘failed community’ or are somehow condoned by Islam. Its inclusion as part of the EMW initiatives in this statement exemplifies the way that social policy discourses related to the Prevent agenda are characterised by the conflation of what are conceptually distinctive policy concerns (such as immigration, forced marriage and terrorism). The securitisation of the policy landscape means that potentially any issues which fall within the social policy cluster relating to Muslims can then be targeted. In relation to women, these conflations are particularly striking.

A cursory analysis of policy literature on preventing violent extremism shows the frequency of references to what are referred to as ‘cultural practices’. Tony Blair’s ‘duty to integrate’ speech included reference to ‘cultural practices’ such as forced marriage which he claimed contradicted British belief in standing ‘emphatically at all times for equality of respect and treatment for all citizens’. Blair (2006) noted ‘that in many religions the treatment of women differs from that of men’ (yet he omitted to mention that gender differences and imbalances are normalised in wider secular society too and that many secular organisations do not reflect women’s voices as a proportion of the population – the House of Commons being a prime example). Furthermore, during a talk about Prevent entitled ‘Many Voices; understanding the debate about preventing violent extremism’, Hazel Blears also included numerous references to forced marriage, female genital mutilation and homophobia, and made various references to ‘respect for women’ and ‘violence against women’ (Blears 2009).

This conflation can also be seen in the slippage between other policy discourses. A House of Lords debate on honour killings which took place shortly after the London bombings, as well as racialising such crimes exclusively to Muslims, made links with both immigration and terrorism. Lord Russell-Johnston stated that while he may be
‘soft on those seeking asylum from persecution...[he was] not soft on the importation of barbarism’ (Hansard 2005: 1421). During the same debate, Lord Parekh uses the expression ‘domestic terrorism’ to discuss a ‘man who has disposed of his daughter’ and suggests that ‘he does not see himself as a criminal; nor does his community see him as a criminal – he is a martyr’. Lord Parekh then goes so far as to compare the situation as ‘like that of a suicide bomber’ concluding that ‘if a man does not fear death or pain, the law has no sanctions to impose on him’. The invocation of the term ‘terror’ is striking in this context and is no doubt connected to the timing of the debate, a few months after the 7/7 London bombings.

Similarly, such policy conflations allow policy solutions directed at one area of policy to be extrapolated to other policy areas. This can be seen in the way in which the issue of forced marriage has been instrumentalised in order to enact immigration laws which limit citizenship rights. In 2007, for example, as part of an announcement on crime, security and justice, the Labour government proposed to raise the minimum age at which foreign nationals can receive marriage visas to enter Britain. It was raised from 18 to 21 in an effort ‘to crack down’ on forced marriages.\textsuperscript{10} The rationale for this move is to ‘allow the young people involved to have completed their education as well as allowing them to gain in maturity and possess adequate life skills’ (BBC 2007). Yet in the UK it is possible to get married at 16 with parental consent, a fact which illustrates the racist assumptions underlying the policy. The state is now ‘using the demand for women’s rights in minority communities to impose immigration controls and justify a racist agenda’ even though there is little evidence that such changes have benefitted abused women (Siddiqui 2005: 273). For example, changes in immigration law only protect British women, whereas conversely foreign national brides who experience problems are at risk of being deported (Anitha 2008). To be clear, forced marriage is a social problem which occurs and which needs to be tackled, but it is its policy positioning as a specifically Muslim concern which is problematic.

Similarly, the ‘cultural practice’ of gender segregation followed by some Muslims has been associated with extremism. In 2009, another New Labour politician made some interventions, drawing on the theme of women, segregation and extremism. Jim Fitzpatrick was MP for Poplar and Canning Town at the time (and since 2010, MP for Poplar and Limehouse) and made a high profile intervention in this area when he declined to stay at a wedding which had been segregated by the couple who had invited him to attend ‘out of respect for the
elders attending’. He said that he did not want to sit separately from his wife and explained that he had left the wedding so as not to cause offence. Later, however, in an interview, Fitzpatrick claimed he was concerned that this was an indication of the increasing influence of the IFE (Islamic Forum in Europe) in Tower Hamlets (although in the same interview he claims this is only the second time in ten years he has observed a segregated wedding) (BBC 2009). Segregation in itself was assumed to imply extremism. Sex segregation exists in wider society of course and is largely uncontroversial (for example, single sex schools, bathroom facilities and changing rooms). Where it does arouse controversy, for example gentlemen’s clubs which bar women, this is not articulated as ‘extremism’. Rather it is regarded as old fashioned, antiquated or anachronistic. In the case of segregated weddings, however, given that it is something that some Muslims do, it becomes associated with extremism.

Combined, these policy conflations link the prevention of violent extremism to a variety of issues and concerns, all of which rely on a rescue paradigm and which construct Muslim women as victims of their ‘culture’. The process is, however, more nuanced and the figure of the Muslim woman is also symbolic of the self-segregation of which Muslim communities are accused. This is most clearly seen in policy discourses about the veil. While the EMW initiatives steered clear of explicitly referring to the veil, a number of politicians have made some very public interventions on it which form a backdrop to the Prevent narrative.

‘Veiled threats’?

In the EMW literature itself there is only one reference to the veil. In her ministerial foreword to Empowering Muslim Women: Case Studies Blears writes, ‘we pay too much attention to Muslim women’s appearance – with perennial debate about headscarves and veils – and too little to what they say and do’ (DCLG 2008: 2). While this statement is in itself uncontroversial and was echoed by the research participants, it draws attention to the issue of the veil (and in fact the majority of the photos in the EMW brochure are of hijab-wearing Muslim women). No other garment of clothing has sparked so much debate. In the UK there have been no initiatives to ban the burka or prohibit schoolgirls from wearing the hijab as there have been in France, Belgium and Italy. Jack Straw (Labour MP), however, notoriously triggered a national debate by writing about the subject in his weekly column in a local paper in his constituency in October 2006. In this
column he described his feelings about niqab-wearing women who came to see him in his Lancashire constituency. He explained that although the particular encounter which provoked these thoughts had been ‘polite and respectful’, it apparently made him uncomfortable that he could not see what he described as the ‘lady’ who was exercising her democratic right to come and see her Member for Parliament. He argued that the conversation would have been of greater value if the woman had taken the covering from her face. He then explained how he always asked niqab-ed women to remove their veils, even claiming, despite any apparent supporting evidence, that ‘most…seem relieved’ that he did so and that in one case ‘the veil came off almost as soon as… [he]…opened…[his]…mouth’ (Lancashire Telegraph October 2006).

This is despite the fact that even Jack Straw admits they appeared to be wearing the niqab from personal choice rather than at the behest of fathers, brothers or husbands, thus differing considerably from the French position where it is automatically assumed to be a symbol of Muslim patriarchy. An alternative interpretation might be that these were articulate assertive women who had come to seek advice or assistance from him, a well-known politician, on a constituency matter, and that they felt obliged to remove their veils given his vociferousness on the matter. In that encounter Jack Straw clearly had power to help or not help, listen or not listen to his constituents. Despite the furore, with a wide range of politicians and media commentators wading into the debate, there is tellingly little sign of the voices of the women at the centre of this debate themselves; how did they experience being asked by their representative in Parliament to remove their niqabs? They may well have been relieved as Jack Straw suggests, or alternatively, they may have felt humiliated or exploited. In the absence of the voices of the women he is referring to, it is more probable that his assumptions are projections reflecting his own discomfort and justifications for his actions.

Media responses to Straw’s intervention illustrate how Muslim difference is conceptualised according to accounts of i) Britishness and national identity, ii) citizenship and social cohesion, and iii) matters of gender and violence (Meer, Dyer and Modood 2010). In his ‘duty to integrate’ speech, Blair also mentions the veil, lending support to Jack Straw’s inopportune interventions.11 Interestingly, he caveats his comments by saying that he knows ‘…it is not sensible to conduct this debate as if the only issue is this very hot and sensitive one of the veil. For one thing, the extremism we face is usually from men not women’. This implies that if women did represent a threat, then their clothing could be an indicator of possible extremism. In contrast to ongoing
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debates in Europe and elsewhere (Turkey, Tunisia and Malaysia, as Blair is keen to highlight) where the emphasis has been on the veil as a symbol of the oppression of women, political discourse on the veil in the UK has been more nuanced. While the theme of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ permeates the discourse, its relevance is also accounted for by its role as a very visible marker of difference and self-segregation. The veil, therefore, has an ambivalent position in UK political discourse; on one level it signifies self-segregation, yet on another level it symbolises a certain kind of militancy and empowerment through religion for Muslim women. For example, there have been a number of high profile cases (Dustin and Phillips, 2008) where women have fought for the right to wear the veil and been accused of both militancy or succumbing to patriarchal wishes. And as I discuss in the epilogue, as the number of Muslim women and girls who join ISIS increases, no doubt its symbolism as an indicator of possible ‘extremism’ will gain further momentum.

Having demonstrated how ‘the Muslim community’ emerges as a uniquely problematic group in the wider policy landscape of the UK, particularly in relation to the role of Muslim women, I now return to the key question of how the relationship between ‘empowering Muslim women’ and preventing violent extremism can be made intelligible.

**Empowering Muslim women to combat terrorism**

In the policy literature Muslim women, along with young people, are positioned as being uniquely placed to combat terrorism. There is, however, very little clarity as to the raison d’être for this. In the introduction to the report ‘Women’s Role in Peaceful Coexistence Tackling Violent Extremism and Promoting Community Cohesion Faith’, Meg Munn highlights the way that ‘Women suffer disproportionately as victims of violent extremism unleashed by conflict, especially in countries where rape has been used as a weapon of war’. In the report, women with experiences from Ghana, Bosnia Herzegovina and the UK (including Northern Ireland) are brought together. This is consistent with long standing feminist critiques of militarism and references the potential for cross border solidarities between women. Comparing the experience of civilian women in the UK with women from Bosnia Herzegovina who have experienced ethnic cleansing, however, trivialises the experiences of the latter. Nor are there any references to women who might be affected by wars in which the UK has long been embroiled. What this juxtaposition
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achieves, however, is the tentative suggestion that there is a broader case for the involvement of women in preventing violent extremism. The most explicit discussion in the policy literature of any possible direct association between empowering Muslim women and preventing violent extremism, however, is put forward by Sadiq Khan (Labour MP for Tooting, assistant government whip at the time, and the Minister for Communities & Local Government). Khan writes:

But it (women’s rights) also has serious consequences for preventing extremism, given that the majority of the extremist and radical ideologies that lead young men to turn themselves into human bombs are also deeply misogynist. The Taliban and their barbaric laws towards the women are a good example of this misogyny.’ Sadiq Khan MP (Khan, Katwala, Jameson 2008: 41) (my emphasis)

Although Khan states that women’s rights have consequences for preventing extremism, he does not identify an explicit causal relationship between misogyny and radical/terrorist political activity. It appears to be enough, seemingly, to refer to both in the same sentence and a meaning can be inferred, suggesting that by dealing with one, you make inroads into the other.

An initial cursory reading of Sadiq Khan’s statement suggests that, beyond the coincidence of misogyny and terrorism, Muslim women were somehow responsible for misogyny, or at least collude in it. His statement intimates that if only Muslim women were empowered, then Islamic radicals would not be misogynists, and if they were not misogynists, then they would not become terrorists. Although a rather cynical interpretation, it appears to be vindicated by a later speech by Khan which he gave to a group of Muslim women and in which he implied that women have almost brought patriarchy on to themselves: ‘Misogyny is an integral part of their (extremists’) ideology….By being the best you can be – as professionals, as citizens, as proud Brits and Muslims, as hope-givers – British Muslim women can prove the hatemongers wrong and weak in the face of strength’ (Khan 2009).

In these interpretations, while ostensibly framed in feminist terms, the possibility that Muslim women might have the potential to be politicised or express their grievances in similar ways to those anticipated from young men was not even entertained. There are no references to women and girls having the potential to be radicalised despite research which suggest that women’s emancipation may increase the number of women terrorists (Oliverio and Lauderdale 2005).
the epilogue I consider these earlier assumptions in the light of the increasing number of British Muslims girls leaving the UK to join ISIS.

At the level of public life, Muslim women are seen to be powerless and in need of state assistance. Conversely they are deemed to have power in the narrow environment of the home. The main way in which women are engaged with is therefore through their role in the family, or as at ‘the heart of the community’, and in their relationship to young people. For example,

> these individuals and groups should reflect the diversity of Muslim communities, including Muslim women and young people. Women can be a particularly effective voice as they are at the heart not only of their communities but also of their families…It is important to reach beyond would-be gatekeepers to the community when seeking strong community voices. (HMG 2008: 17)

This statement highlights the paradox of the logic of empowering ‘strong community voices’; clearly, if they require external assistance to be heard over ‘would-be gatekeepers to the community’, they are not so strong. As Brown (2011) argues, the frequent references to women and young people together is infantilising. In addition it resonates with discourses around protecting ‘women and children’ (Enloe 1990).17

Just as in development discourses, where women are presumed to hold the key to successful economic development, Muslim women are presumed to be moderate and ‘good Muslims’ and able to positively affect the community. What is implied is that if women have a stronger voice and are able to influence members of the community more widely then it will necessarily be for the good of ‘the community’. The implicit presumption is that women are never at risk of becoming radicalised and that they would never be supportive of or sympathetic to expressions of violent extremist ideology or terrorist acts.

In the Prevent literature a number of documents were published which sought to highlight existing good practice. The aim of these was to inspire and guide those third sector organisations who intended to seek local authority Prevent funding. Very few of these original ‘Pathfinder’ projects were specifically focused on women, however. The Pathfinder projects specifically related to women are included in a section about ‘Building the resilience of communities to resist violent extremism’ (DCLG 2009). Resilience is never explicitly defined, however, and the closest definition is: ‘…help them (communities and community groups) actively reject and condemn violent
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extremism’ (DCLG 2009: 4). It suggests that resilience is almost akin to immunity; that women’s empowerment represents a vaccine for the community against violent extremism and radicalism and that women are the carriers of that immunity.

Only one case study was solely focused on Muslim women. It was an e-safety awareness course in Harrow (DCLG 2009: 14–17) and was provided for Muslim women who had children or worked with young people. According to the brochure, ‘the training encompassed the potential issues that can arise from use and misuse of available digital technologies.’ Having said that, the literature is clear in its message that the aim of the project was to consider all aspects of ‘e-safeguarding’ (for example, cyber bullying, chat rooms, pornography and grooming as well as ‘radicalising’ materials from groups promoting violent extremism) and the user website was aimed at different audiences, not just Muslims (DCLG 2009: 14). The project worked with local mosques and community groups, especially women’s organisations, to promote and encourage key target groups to participate. Muslim women were the clear targets or focus of the project, yet the themes were much more broadly applicable to a wider audience, not just women or Muslims, but parents and other people working with young children more generally. Harrow Central Mosque Ladies’ Committee helped to promote the event, encouraging women to participate. The project ‘…reinforced the key messages of safeguarding and mainstreamed Prevent into another initiatives for safeguarding young people’ (DCLG 2009: 15). One of the stated outcomes was that, ‘by receiving e-safety training, mothers and teachers understand how and why young people can become susceptible to radicalisation and other dangers through information available online and via other digital media if their usage of these information sources were to remain unmonitored.’ (my emphasis) (DCLG 2009: 15).

The fact that the only project which is overtly focused on women concerns e-safeguarding validates observations about Prevent, that it was fundamentally about spying and surveillance, a criticism which was levelled at the initiatives primarily focused on young people (Kundnani 2009). This suggests that the EMW initiatives within Prevent were about teaching mothers and sisters to spy on their sons and brothers. If this is read in the context of John Reid’s speech (made in East London in 2006), the message that mothers should spy on their children is even more transparent. In that address he is quoted as saying that:

‘There is no nice way of saying this… these fanatics are looking to groom and brainwash children, including your
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children, for suicide bombings. Grooming them to kill themselves in order to murder others.’ He added: ‘Look for the tell-tale signs now and talk to them before their hatred grows and you risk losing them forever. In protecting our families, we are protecting our community.’ (Batty 2006; Travis 2006)

Conclusion

The language of the debate ensuing from 7/7 clearly emphasised the ‘otherness’ of the perpetrators through their religious affiliation and as a result the ‘Muslim community’ became positioned as ‘the enemy within’. The Prevent agenda emphasised religious ideology as the principal explanation for Islamist terrorism to the exclusion of any other potentially relevant factors. Furthermore it was only Muslims who were positioned as being uniquely conflicted by the assumed contradiction between their religious and civic duties, caught within the competing politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011). This could clearly be seen when the Prevent agenda was tasked with dealing with other forms of extremism such as that of the far right. Ironically the remit was widened in response to criticisms of the exclusive focus on Muslims. This new remit, however, which led to frequent comparisons with far right extremism, only served to highlight the singular pathologisation of Muslims inherent in the Prevent agenda. Only Muslims are reduced to their religious affiliation (‘religious essentialism’) despite the complexities and contestations inherent within such a categorisation. As such, the Prevent narrative reflects the principal themes of Huntington’s ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis (Huntington 1993). I have also shown how these discourses are gendered and argued that the intelligibility of the EMW initiatives relies partially on constructing as problematic the position of women within a homogeneous ‘Muslim community’; policy literature is imbued with these discourses either explicitly or implicitly.

In this chapter I have therefore also analysed the policy discourse of the war on terror as it relates to Muslim women in the UK. This wider discourse of ‘them and us’, a failed community, the wrong type of Islam and the role of women paves the way for the securitisation agenda, the dehumanising, and the end of tolerance (Kundnani 2007). Feminism in the context of the EMW initiatives emerges as part of a civilisationist discourse in which it is positioned as part of modernising mission. This perspective claims ownership of and responsibility for
feminism as a Western value, thus ignoring a whole history of black feminist critiques of white Western feminism and also the existence of ‘native feminisms’, for example, Islamic feminisms. Liberal feminism ends up becoming equated with the West and is thus even less likely to be accepted by those for whom the West represents the source of neocolonial and imperial exploitation. Associating counterterrorism measures with the issue of women’s rights becomes another way of delineating the line between ‘them and us’. This resonates with Inglehart and Norris citing Polly Toynbee: ‘What binds together a globalized force of some extremists from many continents is a united hatred of Western values that seems to them to spring from Judeo-Christianity’ (2003: 65).

On its own, the EMW agenda does not do this. It works in tandem within the context of a wider policy landscape. My argument is that the EMW is an overt expression of the way in which Muslim women are viewed solely in relation to their communities. The themes raised in this chapter will be revisited in subsequent chapters as I trace the way in which these ideas permeate, circulate or mutate in the context of policy in practice. The very fact that the objectives of Prevent are untestable arguably lends credence to the idea that the agenda is, at best, presentational (that the government is at least being seen to be doing something); at worst, it is tantamount to anti-Muslim racist propaganda.

Notes
1 Hilary Benn cited in NBC news (Associated Press 2007). Although notably Gordon Brown continued using the term (Afshar 2012)
2 As set out in the Prevent Strategy
3 Foreign Affairs is the Journal of the Council on Foreign Relations whose Board of Directors includes Madeline Albright, Colin Powell and Fouad Ajami, all of whom form part of the Bush circle that framed the response to 9/11 according to Joseph Power (theorist of soft power) cited in Kumar (2012)
4 Huntington suggests the ‘great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural’. He explicitly links culture and civilisation, describing the latter as ‘a cultural entity’.
5 See also John Reid speech where he repeats this and clarifies that ‘It’s not Muslims versus the rest of us’ (Reid 2006)
6 Frisch’s Fire Starters or Biedermann und die Brandstifter (1986) is a play in which two characters disguised as hawkers talk their way into people’s homes and settle down in the attic, whereupon they set about the destruction of the house. The play was written in the immediate post-second world war period as a metaphor for Nazism and fascism, showing how ordinary citizens could be taken in by evil. The central character is a businessman called Biedermann. The first ‘hawker’ talks his way into spending the night in the attic through a mixture of intimidation and persuasion. Later a second arsonist appears, and before Biedermann can do anything to stop it, his attic is piled high with oil drums full of petrol. He even helps them to measure
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the detonating fuse and gives them matches, refusing to acknowledge the terror of what is happening and becoming an accomplice in his own destruction.

7 Bawer (2006) writing in the US uses similar metaphors, describing the ticking time bomb of increasing Muslim ‘immigrants’ as Europe’s ‘Weimar moment’ (alluding to the Weimar Republic’s weakness in the face of the rise of Hitler and the rest of Europe’s appeasement).

8 Vron Ware at The New Muslims conference on 8 March 2013 at The University of Manchester explained how the British Army’s imam had issued statements making clear that nationalism and patriotism were compatible with Islamic beliefs.

9 Given the way in which the majority of mosques have developed in the UK this could also be connected to lack of space and funding to expand rather than the explicit bar that Blair’s comments suggest.

10 This follows in the footsteps of Denmark where the age has been raised to 24 for overseas spouses.

11 The timing of Blair’s speech was not long after Jack Straw’s remarks for which the latter has since apologised in a politically opportunistic moment prior to the 2010 general election (Walker 2010).

12 By which he simultaneously invokes solidarity with these other countries but also conveniently ignores that these are Muslim majority countries in which the timbre of the debates are distinctly different.

13 Afshar (2012) discussing a more European wide fascination with the veil associates it directly to a fear of terrorism.


15 Stephen Timms MP was attacked by Roshonara Choudhary, a 21-year-old hijab-wearing woman of Bangladeshi heritage, during a constituency surgery in east London. The way the attack was originally reported was interesting. Some blogs and discussion boards have noted the reluctance of some of the media to refer to her ethnicity, faith or background as part of a diatribe against PC, but I interpreted it as a discomfort about representing a Muslim woman who had done something unusual and unexpected; I cannot help thinking about how the incident might have been portrayed if the perpetrator had been male. Later reports which came out after her trial suggest that Roshonara Choudhry carried out the stabbing because she held Timms personally accountable for voting in favour of the Iraq war. Her concern over the war drove her to seek out a website such as RevolutionMuslim and to subsequently download Anwar al-Awlaki lectures which allegedly ‘radicalised’ her. See Githens-Mazer (2010).

16 The Prevent agenda discourse focuses on ‘radicalisation’ and ‘violent extremism’ and ‘empowerment’ (rather than ‘terrorism’ and ‘emancipation’ to which Oliverio and Lauderdale (2005) refer).

17 In Chapter 5, I explore in greater detail how many of the references to Muslim women are as ‘mothers and grandmothers’.