

**SUBJECTS OF CARE:**  
**Ethics, Education, Extremism**

Niyousha Bastani

Department of Politics and International Studies

St John's College, University of Cambridge

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation questions a popular logic that takes the cultivation of “better thinking” as the path toward more caring and ethical political engagement. I study this logic by looking to globally pervasive educational and psychological approaches to counter-extremism, which target Muslims especially as knowing in dangerous ways. Counter-extremism in the UK throws into focus common beliefs about education, psychological well-being, and care. I argue that the latter beliefs co-constitute a widespread racialising ethic of “taking care of” the cognition of Others so that they become suitable, fully human subjects. The dissertation therefore asks: How do dominant beliefs about education, psychology, and care shape counter-extremism? What are the conditions of possibility for the emergence and dominance of these beliefs? How do these beliefs racialise some as less human Others on the basis of “cognitive development”, and what does this process reveal about dominant modes of racialisation more broadly? Pursuing these questions, I elucidate the dominant genre of being human that is secured by counter-extremism and the terms through which it produces its Other. I draw on ethnographic consideration of an extremism prevention “lab” (Chapter 2), historical investigation of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of this genre of being (Chapter 3), and ethnographic engagement with the everyday reproduction of this genre and resistance to it in UK higher education today (Chapters 4 and 5). My intervention deepens understanding of anti-Muslim racism. By pointing to counter-extremism’s framework of care, I challenge the consensus that anti-Muslim racism primarily works through an ethic of fear. I also draw attention away from the exceptionality of counter-terrorism’s production of Otherness by revealing the norms of psychology and education that enable it. In short, this dissertation illuminates how the common association of supposedly superior cognition with ethical superiority constitutes today’s dominant genre of being human.

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## **Preface**

Some of the ideas presented in Chapter 4 informed my thinking in a published co-written article of which I am the first author, in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* (Bastani and Gazzoti 2022), as cited in the text. Some of the interviews cited in Chapter 4 (those dated 2018) were initially conducted as part of the dissertation submitted for a prior degree – MPhil in Development Studies, at the University of Cambridge.

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## Chapter I. Introduction: counter-extremism and ethico-cognitive hierarchy

... while I am interrogated by white officials [...] thinking only that I must endure this public questioning, the stares of those around me, because my skin is black, I am startled when I am asked if I speak Arabic [...] reminded of another time when I was strip-searched by French officials, who were stopping black people to make sure we were not illegal immigrants and/or terrorists, I think that one fantasy of whiteness is that the threatening Other is always a terrorist. This projection enables many white people to imagine there is no representation of whiteness as terror, as terrorizing. – *Displacing Whiteness* (hooks 1997)

### i. Prologue

It is November, 2018. A petite adult sits cross-legged on the sidewalk in front of the gate, a black fabric sack, perhaps a pillowcase, pulled over head and face, reminiscent of images of men incarcerated at Guantanamo Bay, which those who have seen will never forget. The person has their wrists tied together. A cardboard sign rests against their chest: 'Counter-terrorism is unjust. End Prevent. End Islamophobia'. The chapel of King's College towers over this one-person protest. Some passers-by cast a glance down toward the protestor, but no one stops. I approach the protestor and kneel down, 'Hey, are you doing okay?' From behind the fabric, a small trembling voice: 'Yeah. I'm protesting the university's Prevent policy'. I nod, forgetting they cannot see me. I want to say, that is brave, but instead, very softly I just say, 'That is good.' And it is good, except that the protestor, who I guess to be no older than eighteen, is sitting there alone and close-up, I can see that they are shaking. 'Are you sure you're okay? Do you want me to sit with you for a while?' I receive a quick 'No.' They add a thank you for checking in and repeat that they are okay. 'Good luck,' I say, and keep walking to a meeting with my PhD supervisor.

I feel like I should message someone, but I have not asked the protestor's name, and even if I had, who would I call? Because I am researching the UK's counter-extremism policy, Prevent, I know that it deems criticism of counter-terrorism a sign of "vulnerability" to "radicalisation". I also know that the university's pastoral staff, such as tutors, and those employed in mental healthcare, like university counsellors, are legally obliged to report anyone who shows such "vulnerability" to Prevent. So, I know I cannot contact a tutor or the university's mental health services. Thirty minutes later, still thinking about it, I see that someone has messaged a chat group for student activists at the university already, and someone else has responded that they are friends with the protestor and are headed there to keep an eye out,

because they are worried about their well-being. More friends of the protestor message that they are on their way to check in. I sigh with relief, that at least the protestor has a caring social network.<sup>1</sup> In a news report published a few hours later by the student-run newspaper, *Varsity*, the protestor commented that their protest action aimed to ‘highlight the vulnerability and isolation faced by individual students targeted by [the implementation of Prevent]’ (Chye and Spencer 2018).

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A year earlier in October 2017, shortly after moving to the UK and starting an MPhil programme at the University of Cambridge, I had received an email from a professor from my undergraduate studies. The subject line read ‘FYI’ and the message contained a link to an article in the *London Review of Books*, titled ‘Don’t Go to the Doctor’. The article, written by Karma Nabulsi (2017), a professor at the University of Oxford, tells of the terrifying intrusion of Prevent into institutions of healthcare and education, including universities. She writes of the fear fostered amongst students, especially Muslim students, by the imposition of a legal duty on educationalists to ‘snitch’ on students who might be ‘vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism’ (Nabulsi 2017). I assumed my former professor had sent me this article as a warning, given my involvement in student politics and my being Muslim. I fixated on the article, reading it over and over.

My initial fixation was not based in fear; it was based in anger. While a first generation (or “1.5 generation”) immigrant to Canada, my awareness of the policy did not inspire immediate fear because of the facts that I hold a Canadian passport, I do not often get perceived as Muslim, and do not always get perceived as “not white”. Still, despite rationalising away fear at first, a year after I began this PhD project about the ‘dominant genre of being human’ (Wynter 2003) instituted by counter-extremism, I began to have nightmares. I dreamed anxiously of the police knocking down the door of my “quaint” Cambridge college room, because I had looked at the wrong website or checked out the wrong library book; of being deported from the UK *and* having my Canadian passport shredded. Initially, however, reading Nabulsi’s account, I was only angry. Nabulsi (2017) writes:

Last year a friend told me about a Syrian refugee family recently arrived in his town. He and his wife, who had met them at the mosque, helped them to settle in. At nursery, their son ... was constantly drawing pictures of planes dropping bombs. Rather than ensure the child received help to get over his traumatic experiences, the nursery staff called the

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<sup>11</sup> Field notes, November 2018.



police. The parents were visited by the local force, separated, and questioned: ‘How many times a day do you pray?’

The heartbreak of a child’s pain being translated at school into a sign of ‘being drawn into terrorism’, and then being used as justification for police intervention into the intimate space of a family home and for interrogation of people’s faith was haunting. Even more haunting was learning as I began my research that alongside framing “psychological suffering” as a sign of vulnerability to “radicalisation”, Prevent also presents itself as a resource for psychological care for those deemed simultaneously vulnerable and dangerous. Counter-extremism in the UK, as the title ‘Don’t Go to the Doctor’ suggests, parades around in the guise of care.

I began to hear stories from university students of colour who were too afraid to seek help for their mental health within their university. One undergraduate student, Farah,<sup>2</sup> based at a university in Manchester, told me about her hesitation around speaking of her experiences of racism at the university’s counselling services. She explained:

Being able to talk frankly about how living in a racist world makes you feel, and criticising racist institutions is something I wish I could do in therapy, but I can’t. How am I ever really supposed to be well, if I can’t ... seek help for the trauma and the harm that is caused by racism? Prevent perpetuates that problem, because part of it is just that a white counsellor is not going to get it, but part of it is also a white counsellor *might tell the police* that I said that [because] that’s a sign of radicalisation. [That is because of how] mental health is stigmatised, placed on top of how justifiably angry black and brown [people] are seen as aggressive or threatening.<sup>3</sup>

Farah’s exasperation in asking, ‘How am I ever really supposed to be well?’ stuck with me. Prevent’s threat of police intervention and ensuing violent consequences seem to say, ‘Don’t go to the doctor’, and also, ‘Don’t go to therapy’, and if you go to university and struggle there, ‘Don’t ask for help’. This dissertation shows that counter-extremism in the UK demands wellness from those who are racialised as Muslim at the same time as it makes healing from the inseparable material and psychological harms of racism impossible.

This contradiction – and equally, this set-up for failure – is the focus of this research project. The next section elaborates on the context and elucidates some of the significant puzzles that arise from it. I then present my research questions and situate them in the relevant literature. This leads to my approach to the research and an overview of how I develop my argument. Here I include an overview of the chapters through which the argument takes shape. Lastly, this chapter ends with a discussion of the main contributions of this dissertation.

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<sup>2</sup> The names of all interview respondents and interlocutors throughout the dissertation have been changed to a pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup> Interview 2, March 2020, Manchester.

## **ii. Context: ethics, education, and extremism**

In the UK, as in other “Western” liberal democracies, the so-called domestic war on terror continues to haunt daily life. It lurks in invisible architectures of surveillance, makes itself heard through calls to report suspicious activity on public transport and in public spaces, and covertly directs culture and community through funding to “moderate” Muslim organisations. These routinised performances of security are productive of new geographies of war in everyday spaces (Amoore 2009). For those who are marked as suspects because they are perceived as Muslim, the pervasive presence of counter-terrorism is felt in the fear of seemingly mundane decisions that can have life-changing consequences – decisions like how one dresses, whether one grows a beard, what one speaks of in public, which book one reads on the train and in what language (Abbas 2019; Elshimi 2015).<sup>4</sup> In the UK, which has since 2002 ‘taken the lead in updating the terms upon which citizenship can be denied’, the terror of passport removals and citizenship deprivation, of detention and deportation, follows those configured as outsiders inside the nation (Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019b, 46).

Critical studies of the “war on terror” therefore often understand counter-terrorism to be conducive to a fearful, vigilant majority on the one hand and fearful, self-censoring Muslims on the other. In the shadow of infinitely expanding security measures, the dominant ethic of our time appears to be, according to critical security studies, driven by fear and the ‘desire for security’ above all else (Howell 2011). Yet, global counter-extremism measures increasingly draw on a discourse of welfare and support, reconstituting the fearful majority as a caring public that watches out for those deemed vulnerable to “radicalisation” (Bastani and Gazzotti 2022). Pervasive security measures call on caring subjects – who care about at-risk individuals and the risk they pose to society – to do their part in preventing extremism. The constitution of subjectivities by the “war on terror” then is not reducible to fearful frames of mind. Counter-extremism especially relies on subjects constituted through discourses and practices associated with care. The “war on terror” then is also reproduced by and productive of subjectivities constituted through a discourse of care – it is productive of subjects of care.

Contemporary counter-extremism mobilises a partly psychological and partly educational ethos of care that has been instrumental throughout the “war on terror”. Current approaches to counter-extremism prescribe care for individuals deemed vulnerable to “radicalisation”, usually

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<sup>4</sup> For insightful theorisation of Muslims’ experiences of counter-terrorism in the UK as ‘the terror of whiteness’, drawing on bell hooks’ (1997) theorisation of ‘white terror’, see also: [Abbas 2013](#).

those perceived as Muslims, with the stated aim of improving their mental health so that they can think in “better”, less extreme ways. This premise suggests that caring subjects can save those “vulnerable” to “radicalisation” and turn them too into ethical subjects. By learning to think “better”, those who are “vulnerable” will then learn to care about the world in less extreme ways, thereby adopting the correct ethic – that is, way of knowing and being – for belonging to a liberal democratic polity. This premise has been at the heart of older “war on terror” initiatives for making moderates (Mahmood 2006). Saba Mahmood (2006) pointed to U.S. foreign policy’s treatment of religious hermeneutics as a principal target in the “war on terror” nearly two decades ago. At the time, she was making strange a logic that had quickly gained the unquestioning approval of security experts and mainstream media alike: the root cause of “radicalisation” was understood to be the unsophisticated interpretative skills of Muslims. The problem was agreed to be that “fundamentalists” were reading the Qur’an too literally. This consensus in turn validated the belief that “radicalisation” could be prevented by a caring education that fosters more critical thinking. While madrasas were then marked early on as sites of anxiety about “home-grown terrorism” (Haddad, Senzai, and Smith 2009), since then, the anxiety around how Muslims think has been creeping into all sites of counter-extremism policy broadly.

The notion that caring for the less developed “cognitive skills” of “vulnerable” Others is the best means for countering extremism then increasingly appears like common-sense in global politics. Differing and interconnected articulations of “Preventing Violent Extremism through Education” or “PVE-E” can be seen everywhere (Davies 2018), from global development projects that incorporate counter-extremism mandates into vocational training for young Muslims in the Global South to Global North universities (Novelli 2017; Bastani and Gazzotti 2021). In 2015, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) member states charged the body with assisting them to use education to prevent extremism. International networks have been created for the specific task of preventing radicalisation through education.<sup>5</sup> As the European Commission’s Radicalisation Awareness Network (EC RAN) puts it in describing its education practitioners’ working group, educators ‘are well-positioned for prevention work, both for identifying and safeguarding vulnerable young people at risk of radicalisation, and for teaching critical thinking skills’ (‘Promoting Citizenship and Common Values through Education’ 2018, 6). At the level of national policy, the UK’s Prevent strategy has been taken as a leading model by other national governments for preventing

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<sup>5</sup> See: ‘Decisions Adopted by the Executive Board at Its 197th Session’ 2015.

“homegrown terrorism” (Davies 2018). Section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism Act 2015, commonly known as ‘the Prevent duty’ charges public sector institutions to have ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ (Home Office 2015b, para. 1). Prevent thus tasks schools and higher education institutions with a legal duty to take part in countering extremism. Referrals from these institutions can be passed onto the Home Office’s Channel programme, a multi-agency process ‘which provides support to individuals who are at risk’ (Home Office 2011) and can involve actors like psychiatrists, counsellors, or religious leaders. Education institutions are in these ways constituted both globally and domestically as a “frontline” for counter-extremism and education is understood to be a key technique for it.

Yet, little critical attention has been given to the particular notion of education that makes the very idea of preventing extremism comprehensible. Counter-extremism explicitly mobilises education with the aim of securing the dominant political ethic – that is, the dominant way of knowing and being. Prevent, for example, defines extremism as

vocal or active opposition to *fundamental British values*, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs (Home Office 2011, 107; *my emphasis*).

This stipulation of what entails ‘fundamental British values’ presents an ethical prescription, whilst the emphasis on the policy’s implementation at educational institutions and through educational programmes marks education as essential for securing this ethic. Such an understanding of education is not particularly new. From European colonial education to counter-insurgency campaigns for ‘hearts and minds’, education has been historically interlinked with the protection of the status quo. In the current context, critical scholarship widely notes that pre-emptive approaches to knowing have come to define our present (Massumi 2007), while critical security scholars have additionally pointed to evidence that refutes pre-emptive theories of “preventing radicalisation” through education (Elshimi 2015, 110–29). These concerns differ from mine, which regards the culturally sedimented notion of education that underlies the work of counter-extremism. New security practices ‘co-mingle [and] contest’ with past practices (de Goede, Simon, and Hoijtink 2014, 417); like any new practice, they only become sensible through discourses with which existing institutions are already ‘sedimented’ (Sara Ahmed 2012, 25). Counter-extremism mobilises a sedimented notion of education derived from the liberal developmental belief that being truly educated means becoming more fully human and thus a more ethical human attuned to the virtues of human rights (Slaughter 2009).

This notion of education is essential to making the very idea of pre-emption in the “war on terror” comprehensible. It lays the foundation for the widespread faith in the idea that caring

for Muslim Others so that they may “think better” (or, “think critically”) can prevent their “radicalisation”. In response to these core tenets of counter-extremism, some Muslim organisations and allies have decried the forms of care made available through counter-extremism, contending that such care is surveillance, thought-policing, and criminalisation by other means. They have argued that instead of teaching Muslims “how to think”, care for those who are facing systemic violence should be understood differently as requiring political action.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, those resisting counter-extremism also appeal to an ethic of care, but one which disrupts the broader belief in education as that which makes Others more human. Accordingly, this dissertation shows that the leading framework for counter-extremism and contestations of it are bound up with questions of care and education. They are also indicative of a globally dominant genre of being human today, which I characterise as that of ethico-cognitive Man. By paying close attention to counter-extremism’s attempt to secure a particular ethic through psychological care and education, I bring the following overlooked corners of the puzzle of counter-extremism into view.

First, counter-extremism presents a surprising policy parallel to ‘the ethical turn’ in political theory (Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz 2013). The latter has been concerned with the necessary ethic for revitalising democratic activity in increasingly disengaged and pluralistic societies and for the promotion of some notion of equality or justice (E. Myers 2013). While political theorists within ‘the ethical turn’ do not present any unified understanding of the desirable ethic for improving political engagement, they do share ‘the conviction that ethics constitutes the missing something that can help cure what ails democratic life’ (E. Myers 2013, 1). In practice, counter-extremism policies like Prevent threaten to dampen democratic activity by discouraging dissent and impeding freedoms of speech and association (Kundnani 2015). However, at least by its own account, Prevent addresses a similar concern as that of the ethical turn: what kinds of ethics are conducive to a liberal democratic culture and ‘mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and belief’ (Home Office 2011, 107)? While contemporary theorists have struggled to present an answer without undemocratically prescribing ‘uniform ways of being’ (E. Myers 2013, 23), Prevent unapologetically prescribes just that. It recruits everyday actors to partake in “taking care of” those deemed vulnerable to extremism by facilitating the latter’s education into the ethic deemed desirable. The pressing questions of how to care for the Other and the world, and how to cultivate the ethic conducive to doing so in the “right” ways, are thus played out in the implementation of counter-extremism policy and in resistance to it.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Medact’s statement on the securitisation of health: <https://www.medact.org/membership/groups/securitisation-of-health/>

This the case because such policy forces everyday actors to engage with its prescribed ethic, one way or another. Implementation of and engagement with counter-extremism then provide surprising windows from which to observe existing ethics of care and their social and political consequences.

Second, counter-extremism's framework of fostering desirable ethics amongst those deemed dangerous brings into focus a powerful mode of contemporary racialisation. This mode of racialisation constitutes Otherness by referring to how people think and their concomitant values to constitute them as cognitively inferior and (therefore,) ethically dangerous. Citizenship requirements in the UK, for example, emphasise 'good character' requirements, which refer to how people think and the values to which they accordingly adhere (de Noronha 2020; Kapoor 2019). While citizenship in the UK has always been a project of racial exclusion (El-Enany 2019), since the beginnings of the "war on terror", laws that suspend the law in the name of national security have made citizenship even more precarious for those constituted as "not white" (Kapoor 2018). Kapoor and Narkowicz (2019, 18), citing the Home Office, note that in the UK citizenship is explicitly 'a privilege not a right'. Good character requirements were expanded in 2009 in response to supposed 'crises of multiculturalism' (Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019a, 653) ; they sought to determine whether someone shows sufficient similarity with the dominant culture for assimilation. This mode of racialisation also informs counter-extremism's evaluation of whether someone is "vulnerable" to extremism. Through both counter-extremism and immigration control, such evaluation has a distinct influence in determining who is human enough to have 'the right to have [human] rights' (Arendt 1973, 296; my addition) – who can be granted asylum, right to residence, and citizenship, and who must instead face citizenship removal, detention, and deportation. While Prevent presents itself as a way of supporting "vulnerable" individuals to learn the ethics necessary for membership in the state, the lack of such ethics can be grounds for deeming some people ineducable and denying them the right to any sort of care. Evaluations of how people think and the ethic they accordingly adopt thus shape the bounds of a dominant genre of being human. In the UK, assessment of people's adherence to the conventions of this genre is crucial to the process of racialising some as less human than the ideal citizen, with the latter constituted as British and white, or British because white. It is accordingly crucial to grapple with this mode of racialisation to grasp the mechanics of its operations.

Third, studying counter-extremism in the UK is conducive to insights regarding how this mode of racialisation operates pervasively, beyond traditional security services (such as the army, the police, immigration offices) and especially through education institutions. Prevent is

internationally influential in its approach, which entails recruiting non-traditional security actors (like health services, education institutions, and private landlords) as everyday border guards (Keenan 2019). The relative ease with which education institutions and educationalists especially have been enrolled in the task of “taking care of” the minds of those deemed “vulnerable” to extremism is puzzling and disturbing. The relatively easy co-optation of educationalists as non-traditional security actors highlights a need to reconsider the role education *already* played vis à vis security concerns, even before the introduction of counter-extremism. While critical scholars of counter-extremism have often focused on the exceptionalities counter-extremism entails, for example the intrusion of national security into the realm of education (Durodie 2016; Gearon 2017; Holmwood and O’Toole 2018; O’Donnell 2018; Saeed 2016), counter-extremism also throws sedimented norms of education into question. Policies of ‘preventing extremism through education’ largely rely on psychological expertise for their framework of caring for vulnerable minds (Younis 2021). In turn, counter-extremism also throws a spotlight on psychology’s influence on current understandings of education, care, and the relationship between them.

Altogether then, this dissertation looks to counter-extremism to consider the dominant understandings of care and education that enable it and its mode of racialisation. Many renowned critical theorists have argued in different terms that both education and psychological institutions do the work of social reproduction (Bourdieu [1967] 1971), of maintaining the status quo, of interpellating subjects according to dominant structures of power (Althusser [1971] 2006), of maintaining ‘the order of things’ (Foucault [1967] 2018; [1961] 2001). Considering this claim from a different direction, the dissertation questions powerful beliefs that enable institutions of psychology and education to do such work. Specifically, I question the popular ‘liberal belief’ that the role of education and psychological expertise are to make better humans. The phrase liberal belief, which I borrow from Jeanne Morefield (2019), refers to the tendency of liberal theories of justice to take the question of the most just political system as already settled. Accordingly, liberal theories of education tend to take the latter as a social instrument for achieving or maintaining liberal democracy and turning ‘pre-political’ subjects into ideal liberal ones (Straume 2016). Questioning this notion of education brings into view an unholy alliance between education and psychology with a telling colonial history. Historically, colonial psychiatrists have indirectly contributed to colonial rule through an expert discourse on the ‘educability’ of colonised subjects (Mahone and Vaughan 2007). The main influence of British colonial psychologists and psychiatrists was not achieved through the realm of medicine; it rather operated through the production of a discourse on the inherent abnormality of the “native mind” (Linstrum 2016). This discourse fed into discussions on self-governance in the late

colonial period. This project grapples with the persistence of a dominant and colonial understanding of education as “taking care of” the cognition of Others so that they may better adhere to the dominant genre of being human.

### **iii. Research questions**

Motivated by the puzzle of educational and psychological approaches to counter-extremism on the one hand and counter-extremism’s racialisation of Muslims on the other, the overarching questions of this research are as follows. First, how do dominant understandings of what constitutes education, psychology, and care shape counter-extremism policy that targets those perceived as Muslims? Second, what are the conditions of possibility for the emergence and dominance of these understandings of education, psychology, and care? Third, how do these understandings enable the racialisation of some humans as not fully developed humans? Put together, these questions set out to illuminate how counter-extremism constitutes ‘being Muslim’ as a racial identity and how dominant notions of education, psychological well-being, and care inform processes of racialisation more broadly.

I begin to approach these questions by elucidating the ideal ethic (way of knowing and being) imagined by counter-extremism and the terms through which its Muslim Other is constituted (Chapter 2). Drawing on the work of Sylvia Wynter, I explicate this ethic as a dominant genre of being human. I then follow this genre of being human back to the twentieth century, to illuminate the historical conditions for its emergence (Chapter 3). Finally, I clarify how the collective reproduction of this dominant genre and its Muslim Other takes place (Chapter 4), and whether and how it is challenged (Chapter 5). The next sections of this chapter present the central argument of the dissertation, the theoretical approach through which it is developed, an outline of the chapters that shape it, and lastly, the contributions that emerge from it.

### **iv. Argument and approach**

The central argument of this dissertation is that counter-extremism racialises Muslims as less human Others by mobilising a dominant belief about education, psychology, and care. This is the belief that education, especially education as informed by psychological expertise, is the means by which those who know in better ways and are thus “better” human beings – in the dual sense of being more ethical humans and thus more fully human – must care for less cognitively



developed Others so that they too may become “better” humans, again in the dual sense of becoming more ethical and more fully human. The dissertation then is oriented around two axes for grappling with how being Muslim is racialised as being a vulnerable cognitive subject of care: education and psychology. These two axes are presented here as accomplices in the formation of counter-extremism and its constitution of caring subjects on the one hand and “vulnerable” subjects of care on the other. From the study of these two axes emerges an overarching organising principle that institutes racial difference more broadly and shapes the racialisation of Muslims through counter-extremism specifically. I call this the ethico-cognitive principle, which institutes the dominant genre of being human, ethico-cognitive Man.

### ***Situating anti-Muslim racism***

I set out to analyse the racialisation – that is, the process of constructing hierarchical racial difference – that counter-extremism enacts in targeting those perceived as Muslims, and to do so in a way that overcomes two problems in the International Relations (IR) scholarship on anti-Muslim racism. While critical scholarship in Politics and IR has begun to treat “Islamophobia”<sup>7</sup> as a form of racism, the understanding of how Muslims are racialised remains underdeveloped in ways that raise two concerns. One is the erasure of historical continuities, and the other is the erasure of similarities in form with respect to other contemporary articulations of racism. First, the critical study of “Islamophobia” post-9/11 tends to overemphasise historical discontinuity at the expense of continuity, erasing analytically and politically useful links between anti-Muslim racism today and earlier histories of racism. Second, the emphasis on the exceptionality of anti-Muslim racism in the “war on terror” also overlooks and threatens to erase similarities in form with other and overlapping contemporary racisms, that is, racisms with differently constituted targets. Both types of connections – historical and relating to form – are analytically useful in showing how different racisms relate to one another and politically useful in allowing anti-racist solidarities to take shape around common tenets of racialisation.

These constraints in the scholarship arise from an earlier reliance on securitisation theory for analysis of “Islamophobia” within IR. Scholars have insightfully applied securitisation theory to show the ways in which the “war on terror” has targeted Muslims as a security threat and constructed Islamic identity as a risk that requires exceptional measures (Elshimi 2017; Heath-Kelly 2012; Mavelli 2013; Qurashi 2018). Yet, securitisation theory’s focus on exceptionality

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I have placed the term Islamophobia in scare quotes to indicate scepticism of the term, except for when it is used by interview respondents, because the framing of systemic violence as a “phobia” depoliticises the matter.

distracts from the ways in which *deeply rooted* institutional norms facilitate the implementation of counter-extremism and its racialisation of Muslims. When an issue is securitised, it is cast by a powerful actor like the state as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures (Buzan et al. 1998). However, adopting this lens to analyse counter-extremism's "exceptional" treatment of Muslims overlooks how anti-Muslim policy is made possible by a pre-existing, generative, and already institutionalised context of racism. Racism long precedes the post-9/11 eruption of anti-Muslim racism and continues to exist as the social production and hierarchisation of difference 'through processes of dehumanisation' which are 'structurally entrenched in the distribution of power and organisation of society, resulting in ... premature death, subjection to systematic violences and exclusions from society' (Rutazibwa 2020, 223). As Nadya Ali (2020, 4) puts it in her critique of critical studies on Prevent in IR scholarship:

The failure to acknowledge 'race' as constitutive of security practices is manifest in how racism is consigned to being one of the many possible side-effects of Prevent, as opposed to being its condition of possibility.

When racism is taken instead as the pre-existing condition of possibility for security practices that target Muslims, there can be no justifiable nostalgia for a return via de-securitisation to the 'normal politics' that facilitated anti-Muslim racism in the first place. Instead, it is imperative to untangle the historical continuities that inform anti-Muslim racism today. In response to such critiques, scholars have begun to contextualise the "war on terror" racism directed at those perceived as Muslim within longer histories and to analyse the racialisation of Muslims by drawing on critical theories of race, especially from Black Studies (Abu-Bakare 2022a; Ali 2020; Fekete 2020; Miah 2013; Nguyen 2019; Younis and Jadhav 2019). The emerging body of work on anti-Muslim racism fits within critical work on race in IR more broadly (Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015; Gabay 2018; Henderson 2013; Hobson 2012; Muppidi 2018; Rutazibwa 2020; Sabaratnam 2011; Tilley and Shilliam 2018; Vitalis 2016). Such work has continuously challenged the 'white nostalgia' of scholarship that takes racism in international politics as the exception and overlooks 'the ways in which racial, colonial, and ableist violence is foundational to (liberal) civil order' (MacKenzie et al. 2019, 830). It has shown that racism is constitutive of the international in ways that are 'hidden in the banality of plain sight' (Rutazibwa 2020, 231; also: Henderson 2013) and that remain hidden by virtue of 'methodological whiteness' in the study of IR (Abu-Bakare 2022b; Koomen 2019; Sabaratnam 2020).

With these critiques in mind, I look to counter-extremism's racialisation of Muslims as a site of analysis for deepening understanding of the practical and everyday operations of race and racism. In turn, this dissertation also deepens the connection between the IR scholarship on anti-Muslim racism specifically and the broader critical literature on the constitution of racial

difference and hierarchy. I contribute to the emerging body of work on anti-Muslim racism by examining sedimented norms that shape counter-extremism and its racialisation of Muslims, including all those perceived as such. I take up Muslim identity as a way of being racialised, which is related only in ambiguous and non-determinative terms to an individual's commitment to or belief in the religion of Islam.<sup>8</sup> As Nicole Nguyen notes (2019, 15), anti-Muslim racism also threatens those constituted as Muslim who do not identify with the religion in any way – 'like Sikhs misidentified as Muslim' – and overlaps with other forms of racism, for example as is experienced by those 'surveilled both as Black and as Muslim' (Cainkar and Selod 2018, 173). To question deeply-rooted conditions of possibility for anti-Muslim racism, I focus especially on the norms that percolate in institutions of higher education. Counter-extremism relies on powerfully instituted understandings of what it means to be a knowing, cognitively superior and therefore morally superior subject. Higher education institutions are powerful sites for the establishment of what it means to be educated, and they are brought directly under the purview of counter-extremism through policies like Prevent. Through a situated analysis of counter-extremism's mode of racialisation, I show that it can be best understood as a function of a currently dominant organising principle of social and political life.

This principle, which I call the ethico-cognitive principle, determines the form that the 'colonial difference' (Mignolo [2000] 2012) takes today.<sup>9</sup> That is, it determines the terms through which racial difference is constructed, transformed into hierarchical value, and instituted as a 'global colour line' (Dubois 1986). It institutes racial difference and hierarchy by assessing relative humanness based on so-called cognitive development and supposedly concomitant ethical development. This principle institutes a dominant genre of being human, which I call ethico-cognitive Man, associates this genre with whiteness, and over-represents the genre as if it were the only way of being (fully) human. Accordingly, this principle also institutes an imagination of the negatively racialised Others of those associated with the dominant genre as vulnerable cognitive Others. It is this principle that counter-extremism mobilises to secure the

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<sup>8</sup> A concrete example of this distinction, between being Muslim as referring to one's faith and being Muslim as referring to a social identity based on how one is perceived by others as an Other, is provided by Akeel Bilgrami: 'I was looking for paying-guest accommodation in a neighbourhood with a predominantly lower-middle class Hindu population, hostile to Muslims. A landlord who was interviewing me asked me what my religion was. It seemed hardly to matter that I found Islamic theological doctrine wholly non-credible [...]. It still seemed the only self-respecting thing to say in that context. It was clear to me that I was, without strain or artificiality, a Muslim for about five minutes' (1992, 1071).

<sup>9</sup> A discussion of Walter Mignolo's term, colonial difference, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In brief, Mignolo summarises this concept as: 'the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values' (2000 [2012], 13).

fantasy of whiteness this dissertation begins with – that the Other is always already a (potential) terrorist and that there is no representation of whiteness as terror, as terrorising. The following section explains the theory of racism I draw on and extend to arrive at this situated understanding of counter-extremism’s mode of racialisation and the organising principle it mobilises for its operations.

### ***Racism as over-representation***

Counter-extremism measures like Prevent, by their own account, respond to an ethical crisis caused by “misperceptions” of social problems that lead to unduly extreme responses. For example, Prevent presents Muslims in the UK as particularly vulnerable to extremism because of ‘an aspiration to defend Muslims when they *appear to be* under attack or unjustly treated’ (Home Office 2011, 18; emphasis mine). This form of social diagnosis re-presents the violences and exclusions experienced by a negatively racialised group as a misperception of the social situation by that group; it thus pathologises any response from the group as an extreme over-reaction. Such a diagnosis works only by evading what Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon has theorised as *sociogeny*. Through this term, Fanon (1967) points to phenomena that are socially produced and instituted but have their social origins erased, making them appear “natural” (Wynter 2001). Consideration of sociogeny reveals how counter-extremism’s representation of anti-Muslim racism (in the UK and as enacted by the British state) as a misperception among Muslims is made sensible even while evidence of it is abundant – even as ‘the vast majority of victims of recent imperial attacks have been Muslim’, including British military action, with ‘2 million people [...] estimated to be killed as a result of the US-British led invasion’ of Iraq, even as many of those killed in the preventable Grenfell Tower Fire in North Kensington in 2017 were Muslim, including the first identified victim of the fire Mohamed Alhajali, who was 23 years-old and had fled the war in Syria (Bulley, Edkins, and El-Enany 2019, xx). I look to sociogeny and Wynter’s extension of the concept through her term, the governing sociogenic principle, to unravel how counter-extremism can re-present ‘a sense that Muslim communities are being unfairly treated’ (Home Office 2011, 18; my emphasis) in the UK and in Muslim-majority countries by the British state as the group’s “misperception” of how it is treated, as caused by the group’s vulnerable cognition. In other words, I look to sociogeny and the governing sociogenic principle to explicate how counter-extremism erases the terror of whiteness and enables the fantasy of the Other as ‘always already’ (Wynter 1992, 239) a (potential) terrorist.

To grasp the concept of sociogeny, we can consider Fanon's writings on how French doctors treated Algerian patients in the lead up to Algeria's War of Independence. In 'The North African Syndrome' (1952), Fanon wrote of how Algerian patients seeking assistance for a vaguely described and constant pain 'all-over' were dismissed by French doctors who, unable to link the described symptoms to a lesion, concluded that 'the North African's pain ... is judged to have no consistency, no reality' (Fanon [1952] 1988, 6). Drawing on the assumption that 'the North African is a simulator, a liar' (Fanon [1952] 1988, 7), the doctors located the source of their patients' "baseless" suffering in their flawed psyche. Yet, Fanon argues that the real 'wound' responsible for the patients' suffering could not be grasped by the doctors because to understand this source of pain, the doctors would have had to consider their own complicity in it. Even if the French doctors were to follow the then latest knowledge in psychosomatic medicine and make a 'situational diagnosis', Fanon argued, they would have still been unable to account for the pain of North African patients. This is because a true consideration of the patient's 'situation', that is, 'his [sic] relations...occupations...sexuality, his sense of security... the dangers that threaten him' (Fanon [1952] 1988, 10) would have required the doctors to implicate themselves and consider the somatic impacts of 'the colonial situation'. Speaking directly to the paradigmatic doctor, Fanon argued that in considering the patient's sense of security, the doctors would have had to consider their own social relation to 'this man whom you thingify by calling him systematically Mohammed' (Fanon [1952] 1988, 14). That is, the doctors would have had to reckon with how their own dehumanisation – that is, their thingification (Césaire 1955) – of the patients threatens the latter's security and health. They would have had to reckon with sociogeny – in this case, the dehumanisation of Algerians as a socially-produced (and not a "natural") phenomena. In failing to do so, their diagnosis thus rendered invisible the terror of whiteness as enacted by colonialism – the North African was said to be experiencing no pain at all because it was a 'pain without lesion' (Fanon [1952] 1988, 7).

The logic of contemporary counter-extremism presents a striking similarity to the situation discussed by Fanon: it presents Muslim perception of being 'unjustly treated' as a consequence of the group's own cognitive vulnerability. This situation too then demands a reckoning with sociogeny. At the time of Fanon's writing, Freudian psychoanalysis had adapted the concepts of ontogeny and phylogeny, borrowed from evolutionary biology, to argue that an individual's personal history (such as early childhood experiences) and the history of 'humankind' (such as the myth of Oedipus) are the most relevant sources for understanding an individual's subjective experience and perception of the world (Wynter [2001] 2013). Fanon, however, argued that 'in the case of the human besides phylogeny and ontogeny stands

sociogeny' (Fanon [1967] 2008, 4). Fanon argued that socially produced phenomena, the social evolution of which are hidden, are essential to understanding experiences and perceptions unique to different social groups, especially because historically, not all groups have been socially treated as equally human or as human at all. He makes this point succinctly: 'It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individual question' (Fanon [1967] 2008, 4). As Wynter puts it, Fanon thus shows that even subjective experiences and perceptions 'are culturally and thereby socio-situationally determined' (Wynter [2001] 2013, 36). The French doctors about whom Fanon wrote relied on ethno-psychiatry, that is, race-based assumptions about the "nature" of the Algerian/Muslim psyche, to explain a suffering for which they could find no physical wound. Fanon's intervention was to show that they were mistaken to diagnose their patients purely through consideration of 'biological' laws. They should have considered, he argued, the social processes, rules, relations, and groupings that determine human experiences. By allowing us to recognise ourselves as 'always already socialized beings' (Wynter [2001] 2013, 33), sociogeny in turn reveals that our understanding of who is 'fully human, not-quite-human, and non-human' (Weheliye 2014, 3) is socially constituted, even when this understanding appears to have evolved naturally. Conversely then, sociogeny points us to the processes through which being human is delimited.

Studying the way in which counter-extremism constitutes Muslims as less than fully developed humans can therefore bring to a light the socially-established criterion for being human that enables this process of racialisation. Building on the concept of sociogeny, Wynter (2003) argues that our 'always already' socialised mode of being human can be seen to be determined by a *governing sociogenic principle*, just as natural phenomena are determined by natural laws. Wynter coins the concept of the sociogenic principle as 'the organizational principle of each culture's criterion of being/non-being' (Wynter [2001] 2013, 54). The sociogenic principle then institutes the dominant cultural criteria for being human, giving shape to the *dominant genre of being human*. Studying the governing sociogenic principle provides an analytic tool for understanding the overarching logic that binds together the mechanics of racialisation, that is, the transformation of difference into hierarchies of being human. Wynter's concepts are particularly useful for grasping how historically situated processes of racialisation operate. This dissertation then looks to Wynter to questions counter-extremism's constitution of Muslims as less developed human Others. It does so with the aim of glimpsing the sociogenic principle at play and its institution of the currently dominant genre of being human.

Racism is here understood, following Wynter, to operate through the over-representation of one genre of being human, as if it were the only way of being human. The dominant genre of being human is the dominant mode of knowing and being that is instituted through the governing sociogenic principle to be (1) most closely associated with the dominant ethnoclass and (2) so over-represented in the cultural imaginary and in the structuring of social life that it comes to seem like the only way of being fully human. Racialisation then, Wynter (2003) argues, is reproduced and secured through the over-representation one genre of being human – Man. Wynter’s term ethnoclass is understood to refer to a social group distinguished by its interlinked economic position (class) and racial identity (or ‘ethnicity’), with the globally dominant ethnoclass understood to be the white bourgeoisie. Whiteness here then does not refer to a skin colour or other biological traits; rather, it refers to a quality or characteristic of the dominant genre of being human. This characteristic can be understood as the sociogenically-instituted difference of the dominant ethnoclass vis à vis human beings constituted as “not white” and therefore as not being (quite or fully or at all) human. By excluding its Others from this dominant genre of being human, the dominant ethnoclass therefore excludes them from the very category of being fully human. Like a synecdoche, Man is a part that is made to signify the whole.

Building on this framework, I show that counter-extremism’s mode of racialising Muslims mobilises a currently dominant genre of being human, which I call the genre of ethico-cognitive Man. Being fully human according to this genre is determined through the governing sociogenic principle of ethico-cognition, which determines who is “cognitively developed” and therefore ethically superior, and which charges this latter Man with the responsibility of improving the cognition of less developed Others. The dominant genre of Man, Wynter argues, has taken two forms historically, thus far. Beginning with what Foucault has identified as the Renaissance Humanists’ ‘invention of Man’, Wynter argues that this new secular identity as ‘a political subject of the state’ could only be actualised through the ‘colonial difference’ and its concomitant ‘Racism/Ethnicism complex’, identified by Aníbal Quijano as the foundation of modernity (Quijano 2016; Wynter 2003). The invention of Man as a political/rational subject was constituted by the complementary historical processes of

“the rise of Europe” and its construction of the “world civilization” on the one hand, and, on the other, African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation (Wynter 2003, 263).

From the Renaissance onwards, the over-representation of the dominant ethnoclass' genre of being human, which Wynter stylizes as Man, can be mapped through the following sociogenic principles – that of political Man<sub>1</sub> and bioeconomic Man<sub>2</sub>.

Wynter's analysis of racism through dominant genres of being human, as instituted by a governing sociogenic principle, deepens understanding of the terms through which the dominant ethnoclass has over-represented itself as the only fully human social group, in turn elucidating how racism persists. Man<sub>1</sub>'s claim to humanity was premised on being a rational political subject, in contrast to the "irrational" exploited and enslaved Others of Europe who were imagined as having neither political institutions nor political agency. This first formulation of Man marked a secular shift from Christianity as the basis of the dominant ethnoclass' claim to humanity. From the "Darwinian revolution" (19 c.) onwards, Man<sub>2</sub> emerges as the dominant genre, basing its claim to being more human than its Others on a 'biocentric' premise of 'natural selection' and its economic equivalent of 'survival of the fittest' in the free market (Wynter 2003). Within this genre's terms, the dominance of the ethnoclass is naturalised as being the result of more evolved features suited for 'bioeconomic' survival. In this genre, Blackness becomes imagined as the 'missing link between true (because rational) humans and the irrational figure of the ape' (Wynter 2003, 304), with other positions of racial Otherness filling in the evolutionary link between Blackness and whiteness. Wynter (2001, 37), following Fanon, is centrally concerned with

challenging the purely biocentric premise of our present culture's conception of the human, as this conception is elaborated not only by psychology, but by all the disciplines that comprise the human sciences.

By looking to counter-extremism to understand the genre through which the dominant ethnoclass is secured today, I suggest that the currently dominant genre requires a re-evaluation of psychology as more than a mere extension of biocentric logics. Rather, psychology operated as a racialising science in its own right, bringing forth an ethico-cognitive premise for being human.

I introduce the genre of ethico-cognitive Man to elucidate the mode of racialisation reproduced by counter-extremism. I propose ethico-cognitive Man arises from the increasing dominance of psychology as a science that theorises race in a way that is substantially distinct from 'biocentric' race science. In doing so, I show that psychology's authoritative understanding of race has mobilised a distinct sociogenic principle. At the same time, Wynter shows (2003, 318) that the shifts between the sociogenic principles instituting the invention and re-inventions of Man take place 'in the terms of a continuous cultural field'. This cultural field is 'instituted by the



matrix Judeo-Christian<sup>10</sup> [sic] formulation of a general order of existence' (Wynter 2003, 318). This simultaneous continuity (of the cultural field) and discontinuity (of the terms used to distinguish Man from his Others) is pertinent for understanding how the race science of psychology and attendant racialising beliefs about the education of Muslims have emerged. The genre of ethico-cognitive Man re-invents racial difference through psychological terms that adapt those of the 'biocentric' race science that preceded psychology's consolidation as a "properly" scientific discipline. The next section outlines the structure of the dissertation to show how this argument is developed.

## v. Overview of chapters

The structure of the dissertation proceeds as follows. The next chapter (II), **'Counter-extremism experts and the vulnerable cognitive subject'**, begins by considering the underlying premise of educational approaches to counter-extremism – that extremism is rooted in how people think. To do so, it draws on an ethnographic sensibility. I analyse interviews I conducted with prevention experts at a paradigmatic psychology research lab and relevant policy documents to ask, what current conditions have enabled the production of an expert discourse on "better" thinking and with what consequences? Pursuing this question, the chapter introduces the dominant genre through which the racial Otherness of Muslims is reproduced by counter-extremism. This is the genre of ethico-cognitive Man, co-produced by psychological expertise and sedimented liberal belief about education. This chapter thus elucidates counter-extremism's construction of its target, this genre's Other, as the vulnerable cognitive subject, who is more often than not, Muslim.

The following chapter (III), **'The rise of ethico-cognitive Man'**, extends the search for the conditions of possibility for counter-extremism's mode of racialisation farther back. Looking to the historical development of what I call a proto-cognitive psychology in the late British Empire, I argue that psychology's rising authority as a science of race shaped an emerging understanding of "the human race", with the latter now referring to a malleable species requiring "domestication". I draw on archival documents relating to key developments in the discipline's early consolidation to show how psychology reproduced whiteness as a cognitive dominion. It endowed ethico-cognitive Man with this dominion, meaning, it gave scientific validation to an

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<sup>10</sup> Wynter's use of "Judeo-Christian" strikes me as a misleading anachronism when considering the *continuities* of the cultural matrix in question. The "Judeo-" pre-fix is a relatively recent – post WWII – phenomena that indicates the late, unstable, and partial incorporation of Jewish identity into whiteness. See, for example: [Asad 2003, 168](#).

attitude of ownership toward the mind of Others and to the ethical responsibility of “perfecting” Other minds so as to domesticate “the human race”. Through W.E.B Dubois’ conception of whiteness as dominion, as drawn out by Ella Myers (Dubois [1920] 2007; E. Myers 2019), I further illustrate the defining features of ethico-cognitive Man. This chapter shows that the consolidation of psychology as a modern empirical science shaped a project of racial domestication that changed the dominant terms for being human.

Next, Chapter IV, ‘**The genre’s institution**’, takes up the question of how the racialisation of Muslims through the over-representation of this genre operates today, in practice. That is, it considers how the well-being of the dominant ethnoclass continues to be secured through ethico-cognitive terms. It therefore looks to the implementation of counter-extremism in UK universities, where the enforcement of the Prevent policy is mandated by law. I again draw on ethnographic methods, analysing interviews I conducted with educationalists involved with implementing Prevent at six universities. By examining how those charged with implementing Prevent in universities navigate and make sense of their counter-extremist duty, I elucidate mechanisms of the collective reproduction of the dominant genre. I discuss these mechanisms as ‘tactics of whiteness’ and present three such tactics: caring whiteness, critical whiteness, and dismissive whiteness. These tactics show how the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man comes to life and is secured through the implementation of counter-extremism policy in educational settings.

Finally, the last substantive chapter (V), ‘**Intimacies of surveillance**’, shows how young Muslim women experience and engage with these tactics. The nearly all-pervasive racialisation of Muslims as vulnerable cognitive subjects by counter-extremism policy makes it difficult for Muslims too to see themselves outside these dominant terms. In conversation with other young Muslim women who are students at UK universities, I show the intimate nature of their/our relationship with how they/we are constituted through the surveillance gaze of counter-extremism. Through conversations with my interlocutors, I show that this experience shapes a most intimate space for young Muslim women, that of self-perception, and does so in the dominant ethico-cognitive terms. At the same time, this chapter also shows that young Muslims are troubling these terms. I look to the project of a Muslim arts collective as an example of how young Muslims in the UK are demanding and creating space for collective healing from anti-Muslim racism through self-imagination. While some of the ways in which we/they engage with the dominant genre reflect the tactics of whiteness in surprising ways, other modes of engagement also point to possibilities for refusing and resisting these tactics. Then and lastly, the concluding chapter (VI) offers brief notes to indicate additional questions that are invited by my

research. These questions call forth a re-thinking of education and care to unsettle the sociogenic principle that enables anti-Muslim racism and secures only the dominant ethnoclass.

## **vi. Contributions**

Before turning to the chapters outlined above, this last section of the introductory chapter summarises the contributions of this research to the existing literature. By troubling the critical consensus that counter-terrorism measures primarily foster a political ethic of fear (Shamila Ahmed 2015; Aradau and van Munster 2009; Jabri 2006; R. Jackson 2008; Sinclair and Antonius 2013), my dissertation deepens understanding of how the “war on terror” shapes a dominant ethic – that is, a dominant way of being and knowing. In doing so, the dissertation also challenges the literature’s tendency to look to ‘biological’ race science as the historical precedent for understanding how counter-extremism enacts racialisation (Aked 2022; L. B. Jackson 2017; Saeed 2016; Sian 2017). I show instead that the development of psychology as a politically-influential science of race is a crucial condition of possibility for the counter-extremist mode of racialisation, which operates through educational prescriptions of cognitive development. Lastly, the dissertation draws attention away from the no-longer-exceptional exceptionality of counter-terrorism and its constitution of Muslims as less developed humans. This dissertation instead reveals the sedimented norms of education that enable this mode of racialisation.

### ***The race science of counter-extremism***

A main contribution of this project is exposing the development of psychology as a science of race that is crucial to counter-extremism’s reproduction of anti-Muslim racism. Psychological expertise has played a central part in constituting Muslims as especially “vulnerable” to extremism, and thus as particularly in need of counter-extremism measures. The common theory of radicalisation as being rooted in “faulty ideas”, to which deradicalisation’s ethos of rehabilitation and (re)education responds, is largely based in psychological expertise. Counter-extremism draws on this expertise to pre-empt radicalisation before “vulnerable” individuals are ensnared by it. Critical scholarship has already pointed to uses of psychological discourse for framing counter-terrorism broadly and counter-extremism specifically (Aggarwal 2013; Heath-Kelly 2017; Jarvis 2019; Puar and Rai 2002). Often, such scholarship critiques psychological discourse for de-politicising problems of international conflict by presenting them instead as problems of ‘the Muslim mind’ (Coppock and McGovern 2014; Kumar 2021). Yet, the

racialisation of Muslims through psychological discourse has not yet been situated within the development of psychology as a science of race per se. Psychology is not just counter-extremism's favoured source of scientific expertise for de-politicising conflict; psychology is counter-extremism's favoured science of race, which enables a representation of political conflict as a problem caused by the lesser cognitive development of those racialised as Muslim.

Examining the role of psychology vis à vis the racialisation of Muslims brings into view an understated chapter in the history of race science and its underestimated influence in shaping processes of racialisation today. Rather than referring to the development of race science, scholars more often historicise the racism of counter-terrorism with reference to significant political moments in histories of counter-insurgency and of migration. The key reference points are, most immediately, the global “war on terror” and the concomitant transnational spike in anti-Muslim racism, especially in “the West” (Kapoor 2018; Korkman and Razack 2021). Moving further back, the development of racialising counter-terror assemblages (Puar 2017) are linked to techniques used to police the political insurgency of negatively racialised communities in the second half of the twentieth century – for example, in the U.S., counter-insurgency methods used primarily against the political movements of Black, including Black Muslim, communities (Kundnani 2015); in France, methods used to quell anti-colonial movements (Shapiro 2010); in the UK, methods used to racially profile the Irish as ‘suspect communities’ (Hickman et al. 2012). Counter-extremism's racialisation of “vulnerable” individuals is also contextualised within “Fortress Europe”, which prides itself on a hostility toward racial Others within its borders that dates back to initial moments of mass migration from colonies and ex-colonies to the “metropole” (Mayblin 2017). In the UK, these include ‘Windrush’ migration (primarily from the Caribbean), postcolonial migration from Asia and Africa, and the restriction of migration through the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 and 1968, and the Immigration Act 1971 (de Noronha 2020).<sup>11</sup> Most recently, the UK's set of ‘hostile environment policies’ create ‘a border on every street’ (Keenan 2019), including through the counter-extremism strategy, Prevent.

These histories highlight the late colonial crucible in which contemporary counter-terrorism's precedents were forged. However, to fully capture the ‘continuous cultural field’ within which the counter-extremist mode of racialisation has evolved, we must also consider the governing sociogenic principle that enabled these political events and legal developments, and the concomitant dominant genre of being that was secured through them. In her popular book

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<sup>11</sup> For a brief overview of the long history of Muslims in the UK, dating back to pre-modern contact, see: [Hellyer 2007](#).

about the UK's 'hostile environment', Maya Goodfellow gestures to the 'continuous cultural field' that has enabled the systematisation of white supremacy and thereby set the stage for racialising immigration policies (Goodfellow 2020, 51). Looking back to Britain's 1905 Aliens Act, aimed at restricting Jewish migration (2020, 54), Goodfellow notes that the consolidation of race science in the early twentieth century enabled the organising logic of such policies. To my knowledge, only one article (Sian 2017) examines in depth counter-extremism's link to the history of race science and shows the latter's part in shaping the cultural field in which counter-extremism has taken shape.

The critical literature on counter-extremism broadly then has given little attention to the development of psychology as a science of race and its persisting influence on counter-extremism's mode of racialisation as such. Katy Sian (2017)'s article connects the use of race science in nineteenth-century criminology to the expertise that informs counter-extremism today. Sian compares criminologist Cesare Lombroso's (1835-1909) work on 'criminal types' with the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG 22+) framework developed by psychologists Christopher Dean and Monica Lloyd in 2015, which informs the Prevent strategy (Sian 2017, 3). Through this comparison, Sian argues that the science informing Prevent reiterates the 'race-thinking' of nineteenth-century criminology by constructing Muslims as (potential) extremists. She concludes that the only difference is that Prevent mobilises a cultural discourse to racialise Muslims instead of a biological one (Sian 2017). Strikingly then, while Sian notes that *psychologists* created Prevent's risk framework, she still limits her historical consideration to the development of biologically-informed race science. The critical literature's lack of interest in psychology as a science of race has similarly forestalled interdisciplinary engagement with the wealth of scholarship on psychology and/in colonialism to deepen understanding of the mode of racialisation mobilised by counter-extremism. Given counter-extremism's reliance on psychological expertise, this dissertation turns to psychology's involvement in the racialisation of Muslims as less cognitively developed Others. I thus contribute to the literature on security and counter-extremism by showing how the science of psychology facilitates the racialisation of Muslims through its gradation of relative cognitive development and the mapping of this scale onto one of relative humanness.

### ***The applied science of counter-extremism***

The second and related major contribution of this project is its unsettling of the notion of education that enables the widespread implementation of counter-extremism, even by non-

traditional security actors. This is the sedimented ‘liberal belief’ in education as a pre-political project of cognitive and therefore ethical improvement. Much of contemporary counter-extremism draws on psychological expertise on “cognitive improvement” to constitute Muslims as less cognitively developed Others. The inherently educational nature of this premise, that learning to think “better” will lead to “less extreme”, which is understood to mean more ethical, political engagement, has not yet been analysed as such. Put differently, while counter-extremism presumes that the root cause of extremism is “how people think”, this presumption has not been questioned as a politics of or belief about education. This is a different concern from the one pursued by enlightening scholarship that examines the production of terrorism and counter-terrorism as concepts developed ‘between academia and the state’ (Stampnitzky 2013). The question of how powerful sites of knowledge creation partake in shaping the dominant understanding of terrorism/extremism is related to this project, especially in its second chapter, which considers the expert discourse of psychologists working in counter-extremism. However, my project links this concern to a different puzzle, namely, the apparent similarity in structure between how the work of education and the work of counter-extremism are commonly understood.

The widespread appeal of counter-extremism’s prescription of education as psychological care for those deemed “vulnerable” to extremism relies on a common understanding of education as pre-political care. Counter-extremism is conceived of and promoted by its experts and practitioners as a form of pre-political care that makes for better thinkers and thus, more ethical subjects. Similarly, education is widely understood to do the pre-political care work of improving how people think so as to make them more ethical subjects of Western liberal democracies on the one hand and of the liberal international order on the other (Slaughter 2009). Educational interventions then are understood by both counter-extremism policy and liberal theories of education as ‘pre-political’ measures for pre-political subjects, determined through social theory and not political contestation (Straume 2016, 36). This shared understanding of education makes counter-extremism’s project of caring for the supposedly underdeveloped cognition of Muslims appear sensible and even commonsensical. It is a crucial condition of possibility for counter-extremism’s racialisation of Muslims as vulnerable cognitive Others. It allows for education to operate as an “applied science” of the race science of psychology.

By taking up the educational structure of counter-extremism, this dissertation shows that it is essential to extend our critical thinking to beliefs about the work of education. The literature has thus far circumvented the part played by pre-existing notions of education mobilised by counter-extremism. For example, Mohamed Elshimi’s analysis of the ontology of deradicalisation

draws on interviews with Prevent practitioners to argue that while there is confusion around the meaning of deradicalisation, it is generally understood as ‘getting individuals away from violence using discursive debate and education’ (Elshimi 2017, 56). While the shared understanding of deradicalisation then evidently relies on a shared understanding of education, the latter is unexplored in Elshimi’s analysis. Indeed, critical branches of security studies have only problematised counter-extremism’s foray into education insofar as it changes or ‘securitises’ the norms of liberal education (Danvers 2021; Gearon 2017; Saeed 2016; Winter et al. 2021). Accordingly, such scholarship suggests that counter-extremism’s educational approach perpetuates anti-Muslim racism by *suspending* the norms of liberal education. By taking the innocence of norms that preceded the “war on terror” for granted, the literature has not yet considered that perhaps deradicalisation imperatives do not just “misuse” education. Another major contribution of this dissertation then is showing how the educational approach to counter-extremism advances (more so than it mishandles) an existing understanding of education.

It might appear paradoxical to question the seeming truism that “better” thinking, often presented in liberal higher education as more “critical” thinking, necessarily leads to “better” – meaning, more ethical – political engagement. Nonetheless this is exactly the question that critical study of counter-extremism demands, because counter-extremism’s racialisation of Muslims depends on this dominant liberal belief about education, which precedes the “war on terror”. Counter-extremism works through this sedimented understanding of education as pre-political care for those who are perceived as unprepared for liberal political life. It depends on this belief to racialise Muslims as vulnerable cognitive Others. As Robbie Shilliam (2019, 195) puts it,

In the humanities and social sciences, we critical theorists present our worth in terms of a sceptical inquiry into knowing and being. We do not wish to accept the world as it is or is made to appear, and we teach our students to do likewise.

Yet, Shilliam (2019, 196) goes on to write, it is worth questioning who benefits from the critical scholarship that is ‘held aloft as the lodestone of emancipatory academic inquiry’. He argues that this questioning is necessary because it seems that ‘communities-under-pressure do not primarily require critical theorists to shed light on their affairs’ and rather require ‘scholars and students to share resources: time, access, influence, money, transport etc’ (Shilliam 2019, 195–96). I share this concern and similarly call into question this belief that critical thinking necessarily leads to, if not emancipatory politics then at least more just engagement with politics. However, I approach this concern from a different angle, asking not only who benefits from this belief and its institutionalisation, but also who is harmed by it. Against the belief that critical education makes ‘us’ more fully human, I show that this belief is a cornerstone for rendering some less fully human.

### ***The struggle against racism as the politics of being***

Lastly, analysing racism in this way as the over-representation of a dominant genre of being human contributes to the study of race in IR by further expanding the scope for understanding whiteness beyond epistemic concerns. Amal Abu-Bakare's (2022) recent and insightful work on racism in counter-extremism has begun this work by pointing to 'mechanisms of whiteness'. She thus elucidates practices that are intertwined with but not reducible to ways of knowing. Abu-Bakare's argument that one such mechanism is the *persisting* tendency for whiteness to characterise itself through a unique capacity for 'balanced' and 'critical' thought (Abu-Bakare 2022a, 226) is also central to my thinking around the ethico-cognitive genre of Man. I build on this premise to deepen understanding of the practices that enable counter-extremism's mode of racialisation. By approaching anti-Muslim racism as the consequence of the over-representation of a dominant genre of being, my analysis shows how the well-being of the dominant ethnoclass is secured through intertwined ways of knowing and *being*.

The globally instituted claim of whiteness to superior knowledge is crucially accompanied and maintained through a connected ethical claim that deserves more analytic attention. This latter is the claim that by virtue of their superior knowledge, the members of the dominant ethnoclass are "better" humans – meaning more ethical humans and more fully human. The dominant genre of being human then is instituted through both epistemological and ontological claims. Accordingly, the struggle against racism can be understood through Wynter's terms as 'the politics of being' (2003, 318), which is to say, the struggle over the governing sociogenic principle instituting the dominant genre of being. This is not a purely epistemological struggle; it is rather a struggle over a web of socio-political processes that partake in the 'the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west [sic]' (Wynter 2003, 260).

Finally, unravelling the terms and tactics of the dominant genre lets us analyse whiteness without indulging a self-centred mode of critical whiteness that merely allows whiteness to take up more space by being 'anxious about itself – its narcissism, its egoism, its privilege' (Sara Ahmed 2004, 15). It undoes the supposition that thinking more critically about whiteness necessarily leads to an ethic of anti-racism. My final chapter points to a resistance to the dominant genre that came across in my conversation with fellow students who are also young Muslim women. These interlocutors bring to light a desire for not only nor primarily different ways of knowing and rather for different ways of being. These conversations pointed to a



possible re-invention of the ethics of care. This re-invention is imagined in terms of *healing* from past and ongoing over-representations of one genre of being as the only way of being human. This stands in contrast to the ethics of care characteristic of the dominant ethico-cognitive genre, which imagines that knowing “better” is the master key to “being better”. Redirecting our attention to the struggle against racism as the politics of being, more so than a purely epistemological struggle, is the last overarching contribution of this project.



## Chapter II. Counter-extremism experts and the vulnerable cognitive subject

### i. Introduction

Extremism is rooted in *how* one thinks. This premise drives a UK-based research facility (henceforth, the Lab)’s approach of improving cognition to prevent violence. The research facility’s tagline reads, ‘What if preventing violence is about how you think not what you think?’.<sup>12</sup> Taking the Lab as exemplary of contemporary global policies for countering extremism through education, this article questions counter-extremism’s focus on so-called better ways of thinking. Since the onset of the “war on terror”, a popular psychological discourse has attempted to adjudicate the ethical value of different ways of thinking via “objective” scientific metrics of cognitive development. This discourse designates “better” ways of thinking through adjectives like, critical, complex, balanced, and tolerant. Popular psychology titles like *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Haidt 2013) and *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (Pinker 2011) reflect such theorisations of thinking that is supposedly ethically superior because it is also demonstrative of “objectively” advanced cognition. Simultaneously, however, the “war on terror” has shown that psychological expertise can facilitate tactics that are, in ethical terms, extremely reprehensible, such as torture, and that therefore such expertise surely have no “objective” claim to morality (Shaw 2016).

Still, the premise of promoting “better” ways of thinking through psychological metrics of cognitive development widely informs counter-extremism. This premise is enshrined in the United Nations (UN) global agenda of Preventing Violent Extremism through Education, and practiced by national policies, like Prevent. The title of a paper by the EC RAN captures the ethos: ‘Transforming Schools into Labs for Democracy’ (Nordbruch and Sieckelinck 2018). This chapter asks: what conditions have enabled the expert production of this scientified discourse on “better” thinking and its concomitant approach to counter-extremism? With what consequences? I argue that educational approaches to counter-extremism are shaped by a distinct understanding of critical thinking. The latter is bolstered on the one hand by psychology’s authority as a science

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<sup>12</sup> Field notes on Lab’s promotional materials, October 2019.

of the mind, and on the other, by the liberal belief that education amounts to a caring project of cognitive and consequently ethical improvement.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The next section (ii) presents my methodology and introduces the Lab under consideration. Then, section iii contextualises the Lab's work within the globally popular approach of countering extremism through education and the UK's leading position therein. I here (iii) also contextualise my intervention within existing critiques of the educational approach to counter-extremism. I then delve into my research on the Lab, to show how "experts" in the field conceptualise their work (iv). I make sense of my findings by pulling at the core threads of reasoning weaved by the experts (v). One such thread is the notion of developing the minds of Others through psychological care. Here, some of Fanon's reflections on ethnopsychiatry prove useful as historical points of comparison and as critical insight for engaging racialising discourse on the minds of religious Others. The second thread I tug at is the notion that thinking better (cognitive superiority) makes for caring about the world in better ways (ethical superiority) and thus makes for a better subject of liberalism. Contemporary critiques of a liberal ethic of education help to elucidate the workings of this thread. The conclusion (vi) shows how counter-extremism weaves these threads together to racialise Muslim subjectivity as that of a cognitively vulnerable subject and so, as not yet ready for proper liberal ethics.

This chapter demonstrates that historically entangled discourses of cognitive psychology and liberal education meet in counter-extremism to secure the dominant genre of being that I characterise as ethico-cognitive Man. United by a shared language of 'balance', 'tolerance', 'complexity' and 'critical thinking', these discourses collaborate in the literal and proverbial counter-extremism laboratory to create the dominant genre's negatively racialised, religious and pre-political Other. The latter is presented here as the vulnerable cognitive subject. Where the ethos of psychological cognitivism and liberal belief about education meet, a circular principle emerges: cognitive development is configured as thinking better, and better thinking is tantamount to ethical superiority. The counter-extremist mode of caring for Others then works through the claim of enabling Others to think better and therefore become more ethical, too. The pursuit of critical thinking as a scientific cure for "vulnerability" to dangerous ("extreme") ethics accordingly facilitates the exclusion of some from politics by marking them as vulnerable cognitive subjects who are not yet ready for ethical political engagement. The prescription of this cure precludes the possibility for political dissent by dismissing dissent as underdeveloped cognition that requires an education. In other words, it pre-empt the politics of being, which is to say, the struggle over the way of knowing and being fit for political life.

## **ii. Approaching the counter-extremist laboratory**

To elucidate the conditions of possibility that enable the project of countering extremism through education, I draw on an ethnographic sensibility. The use of such a sensibility allows for a grounded view onto how a project with as lofty an aim as scientifically improving how Others think takes form. Lisa Herzog and Bernardo Zacka (Herzog and Zacka 2019, 766) have argued that

an ethnographic sensibility suggests itself particularly when one is interested in how certain values can be realized in today's pluralistic world with its multiplicity of realms, institutions, and roles.

The same is true for the work of critically grasping how certain values are already being realised. An ethnographic sensibility allows for insight into how experts make sense of the problem they are tackling and the solutions they propose. From my conversations with counter-extremism experts, it is evident that they are acutely aware of the critiques of their work. Therefore, an ethnographic sensibility also elucidates how experts perceive and navigate the ethical implications of their work. In doing so, they save and reproduce a powerful discourse.

I first encountered the Lab discussed here by 'following around' (Sara Ahmed 2012, 12) educational counter-extremism to find its physical sites of operation and its documents of expert production. I looked to security expos, academic conferences, privately-funded research projects, and especially, contracts between research facilities and the Home Office. The Lab was selected as my focus due to its former funding from the Home Office under the banner of Prevent and its international profile. My engagement with the Lab spanned ten months. It included semi-structured interviews with researchers at the Lab and associates external to the Lab who had collaborated with them on projects, and sporadic and spontaneous discussions when exchanging promotional, research, and training materials that my respondents shared with me. The latter were just as informative as the former; for example, chatting about some of the Lab's working contacts informally led to an invitation from my respondents to attend a conference that the Lab had been invited to, which was organised for practitioners and academics interested in countering extremism through education and focused on the theme of 'Identities and Resilience'. Another unplanned conversation led to my respondents sharing unpublished data from an intervention they had run. While I cannot include this data in my analysis, the experience allowed me to observe how the data they collect from their interventions is translated into the kind of conclusions I had read in their reports and discussed with them in interviews.

The Lab is based at a department of psychology at an elite university in the UK, and its stated purpose is the prevention of violent conflict through a scientific approach to improving cognition. It is a member and active contributor to the EC RAN's Youth and Education Working Group. The latter brings together experts and educators to exchange knowledge about and best practices in doing counter-radicalisation work through education. The Lab has designed interventions in a range of contexts, including Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pakistan, Kenya, and England. The Lab's interventions have been delivered in schools, community groups, and universities with a variety of target groups. The literature that the Lab draws on for its methods uses archival data to argue that a drop in a measure of 'cognitive complexity' is a predictor for conflict becoming violent. The Lab's projects have been funded previously by Prevent (the Home Office), the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the European Union (EU).

The Lab is taken as paradigmatic of the psychological expertise in the field because its foundational premise reflects that of educational approaches to counter-extremism more broadly. The Lab's interventions combat vulnerability to extremism through a 'healthy spread among value commitments', which they claim positively correlates to a way of thinking about the world that is 'balanced', 'critical', and 'complex' (Lab report 2013).<sup>13</sup> The Lab thus explains "vulnerability" to radicalisation through a contrast between healthy, 'complex' cognition and an inability to balance different perspectives. The Lab's promotional material asks:

Do you see the world in black and white? Do you think your perspective is the only valid perspective on an issue? Or are you able to recognize multiple perspectives or dimensions acting and interacting in a conflict? These questions describe what psychologists call 'cognitive complexity'.<sup>14</sup>

The Lab's interventions then are based on this premise: 'low complexity thinking' is among 'the best predictors' for violence.<sup>15</sup> This assertion reflects the shared ground of educational approaches to counter-extremism, which present "vulnerability" to extremism as a problem of psychological health (Younis 2021) and propose the development of 'cognitive skills' as the solution/cure. The next section draws out the key features of this shared ground, before proceeding to a closer look at the archetypal Lab.

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<sup>13</sup> The report on the intervention discussed in this chapter is cited simply as 'Lab report' without specifying the title of the published report for the purpose of the Lab's anonymity. Page numbers are excluded for the same reason.

<sup>14</sup> Field notes on promotional materials, October 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Field notes on promotional materials, October 2019.

### **iii. Prevent & the global counter-extremism regime**

In March 2019, I attended the annual Security and Counter-Terrorism Expo in London to see “expert” presentations on counter-extremism in the UK. Advertised as ‘the most talked about security show in London’, the Expo had packed the Olympia Exhibition Centre with stalls marketing security products.<sup>16</sup> The open floor layout showed it all happening at once: presentations of research on counter-extremism tactics, live demos of military technology, and interactive presentations of innovative surveillance tools. Also present were a handful of universities advertising their so-called cutting-edge security and counter-terrorism studies graduate programmes. Alongside the sellers of security products and expertise were also the buyers: government departments and policing bodies, such as the Ministry of Defence and UK Counter-Terrorism Policing. At a glance, the Expo was a blueprint of the most powerful actors involved in the field of counter-terrorism, namely, government and private security actors and academic experts.

Within this field, counter-extremism initiatives are proliferating globally (Ambrozik 2019). Development funding is increasingly tied to the promotion of a counter-extremism agenda, amplifying the agenda’s influence in the Global South (Novelli 2017). The “soft hand” of counter-terrorism, counter-extremism purports to be non-coercive and non-punitive, with a focus on supporting those deemed “vulnerable” to radicalisation. Three key distinctions can be made between counter-extremism and other counter-terrorism tactics. First, the former prioritises a pre-emptive approach to ‘potential’ violence (Heath-Kelly 2017). Second, it operates through the soft language of support and care (Bastani and Gazzotti 2022; Busher et al. 2017). Third, it recruits non-traditional security actors like social workers, healthcare workers, and educators for the security work traditionally associated with the police and the army (Bigo and Tsoukala 2008; de Goede, Simon, and Hoijtink 2014).<sup>17</sup>

Amongst the non-traditional security fields enrolled into such work by global counter-extremism, education is central. In the recommendations of international organisations and agencies<sup>18</sup> and in the prescriptions of national policies, ‘education institutions are often tasked a role’ (Davies 2018, 3). The UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent

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<sup>16</sup> Field notes, March 2019.

<sup>17</sup> While this distinction between traditional and non-traditional security actors is common in the literature, and I refer to it here for ease of reference, much of this dissertation debunks this binary by showing that the involvement of so-called non-traditional security actors is not novel.

<sup>18</sup> International organisations that have funded projects or produced resources for countering extremism through education include, USAID, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the UN, Council of Europe, European Commission. See: Davies 2018.

Extremism ('Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism' 2015) calls for investment in Global Citizenship Education. A 2015 decision of UNESCO's Executive Board<sup>19</sup> links 'UNESCO's role in promoting education as a tool to prevent violent extremism' to its 'wider commitment to promoting education for global citizenship' (*Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers* 2017, 11). International networks have formed with the sole purpose of supporting this agenda, such as the aforementioned EC RAN. Similarly motivated networks include the Hedayah Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, based in Abu Dhabi, which has published the 'Abu Dhabi Plan of Action for Education and Countering Violent Extremism' (2015) and the Violence Prevention Network (VPN) based in Germany (see: Davies 2018).

The educational approach promoted by such initiatives suggests that *how* one thinks can prevent extremism by *enabling* the supposedly peaceful values of the liberal international order. UNESCO's 'Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism' (2016, 15) defines Global Citizenship Education as promoting 'fundamental values that help raise the defenses of peace'. The guide further notes the aim of providing the 'skills that enable learners to participate more generally in civic life'. Teachers are guided to target the following psychological areas: 'the cognitive, the socio-emotional and the behavioural'. Examples of cognitive goals include developing 'critical thinking skills' to enable students to 'recognize forms of manipulation'; socio-emotional goals include becoming 'interested in understanding different people'; and the behavioural goals include learning 'to listen with respect to different points of view' ('A Teacher's Guide on the Prevention of Violent Extremism - UNESCO Digital Library' 2016, 19). The abovementioned EC RAN paper similarly highlights the importance of developing 'critical thinking' for 'mainstreaming prevention in education' and promoting 'common values of freedom, equality and pluralism' (Nordbruch and Sieckelinck 2018, 23). The educational approach thus imagines that the development of thinking (or, cognitive) skills naturally facilitate the adoption of shared liberal values that prevent "vulnerability" to extremism. This approach thus aims to cultivate the skills deemed necessary for a political ethic already assumed to be the superior end point of cognitive development.

Prevent, a branch of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, is 'foundational' and used as a model of this approach by other countries (Sabir 2016). It was set up (covertly) in 2003, expanded in 2005 in response to bombings in London on July 7, revised in 2011 to target 'community cohesion', and revised again in 2015 to expand its reach. Its stated aims are (1) challenging extremist ideology, (2) supporting vulnerable people, and (3) involving public-facing

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<sup>19</sup> See: 'Decisions Adopted by the Executive Board at Its 197th Session' 2015.



institutions (Davies 2018, 7). The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 made it a legal duty for public institutions to participate in Prevent's implementation by making referrals, thereby recruiting non-traditional security. Once they are trained in spotting "vulnerability" to extremism, non-traditional security actors are expected to refer "vulnerable" peoples to relevant actors, per Prevent. Prevent referrals are triaged by the police; those deemed relevant are handled through Channel, the Home Office's multi-agency process. To note a few international parallels, the Netherlands and Sweden also recruit non-traditional security actors for counter-extremism (Ambrozik 2019, 108). State-led training for teachers to spot radicalisation also exists in for example, France, Denmark and Australia (Davies 2018; Harris-Hogan, Barrelle, and Smith 2019, 733).

At the Security Expo I attended in 2019, the National Prevent Coordinator's presentation revealed Prevent's heavy reliance on psychological discourse to make sense of extremism and the project of preventing it. Much of the presentation conveyed the message that what leads to extremism – understood as opposition to 'fundamental British values' – is an individual's 'complex needs'. This message was demonstrated through a visual that showed the outline of a head, with various words like 'psychology' and 'depression' written in bubbles within the outline. The statistics accompanying this image indicated that, of the Prevent referrals that were followed up on in some way in 2018, '26% have a diagnosable mental illness as the primary vulnerability'; '46% have multiple and complex needs (mental health, substance abuse, poverty, housing, offending)'; and '81% of high concern cases had complex needs'.<sup>20</sup> The image of the head filled with bubbles of such 'complex' needs gestured toward psychological expertise as the essential background for understanding the claim that counter-extremism is all about addressing vulnerable people's needs.

The Prevent strategy also suggests that vulnerable people's complex needs have a fundamentally psychological root in its discussion of "vulnerability" among Muslims. The strategy document states:

Support for violence is associated with a lack of trust in democratic government and with an aspiration to defend Muslims when they *appear to be* under attack or unjustly treated. Issues which can contribute to *a sense* that Muslim communities are being unfairly treated include so-called 'stop and search' powers used by the police under counter-terrorism legislation; the UK's counter-terrorism strategy; *a perception* of biased and Islamophobic media coverage; and UK foreign policy, notably with regard to Muslim countries (Home Office 2011, 18; my emphases).

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<sup>20</sup> Field notes, March 2019.

This statement frames “vulnerability” to extremism, including vulnerability to being critical of the UK’s counter-terrorism strategy, as a problem relating to *the perception* of how Muslims *appear to be treated* (and not to the *actuality* of how they *are* treated). The issues that Prevent names as contributing to a “sense” of mistreatment, however, are in fact widely critiqued matters of injustice, such as counter-terrorism legislation that erodes civil liberties (as critiqued in, Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019), racist media coverage (as critiqued in, Kundnani 2009), and the UK’s militaristic foreign policy toward Muslim-majority countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia (as critiqued in, El-Enany 2020; Gilroy 2004, 103–4). Yet, the Home Office’s training materials, such as the Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) online module that is often used to train educators to spot “vulnerability”, similarly warn against Muslims’ faulty perceptions of ‘being unfairly treated’. One slide in the WRAP online module reads:

One of the controversies surrounding Prevent is that it is only about Islamist extremism and [...] encourages Islamophobia. [...] Those responsible for implementing Prevent need to be sensitive to these *perceptions* and *feelings*.<sup>21</sup>

The training for non-traditional security actors thus reiterates the assertion that criticisms of counter-extremism policy emerge from flawed perceptions and feelings, which in turn supposedly foster vulnerability to extremism and thus need to be managed.

Given Prevent’s centrality in policies of countering extremism through education, criticisms of it are indicative of critiques of the approach it models. Three major lines of critique have emerged. Firstly, scholars have argued that Prevent ‘securitises’ education (Gearon 2017; Saeed 2016): it marks education as a site of existential threat to the state, thus allowing for exceptional measures therein – like the legal requirement for teacher-police collaboration. They argue that the securitisation of education undermines the positive values of education, such as the promotion of critical thinking (Danvers 2021; Winter et al. 2021). In turn, some suggest that the adoption of critical pedagogies and the restoration of “true” educational values would be a better approach for preventing extremism *and* addressing the anti-Muslim sentiment that “securitised” education fosters (Davies 2016; O’Donnell 2016). Second, critics show that Prevent deploys an epidemiological logic (Heath-Kelly 2017; Younis 2021). By pathologising extremism as a mental illness, Prevent de-politicises extremism. It thereby makes for misunderstandings of the various causes and meanings of the political actions grouped together as extremism. Third, scholars have argued that both the securitisation of education and the epidemiological logic of counter-extremism stigmatise Muslims as particularly “vulnerable” to radicalisation (Miah 2013; Rodrigo Jusué 2022). While recent revisions to Prevent purport to counter ‘all extremisms’ –

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<sup>21</sup> Field notes on training, June–August 2018. Emphases mine.

‘Islamist, far right and far left’ (Davies 2018, 3) – Muslims remain disproportionately targeted (Ali 2020).

These critiques astutely show the underlying logic of countering extremism through education: those diagnosed as psychologically vulnerable can and should be educated into ‘Good Muslims’ (Mamdani 2002), meaning, good liberal subjects. Still, these three lines of critique only problematise security discourses for opportunistically co-opting education and psychology and putting them to the supposedly exceptional use of marginalising Muslims. The framing of the problem with counter-extremism as being its exceptional “misuse” of psychology and education suffers from an unjustified assumption of innocence in relation to the ordinary logics of education and psychology. A different critical understanding emerges when this innocence is not taken for granted. Through the analysis that follows, I show that educational metrics of different ways of thinking (as being more or less developed) and psychological diagnoses of cognitive “vulnerability” are co-constitutive enabling conditions for counter-extremism and its concomitant racialisation of Muslims.

#### **iv. Meet the experts**

This section presents my findings from the Lab. I first visited the office of the Lab, a violent conflict prevention research centre, in October 2019. The long, white-walled hallway of the office was marked by posters presenting research agendas. Some of the images on these posters, purportedly representing vulnerable minds, were reminiscent of the silhouetted head featured in the National Prevent Coordinator’s presentation. I was greeted kindly by two researchers at the Lab, both white women. One of the women, Dr. Collins, holds a senior position at the Lab, and the Lab’s work is in part inspired by her own doctoral research. The other, Dr. Pratt, is younger and a recent doctoral graduate, with just a few years of experience with the Lab. They both have experience running the Lab’s interventions and analysing the data drawn from them. They offered me tea and after nervously introducing my project, I hit record on my phone.

In our first interview, Dr. Collins explained that their organisation was first commissioned by the Home Office and the EU to work with Muslim communities in England and advance the implementation of Prevent early on, before Prevent’s implementation became a legal obligation for public authorities in 2015. She explained that ‘there was an opening’ because it was apparent that ‘a 50-minute lecture did not do a lot in schools – so how do you empower

younger people to engage with critical thinking [and] respect for diversity?'.<sup>22</sup> Stepping into this 'opening', the Lab ran a pilot programme geared toward young Muslims in the UK and centred on reconciling Muslim and British identity (henceforth, 'Being British and Muslim'),<sup>23</sup> from 2007 to 2010. The mean age of the 80 participants was 19 years old, with 60 per cent men and 40 per cent women (Lab report 2013). A 2013 report reflects on the pilot, which took place across England, including at one university, one community college, a Somali immigrant community group, two local Prevent projects, and two youth projects.

The Lab's report explains that the pilot interventions consisted of 16 hours of contact with the project facilitators. In the first stage of the intervention, participants were taught to 'differentiate between viewpoints' by watching filmed interviews with Muslim speakers presenting different perspectives on topics that could be 'used by radicalizers'. Next, participants were presented with 'opposing value poles' on various themes and asked to locate the values of the speakers and their own values on the 'spectrum' between the poles. For example, the opposing value poles included

Communalism versus individualism in regard to relationships, family and marriage (e.g. arranged marriages vs. individualist/romantic relationships).

Finally, participants were presented with a role-play scenario, where different groups were assigned a starting value point and had to integrate the values from both of the opposing ends of the given 'value spectrum' in order to reach a compromise with other groups (Lab report 2013).

In order to get a better sense of how these interventions worked, I also spoke to a psychologist who is external to the Lab and had worked with the Lab to facilitate some of these pilot interventions. Based in Manchester, Dr. Grant is a child psychologist. He is middle-aged and white. He has extensive experience working in education settings and social services for children, and experience with other conflict prevention projects. To better understand how the topics for the videos and the accompanying exercises were chosen for the Lab's interventions, I asked him about this. He explained:

The core structure [of the intervention] always stays the same, but the topics that you might explore [will change]. It's not about hitting the bull's eye. You do it around the edge. And then you might [eventually] get into the top topics.

Instead of tackling extremism directly, Dr. Grant explained, the approach 'might be through gender issues or economic or justice issues or education or environmental [topics] or music. I

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<sup>22</sup> Interview 2, October 2019. Location of interviews with Lab respondents are withheld.

<sup>23</sup> Name of the project has been changed, without changing its spirit.

mean, you just base activities around whatever is more [relevant]’ to the audience. As an example, Dr. Grant noted that when he facilitated an intervention for a Somali community group, the topics for the exercises were ‘around marriage, and then certain aspects of Islamic law’. In the same vein, he explained that the Lab’s interventions are not explicitly presented as relating to counter-extremist work – in Dr. Grant’s words, ‘the titles aren’t, “you’re coming here to de radicalise”” because that would shut people down’.<sup>24</sup> Dr. Grant thus hinted that an awareness of possible criticism of and resistance to counter-extremism is embedded in the design of the interventions, even in the purposely vague titles of projects.

### ***Circumventing criticism***

All aspects of the Lab’s approach carefully pre-empt the negative “perceptions” of counter-extremism that the Prevent policy cautions against. The report on the Being British and Muslim pilot, for example, notes that the ‘broad-brush approach’ of prevention initiatives has received criticism because it ‘*might appear* to target the Muslim community’ (Lab report 2013; my emphasis). The Lab’s approach, however, purports to focus on ‘a structure of thinking – a cognitive construct that is measurable’ rather than focusing on the ‘content of beliefs or ideology’ of a specific community (Lab report 2013). Dr. Pratt explained that

Content in this sense means it doesn’t really matter [...] what the particularity of the identities [...] are. [What matters is] that you have differentiated [between different ideas] and achieved more nuance and seen higher integrations of those nuances, much more than it does matter which group or religion or nationality or... [you belong to].

Dr. Pratt concluded that by focusing on measures of ‘cognitive complexity’ then, the Lab’s approach circumvents the problem of ‘identifying a particular group or... belief as the problem [by] focusing more on structure’.<sup>25</sup>

Still, the introduction to the report on the pilot project posits that young Muslims (‘a particular group’) are especially ‘vulnerable’ to uncritical, ‘us versus them’ thinking in the context of ‘rapid globalization’ because of their possible confusion regarding ‘identity and behavioural norms’ (Lab report 2013). While the intervention then assumes some kind of opposition between being Muslim and being British, the latter is presented as only a *seeming* opposition that can be dissolved through better ways of thinking by young Muslims who are vulnerable to perceiving such an opposition. In other words, the Lab’s approach suggests that any stark

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<sup>24</sup> Interview 3, April 2020, Zoom.

<sup>25</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

opposition between ‘being Muslim’ and ‘being British’ is not socio-politically instituted, for example through the British state’s ‘us versus them’ treatment of white British citizens and Muslim British citizens wherein only the latter is disproportionately targeted by counter-extremism policy; rather, such a stark opposition is mistakenly perceived by young Muslims, who are vulnerable to such ‘low complexity’ thinking. The solution – better thinking – is based on the further argument that extremists target ‘low cognitive complexity’ by presenting ‘black and white solutions’ to complex social issues; in turn, vulnerability to extremism can be reduced by increasing the capacity for complex thinking and ‘value pluralism’, which facilitate imagination of ‘realistic but value-complex solutions’ (Lab report 2013). The Lab presents the role of its intervention as merely aiding ‘an individual’s *normal* developmental pathway’ toward more complex thinking, based in part on the ability to mobilise and integrate a plurality of values (Lab report 2013, emphasis mine). The focus on complex cognition thus purports to overcome the criticism that counter-extremism targets what people believe (Islam), by instead focusing on how they think.

Accordingly, the Lab’s intervention entails fostering capacity for ‘cognitive complexity’ and ‘value pluralism’ to purportedly do away with the “seeming” requirement that young Muslims perceive of having to (in the report’s words) ‘pick between’ Muslim and British identity. The stated purpose of exercises like the abovementioned opposing values poles exercise is then to challenge the ‘structure of polarised thinking’ and encourage more complexity and integration of different values (Lab report 2013). The report explains:

While extremist ideologies concentrate, for example, on the magnetic pull of one value, such as “economic justice,” to the exclusion of “economic freedom,” we aim to enable young people ... to explore the “magnetic pull” of both ends of a value spectrum (e.g., justice and freedom).

Notably, economic “freedom” is defined simply in the report as ‘free market capitalism’, without any explanatory commentary. By challenging ‘polarised thinking’ in this way, the Lab argues that it aims at ‘subverting...caricatures’ of different belief systems and identities (Lab report 2013). In turn, the Lab evaluates the success of its interventions by measuring the increase in participants’ ‘cognitive complexity’, evidenced by less ‘extreme’ commitment to one ‘end of a value spectrum’ (Lab report 2013). Still, a caricature of Muslim identity underlies the simplified oppositions that participants were asked to engage with and overcome: for example, binaries between ‘scientific knowing’ versus ‘religious knowing’; ‘women and men as being similar’ versus ‘women and men as being different’; and ‘Western self-indulgence’ versus ‘early marriage’. The design of the exercise then assumes that before such an intervention, young Muslims are likely to lack the

necessary ‘cognitive complexity’ that would allow them to avoid the lure of a caricatured understanding of their values – for example, they would supposedly be likely to believe that any position on marriage aside from “early” marriage amounts to ‘Western self-indulgence’.

Given that the Home Office-funded pilot targeted Muslim communities, and that the values used to represent being “uncritically” Muslim struck me as odd caricatures, I asked Dr. Collins and Dr. Pratt whether their method involves determining which types of beliefs are most dangerous if they are adopted “to the extreme”. My concern was about whether low complexity thinking is considered more likely in the context of a community characterised by ‘religious knowing’, and specifically, ‘Islamic knowing’, as the selection of intervention sites implied. Dr. Collins responded that the focus on Muslim communities as sites of intervention for this pilot was the consequence of funding priorities, and not related to the Lab’s methodology, since they believe that everyone could benefit from such interventions to improve cognitive complexity. Dr. Collins explained that with any social group,

if you think your group is [the] best, that is kind of matched with you think[ing] the other group is [the] worst. [We’re increasing] the capacity to recognise [that] we are going to get low complexity if [an issue] touches our core values, our identities, [and] to be able to not get sucked into this, [...] to be able to manage and regulate our cognition.<sup>26</sup>

In defending the Lab’s approach, Dr. Collins thus presented a framework of cognitive development that is in principle non-discriminatory. As an expert on the topic, Dr. Collins made sense of the Lab’s method as a primarily scientific project that is more about managing and regulating cognition than it is about the politics of how particular social groups are treated.

Presenting another practitioner perspective, Dr. Grant was also keen to highlight that anyone could benefit from such intervention. He argued that this was so because the “cognitive development” it promotes inherently leads to an anti-discriminatory ethic. He noted that working with the Lab expanded his own capacity for ‘critical thinking’ and ‘challenging assumptions’ about ‘other groups’. ‘What’s been really helpful for me is just [that] it’s blown over lots of my own assumptions’, Dr. Grant told me. He gave several examples, including the following:

Going to work with the Somali community, I made assumptions about how the boys and the girls would be together. [With them] coming from a Muslim culture, I thought that [there] would be... well not restrictions, but you know, obviously...but they seemed very comfortable together. They weren’t separated out. [There was] a bit of banter between them. They had the same interest in music as any other teenagers outside of the Muslim community, do you know what I mean? It was really good to see. And again, [there was

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<sup>26</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

an] assumption from me. I thought they would be a lot more cautious around each other, between different genders, but they weren't at all.<sup>27</sup>

Against the accusations that counter-extremism profiles Muslims then, the experts offered two distinct but related rebuttals. The first, presented by Dr. Collins, was that the method of cognitive development promoted by the Lab is scientific (“and therefore”) politically-neutral insofar as it can help anyone improve how they think. The second, presented by Dr. Grant, was that the result of this process of cognitive development is ethically good, in so far as more advanced cognitive development, as measured by this method, leads to an anti-discriminatory way of thinking. Put together, the defence of this approach to counter-extremism mobilises a narrative of cognitive development as neutral and non-discriminatory in process but ethically good and anti-discriminatory in result. Experts thus circumvent the criticism that counter-extremism discriminates against a particular group and its belief system by presenting their approach as an “objective” science of better thinking, with “better” meaning both more developed and ethically superior.

### ***Evading context***

Through further conversation with Dr. Collins and Dr. Pratt, it became clear that the Lab could only present its work as simultaneously “ideologically-neutral” *and* conducive to an ethically superior way of knowing and being through the evasion of sociogeny. That is, the Lab’s approach to counter-extremism evades the question of how all human ways of knowing and being are shaped through social relations and social context. Through our conversations, it became evident that the distinction the Lab relied on to circumvent criticism – the distinction between changing the ‘structure of thinking’ and targeting the ‘content of belief’ – becomes untenable as soon as real-life social context is brought into the picture.

Voicing my confusion around how encouraging a change in someone’s ‘structure of thinking’ can be distilled from encouraging an ideological change in ‘content of belief’, I invited Dr. Pratt and Dr. Collins to clarify this through an example. I asked:

If you were to use an example with white supremacy – if the original belief was to be that for example, ‘white people are *always* better than everyone else’, and then the more nuanced view would be something like, ‘sometimes white people are better at somethings and sometimes they’re not’. But at that point it’s no longer white supremacist ideology exactly. Hasn’t the content also changed, not just the structure?

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<sup>27</sup> Interview 3, April 2020, Zoom.



Dr. Pratt offered that my confusion might be due to mixing up complex thinking with ‘morality’. She explained that while the Lab’s approach measures cognitive complexity as a predictor for violence, it ‘is not telling you anything about morality’. She elaborated by giving a different example, of the American Civil War:

The abolitionists [had] much lower [complexity] because they were pretty clear and [had] “black and white” thinking about slavery: slavery is wrong. And they were morally correct about that. And the people in the middle, sort of trying to kind of foster peace, were more morally ambiguous. [So] complexity and morality are two different things. ... [Higher complexity thinking] is more conducive to trying to mediate conflict, sure, but maybe one side of the conflict has a moral superiority [vis à vis the other] side of the conflict, and that's not what this research touches on. I would say, [it's] agnostic on that. Not that we [, the researchers,] are but... the measure itself is agnostic to morality.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Pratt thus insisted that whether there are situations like this where low complexity thinking or even the violence it might lead to is ‘morally correct’ is not a matter that the Lab’s method takes a stance on. Through this example, Dr. Pratt drew the conclusion that the measure of complexity that the Lab’s interventions try to increase and morality are ‘two different things’.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, her example shows a distinct relationship between this measure and morality: the people who would have likely been measured to have ‘higher complexity’ thinking were the ones ‘in the middle’ who were ‘more morally ambiguous’ toward the question of whether slavery is completely unacceptable or not.

This relationship between moral ambiguity and higher complexity thinking is also evident in how the success of the Lab’s counter-extremist interventions is evaluated – namely, through less extreme attachment to a single value system. This suggests that the project and its funders deem more complex thinking and a concomitant ethical ambiguity to be desirable for the target group – young Muslims. The implications of this premise come into view when the target group is situated within the real-life political context of being Muslim in the UK. In a follow-up interview with Dr. Collins, I pushed further on whether there are not political contexts where what the Lab calls ‘black and white thinking’ is in fact a more appropriate and accurate perception of a social group’s circumstance. Accepting my challenge to consider how political realities affects the validity of their methodology, Dr. Collins offered another hypothetical situation to think through. The situation she presented was that of a British citizen being discriminated against at the UK border:

Well, let’s say you come to the border, and then suddenly, you are stopped and asked a lot of questions. And then you start noticing that it’s happening every time you go

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<sup>28</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

through the border. [So] you're going to start questioning what it means to be part of that country, because every time you go [to the border], a state authority is stopping you and not some other people who don't look like you. [...] So then every time, you anticipate the border, you might feel yourself tense up a bit, like, 'Okay, am I going to be stopped again?'<sup>30</sup>

Like the Prevent strategy's text, Dr. Collins described the situation of being questioned at the border because of what one looks like (a euphemism for how one is racially coded) in a way that problematised not so much the institutional racism manifested by the encounter and more so the perception of the racism belied by the encounter. Dr. Collins then continued to explain how this *perception* or *feeling* could lead to 'low complexity' and 'us versus them thinking'.

She reasoned that while such a situation can make thinking like this tempting, the temptation is a risk that could be avoided with better developed cognition. Dr. Collins clarified:

Now, most people go through [experiences like that], and they say, 'Yes, this is inconvenient, and we hate it. And it's wrong. And it's discriminatory. And it's oppressive.' But they're able to reason themselves out of it and try to find democratic means to go change that. But some people may feel stuck in that. It just takes too many cognitive resources.

Dr. Collins noted that in some situations, when one is under immediate threat, low cognitive complexity is desirable, even necessary, for survival. These are situations, she explained, where an immediate reaction is necessary. However, with the example of the UK border, she added:

It's not a physical threat. You know, the armed forces, hopefully, in this country will not physically threaten you, but it feels like it. [...] Usually one hopes there isn't going to be any physical abuse. If there is, then of course, they feel threatened because they are being physically threatened. But if it's just a stop and question – well, I don't mean *just*, but if there's no physical violence involved – that itself can start to feel threatening, and then you can start to go into [low complexity thinking].<sup>31</sup>

Through this reasoning, Dr. Collins justified the superiority of more complex thinking in a situation like a discriminatory stop at the border. However, such superior thinking is notably only demanded from the individual facing racism, and not from the state and its agent, even as the agent in this situation employs an institutionalised approach that is quite literally 'black and white'. In Dr. Collins' explanation then, while such a situation may be unjust, it does not warrant 'black and white' thinking in response for survival. Such extreme thinking is not necessary, she reasoned, because the threat of immediate violence is unlikely, even if one *feels* that it is imminent.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

This reasoning becomes untenable when institutionalised social relations are taken into account. Dr. Collins did not touch on *why* one might feel the threat of immediate violence when noticing that ‘a state authority is stopping you and not some other people who don’t look like you’. Yet, the threat of violence seems reasonable and indeed imminent if we consider the broader political context, for example, that for the past two decades the UK has internationally modelled ‘widening the terms upon which citizenship can be deprived’ (Kapoor and Narkowicz 2019, 46-47). The UK also leads in the number of ‘enforced removals’ (deportations), which numbered 12, 321 in 2017 (de Noronha 2017, 11). These deportations include people, primarily Black people, who ‘were born in the UK, or moved as toddlers’ and are nonetheless subject to immigration controls (de Noronha 2017). Given this context, to feel immediately threatened when stopped at the border ‘because of how one looks’, and to then default to ‘black and white thinking’ appears both reasonable and necessary for survival in face of threatened violence.

Still, Dr. Collins could make sense of the suitability of the Lab’s methodology for countering extremism by isolating an individual’s psychology from any social and historical context. She argued that discriminatory experiences like the border stop she described can lead to an ‘us versus them polarisation’ due to a lack of cognitive capacity. With improved cognitive capacity, she proposed, those at the receiving end of the border’s discrimination would be able to analyse their experiences in complex terms. She elaborated that following such an experience,

pretty soon, every state representative that you see on the street becomes someone that is just like those border police. [...] So if we’re talking about [when this person is collecting] socio-economic benefits, or [they] tried to get care on the NHS [National Health Services] and *feel* discriminated against again. [...] It becomes a self-perpetuating, reinforcing, individual narrative, when actually, these different actions may be related, but may not [be]. The NHS isn’t necessarily colluding with the Border Patrol. But you start to string them together, and say, ‘This whole society is out to get me.’<sup>32</sup>

When presented in these context-deprived terms, an individual’s perception of various experiences of discrimination with different governmental services as related to one another appears simplistic, even self-aggrandising. Dr. Collins suggested that this is a ‘self-perpetuating’ narrative where one *feels* targeted. Even as she argued that ‘the NHS isn’t necessarily colluding with the Border Patrol’, Dr. Collins did not mention the context that might make someone suspicious of such collusion.

While the word ‘colluding’ conjures the image of a deluded conspiratorial perception, a key aspect of the UK’s ‘hostile environment’ policies is making all social services and points of

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<sup>32</sup> Interview 4, January 2020. Emphasis mine.

government contact into hostile borders. The explicitly avowed purpose of this strategy is to prompt those who are unwelcome in the country, which can include citizens as Dr. Collins' own example shows, to leave. As former Home Secretary Theresa May put it, the purpose of the Immigration Act 2014 and 2016 was to create a 'really hostile environment', so that those the state deemed unwanted would 'go home'. De Noronha (2017, 12-13) succinctly summarises these policies as such:

Landlords were required to confirm their tenants' 'right to rent'; employers could be fined up to £20,000 per worker for employing 'illegal migrants'; NHS staff were required to check people's right to access healthcare; university lecturers were supposed to monitor their students' attendance; schools were required to collect nationality information on their pupils; banks and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) were required to share information with the Home Office.

Prevent, the very programme for which the Lab's pilot interventions were commissioned, further conscripts the NHS into bordering practices. It demands that NHS staff partake in reporting those patients who appear "vulnerable" to extremism to the Home Office. NHS staff are required to make this assessment according to Prevent training, which draws on the aforementioned psychology-based risk framework, ERG 22+ (Younis and Jadhav 2020). At the same time, the dominant psychological approach to counter-extremism presents the *perception* of such "collusion" between the border and public services as a marker of vulnerability to extremism. Set in this context, the Lab's approach undermines any attempt to question the state's explicitly named hostility by diagnosing accusations of institutionalised hostility toward negatively racialised groups as a symptom of overly simplistic cognition.

### ***Training cognition***

In turn, the Lab's problematisation of "how people think" as the site of dangerous vulnerability results in the prescription of a distinctly educational defence. Just as the diagnosis of such vulnerability erases social context and relations, the prescribed defence against this vulnerability does the same. The defence against this vulnerability is premised on a supposedly natural process of cognitive development, with the aim of counter-extremism articulated as fostering this process. Dr. Collins explained to me that she wants 'to underscore that we are not telling people what to think'. Rather, she went on:

We're trying to increase their inherent capacities that [people] do have, because they will probably already think with more complexity on some topics. We're trying to increase

their capacity to think with more capacity and more complexity about themselves [and] their own group.<sup>33</sup>

Developing ‘inherent’ cognitive capacities can then guard against the “real” villain in the experts’ narratives. While people who face repeated discrimination at the border, at the NHS, in education institutions, and when collecting socio-economic benefits might “mistakenly” perceive all state representatives as hostile toward them, the real risk they face is supposedly from radicalisers who prey on such ‘black and white’ perceptions. What can happen, Dr. Collins elaborated, is that someone may validate the reductive narrative that ‘the whole society is out to get me’:

Someone comes along with the narrative and says, ‘You’re right. That is what's going on. And we need to fight it.’ And maybe it starts out with demonstrations. And then, [one might think] ‘That's not going to be effective, we need to become violent’.<sup>34</sup>

Dr. Collins thus reasoned that training in more complex cognition is a valuable method for countering vulnerability to extremism. This drive toward fostering ‘cognitive capacity’ for ‘complex thinking’ encapsulates the educational nature of these types of counter-extremist interventions.

As discussed above, educational approaches to counter-extremism often highlight the phrase critical thinking as a key skill that guards against vulnerability to extremism, in contrast to the ‘black and white’ thinking that might make one vulnerable to the allure of ‘radicalisers’. Dr. Grant explained that he understands critical thinking in the context of counter-extremist work to mean,

being able to not make assumptions, [to know that] what has been said [and] what was done is not the only way. It’s about being curious, wondering, thinking there might be something else and self-reflection. [...] It’s not to accept something at face value, either what you’ve heard or [are] being shown or told, but also how you are feeling and thinking about it.<sup>35</sup>

This understanding of critical thinking shines a light on its virtues – the capacity to not make assumptions and reflect deeply on one’s feelings. In the context of counter-extremism aimed at Muslim communities in the UK, however, backed by Prevent, the demand to second-guess one’s feelings in fact pre-empts critical understanding of the state’s hostile environment. For those targeted by this environment, the *feeling* of hostility can prompt one to perceive the institution of the hostile environment.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 3, April 2020, Zoom.

The experts' valorisation of critical thinking then is accompanied by a suspicion and hostility toward feelings that point to the reality of institutionalised racism. This framing does not allow for the possibility that such feelings may incite a critical perception of this social context. Instead, feelings appear as pitfalls for risky misperceptions that require management through learning how to think. Dr. Collins explained to me that one way of understanding the Lab's work is 'helping people learn how to learn, or you can even call it readiness for learning'. This framing, she explained, is in line with 'internationally how ethics is moving'. She elaborated:

Initially, we were [commissioned and] brought in to fulfil prevention requirements, and that would be in a lot of different countries. But then there also has been the simultaneous movement and recognition of the need for social, emotional, cognitive learning.<sup>36</sup>

She explained that because of this international trend, the kind of work that the Lab is commissioned for nowadays is often framed in terms of education, instead of prevention. This framing, she elaborated during a later interview, commonly includes references to 'mental health' and having a 'psychosocial support framework'. She explained that countering extremism

used to be just [about] doing no harm, [...] but it's become more proactive. [...] If you're trying to support people to think with more complexity on topics that mean a lot to them, how do you do that ethically with appropriate safeguards? So that's a big part of it.<sup>37</sup>

Through this framework, an ethic of caring for the Other takes form as training the cognition of those deemed cognitively vulnerable.

#### **iv. Discussion**

The educational approach to counter-extremism then presents learning to think "better" as both a strategy for improving individual mental health and securing society against extremism. As the aim of improving how people think is common to recent counter-extremism agendas, the research presented in this chapter provides a thick description of how psychology experts present critical thinking as an antidote to "vulnerability". Cognitive improvement is constituted by the experts as a way of caring for the vulnerable Other so that they too may learn to avoid caring about worldly issues in ways that are deemed extreme. This premise then draws a causation from thinking better, to having better mental health, to being a more ethical subject. In this discussion section, I argue that this premise reveals the features of a dominant genre of

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<sup>36</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

being human, that of ethico-cognitive Man, through its contrast with one of the genre's Others – the vulnerable cognitive subject. Counter-extremism expertise operates through the already institutionalised assumption that ethico-cognitive Man represents the only way of being fully human. This assumption allows such expertise to circumvent criticism and erase political reality by evading the context of hierarchical social relations.

### ***The ethico-cognitive principle***

The Lab's overarching framework suggests that the ethical quality of thought can be improved through "objective" psychological measures of cognitive development that foster healthier thinking. In this framework, extremism can be averted by learning to think critically and with a 'healthy spread' of values (Lab report 2013). As Dr. Collins explained to me, improving cognitive complexity is about nurturing 'inherent capacities' that everyone already has. In other words, these cognitive capacities are presented as an objective (meaning, non-socially determined) feature of being human, and their expansion as a natural feature of human development. At the same time, the scientific measure for healthier *thinking* is mobilised to anticipate more ethical *being*, even as the experts deem the measure 'morally agnostic'. In her example of someone being stopped at the border because of their perceived race, Dr. Collins argued that having more 'cognitive resources' would allow for the person in question to address concerns about discrimination through long-term 'democratic means' instead of taking 'extremist' action on the spot.<sup>38</sup> The Lab's disavowal of its ethical prescription is thus made possible by a teleological slip in the presentation of cognitive development. The prescribed cognitive development is presented as a "natural" progression that increases a 'morally agnostic' measure of better thinking. At the same time, the outcome of the process is presented as the development of a superior and more socially desirable ethic.

By targeting a supposedly objective and measurable feature of being human, countering extremism through 'critical thinking' sets itself apart from past prevention efforts. It insists that the target of intervention is no longer the subjective 'content' of any particular ideology belonging to any one group, as it had been in the case of "conveyor belt" theories of radicalisation. The new target of counter-extremism is a universal process of cognitive development that can supposedly be evaluated through equally universal metrics. This approach refutes accusations of discrimination through its scientific pedigree and its reliance on supposedly objective qualities of being human. At the same time, the need to counter extremism by developing cognitive capacities among the "vulnerable" suggests that the latter are less fully

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<sup>38</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

developed humans. Counter-extremism's targeting of Muslims as 'vulnerable to extremism' suggests that these 'inherent capacities' are less developed amongst them, marking them specifically as less human.

The Lab's logic further shows how this approach can circumvent criticism of profiling Muslims by situating its diagnosis in a historical moment deprived of social and political context. The Lab locates the source of Muslim "vulnerability" to extremism in an *apparent* clash of values in the context of 'rapid globalization' (Lab report 2013). According to the Lab, it is the perception of such a clash, especially amongst young Muslims, that causes 'identity confusion' and makes 'black and white thinking' appealing (Lab report 2013). Such 'identity confusion' is also identified as a sign of vulnerability to extremism in the ERG 22+ psychology framework that informs Prevent (LLoyd and Dean 2011). The Lab's framing of identity confusion, in line with that of Prevent and educational approaches to counter-extremism more broadly, is crucially distinct from the once dominant idea that the root cause of terrorism is the inherent violence of "Islamic values" that clash with "peaceful Western values". This earlier view has been widely critiqued from the outset of the "war on terror" for its reliance on 'culture talk', that is, its tendency to define 'cultures according to their presumed "essential" characteristics' and to accordingly de-historicise and depoliticise 'the construction of political identities' (Mamdani 2002, 766–67). Such 'culture talk' has been widely dismissed for assuming that the political behaviours of Muslims can be understood through the "authentic" essence of "their" supposedly singular culture. In contrast, the Lab pre-empts such critiques of cultural essentialism by suggesting that the 'clash of values' at hand is a mirage, that is, a false perception, to which Muslims are particularly vulnerable.

While the Lab's prognosis then seems to mimic the call of critics who called for deeper thinking around 'being Muslim' in the context of the "war on terror", it in fact distorts the critique by removing it from its political context. While such critics were demanding that powerful institutions, like the state and media outlets, do away with essentialism, the educational approach to counter-extremism demands that individual Muslims do so. Accordingly, instead of problematising the 'black and white' or 'us versus them' thinking of powerful political actors for enabling hostile anti-Muslim policies and mass violence through military action, counter-extremism problematises the 'low complexity' thinking of individual Muslims as that which enables 'violent extremism'. Nonetheless, this distorted echo of anti-essentialism shields the psychology expertise that informs counter-extremism from accusations of essentialism. It is only by introducing the existing political context that this diagnosis of Muslim minds as vulnerable to a mistaken perception of a clash between 'being Muslim' and 'being British' falls apart. It is



difficult to imagine that the perception of such a clash arises primarily from a lack of critical thinking on the part of individual Muslims when so-called us versus them thinking continues to be institutionalised by the state through the aforementioned character requirements for immigration or through Prevent's definition of extremism as 'opposition to fundamental British values' (Home Office 2015b, para. 7).

At the same time, by referring to 'rapid globalization' as the external cause of Muslim vulnerability to identity confusion, the contemporary diagnosis of 'Muslim minds' can also deter well-known criticisms encountered by earlier colonial diagnoses of 'Muslim minds' as inherently extreme. For example, Fanon famously critiqued French ethno-psychiatrists for their diagnosis of Algerian Muslims over 60 years ago. He argued that they explained away Algerian protests on the eve of independence uprisings by diagnosing insurgent violence as a symptom of inherent irrationality. French psychiatrists argued that,

The North African likes extremes. [...] He is insensible to shades of meaning [...] the sense of balance, the weighing and pondering of an opinion or action clashes with his most intimate nature (Fanon [1961] 2021, 241–42).

They claimed that Algerians were prone to thinking that 'excluded all synthesis' (1963, 241-2). This diagnosis cast the dominant ethnoclass as sensible, nuanced, and capable of complex thinking. Conversely, the ethnoclass' Other was characterised through a proclivity for 'black and white' thinking. Fanon thus charged that French psychiatrists approached Algerian patients through stereotypes of innate extremism. Their psychiatric terms that delimited being fully human and ready for "real" political engagement foreshadow those that do the same in global counter-extremism today, with a parallel pathologising of so-called polarised thinking. Yet, the Lab's interventions explicitly problematise cultural stereotypes. The Lab argues that identity 'caricatures' are amongst the 'common rhetorical strategies' that 'radicalisers' use to draw vulnerable people into extremism (Lab report 2013). In doing so, it attempts to shake off the baggage of colonial history and of the caricatures used still today by the state and its dominant ethnoclass. There is no explicit pathologising of any race, religion, or culture as such. Instead, the target is a vulnerability that has arisen from the context of a "politically-neutral" historical event – that of 'rapid globalization'.

Yet, the contemporary diagnosis of Muslim minds with reference to a historical moment of intercultural contact cleverly evades current and historical social relations. The notion that globalisation in its current form is creating a totally new context of encounter between ideas of being Muslim and being British, which in turn makes young Muslims vulnerable to perceiving an apparent clash between these two identities, only makes sense if we bracket off earlier histories

of global movement, including Britain's transatlantic slave-trade, colonialism and empire, and post-colonial migration.<sup>39</sup> For Muslims to be diagnosed as cognitively vulnerable to extremism due to so-called new encounters, the long and violent history of enmeshments of 'being Muslim' and 'being British' must be erased. Fanon's ([1952] 1988) aforementioned analysis of 'pain without lesions' is useful here for further understanding how the evasion of current and historically-informed social relations in the making of psychological diagnoses serves to displace problems caused by a political structure onto the minds of the structure's Others. Fanon's critique pointed to the need to consider sociogeny in the making of psychological diagnoses, meaning, the need to consider socially produced and socially instituted features of being human that appear "natural" (meaning, non-socially determined). Sociogeny put forward the impossibility of problematising an individual or group's way of being without considering how it is shaped by the 'the worm-eaten roots of the structure' (Fanon [1967] 2008, 4). Unlike the colonial doctors and ethno-psychiatrists that Fanon wrote about, contemporary counter-extremism and its experts often acknowledge the existence of racism – a nod to existing social relations. However, in doing so, they immediately reduce racism to individual biases, erasing the reality that a vast range of institutions do in fact operate according to racist structures like those reinforced by hostile environment policies. Counter-extremism thus re-invents the historical diagnosis of the Muslim psyche as prone to extremes by presenting young Muslims as particularly vulnerable to *perceiving* extremes and (over)reacting in extreme ways. This re-invented diagnosis erases the extreme injustices they may perceive in how they are treated as being "all in their heads".

Even when the experts reflected on their position vis à vis the recipients of their counter-extremism interventions (as Fanon had suggested the French colonial doctors should do), they further erased the structural quality of racism. Dr. Grant, for example, shared some assumptions he had made about how boys and girls would interact with each other at the workshop he facilitated at a Somali community centre. He then presented the self-reflection prompted by his experience as evidence of the benefit of critical thinking for everyone. In doing so, he also presented the existence of his a priori assumptions as rooted in a lack of critical thinking. Dr. Collins had similarly told me, 'All of us can be at an extreme end of an ideological dimension. And all of us probably are'.<sup>40</sup> Yet, neither made any reference to the institutionalisation of specific assumptions about Muslims in the UK, such as Prevent's singling out of Muslims as especially vulnerable to extremism (Kundnani 2014). In Dr. Grant and Dr. Collins's responses,

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<sup>39</sup> For an overview of the long history of Muslims in the UK, see: Hellyer, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Interview 1, October 2019.

as in the prescriptions of educational counter-extremism more broadly, ‘assumption-making’ is something that everyone does because everyone is prone to occasional ‘low complexity’ thinking; making assumptions about how Muslims are likely to behave is thus disconnected from counter-extremism imperatives like Prevent that demand habitual anti-Muslim surveillance from a vast range of institutions. Instead of political change targeting institutions, the solution becomes individual cognitive improvement to critically re-evaluate discriminatory attitudes.

Against such diagnoses, as Wynter has argued, Fanon’s concept of sociogeny motioned to a different prognosis than schools of psychology and psychiatry ‘whose goal is to adjust the individual to society’ (Wynter 1999, 12). Instead of problematising the cognition of individuals within a social group in isolation from broader social and political context, sociogeny points to socially produced and instituted relations that condition how the dominant ethnoclass and its Others perceive and engage with the world. This consideration points to a different site of “pathology”: the dominant ethnoclass’ mode of instituting a limited notion of being human as the only way of being. Accordingly, ‘the prognosis is that of overall social transformation’ (Wynter 1999, 12). Wynter’s adapted term, the governing sociogenic principle, designates the ‘organizational principle of each culture’s criterion of being/non-being’ (2001, 54). This principle is the underpinning rationale of sociogeny. It is, in Wynter’s terms, the rationale that institutes the over-representation of the dominant genre of being so that the latter appears as the only way of being human. Insights about the governing sociogenic principle therefore deepen understanding of the terms through which the dominant ethnoclass over-represents itself. Fanon’s analysis, for example, shows that colonial psychiatrists’ diagnoses secured the dominant genre by producing its modes of human Otherness through characteristics of inherent irrationality and mental debility.

In this section, I have shown how the experts’ presentation of their work reveals the ideal way of being that is productive of and reproduced by counter-extremism. The sociogenic principle that emerges from this analysis can be termed the principle of ethico-cognition, which institutes the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man. According to this principle, being ethical is contingent on advanced cognitive development. This sociogenic principle circularly institutes cognitive capacities that are deemed superior through psychological metrics as the objective features of being a fully developed human, meaning a human being suited for the dominant liberal ethic. The next section considers how the experts’ constitution of Muslims as the cognitively vulnerable Others of the dominant genre of being human works through educational norms, alongside the psychological ones already discussed.

### ***The vulnerable cognitive subject***

The experts' prescription of 'critical thinking' as antidote for extremism relies also on a culturally sedimented liberal secular belief about the work of education. As Morefield (2019) argues, liberal theories of justice tend to rely on 'liberal belief', meaning that they take the question of the most just political ethics as already settled. They start from the premise that liberalism has already proven itself to be the theoretically superior ethic (Morefield 2019). Accordingly, liberal theories of education also assume the natural end goal of education, and especially of the ethos of critical thinking, to be the adoption of liberal secular political ethics (Straume 2016). Simply: it is assumed that thinking better leads to adopting the better ethics of liberalism. Educational approaches to counter-extremism mobilise both psychological expertise and this liberal belief about the work of education to present counter-extremism as a kind of pre-political cognitive training for vulnerable cognitive subjects.

My contention is that liberal secular belief about education informs counter-extremism in two ways. It co-constitutes the dominant genre's Other as the vulnerable cognitive subject. It further secures the dominant genre by promoting an ethic of concurrent individual improvement and increasing moral agnosticism toward systemic injustice within a liberal order. In making this argument, I am conscious of Duncan Bell's critique of the 'dizzying variety of ways' (2014, 682) in which scholarship uses the 'liberal' descriptor. Accordingly, my aim is not to indicate 'an ahistorical set of liberal commitments' (Bell 2014, 689) with regards to education. Following Bell, by secular liberal belief about education I refer to 'arguments that have been classified as liberal, and recognized as such by other self-proclaimed liberals' (2014, 685). This section sets out to show that liberal secular belief about what education does and should do is not the 'securitised' victim of counter-extremism so much as it is its accomplice. Together, psychological expertise and secular liberal norms of education enable and perpetuate the negative racialisation of the genre's Muslim Other, imagined as the vulnerable cognitive subject.

While my expert informants characterise their approach to counter-extremism as 'agnostic to morality', it in fact promotes an ethic of *moral agnosticism* that is supported by common conceptions of 'balance' and 'tolerance' in education. Recall how the Lab's report (2013) states that extremists draw on the 'pull' of one 'value pole' to the exclusion of the opposite end of the 'value spectrum'. The report gives 'economic justice' and 'economic freedom' as examples of opposite ends of 'a value spectrum', defining economic freedom briefly as free market capitalism. The intervention's stated aim is to encourage complex synthetic

thinking, a move beyond ‘value monism’ and toward ‘value pluralism’ (Lab report 2013). However, free market capitalism and economic justice are not opposing extremes of a ‘value spectrum’ so much as distinct value systems. What is promoted as ‘balancing’ thinking by drawing on values from ‘both extremes’ is then a position of indecision between different ideologies. This ethic of agnosticism amounts to passive acceptance of the political status quo by default.

Common ideals of balance and tolerance as features of critical thinking in educational settings support this ethic. The conception of critical thinking as constituted by and conducive to balance and tolerance often draws on John Stuart Mill’s case for freedom of speech, and can make for an anti-political idealisation of ‘idle doubt’ (Bilgrami 2015). Mill’s argument is that ‘many of our past opinions, which we had held with great conviction, have turned out to be false,’ and this may also be the case for our current convictions (Bilgrami 2015, 12). We should then ‘*tolerate* dissenting opinions just in case our current opinions are wrong’ (Bilgrami 2015, 13; my emphasis). In liberal educational settings, especially higher education, faith in this conclusion often manifests in demands to *balance* ‘both sides of a disagreement’ (Bilgrami 2015, 16). The ‘idle doubt’ embedded in this conception of ‘critical thinking’ as tolerating ‘both sides’ defers the possibility of critically drawing any strong political conviction or even making an ethical judgement based on the evidence at hand (Bilgrami 2015, 16). Doing so would dangerously signal inferior ‘black and white’ cognition, which is to say unbalanced and intolerant thinking, and therefore a vulnerability to extremism.

The standards of healthy cognition put forth by this conception of critical thinking have historically served an educational mode of racialisation. The racialisation of dissenting religious Others specifically as ‘pre-political’ – that is, not yet ready for political engagement – has a history in the British Empire’s ‘secular conceptions of the political’ (Chakrabarty [2000] 2008, 23). In British colonies, especially in the Indian subcontinent, those whose did not abandon gods and spirits in their protests were dismissed as pre-political by both imperial historians and colonial administrators (Chakrabarty [2000] 2008, 11). Becoming a truly political subject was deemed to be contingent on the passing of ‘some historical time of development and civilization (colonial rule and education, to be precise)’ (Chakrabarty [2000] 2008, 15). This conception of education is part of the sedimented history that makes counter-extremism’s focus on “how people think” appear commonsensical. These terms secure the dominant ethnoclass by fostering suspicion toward those constructed in contrast as vulnerable cognitive subjects and toward their ability to participate in politics without due education.

This deferral of political agency through education has historically been a central premise in an array of other liberal approaches to educating Others, from Macaulay's infamous 'Minute on Indian Education' in 1835 – wherein he claimed that the English should set the terms for the content of education in India and refrain from consulting Indian 'intellectual taste at the expense of their intellectual health' (Macaulay [1835] 2003, 233) – to Martha Nussbaum's currently popular Human Capabilities approach to development, which situates education as the means for achieving the basic capabilities for a life 'worthy of human dignity', including the capacity for thought and reason (Nussbaum 2011, 3–4). Education does the so-called pre-political care work of preparing Others for living fully human lives. Of course, Macaulay and Nussbaum are conceptualising education for the creation of different subjectivities in very different historical contexts: the former a class of 'persons Indian in blood and colour, but English [...] in intellect' (Macaulay [1835] 2003, 237), and the latter, "developing" individuals aspiring to a liberal ethic. What they share is a narrative of individual self-actualisation in a socio-political vacuum and an understanding of education as the pre-political process that enables such actualisation by setting the stage for a life worthy of human dignity, a fully human life fit for liberal politics.

Psychological expertise on countering extremism adapts this understanding of 'learning to think' as a pre-political endeavour by giving it a scientific measure. In doing so, such expertise de-legitimises opposition to the status quo by characterising it as an uneducated position of cognitive underdevelopment. For example, because the existence of institutionalised racism in (and as a function of) a liberal political order is unthinkable within liberal belief, *and* nothing can be unthinkable in a non-tyrannical system, then the "perception" of institutionalised racism is presented by counter-extremism as the consequence of underdeveloped thinking. As Morefield argues, the tendency for liberal theories of justice to distil 'moral resources of liberal theory' without considering the 'extensive histories of illiberal behaviours' by liberal states and the liberal international order constantly shifts the focus back to a theoretical 'liberal pedigree' (Morefield 2019, 191). A concurrent mode of distraction is the constant shifting back of the focus to the 'cognitive resources' and concomitant educational pedigree of the ideal liberal subject and the lack thereof within its Other. In effect, counter-extremism mobilises these modes of distraction to reframe dissent as the misperceptions of the underdeveloped, the uneducated, the cognitively vulnerable. This in turn delays contestation of counter-terrorism structures and their marginalisation of Muslims. The requirement for further education that has historically delayed dissent has been scientified through psychological expertise on the necessary "cognitive capacity" for ethical political engagement.

Against an ethic of dissent, counter-extremism presents an ethic of ambivalence as the moral pinnacle that the ideal liberal subject claims through the subject's cognitive superiority. This ideal subject is over-represented as the only way of being a fully developed human through the genre of ethico-cognitive Man – that is, a genre of being characterised by “fully developed” cognition and accordingly, the paramount political ethic available to humankind. The features of this dominant genre are made visible through their contrast with the genre's Other, the vulnerable cognitive subject. To produce the vulnerable cognitive subject, psychological expertise on counter-extremism moves through liberal belief in the work of education as pre-political care for unbalanced and intolerant minds. The settled terms for political participation are evident in the way such expertise takes for granted the liberal evaluation of the ideals of balance and tolerance as indications of advanced cognition and ethical superiority. The psychological expertise informing counter-extremism moves through these pre-determined evaluations whenever it speaks of ‘black and white thinking’ (read: lack of balance) and ‘monist values’ (read: lack of tolerance). Yet ‘balance’ and ‘tolerance’ can also act as red herrings, distracting from a higher order lack of plurality (Bilgrami 2015, 11). In this case, they distract from the gatekeeping practice of teaching Others how to think under the guise of pre-political psychological care. That is, they distract from the higher order exclusion wherein alternative epistemologies and their concomitant genres of being are only tolerated in anxious terms, as risky underdeveloped cognition, which is to say, not as legitimate alternatives at all. Contestation of the over-representation of ethico-cognitive Man is delayed by reframing any such struggle through the genre's terms as the extremism of the cognitively vulnerable. The vulnerable cognitive subject is an Otherness that protects the superiority of the dominant ethnoclass associated with the dominant genre of being – ethico-cognitive Man.

## **v. The ethico-cognitive alliance**

In conclusion, I have shown that counter-extremism racialises its primary targets, Muslims, by positioning them against an imagination of fully developed and ethically superior cognition informed by both psychological metrics and secular liberal belief about education. It thereby marks Muslims as vulnerable to extreme thinking. As my discussion of the Lab shows, this alliance between powerful discourses of cognitive psychology and liberal belief about education imagines vulnerability through terms like ‘black and white thinking’ and ‘monist values’, in opposition to critical, balanced, and tolerant thinking. The propensity of the vulnerable cognitive subject for extremism fosters scepticism toward the subject's ability to participate in politics

“safely” without undergoing due cognitive development first. From this analysis, we can glimpse a sociogenic principle that over-represents the dominant ethnoclass through the genre of ethico-cognitive Man and casts its Other as a vulnerable cognitive subject. This directs us toward the two following interventions.

First, neither the scientific metrics of cognition drawn from psychology expertise nor educational values with a strong ‘liberal pedigree’ should be left unquestioned by virtue of their claims to objectivity or to universal ethical superiority, respectively. This chapter shows that psychological expertise and liberal belief about education *work together* to racialise Muslims as vulnerable cognitive subjects. Nor is it enough to critique counter-extremism for its supposedly exceptional co-optation of psychology expertise and educational methods. Whilst the value of ‘critical thinking’ and the ‘cognitive development’ deemed conducive to it are often taken for granted, my intervention serves as a reminder that standards of so-called healthy cognition and the promotion of “better thinking” have historically served to racialise especially religious Others and to make their participation in politics contingent on changing how they think. This reminder alerts us to how terms like ‘black and white thinking’ have been historically wielded to delimit being fully human. Whiteness *continues* to characterise itself through a unique capacity for ‘balanced’ and ‘critical’ thought (Abu-Bakare 2021), and to over-represent this self-ascribed characterisation as the only way of being properly human. Any assumption of exceptionality in the involvement of cognitive psychology and education in security work is then untenable and dangerous. Moreover, the prescription of ‘critical thinking’ as a supposedly objective metric for ethical superiority in a socio-political vacuum risks complicity in the over-representation of the dominant genre of being.

Second, I have begun to show how the dominant genre of being, that of ethico-cognitive Man, institutes its own over-representation as the only way of being human. That is, I have begun to show the operations of the governing sociogenic principle that enables contemporary counter-extremism. I have elucidated that through contrast with the vulnerable cognitive subject, the governing sociogenic principle institutes critical thinking as a key characteristic and prerogative of the dominant ethnoclass on the one hand, and as a criterion for being properly and fully human according to the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man on the other hand. The conventions of a dominant genre (or form) often have, to borrow from Frederic Jameson, ‘the function of inventing imaginary or “solutions” to unresolvable social contradictions’ (1982, 79). The ethico-cognitive genre’s convention of educating those deemed vulnerable to ‘rigid and narrow thinking’ (Lab report 2013) to develop their cognitive capacity invents a seeming solution



to the following contradiction: a political order that presents itself as committed to human rights, freedom, and equality is at the same time entirely resistant to recognising those outside the dominant ethnoclass as being fully human and thus being capable of thought and a morally acceptable ethic. Counter-extremism's framework of cognitive-cum-ethical improvement "resolves" this contradiction by framing the deferral of this recognition as a mode of pre-political care, done in the interest of educating the Other who is not yet ready for a liberal ethic. This supposed solution prevents the Other's ability to question the contradiction of casting 'black and white thinking' as a marker of 'cognitive vulnerability' while racialising and racist policies persist through thoroughly "unbalanced" structures.

Accordingly, I propose that to fully grasp the governing sociogenic principle of ethico-cognition and its constitution of racial difference and hierarchy, we must consider the conditions of possibility for its emergence and persistence. The racialising alliance between psychology and education enables the ableist and carceral context that makes counter-extremism's construction of Muslims as vulnerable cognitive subjects a sufficient and convincing reason for their increased policing, surveillance, detention, citizenship stripping, and deportation (see also: Patel 2014). From 2007 to 2017, the number of Muslims imprisoned in the UK increased from 8,900 to 13,200; in 2017, while Muslims made up 15 percent of the imprisoned population in the UK, they only made up 5 percent of the UK's overall population (Lammy 2017, 12). An estimated half (49 per cent) of men in UK Immigration Removal Centres were Muslims from 2013-2016, according to snapshot statistics (Singh Bhui 2018, 213). According to a 2019 report, Muslim women make up 35% of the 'BAME' (British, Asian, Minority Ethnic) women's prison population (Buncy and Ahmed 2019, 25). These realities function in and are held up by a context wherein a so-called lack of critical cognitive capacity amongst Muslims indicates their supposed psychological vulnerability to extremism *and* wherein a lack of education or psychological vulnerability more generally are assumed to be risk factors that necessitate increased surveillance or incarceration. Therefore, it is not enough to argue that Muslims are being treated as if they are all 'uneducated' or 'mentally ill' without questioning the logic that makes the inhumane treatment of those characterised as such widely acceptable.

Educational and psychological rationales collaborate in counter-extremism to co-construct the latter's cognitively vulnerable target. Yet, even the critical literature on the role of race science in informing counter-extremism often brushes past the significance of psychology's role as the most relevant race science in question. Education, on the other hand, when considered in relation to counter-extremism, is often taken as the innocent liberal victim of

securitisation. Such literatures then tend to ignore how race and disability, including mental illness, constitute a historically ‘mutual project of human exclusion legitimized through scientific rationales’ (Patel 2014, 203; Snyder and Mitchell 2006), as do race and liberal education. We must rethink together the co-constituting conventions of psychology and education that secure the dominant ethnoclass and its genre of being human through the purported cognitive development of Others. To do so, we must also understand the conventions of the dominant genre that secure the dominant ethnoclass by saying ‘not yet’ to those whose very position in the current order risks revealing the dominant genre’s over-representation.

As it stands, the vulnerable cognitive subject of counter-extremism follows the underdeveloped subject of development who followed the inherently irrational subject of colonialism. In all cases, the Other must learn how to think, lest the Other make apparent the over-representation of the dominant genre of being for what it is – an over-representation of one way of being human as the only way. The cost of allowing the current psychological and educational conventions of the dominant genre to go unquestioned is the persisting preclusion of the ‘politics of being’, that is, the struggle over what it means to be human. The next chapter therefore scrutinises the rise of the ethico-cognitive genre of being by considering the historical development of cognitive psychology. The latter is analysed as a race science that has paradoxically established an ethical claim to ‘not seeing race’. The chapter after the next then considers the ritualistic tactics within education institutions that enable the collective over-representation of ethico-cognitive Man today.



## Chapter III. The rise of ethico-cognitive Man

### i. Introduction

Islamist extremists regard Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries as a ‘war with Islam’, creating a narrative of ‘them’ and ‘us’. Their ideology includes the uncompromising belief that people cannot be both Muslim and British [...]. Islamist extremists specifically attack the principles of civic participation and social cohesion.  
– *Prevent Duty Guidance* (Home Office 2021)

In the teaching of geography and history in Africa, it would seem to be especially important to stress that the essential thing about all folk to-day is that they are only local examples of a highly homogenous humanity.  
– *Psychology of Mau Mau* (Carothers 1955)

A structure of thought that defeats ‘them’ and ‘us’ thinking and allows for social cohesion – this is the psychological prescription of educational counter-extremism, as discussed in the previous chapter. On the surface, the spirit of this prescription might appear post-racial, or even anti-racist. It proclaims to stand against ‘the uncompromising belief that people cannot be both Muslim and British’. It might ask you to think twice before asking a Black or Brown British person where they are from one too many times. Yet, paradoxically, this prescription to think away irreconcilable racial difference has its origins in colonial psychology and the latter’s re-invention of race. Through the category of a ‘highly homogenous’ human race, British colonial psychology contributed to the reinvention of racial difference as a difference of degree rather than of type. As evidenced in Dr J.C. Carothers’ report, *Psychology of Mau Mau*, which was commissioned by the Empire for counterinsurgent efforts in Kenya, psychology experts could claim to differentiate between the relative cognitive development of different races while attesting to the highly homogenous nature of humanity. That is, psychologists could speak of different stages of cognitive development *within* “the human race” without speaking about an increasingly discredited taxonomy of different races as differing subspecies. They could speak about racial difference, without speaking about racial difference. In this way, colonial psychology has evaded attention as a science of race per se, and so too have its successors. Because the racial thinking enabled by British colonial psychology continues to inform the governing sociogenic principle today and its counter-extremist mode of securing ethico-cognitive Man, giving due attention to this chapter in the social history of being human is essential for understanding how racial difference continues to be reproduced.

In this chapter, I argue that the development of a proto-cognitive psychology in the late British Empire supported an emerging understanding of “the human race” as a monogenetic

animal-species requiring domestication. Domestication of “the human race”, which is to say, intentional transformation of its qualities for the collective good, was informed by the new science of psychology. The insights of the new science were applied by way of social intervention, through institutional and public education. The discourse of racial domestication operated at interlocking scales, from the education of mixed-raced children in their English homes to the “education” of colonies at large. This conception of “the human race” shaped the limits of being human through the genre of ethico-cognitive Man. The historical narrative presented here fleshes out this dominant genre of being that was introduced in the previous chapter. It shows how the genre’s rise was enabled by the consolidation of psychology as a modern empirical science that claimed expertise over the project of racial domestication. After presenting this historical narrative, I further develop the characterisation of ethico-cognitive Man through Dubois’ conception of whiteness as dominion, as elucidated by Myers (Dubois [1920] 2007; E. Myers 2019). I show that the British development of psychology reproduced whiteness as a *cognitive* dominion and endowed ethico-cognitive Man with this dominion—an attitude of rightful ownership toward the mind of Others, to experiment with, dispose of, or develop with the ethical aim of perfecting “the human race”.

The two major contributions of this chapter are as follows. Firstly, the chapter illuminates the historical conditions of possibility that facilitated the advent of ethico-cognitive Man as the dominant genre of being. Accordingly, it also elucidates the conditions of possibility for the twenty-first century development of educational counter-extremism as a popular method for securing this genre’s over-representation as the only way of being human. The chapter contributes to literature in critical security studies and international political sociology that have in the past two decades pointed to the ‘colonial’ nature of counter-extremism and noted the resonance of contemporary counter-extremism with earlier modes of colonial policing, counterinsurgency, and race science. However, the literature has yet to pinpoint the exact science of race responsible for such continuities. This chapter shows what exactly is colonial about the racial logic of educational counter-extremism. Psychology’s development as a science of race is one critical condition of possibility for the understanding of being human deployed by today’s counter-extremism.

Secondly, this chapter contributes to histories of the psy- disciplines (psychology and psychiatry) in the context of British colonialism. Critical historians often focus on how psychological discourse unsettled ‘familiar classifications of race’ (Linstrum 2016, 14; Heaton 2013). They do so even as they point to how psychology produced new ways of ascribing difference that served colonial rule, for example through the category of relative educability (Mahone and

Vaughan 2007). Erik Linstrum's monograph, *Ruling Minds* (2016, 218), concludes that psychology unsettled the rigid classifications of nineteenth-century race science as the imperial order struggled to balance 'difference with development' and 'universality with peculiarity'. Similarly, Sloane Mahone and Megan Vaughan introduce race in their edited volume on *Psychiatry and Empire* by emphasising that 'the history of psychiatry and empire is more complex and more subtle than one which sees psychiatry simply as a tool of colonial racist oppression' (2007, 10). They are at pains to highlight 'the complicated relationship between scientific knowledge and power' (Mahone and Vaughan 2007, 10). Unfortunately, this focus, alongside the lack of consideration given to whether and how twentieth-century psychological discourse re-invented race in other terms, can give the false impression that psychology did away with nineteenth-century notions of race altogether. Critical security scholars could then be forgiven for not looking to histories of the psy- disciplines for a deeper understanding of contemporary racialisation. Still, the lack of interest on the part of critical scholars of counter-extremism in psychology's colonial development has delayed productive engagement with this historical scholarship. I look to this rich historical literature and primary sources to illuminate the rise of psychology as an authoritative and politically influential science of race. The historical narrative I present deepens understanding of the mode of racialisation mobilised by counter-extremism today by showing its formative conditions of possibility. At the same time, my intervention speaks back to the historical literature by asking: beyond unsettling earlier understandings of rigid, 'biological' and even polygenetic difference (Rusert 2017), how did psychology in the British Empire *re-invent* race?

## ii. The relocation of race science

This section and the next show how psychology's development as a new scientific discipline in the early twentieth century in the British Empire began to re-invent racial difference as a scale of relative and malleable humanness. It did so against earlier understandings of biologically different 'types' of (non)human beings, thereby re-forming (that is, giving new form) to the culturally dominant understanding of race. This consideration of psychology's historical role in the *production* of racial difference is distinct from existing literature's discussion of the discipline's role in the *management* of racial difference today. For example, in 'The psychologisation of counter-extremism', Tarek Younis astutely shows that 'an understanding of psychologisation is necessary to grasp how Muslim subjectivity is *managed* by the "war on terror"' (2021, 40; emphasis mine). Pursuing a distinct concern from psychology's *governance* of race, this section and the next show how psychology has historically facilitated the production of hierarchical racial difference through

its gradation of relative cognitive development and the mapping of this scale onto one of relative humanness.

Writing in 1901, W. H. Rivers, a psychologist based at the University of Cambridge, noted the following method for coercing the participation of Torres Strait Islanders in his report on research conducted at Murray Island:

The natives were told that some people had said that the black man could see and hear... better than the white man, and that we had come to find out how clever they were, and that their performances would be all described in a big book (Rivers 1901, 3).

The research Rivers refers to was conducted as part of an expedition organised by anthropologist A.C. Haddon (after whom the library of the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge is named today). This colonial voyage has been marked by scholars as a turning point in the colonial understanding of racial difference and in the development of British psychology as a scientific discipline (Linstrum 2016, 29; Richards 2012; Saugstad 2018). In March 1898, Rivers and two of his doctoral students, C.S. Myers and William McDougall, departed on this journey for the Torres Straits. The latter had been recently annexed to the British colony of Queensland in 1879 for control of the strategic commercial passage and to capitalise on the pearling industry (Nakata 2004, 156). The expedition was notable for its scale: in the Murray Island community, ‘almost the entire male population was involved and the research extended over weeks’ (Richards 2012, 51). This far exceeded meticulous psychological research on any population at the time, and its longitudinal approach contrasted ‘the hour or two per subject typical of laboratory research’ in Europe (Richards 2012, 51). Of the psychologists involved, Myers would go on to fund and become Director of the Cambridge Psychology Laboratory, and to act as Director of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology; McDougall would teach at Oxford and later become the chair of psychology at Harvard University before moving to Duke University. The start of their careers in the Torres Straits and their development thereafter is revealing of the emergence of a proto-cognitive discourse of “the human race”.

The passage above, wherein Rivers explains how participants were lied to in order to secure their cooperation, indicates how the colonial context was interlinked with the island’s use as a laboratory. Rivers’ open admission that participants were lied to in order to secure their cooperation suggests that a sense of colonial authority shaped how the researchers engaged with their participants – in this case, manipulatively. Rivers further notes in his report that inhabitants of another village on the Island, Las, were hesitant to participate because they feared a rumour that ‘if they told lies, Queen Victoria would send a man-of-war to punish them’ (Rivers 1901, 4).

In a book-length examination of the history of racism in psychology, Graham Richards (2012), former Director of the British Psychological Society's History of Psychology Centre, reiterates Rivers' statement and uncritically concludes that participation was thus secured through 'an appeal to [the Islanders'] vanity' (2012, 45). That the research subjects' assumed "vanity" is noted in a 2012 historical review, and not the British scientists' manipulative methods, is indicative of the extent to which the discipline's early twentieth-century assumptions have remained embedded in psychology and its historiography. The younger research subjects at Murray Island had experienced missionary school education, and the principal of the missionary school assisted the Cambridge scientists, serving as their local guide. The psychologists' treatment of their research subjects as also their *colonial* subjects, theirs to coerce into contributing to their knowledge production, alongside their use of the network of colonial education to secure participation, locate this critical moment in the early consolidation of British psychology firmly within the colonial enterprise.

At the same time, the researchers at Murray Island struggled to reconcile their empirical findings with the dominant colonial understanding of racial difference at the time. The Cambridge scientists set out to measure psychophysiological phenomena, like reaction times and visual perception, and framed their research with reference to a Spencerian logic. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) – known for spearheading "social Darwinism" and coining the phrase 'survival of the fittest' – argued that "lower" races naturally excel at "lower", physiological functions, while "higher" races excel in higher, cognitive functions, like reasoning (Haller Jr. 1971). The Cambridge psychologists studied those psychophysiological functions in which "lower races" were supposed to excel. Rivers studied visual perception, McDougall studied pain sensation, and Myers studied the senses of smell and hearing. To an extent, the claim used to coerce participation – that Black people were assumed to have better psychophysiological abilities – was true; however, these abilities were seen as functions with lower value and associated with being more 'animalistic' (Richards 2012, 52). Yet, the researchers ultimately found little difference between the people under study and the European "norm" in terms of psychophysiological ability. In turn, as I will show through a closer look at their reports, they shifted towards a proto-cognitive understanding of racial difference.

The psychologists at Murray Island thus began a relocation of race science in three ways. First, data was easier to collect in the colony, making it a convenient location for the discipline's reinvention as an empirical science. Second, their reports gave much space to methodological consideration, noting the pressing need for evidence that went beyond travellers' anecdotes (Haddon et al. 1901, 143). As has been argued elsewhere, this focus on improving



methodological shortcomings ushered psychology toward the space of empirically-informed science (Linstrum 2016, 14). Third, as I will show, the psychologists saved the science of race from becoming obsolete by moving away from the increasingly untenable Spencerian orthodoxy. The psychologists engaged with the question of race on a proto-cognitive rather than a primarily physiological plane. Within this framework, negatively racialised Others could be conceived of as theoretically *capable* of “higher” cognitive functions like reasoning but practically underdeveloped in them. By relocating the science of race in these ways, the psychologists moved the study of race from a biological field to a psychological one. In doing so, they on the one hand seemed to diminish the significance of racial difference and on the other hand, they breathed new life into it by proposing a better-informed approach to understanding it.

### ***W.H.R. Rivers – towards intimate knowledge of Other minds***

Despite Rivers’ initial commitment to a Spencerian racial framework in his report, his slight departure from it evidences the beginnings of the relocation of race science. In his study on visual acuity, conducted on 115 inhabitants of Murray Island, Rivers found minimal difference with the European “norm”. His finding contradicted the Spencerian thesis that Black people have better visual perception as a matter of “primitive” psychophysiological functioning. Rivers observed, however, that the Island’s inhabitants did seem more capable of visual *discrimination* – for example, it seemed to him that they had a knack for spotting birds ‘hidden in the leaves’ (Rivers 1901, 13). He therefore concluded:

Although the visual acuity (in the strict sense) of the Torres Straits Islanders was not found to be in any way extraordinary, their visual powers were [...] equal to any of those which have excited the [...] wonder of travellers (Rivers 1901, 13).

Since Rivers’ findings could not account for this superior ability within the Spencerian framework of different physiological ability according to race, he instead gave an explanation for differing ability in proto-cognitive terms. Here, he drew on his own framework of two levels of neurological functioning: the ‘protopathic’ – evidenced in ‘all or nothing’ responses – and ‘epicritic’ – evidenced in ‘rational judgement’ (Langham, Langham, and Langham 1981; Richards 2012, 52). He explained:

Minute attentions of this sort are only possible if the attention is predominantly devoted to objects of sense. [...] There can be little doubt that such exclusive attention is a distinct hindrance to higher mental development (Rivers 1901, 44).

The Islanders’ superior ability then, Rivers argued, was caused by bad cognitive behaviour (namely, wasting attention on ‘objects of sense’) that hindered ‘higher mental development’.

Rivers' initial commitment to a Spencerian framework can be seen in his pre-determination that the ability for *superior* visual discrimination must be explained as some kind of racial *inferiority*. However, since he could not present the superior ability into a racial inferiority in purely physiological terms, he shifted his account of inferiority to a cognitive one.

In his recent reflection on the Expedition, Richards has argued that the lack of findings to support a definitive psychophysiological difference between Europeans and the Islanders sowed the seeds for undermining 'the prevailing Scientific Racism orthodoxy' (2012, 47). Linstrum has also argued that the "Expedition" and the new norms of scientific fieldwork it established for the human sciences 'made generalizations about colonized populations even more difficult to sustain' (2016, 15). However, such evaluations ignore the fact that, as if through a well-conditioned instinct of his own, Rivers did not attempt to explain his subjects' seemingly superior ability as a potentially positive characteristic, for example by presenting it as a result of attentive practice. Rather, he presented it as the negative consequence of wasting time on "lower" functions. While Linstrum argues that generalisations about Others became increasingly untenable due to the 'close, sometimes intimate encounters between researcher and subject' (2016, 15), such a reading of events draws on a premise that Laleh Khalili (2014, 25) astutely describes as a 'false implication of intimacy'.

The proximity of actors does necessarily make for a more accurate understanding of the Other; to assume that it does in fact flattens 'the difference between the occupier and the occupied' in terms of power (2014, 25). As Khalili argues, ethnographic promixity-read-as-intimacy does not make for an inherently better understanding of the colonised Other, so much as it serves to assert 'the knowability and legibility of the conquered' (2014, 25). Through his fieldwork, Rivers drew on such an assertion of intimate knowledge to move the hierarchy of racial difference from a purely physiological framework that was no longer tenable as legitimately scientific to a proto-cognitive plane. While earlier 'armchair psychology' had presented the Other's mind as "inscrutable" and only comprehensible through vague generalisations, the proto-cognitive psychology of British psychologists asserted an ability to understand the workings of the Other's mind in scientific detail through proximate fieldwork.

### **C. S. Myers—towards the malleability of Other minds**

The move toward experimental methods for a comparative race psychology was for Myers, as for Rivers, a move away from travellers' lore and towards scientific legitimacy (see also: Linstrum

2016, 15). Within the research group, Myers, moved farthest away from the race science orthodoxy of the day, indicating the extent of the shift. Like Rivers, Myers approached the island as a laboratory for advancing experimentation. In his report on the study of smell, he noted that since ‘so little work has been done in olfactometry generally’, his experiments ‘were primarily directed to the discovery of suitable methods for future experiments’ (C. S. Myers 1901, 170). Myers noted in his study of hearing capabilities:

It is scarcely necessary to point out that the stories, which travellers relate about the remarkable capacity possessed by the primitive people for distinguishing faint sounds [...] cannot be accepted as evidence (C. S. Myers 1901, 143).

Myers’s explanation of such tales, however, diverged from that of Rivers by bringing in the relevance of social environmental factors. By noting familiarity with one’s surroundings as a relevant factor, Myers also shifted his analysis toward a cognitive plane, but without a priori assumption of inherent white superiority.

While Rivers claimed that the Islanders’ better capacity for visual discrimination was caused by the undue attention they give to this “lower” senses, Myers instead argued that the seemingly sharper hearing of “primitive races” merely showed familiarity with their surroundings. He wrote:

We need but imagine such an individual transported to the streets of a busy city, to obtain a complete reversal of the phenomena, the primitive man heedlessly passing various noises which would be full of significance to his more civilised companion (Myers 1901, 143).

Myers thus argued that all peoples’ senses appear sharper in familiar environments. He disposed of the “common sense” of Spencerian science, which always concluded with some immutable inferiority of the negatively racialised. Myers stepped even farther away from this orthodoxy by noting individual variety within the studied group. In his study of reaction times, he highlighted the ‘well-marked variety of temperament’ among research subjects and argued that ‘general mental attitudes towards the experiment’ affected individual performance (Myers 1901, 220-221). He noted that research subjects could improve their performance over time, especially if they found the task interesting. He concluded then that intra-racial variety must also be accounted for (Myers 1901, 220-221). By accounting for difference through individual (not group) variability and noting adaptability, Myers’ conclusions show how this proto-cognitive psychology promised to move away from the bio-determinism of earlier race science.

Lastly, instead of comparing the abilities of “different races” with reference to distinct bio-evolutionarily determined qualities, Myers was also attentive to how political “inter-racial”

interactions shaped the Island, its inhabitants, and their abilities. This stands in contrast to Rivers (1901) for example who described the Islanders as ideal research subjects because they were supposedly uncorrupted by civilisation and thus closer to “nature”. In contradistinction, Myers pointed to colonial interactions as the relevant parameters for understanding seeming differences in the capacities of “different” racial groups. He began his report on aural capacities for example with a discussion of ear damage caused by pearl shell diving, which was driven by foreign industries that provided no protective equipment to the Islands’ inhabitants, who in turn performed dangerous labour that white Europeans would not risk. Myers wrote:

A more important cause of partial deafness lay in their practice of diving after pearl shell. Until the recent legislation enacted by the Queensland Government, natives were induced to dive, without dress or helmet, into such deep water that deaths were of frequent occurrence. [...] The effect of deep diving [...] was to cause a noticeable amount of immediate haemorrhage from one or both ears (Myers 1901, 141-142).

Myers did not say more here on these imperial commercial relations, yet he did take them into consideration for his study’s design and evaluation. He thus located his research subjects in a place shaped by colonial capitalist processes. In short, Myers understood seeming differences between races by referring to their ways of life and surroundings, which could not be understood without accounting for political and social interactions with imperial ventures.

### ***William McDougall—towards the science of racial improvement***

Like his colleagues, McDougall was invested in moving away from the generalisations of armchair race and toward a psychology backed by empirical findings; he similarly treated Murray Island then as a place for mining data to this effect. Unlike Myers and Rivers, however, McDougall merely used his data to rewrite the conclusions of existing race science, without changing much of its reasoning. For example, he mapped the findings from his study on sensitivity to pain onto already assumed narratives about the ‘animal-like insensitivity’ to pain of ‘primitive races’ (Richards 2012, 60). He concluded that the Islanders’ susceptibility to pain was *half* that of Englishmen (McDougall 1901). McDougall does not say much to discuss these findings, suggesting that they were unremarkable to him. They fit neatly with his pre-conceived framework of racial hierarchy that positioned Black men as unfeeling. Still, McDougall’s work is clearly influenced by the new proto-cognitive framework of race and psychology. This influence can be seen in his indirect engagement with the question of ‘educability’.

Even while reproducing status quo assumptions about racial difference, McDougall reflected on whether psychophysiological qualities are entirely a matter of “genetic inheritance”

or if they are affected also by education. In his study on pain, his choice of a convalescent home in England as the white control group is telling, because he describes the group as ‘fairly representative of the *uneducated* class’ (McDougall 1901, 192; my emphasis). His characterisation of the control group suggests that he assumed the uneducated class may have a different pain threshold than the educated. On the one hand, the reference to education as a relevant factor then fits within the emergent, proto-cognitive terms for understanding racial hierarchy as being informed by “thinking habits” (per Rivers) and factors relating to social environment (per Myers), such as education. On the other hand, the choice of a convalescent home also speaks to McDougall’s a priori commitment to a bio-economic evolutionary scale that moves from so-called animal-like races to uneducated, poor and/or disabled white people and then to the truly civilised, able, moneyed and educated white Man who is capable of “higher” cognitive functions.

Therefore, while McDougall’s thinking was shaped by the dominant biocentric genre of bioeconomic Man, his tactic acknowledgement of the role of education in shaping “how people think” shows the increasing influence of a framework of malleable cognition. According to the latter, inter- and intra-group difference in “how people think” was not only determined by bio-evolutionary “selection” and could be changed through education. Both these factors – his a priori commitment and the influence of the changes in race science as informed by psychology – shaped McDougall’s passion for eugenics, which is discussed in the next section. After his doctoral research in the Straits and upon finishing his studies, McDougall gained steady influence in the field of psychology. His *Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908) was one of the most cited throughout the interwar years. It dominated the syllabus of British Teachers’ Colleges in those years, suggesting significant influence on the practice of education (Tisdall 2019, 60), even as he received increasing academic criticism from within the discipline of psychology. Myers’ and McDougall’s careers post-Expedition are helpful for unravelling the implications of psychology’s relocation of race science within the British Empire. Reformulations of the central questions of race science in proto-cognitive terms gave it a new practical application—that of racial improvement.

### **iii. The science of racial improvement**

The scientified question of educability, that is, whether the capacity to think is pre-determined by race and class, was the subject of two inaugural and momentous conferences in Britain in the 1910s. Together, these events reveal the understanding of race shaped by the early years of British psychology and its double-edged impact on racial politics. On the one hand, the idea of

educability was useful for indicating the malleability of cognition and arguing for the possibility of progress, development, and (eventual) equality of “the human race”. On the other hand, the malleability of “the human race” was also marked as a site of vulnerability to racial degradation, marking supposed cognitive underdevelopment as a danger to humanity. Through the development of debates on the psychology of Other minds, the focus of race science shifted from understanding immutable differences “between races” to manipulating differences in order to foster an ideal “human race”. This ideal genre of being human was imagined in terms of its superior cognition.

### ***Universal Races Congress, 1911***

The First (and only) Universal Races Congress took place in 1911 at the University of London. The congress pitched its meetings as primarily ‘scientific’, but drew notable political names, with Arthur Balfour acting as Vice-President. Leading figures in the human sciences were in attendance, including anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. The Congress set out to discuss relations between ‘so-called white and so-called coloured peoples,’ doing so ‘in the light of science and [...] the modern conscience’ (Spiller 1911, v). The Congress was initiated by Felix Adler, a Jewish professor of social ethics at Columbia and was ‘identified with liberal Jewish opinion on both sides of the Atlantic’ (Lyons and Lyons 1983, 149). Following the 1905 Aliens Act, Britain’s Jewish community was anxious about the articulation of racial concerns in public discourse (Lyons and Lyons 1983, 156). Andrew and Harriet Lyons sum up the articulations of these concerns as ‘questions of whether there was a unique Jewish mind, whether it was housed in a unique Jewish body, and what influences the surrounding environment might have on the physical and mental characteristics of the Jew’ (1983, 156). These concerns evidence the shifting focus of race science toward investigating race through the mind/psyche as distinct from, though to varying degrees related to, the body.

At the time, opinions varied on whether scientific answers to such questions would ultimately help or hurt marginalised racial groups. An article published in the May 26 and June 6 issues of the *Jewish Chronicle* in the year of the Congress, entitled ‘The Psychology of the Jewish Mind’ (qtd. in Lyons and Lyons 1983), took on these questions – ‘whether there was a unique Jewish mind, whether it was housed in a unique Jewish body’ – and responded with a firm ‘no’. While some within Britain’s Jewish community rejected in this way the ‘attribution of historical events to a general national character’, others were interested in the potential for human sciences in general, and the Congress specifically, to provide “objective” findings that may provide

protection from anti-Semitism (Lyons and Lyons 1983). The Congress's widespread and international appeal suggests that turning to the human sciences to secure the well-being of a negatively racialised group was not limited to the Jewish community. The framing of the Congress as serving 'both a humanitarian and scientific purpose' (Spiller 1911, v) indicates that participants were generally interested in this possibility.

W.E.B. Dubois, for example, attending on behalf of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and as the American Delegate, wrote in his publication, *The Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line*, that the scientific findings on race were 'the most important work' of the Congress (Rudwick 1959, 374). Writing about the Congress in the *Independent*, he similarly noted that making 'clear the present state of scientific knowledge concerning the meaning of "race"' was of 'inestimable importance' (Dubois 1911, 401–2). Dubois argued that assumptions about Black racial inferiority, white racial superiority, and 'the brown and yellow peoples with intermediate capacities' had 'become the scientific sanction for widespread and decisive political action' (Dubois 1911, 402–3). That is, scientific beliefs about race supported the institutionalisation of the global colour line. The scientists at the Congress, Dubois stressed, provided a political opening by pushing back at these assumptions.

The scientific conclusions that Dubois highlighted in his writing about the event were first and foremost those that spoke to the likeness of "different races". He quoted Felix Von Luschan, Austrian doctor and anthropologist, who began his address with the declaration that 'mankind is one' (qtd. in Dubois 1911, 402). He further cited Von Luschan's dismissal of a science of race that claimed to identify different types of races with immutable difference:

The question of the number of human races has quite lost its *raison d'être* and has become a subject of philosophical speculation. It is no more important to know how many races there are than to know how many angels dance on the point of a needle! (qtd. in Dubois 1911, 402).

The 'old idea of the absolute stability of racial types' and 'belief in the hereditary superiority of certain types over others' (qtd in Dubois 1911, 402) were dismissed at the conference, but the dismissal too was expressed in scientific terms. That is, the 'old idea' of stable racial types was deemed to be outside the scope of legitimate scientific investigation, and rather a matter of 'mere' and practically futile philosophical inquiry. Just as the Torres Strait researchers had dismissed generalisable and rigid psychophysiological difference "between" races as the stuff of travellers' lore and armchair psychology, the conference on the whole refused the scientific validity of different racial "types". Dubois' reporting on the event is indicative of the mood at

the congress—science, it was hoped, might at last come to undermine the notion of supposedly natural racial difference and hierarchy, instead of enforcing them as it had done historically.

The question of hierarchical difference, however, was not entirely erased. Instead, it was reimagined in terms of ‘mental characteristics’ that could be changed through scientifically-informed intervention. Myers, who was himself Jewish and participated in the planning for the Congress, gave an address ‘On the Permanence of Racial Mental Differences’. He advanced four arguments:

- I. That the mental characters of the majority of the peasant class throughout Europe are essentially the same as those of primitive communities.
- II. That such differences between them as exist are the result of differences in environment and in individual variability.
- III. That the relation between the organism and its environment (considered in its broadest sense) is the ultimate cause of variation, bodily and mental.
- IV. That this being admitted, the possibility of the progressive development of all primitive peoples must be conceded, if only the environment can be appropriately changed (C. S. Myers 1911, 73).

Myers made his case for ‘the possibility of the progressive development of all primitive peoples’ by drawing on his authority as a psychologist who had conducted ‘systematic studies’ in the Straits (C. S. Myers 1911, 73). He concluded that like the European peasant class, ‘primitive peoples’ can develop the capacity for ‘abstract thought’ with appropriate education. Still, he stressed that environmental and educational changes needed to be slow and scientifically-determined if the ‘lowest races’ were to attain the mental character of the ‘highest’ (Myers 1911, 77-78). Racial equality in cognitive capacity was to be achieved by a veritably slow process of scientifically calculated ‘mental development’ over ‘hundreds of thousands of years’ (Myers 1911, 78).

Thus, just as the ‘old idea’ of ‘racial types’ seemed to be losing its *raison d’être*, the prospect of racial development provided a *raison d’être* for psychology as a scientific discipline. As Myers drew on the newfound authority of psychology to highlight cognitive plasticity, he also consolidated this authority by proposing that psychological expertise should inform the meticulous methodology for administering slow change toward equality. Accordingly, the comparison between the mental capacities of European peasants and “primitive races” claimed even more ground for cognitive psychology, bringing the development of lower races *and* lower classes through environmental adjustments into its realm of authority. Myers’ proposals thus



reveal one edge of the weapon of human sciences: its potential for re-inventing a new science of racial development.

Undeniably, the Universal Races Congress illuminated a dual potential of the human sciences. On the one hand, they could provide an authoritative (because scientific) refusal of older 'biological' race science. On the other hand, they could institute (and were instituting) their own new claim to authority over a better understanding of racial difference as informed by social conditions and a better understanding of how to equalise these differences. Tellingly, Dubois does not end his report by referring to the question of racial "improvement" or development. Instead, he ends with a quote attributed to 'the congress itself' that urges 'the vital importance at this juncture of history of discountenancing race prejudice' (1911, 403). Thus, while he extensively draws on the scientists' expertise to refute immutable racial hierarchy, he is careful to avoid writing a report of the findings that would seem to call for a new science of race, instead of leaving race-thinking behind altogether. Conversely, the Secretary of the Congress, Gustav Spillers, ended his confidential 'Outline Plan' for the congress, which was pre-circulated to attendees like Dubois, by pointing to a 'happier age' inhabited by an improved "human race". He foreshadowed a new imaginary of "the human race" by characterising this happier age as a future when 'one civilisation will prevail, embodying the excellences of all peoples and the defects of none' (Spillers 1911, 1).

### ***International Eugenics Congress, 1912***

The first International Eugenics Congress was also held at the University of London the following year. It was reportedly attended by 500 or so political figures and scientists, including delegates from France, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Denmark, and Germany (Kühl 2013, 23). The Congress was organised by the British Eugenics Education Society and informed especially by consultation with German and American counterparts (Kühl 2013, 17). Major Leonard Darwin, the son of Charles Darwin, acted as President of the Congress. Arthur Balfour, who had been the vice-president of the Universal Races Congress in 1911, also acted as honorary vice-president and the principal speaker at the first International Eugenics Congress. There, Balfour declared in his opening speech an oddly similar vision to that of Spillers, quoted above. The aspiration of such a Congress, Balfour declared, was for 'a society of the most perfect kind', as cultivated through scientifically informed social intervention (qtd. in Times 1912, 9). In this speech, Balfour warned against the tendency in popular discourse to confuse eugenics with a 'desire to imitate natural selection' or 'survival of the fittest' (qtd. in Times 1912, 9). Above a pursuit for the

restoration of ‘the law of natural selection’, the conference advocated instead for the principle of ‘rational selection’ to advance an ideal society (Searle 1976, 46). ‘The whole point of eugenics,’ Balfour declared, ‘is that we reject the standard of mere numbers’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). The eugenicist, Balfour professed, aspires to greater “fitness” of society beyond mere survival – the eugenicist ‘has got ideals of what a man ought to be, of what the State ought to (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9).

Like psychology, eugenics was an emerging field that sought to establish its legitimacy and its right to influence politics by presenting itself as a science. In order to establish such legitimacy and influence, Balfour urged that international cooperation was possible and necessary. He argued that problems of eugenics were ‘problems which every civilized nation both in new countries and in old countries has got to face’ and that ‘in any case, we are scientific or we are nothing, and science knows no divisions between nations’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). As Stefan Kühl (2013, 22) has shown, the first International Eugenics Congress did indeed indicate to eugenicists ‘that international cooperation could increase their influence in politics’ by establishing eugenics as an internationally recognised scientific enterprise. Balfour was reportedly cheered on by the audience as he declared that the scientific interventions he has in mind ‘ought deliberately to consider the health, the character, and the qualities of the succeeding generations’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). The primary concern of eugenics then was presented as being the overall welfare of “the human race”.

At the International Eugenics Conference, the racial question was represented more as a discussion over how the singular human race *should* be changed, rather than whether different races *could* be changed, which had been the primary concern of the Universal Races Congress. Such a mission amounted to, Balfour explained, the ‘domestication’ of ‘man’:

Broadly speaking, man is a wild animal. [...] If we carry out to its logical conclusion the sort of scientific work which is being done by congresses of this sort, man must become a domesticated animal (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9).

Most societies, Balfour argued, had unwittingly followed some of the ‘sound laws of eugenics’ through the establishment of ‘marriage customs’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). This was domestication at a micro scale, meaning the regulation of who could reproduce with who. Pointing to the next necessary scale for intervention, he spoke to anxieties about declining birth-rates among educated classes. The eugenicist, Balfour argued, holds that ‘a feeble-minded man, even though he survives, is not so good as the good professional man’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). The principal site of domestication at the national level was then to be class, as marked by education.

Balfour argued that such intervention was necessary precisely because anxieties about the decline of educated classes indicated that the domestication of Man was ‘not being carried out’ by nature (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). Earlier English discourse on the education of colonised Others in the nineteenth century had drawn on a notion of “natural” English superiority and the “natural” inferiority of colonies, making a case for an education that mirrors this “natural” difference. For example, Macaulay in his “Minute on Indian Education” claimed that a British-funded education system that promotes study in Arabic and Sanskrit ‘tends not to accelerate the progress of truth but to delay the *natural* death of expiring errors’ (Macaulay [1835] 2003, 238; my emphasis). He argued that the education of Others should only accelerate what is already natural – the “truth” of English moral superiority, and the death of knowledge systems that ‘contain neither literary nor scientific information’ (Macaulay [1835] 2003, 230). The inaugural Eugenics Congress betrayed a different ethos. Crucially, the concerns highlighted at the inaugural gathering of eugenicists were not what an English man ought to be nor what the English state ought to be; the concerns were rather about what universal ideals of Man and the State ought to be – not according to nature and rather according to rational scientific design. Like Balfour, Major Leonard Darwin characterised the aim of eugenics in his address as ‘conscious selection’ for ‘improvement in the racial qualities of future generations’ (‘Proceedings of the First International Eugenics Congress 1912, Volume 1’ 1912). The Congress thus advocated for eugenics as a scientific enterprise that would make rational interventions to domesticate Man.

Psychologists with an interest in eugenics argued that their discipline was the best suited for informing this project of domestication. Soon after the Congress, in 1914, McDougall gave an invited paper at the Eugenics Education Society to highlight psychology’s unique suitability for advancing eugenics. The Eugenics Education Society tasked itself with so-called public education about the threat of racial deterioration and the urgent necessity of eugenics. McDougall argued that psychology as the study of the mind, above biology as the study of the body, could best serve eugenics. He marked the study of ‘mental endowments’ as paramount for guarding against the ‘racial decay’ of ‘higher civilisations’ (McDougall 1914, 298). Eugenics, ‘like education’, McDougall (1914, 296) wrote, is ‘an applied science’; it should claim psychology as its nearest ‘pure science’ because the ‘mental qualities of the race’ – the ‘intellectual, moral, and spiritual’ – were the qualities under greatest threat (McDougall 1914, 297). Psychology, he argued, could best answer pressing questions of whether ‘general intelligence’ is hereditary, and whether it differs between different ‘social strata’ and ‘subraces of mankind’ (McDougall 1914, 296).

Whereas the cognitive was for Myers and his fellow attendees of the Universal Races Congress a malleable site of adaptation and improvement for “lower races”, for McDougall and his fellow eugenicists, psychological research could principally guard the ‘mental qualities’ of “the human race” by preventing its deterioration. For McDougall (1914, 296) ‘racial decay’ was a matter of national concern with respect to class and an imperial concern with respect to the ‘subraces of mankind’. Looking to patterns of immigration in the U.S., McDougall noted that all ‘high civilisations’ (meaning white-majority societies) will require ‘positive knowledge of the mental endowments of the various subraces of mankind; and especially [...] the mental endowments of the progeny produced by the crossing of these subraces’ (McDougall 1914, 306). He therefore argued that ‘Citizens of British Empire’ should expand the purview of eugenics beyond class difference at the national level, so that it may instead be ‘broadly conceived as concerned for the future welfare of *the whole human race*’ (McDougall 1914, 306; emphasis mine). From Balfour’s role as both an honorary vice-president for the Universal Races Congress and the International Eugenics Congress, it can be seen that improvement of groups with supposedly underdeveloped cognition and the prevention of ‘racial decay’ were two edges of the same sword. The project of domesticating Man through psychological expertise was differently imagined as the improvement of the mental capacities of those who were deemed “less developed” and the prevention of the deterioration of the mental qualities of “the human race”.

#### **IV. The domestication of Man**

The emerging international vision for the domestication of “the human race” was therefore productive of a rising genre of being human. According to the terms of this genre, being human – in Balfour’s words, ‘what a man ought to be’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9) – was determined by superior ‘mental qualities’ (McDougall 1914). This section shows that this rising genre of being human directly linked cognition to ethics, with the ideal human understood to be ethically superior due to superior “mental qualities”. What’s more, this genre’s terms granted the ideal human the right and responsibility to “domesticate” those who were racialised as “subraces” that were not yet “what a man ought to be”. The ideal human was to undertake this domestication by improving the ethico-cognitive qualities of those imagined as less than ideal. The psychologically informed project of domesticating Man thus brings into view the emergence of ethico-cognitive Man, which I presented in the previous chapter as the dominant genre secured by counter-extremism today. By paying attention to the psychologically informed process of racialisation

that was imagined as domestication, this section looks back to and explicates how ethico-cognitive Man was first secured.

### ***Domestication on the international stage***

Psychological discourse regarding racial welfare gained an increasingly authoritative influence in international politics between the two World Wars. In Britain, even as earlier conceptions of “biological” racial difference (of the Spencerian variety) continued to lose credibility, anxieties about the “mental qualities” of the Empire’s population increased. Questions of “educability” were present on the international stage from the 1919 peace process. In advance of the peace process, the victors had established national inquiries into “scientific facts” about the territories they would each inherit. While these committees included geographers, historians, and imperial bureaucrats, they uniformly looked to ‘psychological conceptions of the subjectivity of nationality expressed in the mental evolution of groups’ (Sluga 2006, 31). Walter Lippmann, who was heavily involved in the peace process and was especially interested in a ‘scientifically-informed’ peace, would eventually regret that peace was informed instead by the ‘slums of psychology’, of the McDougall variety (Sluga 2006, 66–78), with stereotypical notions of ‘national souls, and race psychology’ (Lippman 1922, 61). Whether or not politicians looked to psychology during the peace process merely because it provided a conveniently malleable metric, as Lippmann’s assessment suggests they did, that they *could* look to psychology suggests that the newly institutionalised science was seen as sufficiently legitimate to carry international political authority.

For example, the legitimacy of psychological expertise and its discourse of “educability” were conditions of possibility for the Mandate System, which articulated a vision of “preparing” colonies for independence. The preparation was to be achieved by fostering their capacity for national consciousness, viewed as the highest stage of “mental development”. This twentieth-century colonial agenda of education for the development of an ideal human race was distinct from nineteenth-century visions. As argued in the comparison between Macaulay and Balfour, earlier framings of English colonial education had promoted the colonising power’s national character, calling for example for the replication of English tastes, opinions, and morals – a vision captured in Homi Bhabha’s critical concept of mimicry (1984). In contrast, the race and nation discourse of the early twentieth century spoke of fostering colonies’ own national consciousness. The framing discourse of the peace process therefore marked a step toward internationalising the mission of domesticating Man. This was an educational mission that

promoted the genre of mentally developed and therefore nationally conscious Man by ranking nations, colonies, and mandates according to the terms of this genre.

The Mandate System was then emblematic of the vision of domesticating not yet independent nations into, to borrow from Agathangelou and Ling (2004), ‘the House of IR’. Both the defensive narrative of guarding against “racial decay” and the altruistic narrative of “racial improvement” influenced this vision. Mandates classified territories based on their relative development and whether they were sufficiently educable and educated for self-rule. On the one hand, the notion that some people had not yet achieved the necessary level of consciousness for self-determination excluded them from deliberations on the desired qualities of future generations. They were to be domesticated, not domesticators. This exclusion would supposedly prevent “racial decay” on the international stage, since they could not contaminate the project of domesticating Man. On the other hand, the exclusion (in theory) aimed at due development and eventual inclusion through education. This mandated vision of a pre-political education for the attainment of national consciousness foreshadows the domestic vision of counter-extremism policy like Prevent today, which legislates pre-political education for negatively racialised groups toward the adoption of “fundamental British values”.

### ***Domestication on the streets***

In 1919, the notion of domesticating “the human race” contemporaneously informed domestic politics in England. In the same year as the peace process, the discourse of racial domestication was pervasive in the narration of England’s street-level politics. Several port cities witnessed incidents of white men targeting men of colour who were recently de-mobbed from the war, which they had spent in the British army, in the merchant navy, or in munition and chemical factories. Recalling one attack, ‘which had all the trappings of lynch mobs’ (qtd. in Bland 2005, 25), Sierra Leonean-born writer Ernest Marke, who had arrived in Britain in 1917, wrote that he and ‘a young West Indian friend’ were chased by a group of white men and that his friend was ‘left for dead’ (qtd. in Bland 2005, 35). Police and the press widely characterised the riots as white men’s expression of an “instinctive” revulsion to seeing white women and men of colour together (Bland 2005). The *Western Mail*, for example, reported: ‘The consorting of black men and white women [...] is repugnant to all our finer instincts’ (qtd. in Bland 2005, 36). Such reporting recalls Balfour’s suggestion in his speech at the Eugenics Conference that most societies have “intuitively” followed some ‘sound laws of eugenics’ through ‘marriage customs’

(qtd in *Times* 1911, 9). In a letter written to *The Times* about the attacks, Ralph Williams, formerly a colonial administrator in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (now Botswana) and governor of the Windward Islands, echoed Balfour's premise:

It is an *instinctive* certainty that sexual relations between white women and coloured men revolt our very nature. [...] What blame [...] to those white men who, seeing these conditions and loathing them, resort to violence? (Williams 1919, 8; emphasis mine).

Lucy Bland (2005) cites such examples to astutely argue that the popular narration of the events belied both popular racism and the misogynistic sense of entitlement that white men felt toward white women, who had gained some new independence during the war. I add to this reading that the psychological discourse of the day on the protection of racial welfare was another critical condition of possibility for this popular narration of events.

The popular moral justification of racist attacks drew on the idea of a eugenicist “instinct”. It thereby framed the violence as simultaneously natural, because instinctive, rational, because motivated by the “finer instinct” of white men, and moral, because congruent with the protection of the welfare of “the human race”. Claude McKay, the Jamaican poet based then in London, reflected on his experience of seeing support for such overt racism from even ‘proletarian’ groups and press in the interwar years and concluded that racism ‘had become almost *congenital*’ (qtd. in Bland 2005, 43; emphasis mine) for the English. He too reflected on such racism through the psychological discourse of the day, noting:

the Anglo-Saxon mind becomes morbid when it turns on the sex life of coloured people. Perhaps a psychologist might be able to explain why (qtd. in Bland 2005, 43).

And indeed, the psychologists were explaining why, though their influence manifested as a popular discourse on the superiority and not the morbidity of ‘the Anglo-Saxon mind’. The framing of racist attacks through this discourse foreshadows Dubois’s concept of psychological wages (Dubois [1935] 2017): the popular narration of the violence suggested that white men were demanding their natural-cum-rational-cum-moral right (that is, their ethico-cognitive right) to be recognised as superior reproductive partners for white women.

This project of domesticating Man was thus multi-sited, with its ambitions manifesting at overlapping scales of the imperial/international, the national, and even the domestic in the sense of familial households. Alongside the riots, the Eugenics Education Society continued to heighten anxieties about mixed-race marriages and children through social work measures. In its mandate, the Society stated:

In certain circumstances, race mixture is known to be bad. Further knowledge of its biological effects is needed in order to frame a particular eugenic policy. Meanwhile, since the process of race mixture cannot be reverse, great caution is advocated (qtd. in Richards 2012)

With the press regularly characterising Black men as ‘animal-like’ in their sexuality, Chinese men as conniving in theirs – ‘luring women and girls through gambling and drugs’– and Arab and “Eastern” men as ‘perverse brutes’ (Bland 2005, 45), the Eugenics Education Society could present its interest in research on mixed-race children as a response to public concerns about their intellect and morality. They commissioned psychometric studies on children with white mothers and Chinese fathers, and children of white mothers and Black fathers. In response to the 1919 riots, how they were narrated, and the eugenics research they catalysed, welfare associations were set up for mixed-race children, such as ‘the Liverpool Association for the Welfare of Half-Caste Children’ in 1927 (Bland 2005). Narratives of racial anxiety thus facilitated the treatment of the domestic space of negatively racialised families as sites for research and welfare work. The vision for domestication persisted with its scientific and philanthropic gloss, insidiously permeating popular discourse on domestic life and stigmatising mixed-race families as risks to the welfare of “the human race”.

## **v. Education as domestication**

With future generations centred in the discourse of “racial welfare”, the major social policy site of intervention for psychologically informed eugenics discourse in the interwar years and immediately after the Second World War was in the design of education. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain had seen the dawn of compulsory state education. In the first half of the twentieth century, psychologists and eugenicists sought to influence policy design for mass education and attempted to also guide the education of children in their private homes. Especially after the Second World War, eugenicists shifted their attention to education as their mission could no longer be articulated directly in terms of race whilst they tried to distance their proposals from the ‘race hygiene’ policies of Nazi Germany (Kühl 2013). Simultaneously, as anti-colonial movements erupted in this period, educational tactics of counterinsurgency also sought to influence the management of disorder through intervention at schools and in the privacy of households. Countering “racial decay” on the one hand and anti-colonial insurgency on the other were both shaped by the genre of ethico-cognitive Man. These efforts were formulated as the domestication of Man as such. The treatment of education institutions and the domestic realm of familial households as ‘frontlines’ in these efforts is echoed by counter-extremism today,



which treats the Muslim home as a 'pre-crime space' (Fernandez 2018; see also: Abbas 2019). This section shows the historic role of domestication through intimate and public sites of education in advancing the dominance of ethico-cognitive Man.

### ***'Rational selection' via education***

In the first decades of the twentieth century, with the expanding reach of education coming into force, educational policymakers in Britain often looked to psychologists for guidance in implementing mass education (Wooldridge 1994, 3–4). During this period, Cyril Burt, McDougall's former student at Oxford, was among the most influential figures of 'the first generation of professional educational psychologists' (Wooldridge 1994, 2). In 1913, Burt was appointed as official psychologist to the London County Council – 'the first [appointment] of its kind anywhere in the world' (Wooldridge 1994, 11). This appointment put him in an ideal position to study schoolchildren, among whom he was particularly interested in those he evaluated to be "subnormal", and to suggest policies aimed at improving the so-called mental qualities of the national population. Burt, along with other psychologists, engaged extensively with the Board of Education Consultative Committee in the interwar years. His connections with the London Institute of Education, the London County Council, and the University College, London, garnered him substantial influence in the Committee (Wooldridge 1994, 15). The approach of Burt and his colleagues was referred to by contemporaries as 'child-centred' and 'progressive' (Tisdall 2019). This was the case insofar as their approach was motivated by a 'meritocratic' notion of equal opportunity based on 'natural ability', instead of opportunity being determined by the social effects of nurture, including the impact of class. Their reports to the Committee, as Wooldridge notes, were not 'pieces of crude propaganda,' and like scholarship in general, they did not translate directly into policy (1994, 13). In at least one area, however, the influence of Burt and his associates can be clearly traced – the use of intelligence measurement for organising children into different schools.

Vying for legitimacy in the inter-war years, psychometric testing was a loudly scientific approach to organising education. Through McDougall, Burt was introduced to other major figures in British eugenics and psychology, Charles Spearman and Karl Pearson, with whom he advanced the field of psychometrics. The psychometricians approach to education policy contradicted the eugenicist proposal of Balfour at the first International Eugenics Congress, wherein he had highlighted the need to domesticate 'mankind' by way of intervention at the macro level of population and not at the micro level of the individual. Balfour had argued that

the question of domesticating ‘mankind’ should be looked at through ‘the same questions which we have to consider when we are dealing with the race of domestic animals upon which so much of our happiness...depends’ (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9). Here, Balfour was motioning to the ‘problem’ of declining birth-rates among educated classes. Such an understanding of eugenics as aiming for the increased survival of particular social groups (and the decreased survival of others) already had mixed reception in 1912, when it was articulated Balfour. The *Times* report on the Congress notes that the audience cheered as Balfour articulated this view, however, he jokingly rushed past the point:

I apologize. I have been led, perhaps you will say, into waters far out of my depth, but in any case, I have been led into a discussion very little appropriate to an occasion of this sort. I believe that even if I were summarizing a paper at your congress I have about reached the time when the President’s bell would ring and I should be told I had only one minute more for speaking (qtd. in *Times* 1912, 9).

The social milieu in Britain became even less receptive to such ideas in the interwar years and downright hostile to them after the Second World War (Kühl 2013). In contrast to this vision, Burt and his fellow advocates of psychometrics called for widespread intelligence testing by proposing that above all else, innate and individual difference in cognitive ability should determine the kind of education best suited to each child (Burt 1912). Burt and his colleagues thus devised an approach that maintained a hierarchical notion of innate cognitive ability and called for social intervention that could match individuals’ abilities with social conditions that would best nurture them.

Psychological expertise in Britain then was primarily applied to social policy through education, and not the kind of population control or ‘race hygiene’ that had fascinated British (and broadly, European) eugenicists before the Second World War (Kühl 2013). Burt and his associates drew on psychological surveys, tests, and experiments to evidence the existence of an innate, hereditary ability, which they argued to underlie all other cognitive functions. They referred to this ability in shorthand as ‘g’, for general intelligence (Tisdall 2019, 56). They argued that testing for g. could serve to “meritocratically” select students for different types of education best suited to their supposedly natural ability, allowing children to achieve their maximum though unequal potential. This, they argued, would ensure via scientific rigour that the most capable children would not fall short of their potential based on their upbringing. Additionally, it would allow the most capable children to eventually channel their potential toward national racial welfare by gaining positions among the political elite, regardless of their initial class position. The psychometricians re-inscribed a “natural” hierarchy in cognitive ability, but they nonetheless advocated for so-called rational and not “natural” selection by promoting

social intervention via intelligence testing. Burt's influence as an oft-consulted expert by the Consultative Committee shows the extent to which the "pure" science of psychology informed "rational selection" through education policy. The wars delayed the recommendations of psychometricians from taking shape as policy (Wooldridge 1994). Therefore, their influence was belatedly cemented by the 1944 education reforms, which promised compulsory education to every child under fifteen, and pushed forward the tripartite system, wherein students were selected for schools based on their performance in 11-plus examinations. At the same time, as eugenics as such was a decreasingly favourable field for psychology's application, education became its preferred site of social application.

While the approach of Burt and his associates appeared "meritocratic" because it elevated the importance of individual difference over group-based ones like class, it did not try to equalise ability by changing social conditions. Adrian Wooldridge (1994) argues that psychometricians' insistence on 'the innate inequality of man' based on hereditary ability and their association with eugenics has cemented a mistaken contemporary orthodoxy that casts them as 'conservative in their politics and traditionalist in their approach to education' (1994, 14-15). Wooldridge reminds readers that figures like Burt were in fact seen by contemporaries as leaders of 'progressive education'. While 'educationists have accused them of preserving a divisive system of selection' and 'left-wing sociologists have suggested that they distorted "science" in order to justify social inequalities' (1994, 14-15), Wooldridge's revisionist account challenges these critiques. He posits that their meritocratic theory of equal opportunity was 'subversive of the social hierarchy' and that 'in practice they provided important opportunities for *able* working-class children to rise into the elite' (1994, 16-17; my emphasis). Unfortunately, Wooldridge takes the category of ability for granted here (as did Burt and his fellow eugenicists) as a positive "natural" fact that could be evaluated in "pure" scientific terms. If we question the premise that individual cognitive capacity is pre-social (or "natural"), it becomes clear that the British psychometricians did not so much undo social hierarchy as rewrite it.

In calling for cognitive capacity to be primarily understood through individual difference, Burt and his colleagues fostered an understanding of cognitive capacity that inspired a more optimistic vision than earlier anticipations of "racial decay". In 1935, Burt wrote:

It is clear that racial intelligence and racial temperament may impose certain minor limitations upon each community; but within those limitations there is no reason why custom and culture should not be reorganized and changed (Burt 1935, 224).

Through such reorganisation, he wrote, "we" could 'ultimately evolve, not only a national consciousness, but a world consciousness, not only an ideal for each country, but an ideal for the

whole world' (Burt 1935, 224). One may be tempted to read this declaration as Richards does, claiming that 'this is hardly consistent with [Burt's] current image as an apologist for racism' and that 'he was doing pretty well' for his time (2012, 213). Still, Burt's vision of facilitating all individuals' ability to reach their maximum potential in pursuit of a universal ideal maintained that everyone does not have equal potential (or, "general intelligence") to reach this ideal. His vision also maintained that this difference is in part racially determined, even if only 'minimally'. Like McDougall's project of preventing decay of the Empire's "racial stock", Burt's vision was anticipatory and aimed at an ideal mode of being human. However, whereas McDougall (1914, 306) had framed the joint task of psychology and eugenics as guarding the 'the future welfare of the whole human race', Burt presented the joint task of psychology and education in productive terms as bringing into being a 'world consciousness'. This 'ideal for the whole world' was conceived of as being achievable to slightly different degrees by different racial groups, with more significant individual variation. The psychometrician's vision of a world consciousness thus re-articulated the welfare of "the human race" in terms of the aggregated fitness of the world's individuals for being human.

### ***'Breeding' world consciousness via counterinsurgency***

Psychological visions of "racial welfare" continued to travel, morphing as they did so and showing the limits of the ideal universal consciousness imagined for "the human race". In an early article published in the *Eugenics Review*, Burt (1912, 191) had set out the sources of knowledge that could be used to understand 'The Inheritance of Mental Characters' and how to organise education accordingly: 'Evidence may be sought in two directions: from experimental investigations among savage peoples, and from statistical investigations among the civilised'. From the 1920s, the psy- disciplines in African colonies indeed began contributing to a discourse on "educability" in an increasingly systematised way. Through the circulation of medical journals, an 'East African School of Psychiatry' emerged as 'an ad hoc network of East African asylums' (Mahone 2007, 41). The physicians involved in the network often had little to no formal training in psychology or psychiatry – they were involved because there was no one else to take up the job. They drew on general and outdated ideas and their own settler fears of anti-colonial uprising. Their reports were nonetheless interesting to colonial administrators, who were keen to assess the behaviour of the colonised and its implications for the future of colonial rule, and to eugenicists whose attention and support the colonial psychiatrists actively solicited (Mahone 2007).

The question of “educability” in Britain’s African colonies is particularly revealing of how the emergent proto-cognitive understanding of colonial subjects extended the project of domesticating the population “at home” in Britain through educational selection. As Mahone has shown, ‘the quasi- medical problem of the “educability” of the African subject, and [...] the future of “native education”’ were central topics of discussion in the interwar years (2007, 43). Psychological conclusions regarding “educability” were not so much widespread ‘tools of social control’ and more so a ‘rationale for colonial rule’ and the form it should take (Mahone 2007, 42). Concerns about ‘culture-contact’ and ‘acculturation’ were discussed in distinct but overlapping psychological terms—to highlight anxieties about “racial decay” in the style of McDougall; to advocate the slow and scientifically-informed development of “lower races” in the style of Myers; and to map out Burt-like educational systems aimed at maximising the universal ideal of an ideal world consciousness.

The interwar British anthropological discourse of indirect rule was especially interwoven with Myers-like ideas of racial development,<sup>41</sup> but psychology in African colonies was the human science through which the strongest opposition to such ideas was expressed. In Kenya, for example, the white settler population was especially hostile to the education of Kenyans. The settler population imagined Kenya’s future as, in the words of H.C. Trowell (an advocate for African medical education in Uganda) ‘another South Africa’, wherein ‘Africans would remain hewers of wood and carriers of water to the end of time’ (qtd. in Mahone 2007, 44). Accordingly, the likes of H. L. Gordon, a medical famer in Kenya who was granted a post in Mathari Mental Hospital, argued throughout the 1920s and 30s that research on brain size showed ‘natural limits to the education of the African’ and that education beyond these limits would lead to insanity, posing a ‘social danger’ (Campbell 2013). Gordon’s thought, which was summarised in the *British Medical Journal* (1932), echoed McDougall’s (1914, 296) earlier fears that “lower races” threaten the prospect ‘of improving the human breed’. Gordon claimed that while McDougall had been initially key to his psychological interest, Gordon had eventually moved away from his methods towards the more ‘brain-focused’ statistical methods of Charles Spearman and Francis Galton (Campbell 2013, 45), both associates of Burt. While Gordon’s work did not receive significant funding nor positive reception in London (Campbell 2013), it did garner some engagement when it caught Burt’s attention. The latter responded to Gordon’s research harshly, but with some interest. Dismissing methods of measuring brain size as outdated and refuting Gordon’s

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<sup>41</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski (1938), for example, warned that the colonial ‘subject-matter threatens to disappear’ (xii) and called for methodological adaptations to study how “backwards” races become ‘active participant[s] in modern civilization’ (vii). See: Mahone and Vaughan 2007, 51.

conclusion that ‘over-educating’ Africans leads to insanity, Burt suggested that research in the colonies would do better to shift its focus away from whether they *can* be educated to *how* they should be (Burt 1933, 10). As Burt advocated for educating each to their maximum and unequal potential in Britain, he argued that the project of colonial education should do the same to push “the human race” broadly, though to unequal degrees, toward an ideal world consciousness.

The engagement between settler eugenicists and those based in England then mostly entailed disagreement. Still, their mutual terms of engagement maintained the notion that scientific assessment of so-called mental ability should act as an authoritative knowledge source for the colonial project of racial domestication. The project of domesticating “the human race” actualised starkly as policy recommendations for and justification of brutal counterinsurgency in colonised Kenya. Dr J.C. Carothers’ infamous 1954 report on the *Psychology of Mau Mau* advised the colonial government on its punishing counterinsurgency in the “Kenya Emergency”. Carothers was an asylum director in Nairobi and had held a consultancy position at the World Health Organisation from 1953 (Linstrum 2016, 198). He began his report with the declaration that,

No fundamental differences between different groups of Africans, or even between Africans and Europeans, have yet been demonstrated. It is possible that intrinsic differences do exist but, if so, they are probably quite slight and at present undiscoverable. Individuals vary in their innate emotional and intellectual potentials. [...] The manifest differences that do exist as between Europeans and Africans... can be well explained on the basis of experience, of environmental factors (Carothers 1955, 2).

Carothers echoed Burt in noting that there is only ‘slight’ difference, if any, between races in their ‘intellectual potentials’ and that such potentials vary more significantly between individuals. At the group level, apparent differences are constituted by ‘environmental factors’, of which Carothers highlighted the ‘cultural’ as ‘overwhelmingly important’ (1955, 2). With reference to cultural difference, he offered the following cognitive characteristics of ‘the African’: a tendency toward ‘extreme thinking’ and the lack of ability to ‘look critically at himself and the world’ (1955, 3). He concurred that African subjects were nonetheless ‘teachable’, and that the necessary “teaching” must come through changing culture via social intervention.

Key to the necessary social intervention, Carothers argued, should be education, at home and outside of it. Carothers posited that ‘family disruption’ played an influential part in ‘rebellion’ and should be a primary target of intervention. He attributed ‘disruption’ to ‘young men who too often now drift off to townships and return with strange and often false ideas, with which to reinfect their credulous country cousins’ (1954, 22). He thus highlighted the importance of ‘the education one receives at home’ (1954, 24). To foster loyalty to colonial rule in familial households, Carothers advocated ‘villagization’ (1954, 22) – the creation of small villages where

the provision of food, health services, and education would be entirely dependent on the colonial government. This structure would remove urban influence. It would also coerce the loyalty of familial households, allowing for the main lesson to be taught in colonial schools to take hold at home: ‘that the essential thing about all folk to-day is that they are only local examples of a highly homogenous humanity’ (1954, 25). The report therefore suggested that this ‘lesson’ must be taught through multi-sited domestication that intervenes on the family, the school, and ‘the village’. While Carothers’ reasoning did not reflect ‘an intellectual consensus’ among his contemporaries, and his report faced criticism and opposition for being ‘unsubstantiated’, it helped to frame even the most violent British detention camps for insurgents as sites of “rehabilitation” (Linstrum 2016, 182-186). The influence of the psychological discourse on domesticating Man thus actualised as counterinsurgent tactic.

## **vi. The development of ethico-cognitive Man**

The appeal of visions of fostering a ‘highly homogenous humanity’ continued to increase on the international stage as bio-centric notions of immutable racial difference became decreasingly tenable in the aftermath of the Second World War and as decolonising nations began to gain independence (Antic 2022; Kühl 2013).<sup>42</sup> The promise of a ‘highly homogenous humanity’ offered a conceptualisation of being human as a work in progress. It did so through a developmental narrative, akin to narrations of the formative education of youth (Slaughter 2007). Thus, while the earlier bio-centric race science of the nineteenth century had posited a static, substantive and sometimes polygenetic difference between “primitive” and “civilised” races (Rusert 2017), the twentieth century saw the rise of a developmental understanding of racial difference. The cognitive expertise that had begun to develop in the British context since the Torres Straits Expedition supported this vision by suggesting that those who were less like the homogenous ideal and farther away from achieving Burt’s ‘world consciousness’ could be cognitively developed to approach this ideal way of being human. Difference in terms of ‘types’ of being (non)human was rewritten through the developed/underdeveloped binary as difference in terms of degree of humanness. The degree to which people were considered to be human was determined in part by proximity to a homogenous world consciousness. This rethinking was appealing in two directions: it maintained the superiority of the dominant ethnoclass (white,

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<sup>42</sup> For more on the ascendance of universalism and ‘world citizenship’ broadly in the second half of the twentieth century as institutionalised by several powerful international organisations, see: [Betts 2021](#); [Pemberton 2001](#); [Sluga 2010](#).

‘Western’) as the ideal way of being human; it also appeared almost “post-racial” by promising access to being equally human to those who had been conceived of as other than or less than human by bio-centric conceptions of race.

After the Second World War, it was principally transcultural psychiatrists who set themselves the lofty task of reimagining the psy- disciplines with the aim of ‘fostering a transformed new generation of peace-loving “world” citizens’ (Antić 2022, 23). Through their expertise, the promotion of a ‘highly homogenous humanity’ with an idealised ‘world consciousness’ was undertaken in part by international organisations of the new liberal international order, such as the UN, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and World Federation of Mental Health (WFMH). Transcultural psychiatry was initially dreamed up by psychologists, psychiatrists and anthropologists from Western Europe, the U.S. and Canada (Antić 2022). At this time, Britain’s influence on the newly consolidating liberal international order was often superseded by the U.S.. At the same time, the conception of transcultural psychology was deeply influenced by the earlier proto-cognitive expertise of British psychology, as developed through its empire (Linstrom 2016). Transcultural psychiatry sought to progress the well-being of “the human race” by developing the psyche of all toward a universal consciousness; and it was, after all, the proto-cognitive British psychologists who had suggested that the psy- disciplines should be the ‘pure science’ to inform the welfare of ‘mankind’.

Transcultural psychiatrists and the WFMH were regularly consulted by the UN and UNESCO. The genre of ethico-cognitive Man, according to which the improvement of mental well-being leads to cultivation of “peace-loving” world citizens, largely informed their developmental and postcolonial policies in the 1950s and 60s (Antić 2022; Heaton 2013). Like their British predecessors, transcultural psychiatrists continued to dismiss biological distinctions between races. As one of the most prominent figures of the discipline Ari Kiev (1974, 19) put it:

It seems not unlikely that mental illness is manifested in certain basic structural mechanisms and processes... providing a substratum on top of which the different cultures impose differences in content.

Thus, transcultural psychiatrists argued for an understanding of being human as constituted by a uniform biology overlaid with culturally different understandings of it. These cultural differences could be overcome, they argued, to promote world peace and world citizenship. Accordingly, at the 1948 WFMH international congress, transcultural psychiatrists focused their discussions on the relationship between ‘mental health and world citizenship’ and the influence of this relationship on the well-being of “the human race” (Antić 2022). In a period of optimism about



the promise of modernisation, transcultural psychiatry consolidated the transformation of racial difference into a “cultural” (and not biological) position on a socially-determined developmental scale that had more to do with “how people think” than a biocentric understanding of what different groups of people are “naturally” like.

Despite the entanglement of the psy- disciplines with colonialism, transcultural psychiatry’s insistence that people were all equally human in their biological essence also appealed to psy- professionals in the decolonising global South. Psychiatrists from newly postcolonial nations in Asia and Africa played a significant part in shaping the sub-discipline’s terms (Antic 2022; Heaton 2013). In 1961, just a year after gaining its independence, Nigeria hosted the First Pan-African Psychiatric Conference. The Congress was convened by Nigerian psychiatrist Thomas Adeoye Lambo and sponsored by powerful foreign development funders like the Rockefeller Foundation and Pfizer Products. The First Pan-African Psychiatric Conference set out to consider ‘*universal* human problems’ of psychiatry (Heaton 2013, 2; emphasis mine). The attendees included psy- professionals from the U.S. and England, including the infamous J. C. Carothers and the founder of the WFMH and influential transcultural psychiatrist, John R. Rees. As Matthew Heaton has argued, far from naively accepting the terms of Western universalism, “Third World” psychiatrists like Lambo ‘sought to decouple the “modern” from the “Western” by stretching universal norms to integrate non-Western ones’ (2013, 14). The base-level universalism of transcultural psychiatry presented an opportunity to assert and institute the inclusion of “non-white” races in the modern ‘human family’ of the liberal international order and its international institutions. It also provided an opportunity to recast the ‘coherent, universal whole’ (Heaton 2013, 14). Transcultural psychiatrists from the Global South and “the West” alike thus ‘establish[ed] themselves as gatekeepers’ whose expertise qualified them to determine the universal terms for being human.

Still, while transcultural psychiatry did criticise earlier ethno-psychiatry for relying on racial stereotypes, it nonetheless tended to posit that only modern societies uniquely allowed ‘for individualized (and automatically more nuanced) forms of thinking, speaking and feeling’ (Antic 2022, 28). Therefore, while in theory, everyone could achieve the ideal of universal consciousness, in practice, people in not-yet-modern societies could only do so through the modernisation of their society. By virtue of their society’s delayed developmental stage, people of “the developing world” were supposedly not yet individualised enough to be fully human. In this way transcultural psychiatry overlapped with modernisation theory in isolating the problem of “underdevelopment” from colonial and global relations. It also supported modernisation theory

by arguing that only “developed” societies allowed for “mental qualities” conducive to peaceful political engagement. This psychological discourse thus linked the project of economic modernisation with both cognitive and ethical improvement.

By the 1970s however, the new sub-discipline of cross-cultural psychiatry was taking shape and putting forward a disavowal of transcultural psychiatry. This disavowal emerged alongside postmodern and postcolonial critiques of “international development” projects in the social sciences and the increasingly evident failures of modernisation. The universal promise of becoming an equally human member of “the human race” through national development appeared chimeric by the late 1970s. Accordingly, cross-cultural psychiatry pointed to the social contingency of the so-called universal consciousness imagined by transcultural psychiatry. It argued that transcultural psychiatry had merely deemed what was “Western” to be universal. However, cross-cultural psychiatry did not change the international discourse of mental illness to the extent that transcultural psychiatry had. It lacked the widespread influence (Heaton 2013). Instead, the regime of Global Mental Health (GMH) has taken the politically influential place of transcultural psychiatry up to the present day (Mills 2013).

The Global Mental Health framework maintains some of the key tenets of transcultural psychology for understanding similarities and differences within “the human race”. Namely, it maintains a universalising understanding of an essentially “homogenous” humanity, aspires toward ‘Global Citizenship’, and explains difference with reference to cultural and social settings conducive to “underdeveloped” or “maladaptive” cognition. Just as transcultural psychiatrists linked psychological problems in “underdeveloped” countries to the self-contained situation of underdevelopment, with no link to the global relations that produced it, the Global Mental Health framework treats particular cultural and social settings as especially “vulnerable” to extreme thinking. However, as was shown in the previous chapter, the “situations” deemed conducive to such vulnerability often refer to the social situation of systemically disadvantaged groups whilst also erasing the socio-political causes of the groups’ marginalised position. For example, the Lab discussed in the previous chapter argues that ‘Muslims in the West’ are especially vulnerable to extremism due to ‘rapid globalization’ and concomitant ‘identity confusion’ (Lab report 2013). This diagnosis presents the “vulnerability” of young Muslims as a consequence of a seemingly neutral and natural situation – that is, a situation that is not politically and socially determined by a global and domestic colour line. Thus, what Fanon called sociogeny, meaning the *social* evolution of being human, is rendered invisible.

This example of counter-extremism expertise, as with the Global Mental Health framework that informs it, gives the impression that only individuals can be changed and not the social situation they find themselves in. Seemingly, the only feasible ‘goal is to adjust the individual to society’ (Wynter 1999, 12). At the extremism prevention Lab, Dr. Collins, the senior lab researcher, noted that counter-extremism initiatives internationally are increasingly supported by Global Mental Health initiatives. She explained this shift as emerging from the knowledge that ‘you can’t stop extremism just by apprehending [people] and putting [them] in prison, as we know from reports that have just come out, you have to work on more of a public mental health promotion agenda’.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, she characterised ‘the third wave of prevention’ as moving ‘from a purely criminal justice framework to a partnership with mental health.’ This partnership draws on the belief ‘that if you increase well-being and resilience, then actually [you are] increasing the protective factors, rather than only decreasing the risk factors, and you need to do both.’ Dr. Collins noted that there is a parallel move in global education, which ‘is also linking [more] with a mental health psychosocial support framework.’ The move toward greater consideration of psychological “protective” factors, meaning factors that adjust the individual to society, is in Dr. Collins’ words, indicative of ‘internationally, how ethics is moving’.<sup>44</sup> This ethical direction highlights a focus on increasing the ‘well-being and resilience’ of those racialised as cognitively vulnerable on the one hand and on the other hand, a total erasure of that which produces this racial difference and makes the well-being of those constituted as racial Others difficult, if not impossible.

This chapter has shown that we must look beyond the influence of “biological” race science in investigating the historical conditions of possibility for the racialising operations of counter-extremism today. The chapter elucidates psychology as a science of race that characterised being fully human through supposedly superior cognition and the associated ethical capacity and responsibility to partake in domesticating “the human race”. The twentieth-century development of British psychology was central to the invention of “the human race” as imagined through a developmental schema, progressing from an underdeveloped collective psyche to developed individualised cognition capable of nuance. In an optimistic era of decolonisation and modernisation, transcultural psychiatrists presented themselves as experts who could inform the processes of development and modernisation by caring for the mental well-being of those supposedly trapped by underdevelopment. They put forward their task as the promotion of an

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<sup>43</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Interview 4, January 2020.

ethical ‘world citizenship’ through the cultivation of ‘world consciousness’. In turn, their vision was mobilised and institutionalised by international organisations of the new liberal international order.

By presenting the development of psychology as a race science, I am then pointing to the development of a genre of being that claimed a fundamental, expansive, and supposedly ethical entitlement to domesticate “the human race”. The rise of a proto-cognitive psychology throughout the British Empire facilitated this imagination of “the human race” as wild animals to be “domesticated”. Yet, the impact of British proto-cognitive psychologists in re-inventing racial difference has been underestimated. This proto-cognitive psychology was concerned with the impact of “mental qualities” on racial welfare, with the former understood as (1) distinct from purely biological features; (2) including intelligence, critical thinking, and rational thought; and (3) interlinked with ethical and moral quality. Political thought intertwined with this psychological discourse, fostering a vision of the cognitive as a primary target of intervention for the welfare of “the human race”. By demonstrating this shift in political thought, I am pointing to the governing sociogenic principle, that is, the dominant logic instituting the ‘colonial difference’ (Mignolo [2000] 2012) between the dominant ethnoclass and its Others. Through this principle, the new genre of being that I call ethic-cognitive Man has emerged and struggled for dominance.

Throughout the twentieth century, the ‘global colour line’ (using Dubois’ phrase) was redrawn as the division between those who were to lead the “domestication” of “the human race” and those who were to be domesticated. The former included psy- professionals, both colonial and postcolonial. Additionally, the popular narration of the riots in 1919 England through lay psychology suggests that everyday white men were seen to be rightfully contributing to the “ethical” project of domestication through their violence. This narrative justification of the violent incidents can be understood through Dubois’ concept of ‘psychological wages’, wherein white people, especially white men, of all classes are made to feel entitled to affirmations of their superiority (Dubois [1935] 2017). When the prospects of receiving such affirmation were seen to be threatened by the presence of men of colour in England after the War, the violence of white men not only ensued, but was also publicly justified as advancing the domestication of “the human race”. To explicate the reproduction and maintenance of racial difference at this time then requires an analysis of domestication as shaped by the development of psychology as a race science.

A psychological discourse of domestication has constituted ‘how individuals think’ as a “frontline” for defending the welfare of “the human race”. Discussions of counter-insurgency as

domestication are not new in IR. For example, Patricia Owens (2015) presents a powerful history of modern counterinsurgency as the management of biological life processes, akin to the domestic management of these processes within the household. However, Owens does not attend to the ways in which “domestication” has been inflected with scientific ideas about race – and not all of them neatly biological. In the abovementioned context of British detention camps in Kenya, for example, intelligence tests were sometimes administered by the British alongside ‘grim living conditions’ and ‘pervasive violence’ (Linstrum 2016, 187). Even as violence remained and remains the preferred technique for securing racial hierarchy then, throughout the twentieth century, the development of a proto-cognitive British psychology, its influence on political thought, and the later institutionalisation of this influence by international organisations of the liberal order ultimately marked cognition as an even more expansive site of entitlement and intervention for the dominant ethnoclass.

The cognition of Others has become the dominion of the dominant ethnoclass through a governing sociogenic principle that makes caring for “vulnerable” minds the task of those deemed capable of better (meaning more developed and more ethical) thinking. As Ella Myers has written, psychological wages are just one aspect of Dubois’s more expansive articulation of *whiteness as title* or dominion. The latter indicates an all-encompassing ‘attitude of ownership’ toward other people (through slavery), and their land and their labour (through colonialism) (Dubois, 1920; Myers, 2019). Dubois, attending the Universal Races Congress, reported hopefully on the possibility that anthropology and psychology would finally disprove hierarchical racial difference. At the same time, his other writings from the same period already show an astute awareness that *scientific* proof would not be enough to overturn this spiritual ‘attitude of ownership’ that he described in ‘The Soul of White Folk’ as ‘the new *religion* of whiteness’ (Dubois 1920, 16; my emphasis). Despite the scientific refutation of essential bio-evolutionarily determined difference that Dubois hoped could disprove a “natural” racial hierarchy, a British proto-cognitive psychology in fact saved racial hierarchy by calling forth a new dominant genre of being, ethico-cognitive Man. This genre has in turn endowed the dominant ethnoclass with a white dominion over the cognition of Others.

## **vii. Conclusion**

In short, the development of psychology as a science of race gave politics the gift/curse of *continuing* to treat ethical questions as scientific problems of racial difference, even as the

legitimacy of bio-centric understandings of race declined. In line with the story of nineteenth-century biocentrism and the early twentieth-century expansion of this epistemic order to all aspects of life, the global takeover of cognitive psychology is usually narrated in the history of science as a mid- to late-twentieth century and U.S.-led event. This takeover is understood to have been enabled by a post-World War II and Cold War disillusionment with biocentric behaviourism, seen by critical intellectuals as complicit in reducing the oppressed to ‘Pavlov’s dogs’ (Carr 2020). Liberalism was widely held responsible for its complicity with behaviourism by thinkers like Hannah Arendt, who charged the political order and its ‘scientism’ with ‘facilitating the mechanization of man’ (Carr 2020). However, behaviourism was not the only significant empirical psychology that fought for political influence in the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter shows that the mid-century takeover of cognitive psychology was enabled by its earlier conception by British psychologists who were centrally concerned with questions of racial decay and racial improvement.

The development of a proto-cognitive psychology as a science of race in the context of British Empire in turn allowed for the ‘religion of whiteness’ and its belief in the superiority of the dominant ethnoclass to persist, even as taxonomical understandings of racial difference were rendered illegitimate. Tracing the development of this science and its political influence shows how ethico-cognitive Man emerged as a genre of being human vying for dominance. He was endowed with and characterised by a cognitive dominion, a sense of ownership toward the mind of Others – to domesticate, that is, violently contain or develop. This genre shaped an imagination of the dominant ethnoclass as those who have control over their own minds and are burdened with an ethical imperative to improve the minds of Others and thereby domesticate “the human race”. In the monograph *Black Skin, White Coats*, Matthew Heaton poignantly asks, ‘What exactly was colonial about colonial psychiatry?’. I offer the following response: the psy-disciplines reformed the terms for articulating racial difference and thus re-invented and saved ‘the colonial difference’ (Mignolo [2000] 2012). The following chapter develops the characterisation of ethico-cognitive Man and the maintenance of his dominion through consideration of counter-extremism’s implementation through/in education today.

## Chapter IV. The genre's institution

The college did not have good psychiatric services. He was twenty-six; no one could force him to get help or even legally contact his parents.

[...] 'Calvin'—I spoke slowly— 'a lot of the things you're saying aren't really making sense to me.' Was that true? 'I get the feeling you've been really stressed. This is a stressful place, a stressful time...' He looked at me with hurt surprise. 'I'm wondering if you're seeing anyone or maybe could consider seeing somebody. Just to talk through things.'

'Okay, wow. Wow. You want to pathologize me, too. I guess that's your job. *You represent the institution. The institution speaks through you.* But let me ask you something [...] can you look at me and say you think this,' and here he swept the air with his arm in a way that made "this" indicate something very large, 'is going to continue? You deny there's poison coming at us from a million points? Do you want to tell me these storms aren't man-made, even if they're now out of the government's control? You don't think the FBI is fucking with our phones? [...] Sorry for wasting your time,' he said, maybe holding back tears, and stormed out of my office.

[...] I did the things one does, *the institution speaking through me*. I e-mailed my closest colleagues and the chair about my concerns and asked for advice. [...] Then I e-mailed Calvin to say I was sorry if I'd upset him, but I was concerned about him and wanted to be of whatever help I could. I did not say that our society could not, in its present form, go on, or that I believed the storms were in part man-made, or that poison was coming at us from a million points, or that the FBI fucks with citizens' phones, although all of that was to my mind plainly true.  
— 10:04 (Lerner 2014; emphases mine)

### i. Introduction

If the professor protagonist of the novel quoted here was based at a UK university, doing the things one does, the institution speaking through him, might include reporting the distressed student to Prevent. This would especially be the case if the student were Muslim and expressing the belief that the government targets Muslims at large through counter-extremism, which is one of the 'perceptions' that signals vulnerability to extremism, according to Prevent. The student in question could indeed be forced 'to get help' through the Home Office's Channel programme. In speaking to educationalists involved with directing the implementation of 'the Prevent duty' at universities about this work, I have found that one hears the institution speaking through them. Conversely, one can also hear them speaking through the institution, as they refer to the terms and beliefs deemed legitimate by the university to make sense of their counter-extremist duty. I therefore argue that by examining how those involved with implementing Prevent in universities navigate a counter-extremist policy that reproduces the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man, we can glimpse the mechanisms of the collective reproduction of this genre. I elucidate in this chapter how the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man, which I have

thus far argued informs educational approaches to counter-extremism like Prevent, comes to life and is secured through the implementation of this policy at places of higher education.

The legal obligation to implement ‘the Prevent duty’ (henceforth also, the Duty) – fosters tensions between how educationalists tend to understand their work and their institution on the one hand, and the non-traditional security role they are called on to adopt on the other hand. The Duty to foster an atmosphere conducive to the promotion of ‘fundamental British values’ creates tensions with the prevalent understanding of liberal universities as spaces for critical and ‘open-ended’ thinking. What’s more, the legal directive to spot and report students who may be vulnerable to extremism creates tensions with an understanding of liberal universities as spaces of ‘academic freedom’, including an assumed freedom from state surveillance. The well-documented and high-profile characterisations of Prevent as discriminatorily targeting Muslims, for example by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) (Kiai 2017), also create tension with liberal universities’ ideals of secularism and non-discrimination. This chapter therefore asks: how do educationalists reconcile the Prevent policy with the liberal university? As they do so, how does educational counter-extremism policy get shaped in practice, and with what consequences?

To pursue these questions, this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I provide a note on methodology and how I approached the counter-extremist university. Then I situate my research questions in the broader context of the implementation of the Prevent duty in higher education generally, and in the universities where I conducted my research more specifically. Next, I present my findings on the recurrent approaches to navigating the Prevent duty’s implementation that I observed. The discussion section that follows demonstrates how implementers’ sense-making with regards to the policy is conditioned by existing conventions within the university setting. These conventions are mobilised as overlapping tactics that I call ‘caring whiteness’, ‘critical whiteness’, and ‘dismissive whiteness’. The conclusion develops the argument that even without Prevent, universities already do the work of securing the conception of scholars belonging to the dominant ethnoclass (white scholars) as the rightful ethico-cognitive subjects of higher education. By drawing on conventions already institutionalised within universities, those who implement Prevent wield a set of ritualistic tactics to naturalise and thus protect the over-representation of ethico-cognitive Man and the whiteness of this genre of being. Conversely, these tactics fix the “authentic” Muslim Other as always outside of or an outsider within the liberal secular university.



## ***Approaching the counter-extremist university***

To advance a deeper understanding of how Prevent is incorporated into the everyday business of universities, I followed the policy around at six universities. I conducted semi-structured interviews with those involved in implementing Prevent and those involved in activism against it. I also: attended university-based talks, trainings, and events related to Prevent; examined Prevent related paperwork in university policies and its funding to universities; and observed relevant news media and social media outlets of groups that engage with the policy. The universities I engaged with were the one where I am based – the University of Cambridge – and two universities in Manchester, two universities in London and one university in Birmingham.<sup>45</sup> This chapter focuses on how implementers at these universities make sense of the policy, because policy is always remade in the process of implementation.

As implementers make sense of a new directive, they must work to reconcile it with their existing understanding of their role and their institution. Ethnographic sensibility enriches political theorising through observations of how everyday institutional actors ‘make moral choices, evaluate each other’s conduct, and deal with institutional constraints’ (2019, 766). This process of sense-making is particularly intense when a new directive creates tensions with how those tasked with it understand their existing role. This is the case for educationalists tasked with counter-extremism work. By questioning their process of sense-making, I bring into view the existing conventions of higher education institutions that make it possible for Prevent to “fit” within universities. The ethnographic sensibility presented here provides insight into how implementers reconcile Prevent with values already ‘sedimented’ (Ahmed 2012) in their institutional context. It allows us to glimpse the work that the university *already does* that enables the introduction of counter-extremism into the institution in the first place.

Those most directly involved in leading the implementation of Prevent, however enthusiastically or reluctantly, are enlisted both to co-construct the vulnerable cognitive subject who is Other to the institution and to present themselves as “good” institutional actors (Bastani and Gazzotti 2021). To make sense of their Prevent duty and make it appear sensible, university actors ritualistically refer to existing values of the university – the things that are characterised in ‘institutional talk’ as just ‘how we do things here’ (Ahmed 2012, 25). Those most directly involved with shaping the implementation of Prevent at universities are usually senior

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<sup>45</sup> Aside from the University of Cambridge, where I had permission from interviewees to include the university’s name, the names of the institutions where I conducted interviews are not included to minimise chances of the respondents being identifiable.

administrators, human resources staff in charge of employee training, administrators with roles specifically dedicated to safeguarding or risk management, and educationalists and staff with existing student welfare and ‘pastoral care’ responsibilities (such as, tutorial staff and counsellors). How they navigate their new duty as non-traditional security actors is revealing of the role of higher education institutions in securing the dominant genre of being, even before the introduction of counter-extremism.

## **ii. Counter-extremism’s arrival at universities**

Prevent has imposed a statutory duty on ‘relevant’ public-facing public sector institutions in the UK to partake in preventing radicalisation and countering extremism since 2015. The two main sectors affected have been health and education. Universities are expected to submit annual data returns to prove their compliance to the higher education regulator appointed by the Secretary of States for the monitoring and enforcement of the Prevent duty. Currently, this is the Office of Students. The ‘Prevent duty guidance: for higher education institutions in England and Wales’—henceforth, the Guidance—outlines two main areas of intervention in the sector. These are (1) the management and risk assessment of external speakers and events and, (2) the provision of ‘welfare and pastoral care/chaplaincy support’ ([Home Office 2015a](#)). The first entails ensuring that events held at universities, especially those hosted by student societies and featuring speakers external to the university, do not foster an environment ‘conducive to terrorism’ ([Home Office 2015a, para. 19](#)). The second concerns making adequate welfare support available to students who may be “vulnerable” to radicalisation. The Guidance advises higher education institutions to implement Prevent by using existing structures (policies, procedures, and committees) to manage these two sites of concern. It thereby presents the Prevent duty as already relevant to the work of universities. The Guidance notes, for example, that ‘We do not envisage the new duty creating large new burdens on institutions’ as ‘most of these institutions already have a clear understanding of their Prevent related responsibilities’ ([Home Office 2015a, para. 4](#)).

Moreover, the Home Office presents universities as a relevant and critical frontline for two reasons. First, it has claimed that universities are particularly relevant because

young people continue to make up a disproportionately high number of those arrested in this country for terrorist-related offences and of those who are travelling to join terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq ([Home Office 2015b](#)).

As Prevent is based on the understanding that “vulnerability” to extremism arises from being psychologically unwell, the Guidance advises that higher education bodies are critical to countering extremism because they already ‘have a clear role to play in the welfare of their students’ who are largely young people (Home Office 2015b, para. 25). In the UK, ‘academic staff frequently have formal pastoral responsibilities as part of their contracts’ and it is common to fall into informal support roles ‘when working alongside students who are often at a transitional stage of their life’ (Whiting et al. 2021, 529). The Guidance thus links Prevent with existing care responsibilities that are already embedded in British universities through the frameworks of safeguarding and pastoral care. Second, the Guidance states that higher education institutions’ existing

commitment to freedom of speech and the rationality underpinning the advancement of knowledge means that they represent one of our most important arenas for challenging extremist views and ideologies (Home Office 2015a, para. 1).

This framing thus presents Prevent as continuous with what universities already do (Busher et al. 2017) – supporting the psychological welfare of students and advancing their ability to think and know.

Accordingly, the Guidance is vague in its stipulation of what constitutes appropriate policies and procedures and who the relevant staff members are for Prevent’s implementation. The Guidance advises that its requirements should be met by having in place appropriate ‘procedures and policies’, including in relation to ‘external speakers and events’ and through the provision of ‘Prevent awareness training and other training that could help the relevant staff prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ (Home Office 2015a). This vagueness regarding who should take on this work and how is indicative of the space for discretion that those involved with Prevent’s implementation at higher education must navigate. Usually, a high-level administrator, such as a vice-chancellor, takes on the position of ‘Prevent Lead’, which makes them the central point of contact for Prevent-related cases of concern. The Prevent Lead is also usually tasked with managing the university’s ‘partnership’ with actors external to the university in the management of Prevent, including the police. The roll out of the policy internally is often taken on by existing risk and compliance committees, which tend to already have policies in relation to events held at the university, the activities of student societies, and the university’s IT infrastructure. The implementation usually also includes staff whose work is related to student welfare and pastoral care, such as tutors and mental health staff, and Human Resources staff who already do the work of organising staff trainings on a range of policies.

The bulk of the staff training involved for Prevent at universities usually follows the logic of the Guidance: the training assumes that educationalists already know how to and do perform care work related to countering extremism. Those deemed to be relevant “frontline” staff, which also often includes anyone with teaching responsibilities, tend to be accordingly trained for implementing Prevent through a very brief online module, part of the Home Office’s WRAP package. For most in university settings then, the training for spotting those “vulnerable” to radicalisation entails a cursory introduction to the relevant “risk factors” through the online module, which takes about 15 minutes to complete. Once trained in spotting signs of “vulnerability” to extremism, educationalists are expected to make Prevent referrals regarding students that exhibit such signs to the appropriate committee or the Prevent Lead. According to the WRAP training, these signs can include, the ‘need to redress injustice’; ‘us and them thinking’; and ‘need for identity’.<sup>46</sup> If the Prevent Lead passes on a referral to the regional Prevent Coordinator, then the referral is ‘triaged’ by the police in the first instance, to make ‘a gateway assessment of risk and vulnerability’ (Home Office 2021, 20). When deemed relevant, cases may be handled at a regional level through Channel, the Home Office’s multi-agency process, which may include psychiatrists, psychologists or counsellors, educators, local religious leaders, or other community members.

Since its imposition as a statutory duty, Prevent has faced criticism and resistance from critical scholars within higher education (Nabulsi 2017; Qurashi 2018). The criticism has echoed issues raised by, for example, the UNHRC’s Special Rapporteur (Kiai 2017) and human rights organisations like Amnesty International, Liberty, and Human Rights Watch.<sup>47</sup> As a Special Rapporteur’s report to the Human Rights Council (2017, 5) put it, the strategy ‘raises the spectre of Big Brother’ and disproportionately expands state surveillance, especially of Muslims. In 2016, publication of the methodology used in the psychological research that informs the risk factors highlighted in Prevent sparked further criticism from academics who pointed to a lack of sufficient evidence and rigour. They also argued that the authors provided no evidence to support applying their findings, which were based on research with incarcerated participants who have already been “radicalised” to a wide-reaching prevention strategy (Ross 2016). Many student unions also have standing policies against participating in the implementation of Prevent and have been guided in this stance by the National Union of Students’ (NUS) campaign against

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<sup>46</sup> Field notes on training, June-August 2018.

<sup>47</sup> See: ‘[Open Letter on the UK’s “Prevent” Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#)’ 2018.

Prevent, ‘Students Not Suspects’.<sup>48</sup> Coalitions of academics and students have also campaigned against the policy. For example, in March 2020, during nation-wide strikes of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) regarding disputes over pensions, pay equality, and casualisation, a coalition of academics and students organised a ‘National Day of Action Against Prevent’ on picket lines across the country. The Day of Action aimed to raise awareness about the strategy’s often invisible presence on campuses and criticisms of it.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, the Guidance and the government-designed training for universities absorb some of the criticism about Prevent’s intrusion into the realm of education. They appeal to universities by presenting Prevent as a part of the routine work of student welfare and safeguarding. This echoes the framing of the Prevent duty as a form of care in the health sector (Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2019; Younis 2021). The presentation of Prevent as a form of care opens the door to ‘narratives of continuity’ (Busher et al. 2017). Through this framing, implementers can make sense of “watching out” for students who are “vulnerable to radicalisation” as part of the work that their institution already did before the Duty’s introduction. Scholars of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism have extensively pointed to the state’s recruitment of a ‘vigilant public’ who is expected to co-construct the “suspect” identity of Muslims by perceiving and treating them as a security threat (Amoore 2009). The appeal of a care and welfare framing of counter-extremism in educational settings, however, suggests that institutional actors turned non-traditional security actors are not the ready and willing ‘eyes and ears’ of the vigilant state (Bastani and Gazzotti 2021). Their recruitment into the role of a ‘vigilant public’ requires a mutual process of negotiation. This negotiation includes the state’s appeal to these actors through discourses of continuity and care and is not purely constituted by a traditional security discourse of exception and suspicion.

Additionally, the Guidance and the WRAP training both note explicit awareness of potential hesitation on the part of institutional actors. They note the presence of ‘negative perceptions’ of Prevent and advise that that management of such perceptions is also part of the required work. For example, one slide in the WRAP training reads as follows:

One of the controversies surrounding Prevent is that it is only about Islamist extremism and that the Duty itself encourages Islamophobia and alienates Muslim communities. Those responsible for implementing Prevent need to be sensitive to these *perceptions* and *feelings*.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Campaign page: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/preventing-prevent-we-are-students-not-suspects>

<sup>49</sup> Field notes, March 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Field notes on training, June–August 2018.

How educationalists then reconcile themselves to their additional role as de facto public relations managers of counter-extremism (or how they do not) also deserves analysis. My findings show the micro level efforts that institutional actors make to make sense of counter-extremism policy and to make it sensible to colleagues and students. These findings deepen our understanding of the actual practices that enable a vigilant and caring public to form and become ordinary.

### ***Sites of implementation***

The universities I considered as sites of implementation were the University of Cambridge, two universities in Manchester, two universities in London, and one university in Birmingham. These universities were selected based on either their institutional prominence in shaping national discourse about Prevent, the influence of the region in which they are located in doing so, or both. They are not intended to be a representative sample of UK universities, but rather to deepen our qualitative understanding of some of the ways in which counter-extremism moves through higher education in the UK. This sub-section provides some context regarding these sites, before delving into my findings in the next section.

The city of **Birmingham** has been a significant site of contestation over the implementation of counter-terrorism measures, including Prevent. Over a quarter of Birmingham's population is Muslim (Birmingham City Council 2013, 13). In 2010, preceding the overt rollout of Prevent in 2011, a joint police and counter-terrorism operation called 'Project Champion' saw the installation of 216 CCTV and ANPR cameras in two areas with high Muslim populations (O'Toole et al. 2016). The cameras were later removed and an apology was issued from the West Midlands Police following a successful grassroots campaign, Birmingham Against Spy Cameras (BASC) (Fussey 2013). In 2014, the 'Trojan Horse Affair' caught nation-wide attention: an anonymised letter to the City Council purported to provide information about an alleged plot by 'hard-line Islamists to take over some Birmingham schools' (Arthur 2015). The alleged plot catalysed formal investigations of 21 Muslim-majority schools. While the investigations found no evidence to support the letter's claims (Shackle 2017), they nonetheless incited a national debate about the place of Muslim educationalists and the education of Muslims in the UK. That same year, the University of Birmingham made headlines about Prevent's dangerous potential for suppressing dissent when a student activist was referred to Prevent for potentially supporting 'domestic terrorism' because of his experience campaigning against fee raises in education (Allen 2014). In 2019, the city's Muslims again came under the scrutiny of national media as community protests took place outside of schools running the 'No Outsiders' program – a counter-extremism curriculum that purports to teach 'fundamental British values',

including instruction about sexuality and gender rights (Khan 2021). The ward where the school that witnessed the most notable protests is located is among the most impoverished areas nationally (Khan 2021; see also: Birmingham City Council 2019).

**Manchester and London** are both sites of recent terrorist attacks. These attacks are often pointed to in Prevent training to “prove” that radicalisation and terrorism are “real” threats and that a solution like Prevent is necessary. Universities in London have repeatedly made headlines for reportedly ‘risk-averse’ and heavy-handed implementation of hostile environment policies that overlap with and extend beyond Prevent, such as tracking students’ class attendance and using biometric fingerprinting to track the movements of international students (Swain 2018). Heavy-handed implementation of hostile environment policies including Prevent is at least in part motivated by the fear of the university’s visa licensing rights being revoked. Such a revocation took place at the London Metropolitan University in 2012, when the UK Border Agency reported ‘systematic failures’ in its tracking of international students (Meikle 2012). This is a serious threat to universities in the UK, given the emphasis on international students as an essential ‘revenue stream’ under conditions of neoliberalism (Beech 2019, 33). At the same time, dissenting groups at universities in London and in Manchester have been particularly active in resisting Prevent. The Student Union at the University of Manchester was active in raising awareness about Prevent as a tool of ‘Islamophobic surveillance’ in the early stages of the policy’s implementation in universities in 2015.<sup>51</sup> After the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, which was carried out by a former student at the University of Salford, Manchester, the Salford Students’ Union’s decision to boycott the Prevent duty a year earlier suddenly came under especially harsh media scrutiny (for example: Walker 2017).

Finally, implementation at **the University of Cambridge** is worth considering for three reasons. First, the University of Cambridge and Oxford University operate through uniquely decentralised structures through their college systems, which requires more staff to work on the implementation of the policy than at most institutions. This situation provides more points of contact with the policy and for analysis. Second, the University’s self- and popular perception is uniquely distant from Prevent’s imagined target space – it is elite, wealthy, and overwhelmingly white. Given Prevent’s history of targeting Muslims, especially poor Muslims, its implementation here provides insight into the hoops of meaning-making implementers must jump through to make Prevent appear at once mundane and necessary anywhere, however close or far from the terms the policy uses to construct its target “threat”. Third, Cambridge and Oxford receive

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<sup>51</sup> Field notes, February 2020.

disproportionate attention in national media outlets due to their elite status, granting them significant influence in shaping the discourse around a nation-wide higher education policy like Prevent (for example: Mandhai 2017). I had also conducted interviews with educationalists involved with Prevent's implementation at the University of Cambridge in 2018, before beginning my doctoral research. Conducting interviews with some of the same respondents from 2019 to 2021 allowed me to inform my research with a longitudinal view of how respondents' approaches to making sense of Prevent in higher education have or have not changed over time.

### **iii. Implementing Prevent**

Whether they are in principle in favour of, against, or ambivalent about Prevent's implementation at universities, those involved with it largely navigate the Duty through a shared understanding of the university. This is an understanding of higher education institutions as institutions that do or should nurture the "thinking capacity" of students and that are also responsible for caring for their mental health. In line with the neoliberal structure of their universities (Beech 2019) and Prevent's injunction to manage 'negative perceptions' of the policy, implementers often understand the work of making Prevent "fit" into the university as a project of re-branding. To make sense of Prevent within their context, university implementers must bring it in line with what they perceive as the university's "brand", or its (marketable) way of doing things.

One of my respondents who expressed the most enthusiasm about Prevent was Dr. Warren, an administrator at a university in Manchester. Dr. Warren is a white, middle-aged man, a former scientist and current university administrator working in the realm of risk management and safeguarding. We met at a café on campus at his university, where Dr. Warren eagerly explained that he had been involved with Prevent since 2010, five years before the Duty came into effect and made Prevent's implementation in universities mandatory. He had engaged with the Greater Manchester Police's (GMP) 'Terrorism Planning Awareness Group' to proactively consider how universities can be involved with countering terrorism before this was a legal obligation. Through his contacts with the GMP and City Council, Dr. Warren was asked to participate in the recruitment process for a Regional Prevent Coordinator in 2012. He explained that he believed the candidate 'needed to be grilled and confronted and challenged in a way that he would be by academics'.<sup>52</sup> He therefore 'gave [the candidate] a really hard time at the interview

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<sup>52</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.



purposely, because [...] he was going to have a difficult job dealing with the academic community'.<sup>53</sup> He described his involvement in the recruitment of a Regional Prevent Coordinator in this way:

What I wanted to do was mimic the kind of conversation you might end up having with an academic in a liberal institution who wants to challenge [the Prevent Officer] effectively as an agent of the state coming into a university. With all the issues that Prevent had, it's described as a toxic brand.

In 2014 (still pre-dating the Duty's legislation) Dr. Warren worked with the Regional Prevent Coordinator and the GMP to 'put together an action file for embedding Prevent in the university' at which he is based. He described this as an activity that 'was certainly considered politically sensitive' and that 'met a degree of resistance' from students and academic colleagues.<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Warren mentioned two tactics that have helped him and the Regional Coordinator he helped to recruit overcome resistance to Prevent's presence on campus. First, he mentioned the framing of Prevent as 'safeguarding'. Second, he highlighted the usefulness of "real life" examples to "prove" that radicalisation is a risk that requires such safeguarding. He presented both tactics as strategically useful for persuading those who are resistant to the policy that the latter is a way of "looking out" for students. A third tactic that I noticed in our conversation was the joking dismissal of persisting criticism of Prevent by presenting such critiques as emanating only from "misinformed" white students. These three tactics were echoed almost ritualistically by other respondents. This section presents the ritualistic utterances that point to these tactics.

### ***'Watching out for students'***

Dr. Warren told me that the best approach for gaining support for Prevent and widespread institutional training for it was to 'frame it in safeguarding terms'. He said that 'in describing Prevent to colleagues and students' he presents counter-extremism as 'addressing one risk area that might [be faced by] vulnerable students'. This is just like other risk areas, he argued, which 'could be, sexual exploitation, financial exploitation'. He summed up this framing as promoting the understanding that, in short, 'a student in trouble is a student trouble'. He therefore presented the demand to spot and refer students who are 'vulnerable to radicalisation' as a continuation of what universities should already be doing – 'if somebody's marks are dipping off,

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<sup>53</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

<sup>54</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

if somebody's appearance is changing, you should be picking that up anyway and you should be concerned about it'. Those who were resistant to Prevent, Dr. Warren claimed, had simply not understood that in practice, the policy amounts to taking care of students in trouble. As he put it, 'the issue was [there] largely for people who've approached it from *a position of ignorance* rather than really knowing how it works in practice'.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise at the University of Cambridge, Dr. Adams, also a white man who held a leading role in Prevent's implementation, explained away the discriminatory nature of Prevent by framing it as a matter of pastoral care. In line with the official policy discourse, their shared articulation of how the policy "really" works in practice aligned Prevent with universities' existing responsibility to provide care for students' well-being. Dr. Adams even characterised Prevent as a particularly suitable addition to Cambridge's system of pastoral care because of an existing informal practice of watching students. He explained,

Oxbridge [(Oxford and Cambridge)] are the best places to implement Prevent, because you can't move here in colleges without someone noticing – you go through the porter's lodge to enter and exit, you eat at college; everyone has eyes on everyone so unusual behaviour would be noticed.<sup>56</sup>

He was adamant, therefore, that Prevent is neither incongruous with nor divergent from the university's pre-existing commitment to 'reassuring the safety of students'. Rather, he presented Prevent as a fitting addition to existing practices for 'taking care of' students by having 'eyes on everyone'.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Ms. Smith, the Safeguarding Lead at a different university in Manchester than the one at which Dr. Warren is based, told me that 'the right approach' to Prevent is one 'that's about support, that's about well-being. And that's about protection'.<sup>58</sup> Ms. Smith is a younger, mid-30s, white woman. She shared that for her, Prevent is a positive addition to existing responsibilities: 'It's very much about our welfare services and the support we offer in house'. Like Dr. Warren and Dr. Adams then, she presented the demands of Prevent as a requirement to consider just another 'risk' to students, like any other. She explained, 'For me, radicalisation is very much like other forms of exploitation' and 'I look at Prevent the same way I would look at [situations] when we're dealing with things like child sexual exploitation or other forms of exploitation people might experience'.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

<sup>56</sup> Interview 6, January 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 6, January 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>58</sup> Interview 7, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>59</sup> Interview 7, January 2021, Zoom.

Like Dr. Warren, Ms. Smith viewed negative perceptions of Prevent as a type of misunderstanding, which she characterised as being rooted in a lack of knowledge regarding the changes the policy has gone through to better align itself with the work of safeguarding. She accordingly presented any problems arising from Prevent’s implementation as being caused by a lack of familiarity with changes in the policy and a lack of experience in doing student welfare work. These gaps in knowledge, she argued, can lead to subsequent mis-implementation. She explained that in her experience, implementing Prevent has ‘been part of the safeguarding process’, however, ‘the problem can be sometimes if you have somebody leading on Prevent or working on Prevent who hasn’t ever worked in support or safeguarding’. This lack of experience, she noted, can lead to a situation wherein implementers in the education sector ‘might see [Prevent] as a compliance issue, or they might see it in a different way’, instead of taking ‘the safeguarding approach’, which is ‘the right approach’.<sup>60</sup> In this framing, the solution to any “mis-implementation” of Prevent appears to be better training aimed at better embedding Prevent within care and welfare work.

A closely related sense-making strategy used by institutional actors who were clearly aware of the critiques of the policy was to present it as simply a ‘non-issue’, using the same logic: it did not change existing care practices of the university. At the University of Cambridge, Dr. Peters, a middle-aged white man and tutorial staff who was leading the committee tasked with Prevent’s implementation at the college at which he is based, claimed that ‘given all the huge noise made about it, it’s for me a bit of a non-issue’.<sup>61</sup> The demands of Prevent are nothing new, he explained, because the policy is ‘an extension of welfare obligations’. He elaborated:

‘With vulnerable students, they may be exposed to extremism through friends, online, et cetera, and that vulnerability can arise from a range of factors ... we’d be aware of these issues *anyways*’.<sup>62</sup>

Highlighting the same continuity, Mr. Atwood, another respondent at the University of Cambridge and also a middle-aged white man who had been tasked with designing extra training for the committees in charge of implementing Prevent at the college level, similarly explained that, ‘Because Cambridge by and large takes care of students, it’s business as usual’.<sup>63</sup>

Dr. Park, another middle-aged white man who chaired one of the committees involved in shaping the implementation of Prevent at the university-wide level at Cambridge, similarly

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<sup>60</sup> Interview 7, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>61</sup> Interview 8, January 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>62</sup> Interview 8, January 2018, emphasis mine.

<sup>63</sup> Interview 9, February 2018, Cambridge.

acknowledged the concerns staff had raised only to dismiss them in turn by presenting Prevent as non-concerning because it is imperceptible. He noted that academic staff had expressed concerns to him about how the policy might contradict institutional norms and values: they had expressed that it could ‘undermine freedom of speech’ or lead to ‘inappropriate monitoring strategies’. Dr. Park claimed, however, that because Prevent has been integrated into existing procedures, ‘in practice, *nothing new* would happen. In most cases, students might not even notice [its implementation]’.<sup>64</sup> He thus argued that the policy was no cause for concern because it was so well camouflaged into existing practices. Dr. Park claimed that even those who had been initially hesitant about the policy have accepted Prevent’s integration into existing welfare procedures as ‘the best of a bad job’.<sup>65</sup>

This emphasis on a continuity of care was echoed at the university in Birmingham, where I spoke together with an older white man, Mr. Williams, who was in a senior Student Services position involved with overseeing Prevent-related processes, and a younger white woman, Ms. James, who was in a Human Resources position also involved with managing Prevent processes. Mr. Williams expressed surprise that research like mine about Prevent’s implementation at universities was still being conducted at all. He explained that Prevent had been a controversial issue when universities were first legally obliged to implement it in 2015, however, he expressed that ‘from our side, it’s now kind of old news’.<sup>66</sup> He added that while Prevent had required the University to set up some new processes, such as including the requirement ‘to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ in event planning and room booking procedures, the change to existing processes had been minimal in practice. Ms. James nodded her approval at this point, adding that ‘the University doesn’t [even] have a separate Prevent policy. It’s just included in our existing policies’ for welfare and event management.<sup>67</sup>

Others were more tentative and hesitant in connecting Prevent to existing care practices. Dr. Finch, for example, a middle-aged white woman and part of the academic tutorial staff tasked with overseeing Prevent at a college at Cambridge, and Dr. Watson, a middle-aged white man tasked with the same at another college, noted that some reframing of existing practices is inevitable when Prevent enters the realm of care. Dr. Finch struggled to equate monitoring or watching students with watching out for them. She explained:

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<sup>64</sup> Interview 10, January 2018, Cambridge; emphasis mine.

<sup>65</sup> Interview 10, January 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>66</sup> Interview 11, October 2020, Zoom.

<sup>67</sup> Interview 11, October 2020, Zoom.

I don't like it as a concept, that you're monitoring students, but we watch out for them in lots of ways, in some ways it's another way of watching out for students – but it's still a bit uncomfortable, to be an arm of the state.<sup>68</sup>

Similarly, Dr. Watson expressed some scepticism, but ultimately presented the policy as not concerning. He said:

I don't think it has altered anything because tutors would notice concerning behaviour anyway... I see it as a tiny corner of pastoral care, things we are already doing but now we also have to jump through some Prevent hoops.<sup>69</sup>

Noting the scepticism in the phrase 'Prevent hoops', I asked Dr Watson whether Prevent contradicts *any* of the college's business as usual practices. He responded: 'My role as [the college's] prevent lead is to make sure that doesn't happen'.<sup>70</sup> This framing thus appeals to critics of Prevent at large by presenting it as a policy about care and as one that is a 'non-issue' in university contexts because it creates minimal change.

### ***'Perception is different from impact'***

A second point of convergence between respondents was a focus on advancing "a better understanding" of the policy in order to better "manage" its implementation. Respondents who took up Prevent's prescription to manage the perception of the policy, for example by promoting its image as a caring policy, did so with varying motives. Some believed in the necessity and the beneficial nature of the policy tout court, while others believed it requires careful management in order to be implemented in a way that promotes care and does not cause harm. Therefore, some hoped to aid in 're-branding' the policy in light of its unfairly perceived 'toxic brand', while others hoped to mitigate consequences of the policy that could in their opinion be in fact toxic.

As someone who found the necessity and benefit of Prevent indisputable, Dr. Warren explained that while he had already understood extremism to be an important risk for universities to address even before Prevent became a legal duty, he found that recent terror attacks in the country had made it easier to communicate this higher understanding to colleagues. The necessity of a measure like Prevent, Dr. Warren argued, had become undebatable since the

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<sup>68</sup> Interview 12, February 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>69</sup> Interview 13, May 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>70</sup> Interview 13, May 2018, Cambridge.

Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, which was carried out by a former student at the University of Salford, in Greater Manchester. He claimed that the incident had significantly decreased resistance to the policy within the University because it showed the policy's necessity. He said that before the 2017 bombing, 'when I've gone out to [departments] and spoken to them, it wasn't hostile, but it was difficult. [...] I had to fight my corner'. He added: 'That changed with the arena bomb'. According to him, this was because, 'Salman Abedi [who was responsible for the Manchester Arena bombing] was a student at Salford. Jack Renshaw, who was [a student] at Manchester Metropolitan University, was jailed for plotting to kill Rosie Cooper [, a labour MP,] a couple of years ago. [...] So, it's *real*, it's not a hypothetical problem'.<sup>71</sup>

It appeared to Dr. Warren then that real examples close to home had functioned as trump cards. It seemed to him that these examples allowed him to overcome criticism of counter-extremism's implementation in universities by pointing to the fact that extremism is a "real" problem at universities in the region and requires some form of response. He did not consider that audible resistance may have declined due to the danger of critiquing a policy that marks criticism of itself as a sign of vulnerability to extremism. Nor did he consider that attacks on those who refuse to support counter-terrorism policy always increase after terror attacks, as was the aforementioned experience of the Salford Student Union.<sup>72</sup>

Like Dr. Warren, Dr. Adams had also hoped that after 'recent terrorist attacks in London', those who were 'antagonistic to Prevent would be more sympathetic' because they would have to understand its necessity. Still, Dr. Adams was aware, he said, of persisting concerns that Prevent 'might single out' Muslim students. He had discussed this concern with colleagues who he called 'dissenters'. He had even designed extra training himself for the college at which he was based to bust 'misconceptions' of the policy. He explained how he had hoped that by using examples about animal rights activism as an activity that could lead to extremism in the training, he could 'prove' that Prevent does not just target Muslims through the category of "Islamic extremism".<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Mr. Atwood explained that he had tried 'to challenge the malicious perception of Prevent' as being racist in the same way. Mr. Atwood recounted that the governing bodies of some colleges were reticent about implementing Prevent, because 'at the time, the government [training] only gave examples of Muslim groups, so that did not help' the perception of Prevent as racist. He therefore 'included benign examples' to challenge this

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<sup>71</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

<sup>72</sup> For an insightful exploration of the consequences of critiquing counter-terrorism policy after recent terror attacks, see: [Qureshi 2020](#).

<sup>73</sup> Interview 6, January 2018, Cambridge.

perception in his presentation to these boards. His were examples of students who needed welfare support due to mental health concerns, including homesickness or a state of depression following a recent break-up. He recounted that he was ‘accused of being a racist and government lackey’ at one presentation, because he had used the name ‘Samina’ (presumably coded as “not white” and Muslim) in one of his case studies. Mr. Atwood laughed when recounting this story, as if to indicate the preposterousness of this accusation. In his view, while he had designed the presentation to challenge views of Prevent as racist and to provoke a broader discussion about the vast range of “vulnerabilities” that could lead to radicalisation, ‘some colleges ironically didn’t get past *their* own prejudice’.<sup>74</sup>

There were then two views shared by this group of respondents. Firstly, they believed that the reality of recent attacks should trump any concerns about the policy by making its necessity understandable. Second, they believed that those who critiqued Prevent were in fact ignorant of how the policy “really” works, and unable to think better in order to overcome their “ignorance”. In this framing, critics of the policy appear as obstructive to students receiving care due to their inability to think better about Prevent, move beyond their ‘prejudice’, and reach a more accurate understanding.

For such respondents, the priority was to manage the ‘misperception’ of Prevent. In a follow-up interview a year after I had first spoken to him, Dr. Park named the management of perception as a one of the university’s priorities with regards to Prevent. He noted: ‘Perception is different from impact’.<sup>75</sup> He gave the following explanation and example to distinguish between perception and impact. To manage the impact of the policy’s implementation, Dr. Park explained that the committee overseeing its implementation

is acutely conscious of how it is perceived, and we are ensuring that what we are doing in training, engagement, et cetera, does not identify certain ethnic groups or particular groups who are connected by a protected characteristic.

This approach, he explained, is informed by ‘a lot of talking to student groups, particularly about concerns about how Prevent might be applied’. He elaborated:

- I have had discussions with the University’s Islamic Society and I’ll give you one example. They were very concerned that they had been told that – they have a prayer room space – that they were not allowed to have any religious texts which were not in English. Now, I investigated that.
- Sorry, they’ve been told that by whom?

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<sup>74</sup> Interview 9, February 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>75</sup> Interview 14, October 2019, Cambridge.

- Well, I don't know. It was I think something that was passed down. There is no record of any decision being made about that. There is no obligation under Prevent to require that. So, we just said, that is just not the case. I [had] asked to see them about various matters, including their *perception* of Prevent, and they gave us that example. And I think that's a really good example of just maybe somebody had said something at some point, and *there was nothing we could find about that being written down*. Absolutely no requirement at all. And we just said: No, absolutely not a problem at all. So that could be characterised – certainly if the University had said something like that, which is not required by the Prevent Duty – as crossing the line and being inappropriate, but it's a really good example of *perception*, and how as an institution, we can respond to that.<sup>76</sup>

According to Dr. Park then, where the University can be most effective is in correcting 'misperceptions' about Prevent's propensity for causing discrimination. In the example he gave, the belief among Muslim students about what Prevent can do is deemed a misperception because there is nothing written down about it in university policy.

However, as mentioned earlier, Prevent training calls on educationalists to use their discretion and existing knowledge about what might signal that students are "at risk" or "unwell". Prevent does not work through what is written down in university policy exclusively. It also works through assumptions that educationalists are encouraged to make about what may constitute a "sign" of vulnerability to extremism. Perception does have an impact on implementation. What various implementers perceive to be a threat according to their own discretion and the training, which marks out 'becoming more religious' for example as a potential sign of vulnerability,<sup>77</sup> informs who they may assess as being at risk, regardless of whether the particular "sign" they notice is explicitly named in internal university policy or not.

Nonetheless, Mr. Atwood similarly indicated in a follow-up interview that there is a lack of evidence that Prevent *actually* has a negative impact at the university, reiterating that it is the negative perception of the policy that is the major concern with its implementation. Giving the example of concerns academic colleagues had raised with him regarding Prevent's potential to disrupt the right to protest, he explained that 'these are just general fears of people who are sort of fundamentally opposed to Prevent, rather than [people who are] really looking to see whether the University or colleges are engaging in Prevent duties in an appropriate and proportionate way'.<sup>78</sup> Speaking about concerns raised by the Student Union, he added:

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<sup>76</sup> Interview 14, October 2019, Cambridge; my emphases.

<sup>77</sup> Field notes on training, June-August 2018.

<sup>78</sup> Interview 15, November 2019, Cambridge.



They [Student Union officers] talk quite a bit about this “chilling effect,” you know, where they say a lot of students don’t want to research certain subjects, don’t feel they can write essays on certain things, because they think they’re going to be monitored or scrutinised in some way – it’s very difficult to provide evidence [about this], one way or the other. The way they speak about it, you would think that this was a significant number of students, but they don’t really have evidence to back up that claim. Equally, they claim that certain student societies don’t feel that they can host events, or that they will be allowed to host events. So, because they’re not gonna be allowed to, they don’t ask for an event to be hosted in the first place. [...] It’s very difficult to measure that. Because you can only measure events that have been requested and then turned down, we can’t measure the ones that people have felt too afraid to put forward. So, I think they place a great emphasis on this “chilling effect,” but it’s very difficult to quantify it, or even try to address it.<sup>79</sup>

Dr. Park’s example of students in the Islamic Society at the same university being uncertain about whether they could have non-English language religious texts in the prayer room evidences this sense of fear, but circularly, that too was dismissed as a “misperception”. Mr. Atwood’s scepticism about an unquantifiable fear amongst students echoed the disbelief he had expressed a year earlier about his training being perceived as racist for using a racially-coded name. Criticisms of Prevent were thus dismissed as rooted in baseless misperceptions.

With the impact of Prevent on the university atmosphere dismissed as unfounded in evidence and a misperception, the focus of university implementers could be turned toward Prevent’s “branding”. For Ms. Smith, critics did not have the relevant expertise to grasp that Prevent has changed from its earlier iterations, which had more explicitly targeted Muslims. She explained:

Prevent had a really difficult history [...] and I think it’s quite hard for it to shake some of the views and feelings around it being very much geared towards Islamic terrorism and certain communities.

Echoing Dr. Warren’s lamenting of Prevent’s ‘toxic brand’, Ms. Smith noted that ‘it’s almost a shame that [Prevent has] not been able to have a re-brand, in terms of the language and the wording around it’.<sup>80</sup> Mr. Williams and Ms. James echoed this concern about branding. They agreed with each other that the only remaining issue with Prevent is that the policy’s title is, as Mr. Williams put it, ‘a bit of a misnomer’. He argued that while the title presents the policy as being focused on preventing something, which sounds restrictive vis à vis student life and activities, they like to think of it as ‘more about enabling’ students to conduct events in a ‘safe’

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<sup>79</sup> Interview 15, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>80</sup> Interview 7, January 2021, Zoom.

manner.<sup>81</sup> Their implementation, Ms. James concurred, is about ‘helping’ students organise events in the ‘safest’ way.<sup>82</sup> A respondent at Cambridge, an academic who led the implementation of the policy at one of the colleges, Dr. Jones, even claimed that despite Prevent’s name giving the impression of repressing dissent, his experience indicated that Prevent could enable students to conduct *protests* in a ‘safe’ manner. As an example, he told me that concerns had been flagged to him about a potential direct-action style of protest regarding climate justice being taken up by students during a college-organised Green Week. Dr. Jones then got the students about whom concerns had been raised to ‘sign a form saying that they committed themselves to not engage in direct-action during that time’ and that they were guided on how to safely engage in other forms of protest.<sup>83</sup> Instances like that of the Green Week show how even when a material consequence of Prevent is more visible, the impact can be ‘rebranded’. That is, even when Prevent is explicitly mobilised to soften dissent, this use of the policy can be represented as enabling students to express dissent in a way that is “safe” for them.

Usually, interventions like this are only imperceptibly linked to Prevent because universities do not let students know that the intervention they are facing is linked to the policy (Wei and Ashworth 2018).<sup>84</sup> Still, there are some instances wherein Prevent has consequences that cannot be dismissed as only a matter of misunderstanding or reframed as ‘helping’ students. For example, in November 2017, students and staff noticed Prevent’s effect at the University of Cambridge when the chair for a panel event about the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, a Palestinian woman and a well-established and respected academic, was stopped from chairing the panel by the university administration just hours before the event. She was removed as chair with the reasoning that she would not be “neutral” enough to moderate the panel in an unbiased manner, and was replaced by the university’s communications director, a middle-aged white man deemed neutral enough.<sup>85</sup> This incident manifested (even, caricatured) both principal critiques of Prevent’s effect on universities: disruption of academic freedom and discrimination against Muslims. Outrage and solidarity from students and staff over the University’s decision to stop the chair from speaking led to the event garnering attention among students, on national media, and even in international news (Mandhai 2017). When I asked Dr. Park about this incident, he presented it as a positive ‘learning experience’ for the University. He noted that the University’s committee that manages oversight of Prevent had

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<sup>81</sup> Interview 11, October 2020, Zoom.

<sup>82</sup> Interview 11, October 2020, Zoom.

<sup>83</sup> Interview 16, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>84</sup> Field notes, September – November 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Field notes, November 2017.

‘really constructive meetings’ to understand why that intervention had been ‘an incorrect decision’.<sup>86</sup> There was no mention of the not so positive consequences for the chair in question, whose name and reputation as a scholar were now tied to an instance of being perceived as a threat by a counter-extremism programme. In this way, even incidents that reveal an unquestionably negative consequence of Prevent’s implementation can be re-presented as an opportunity for “bettering understanding” of the policy.

At the same time, the necessity of deeper thinking about Prevent was also highlighted by respondents who were much more critical of the policy, and who openly expressed concern about its potential to increase discrimination against Muslims. One such respondent, Dr. Garner, an older white woman with a prestigious academic position who was overseeing Prevent’s implementation at a college at Cambridge, expressed awareness about her ‘positionality’ as a white English woman implementing the policy and concern about the anti-Muslim nature of Prevent’s gaze. She confessed:

I wonder about whether it’s my place to enforce something like “fundamental British values” ... When I see someone who is covered head to toe and walking behind a man, there is *the good liberal in me* that thinks no, you can’t do that here, but then I think, is it my place to say?<sup>87</sup>

She went on to explain that “we” should be careful about how Prevent may affect those for whom what can be done “here” is always under question. When I asked about whether she has considered directly resisting the policy, she explained that universities have no choice about implementing the policy. They implement it, she said, ‘because we have to’. She claimed that the responsibility of implementers was therefore to take care to do so ‘thoughtfully’.<sup>88</sup>

Those who were similarly critical of Prevent and charged with implementing it shared the belief that critical thinking and self-reflection by implementers could serve to mitigate the policy’s potential negative consequences. The threat of discrimination could be annulled through individual ethical responsibility, that is, through implementers personally not being racist. Dr. Wesworth, for example, also a middle-aged white woman with a prestigious academic position who was overseeing Prevent’s implementation at a college at Cambridge, noted that ‘what slightly worries’ her is ‘the focus on one particular area of concern’. She explained, ‘We are being

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<sup>86</sup> Interview 15, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>87</sup> Interview 17, March 2018, Cambridge; emphasis mine.

<sup>88</sup> Interview 17, March 2018, Cambridge.

asked to look at Islam. It's like wearing blinkers. It closes [us off to] other issues'. She referred to examples given in the online training to elaborate her point:

Some of the examples [are] like, if a young man who grows a bushy beard and is no longer willing to shake women's hands ... again, it's all so skewed toward Islam, then you start to think about a young woman wearing a headscarf, and [so on].<sup>89</sup>

Even more emphatically, Dr. Davis, an older white man also in charge of overseeing Prevent's implementation at a Cambridge college, noted that although revised trainings emphasise 'this isn't only about Islam and give examples of other things like fascism', because of the country's political climate, 'you are 40 times more likely to get targeted as a Muslim'.<sup>90</sup>

The reaction of this group of respondents to the discriminatory threat of Prevent highlighted a critical ethic of personal responsibility. They stressed their own and other implementers' responsibility to mitigate discrimination in implementing Prevent. Dr. Davis told me that he had voluntarily taken on a leading role precisely to make sure that Prevent was not implemented in a discriminatory fashion.<sup>91</sup> Dr. Garner stressed that in her approach,

People should not be seen as woman, Muslim, Black, et cetera. We are complex and we should be sensitive to individual needs in implementation [of Prevent].<sup>92</sup>

Dr. Wesworth similarly stressed that '*if* we are not careful, we risk running a racial divide in society'.<sup>93</sup> They thus hoped to enable non-discriminatory implementation by thinking critically about the policy and reflecting on their own biases. Dr. Wesworth, for example, expressed her commitment to ensuring that the policy's implementation 'doesn't lead to a discomfort for people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds'.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, these respondents did not mention any attempt at or even the possibility of direct resistance to or protest against the policy. Dr. Garner told me that she tried to 'contain' Prevent's implementation to the necessary paperwork (such as annual reports) and other administrative processes,<sup>95</sup> just as Dr. Watson had expressed that the college was only providing pastoral care in the ways it always had, with the unimportant addition of jumping 'through some Prevent hoops'.<sup>96</sup> When I asked Dr. Wesworth about the possibility of more direct resistance to the policy than implementing it with a critical

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<sup>89</sup> Interview 18, March 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>90</sup> Interview 19, January 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>91</sup> Interview 19, January 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>92</sup> Interview 17, March 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>93</sup> Interview 18, March 2018, Cambridge; emphasis mine.

<sup>94</sup> Interview 18, March 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>95</sup> Interview 17, March 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>96</sup> Interview 13, May 2018, Cambridge.

perspective, she said that she would consider such an option if the policy ‘became more intrusive’ in a way that made continuing to manage its consequences impossible.<sup>97</sup>

### ***‘White, wanna-be, middle class politicians’***

Alongside respondents who acknowledged criticisms of Prevent if only to dismiss them as based in misunderstanding, and those who expressed their own critical concern about the Othering gaze of Prevent, others dismissed the validity of such critiques by framing them as ridiculous or nonsensical. I observed three modes of such dismissal.

The first was to ridicule the notion that educating the “backwards” Muslim Other was anything other than a positive and necessary task of a liberal education institution. Critics of Prevent who accused it of imposing one way thinking only through the category of ‘fundamental British values’ were ridiculed by some respondents as absurdly “politically correct”. For example, one respondent at Cambridge, Dr. Johnson, is an older white man in a senior academic position who has taken a long-standing interest and active stance in university debates about the policy. He told me with regards to such criticism that:

One of the things we tend to do in a liberal university [is that we say] it’s always okay to have whatever view you like. We do a lot of that. Of course, I am fundamentally liberal. But there is a case to be said that, in my view, the most transformative thing in society is education.<sup>98</sup>

He elaborated that the question of whether one of the functions of education is to transform values ‘is not even an issue for discussion’. Instead, he argued with regards to this purpose of education that, ‘It’s just self-evident. I just don’t even know how you get off the ground to say that education shouldn’t be *the* frame for thinking about social change’. He added that at liberal higher education institutions, there is a tendency to shy away from taking a stance on the beneficial, transformative purpose of education, which to him appeared undebatable:

I’m ready to say that you can educate the Middle East, and Africa, and parts of India into believing that violence is not the [right] mode for social change. [...] I’d have no problem with that.

When Dr. Johnson then brought the discussion back to Prevent’s place in the university, I could not help but to imagine that the people he had in mind as needing a similar kind of education at

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<sup>97</sup> Interview 18, March 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>98</sup> Interview 20, October 2019, Cambridge.

the university were those (perceived as) hailing from the places he had just mentioned. Regarding Prevent's implementation, Dr Johnson elaborated:

Yes, we should be educating people into the values we care about and not be ashamed of that. [...] I don't think it's wrong to think we should be doing something [about extremism] and thinking about that at the university level.<sup>99</sup>

In these terms, he dismissed criticisms of Prevent by arguing that teaching Others how to think is good and necessary for the promotion of "obviously superior" values. While not explicitly delineated, these seemed to be the "progressive" and "peaceful" values of "the West", given Dr. Johnson's mention of needing to educate 'the Middle East and Africa' out of their violent way of doing politics.

The second mode of dismissal used by some respondents was to ridicule not the content but rather the sources of complaint within the university. Multiple respondents dismissed critics who claim that Prevent targets Muslims by claiming in turn that these criticisms emanate from "inauthentic" sources. These sources were characterised as inauthentic because they did not represent the "authentic" concerns of Muslim students and were voiced predominantly by white students. The latter were at times characterised as "misinformed allies" who want to take a "politically correct" stance but are not actually affected by the policy and so do not really know what they are talking about. This characterisation echoed the respondents discussed in the previous section, who acknowledged criticisms of Prevent only to dismiss them as based in ignorance. At other times, the "inauthentic" sources of criticism were characterised as aspiring politicians who critique Prevent to opportunistically present their platform as anti-racist, but who do not really care about the "reality" of the policy's implementation nor about the real experiences of Muslim students.

For example, when I asked Dr. Warren at the university in Manchester about his interactions with the university's Islamic Society (ISOC) and whether he had received criticisms specifically from Muslim students, he immediately shifted the conversation toward white students.<sup>100</sup> He told me:

My engagement with ISOC has always been very positive. Where I've had more challenge and difficulty has been with, to be blunt, sort of white, wanna-be, middle class politicians who aren't speaking on behalf of Islamic students, and certainly don't have the experience they have, but are taking political stances, often influenced by NUS [the National Union of Students] or others. Or, [it's about] their own platform that they've declared and their election process [in student politics].

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<sup>99</sup> Interview 20, October 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>100</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

He added that this was where he had seen ‘a real kind of preventing Prevent platform’, and not from Muslim students who he characterised as ‘very co-operative’ and understanding. Additionally, he noted that beyond the students who he cast as ‘white, wanna-be, middle-class politicians’, most ‘students are pretty apathetic. The majority of them aren’t politically active in the sense of engaging’ with university policies.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Dr. Johnson dismissed the notion that protests against university policies from within universities ever really emanate from those who are disempowered in society. In an incredulous tone, he said:

University students are already by definition in the top [percentile] of any community, most of them in the top 10% of the world. Disempowered by virtue of being a student at [an elite institution], give me a fucking break!<sup>102</sup>

Dr. Johnson’s mode of dismissal then relied on the same notion as Dr. Warren’s, that university protests are usually led by ‘mainly middle-class students who want to make it fast [as politicians]’.<sup>103</sup> It also relied on the generalisation that all university students are members of an elite privileged class anyway. The resulting image of dissenting students was then one of an exclusively elite group of “spoiled brats” complaining opportunistically to climb a political ladder.

Finally, the third mode of dismissal was to ridicule the very possibility that a liberal secular university *could be* enacting racism at an institutional level. When discussing criticisms of Prevent with Dr. Peterson, an older white man in charge of overseeing the implementation of the policy at a college at Cambridge, he told me: ‘I would want students to understand that we’re not spying on them, we’re trying to keep them safe’. To make this case, he described to me a hypothetical situation that he would consider ‘Prevent-related’: a cleaner notices newspaper clippings about terrorist incidents in a student’s room and reports this to him. He explained what would happen next:

It’s a very low-key thing to start with. We would bring the student in and ask them if they know why they have been invited in. Then, we would explain that we found X thing in your room.

He added that afterwards he and the student would have a chat about this to check in on the student’s well-being. I asked whether this example itself was not indicative of how Prevent could open the doors to particular students being watched more, such as students like me, who are

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<sup>101</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

<sup>102</sup> Interview 20, October 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>103</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

Muslim and researching (counter-)extremism. Dr. Peterson seemed visibly annoyed with such concerns. He scoffed, reminding me that ‘this is really such a liberal environment.’ Half-joking, half-exasperated, he added: ‘It’s not like we are saying everyone with a bushy beard has to report at 9 a.m. to the porter’s lodge’.<sup>104</sup> The takeaway from his joke was that it was absurd to even suggest that the university could be taking measures deserving of serious accusations of racial profiling.

In a parallel move, a respondent at Cambridge dismissed the likelihood of Prevent being implemented in a discriminatory fashion at this elite university specifically by pointing to the low number of negatively racialised students. Dr. Thomson, a middle-aged white man in charge of overseeing the implementation of Prevent at his college, told me that accusations of Prevent as a racist policy are almost irrelevant ‘here’ because ‘our number of BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] students is woefully low’. In other words, there are not even enough negatively racialised students, he suggested, for there to be a coordinated effort at discriminating against them. He elaborated:

there may be other universities, where you’ve got a much more radicalised and potentially more diverse student population, [that is] in universities which have a far higher number of BME students who come from contexts where radicalisation is more likely to occur.<sup>105</sup>

Dr. Thomson’s response echoed how Dr. Warren had dismissed the possibility that criticisms about Prevent at his university in Manchester could be coming from “authentic” sources of complaint. Whereas Dr. Warren had argued that the Muslim students at his university were ‘very co-operative’ and most students at the university were apathetic anyway, in a hyper-elite university with even less negatively racialised students, Dr. Thomson erased the possibility of anti-Muslim racism and subsequent Muslim complaint even more thoroughly. He did so by pointing to a general absence of students who may be targeted by anti-Muslim racism in the institution.

#### **iv. Tactics of whiteness**

There is something strikingly ritualistic about the tactics through which those tasked with the implementation of Prevent reconcile themselves to the role. A process of sense-making is required on the part of implementers to reconcile the role of higher education in society with a policy criticised for discrimination against Muslims and “thought policing” by sources as

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<sup>104</sup> Interview 21, February 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>105</sup> Interview 22, November 2019, Cambridge.



mainstream as the UNHRC (see also: Bastani and Gazzotti 2021, 536). As my findings show, even those who expressed hesitance or outright frustration about their recruitment into security work cited the belief that if implemented with a personal ethic of care and critical thinking, the adverse effects of Prevent could be mitigated or overcome. Three overlapping tactics for making sense of Prevent and making it sensible to colleagues and students emerge. I analyse these tactics as: (1) caring whiteness; (2) critical whiteness; and (3) dismissive whiteness. As explained in this dissertation's introduction, whiteness is here taken as a characteristic of the dominant ethnoclass as ascribed by the genre of ethico-cognitive Man, which is the currently dominant genre that normalises this ethnoclass exclusively as fully human. This understanding of whiteness includes but is distinct from and broader than how one is racially perceived. Indeed, 'phenotypically "non-white" people can also uphold whiteness' (Abu-Bakare 2022a, 240) in the sense of upholding the organisation of social, economic and political life that maintains the supposed superiority of those characterised as white. In the case of my findings, all my respondents who held institutionally powerful positions involved with implementation were, not incidentally, white.

I argue that their tactics for navigating Prevent and reconciling it with their work reveal three overlapping self-avowed commitments of universities, which all precede Prevent. These are, namely, commitments to: (1) caring for students; (2) liberal values of education such as critical thinking; and borrowing a term from Sara Ahmed (2012), (3) 'institutional happiness'. By institutional happiness I mean, following Ahmed, a widespread belief within an institution, especially among its administrators, that everyone within the institution is happy, or as happy as they can be, which in turn 'allows management to not hear the problems' (Sara Ahmed 2012, 146). My respondents' performance of these commitments can be understood as rituals that reproduce the ideal subject of the secular liberal university through the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man.

I examine the tactics emergent in my findings as rituals because rituals are precisely 'episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication' (Alexander 2004, 527) that enact the norms and values of an institution. They also socialise participants into these norms (Dacin, Munir, and Tracey 2010). In listening to my respondents, it was difficult to shake the feeling that the institution spoke through them and that at the same time, they spoke through the institution's terms and beliefs. Rituals, including ritualistic utterances, are performances or modes of storytelling that may appear scripted, but when one pays closer attention, they also reflect engagement with and negotiation of the norms and values at play. Because they are involved in the work of reproducing institutions, rituals allow us to see the ways in which

institutions are situated, interpreted, and reinforced locally, suggesting a more fragmented and less strategic conception of institutional maintenance than is often portrayed (Dacin, Munir, and Tracey 2010, 1394).

Unlike the analysis offered here, critical security studies literature tends to portray subjugation by the logics of security as something that happens *to* institutions of public life, such as education. I hope to show that counter-extremism policy is also *enabled by* amenable institutions. Counter-extremism at universities takes shape through the however willing or reluctant participation of educationalists as they lean on institutional rituals to make sense of new policy.

### ***Caring whiteness***

One type of ritualistic utterance used by implementers to reconcile the policy with the university setting was the declaration that watching students could be more or less aligned with an existing frame of watching out *for* students. They could thus argue that Prevent can be integrated into existing welfare and safeguarding policies. Implementers can make sense of Prevent in this way in part due to the policy's psychological discourse of "vulnerability" to extremism. The Guidance for higher education reflects this discourse, presenting education institutions as important providers of welfare support. The Guidance accordingly advises institutions to implement Prevent as part of existing student welfare practices. In doing so, the Guidance echoes the expertise informing the policy, discussed in this dissertation's second chapter, which constructs educational space as a place of pre-political care. The premise underlying Prevent takes the teaching of "correct" ways of thinking as a welfare practice concerned with mental well-being, and it thus blends education and care together.

Even though Prevent sets up Muslims as the target "vulnerable" population, as openly acknowledged by some of my respondents, implementers can still reconcile this discriminatory ethos of the Prevent duty with their existing understanding of caring for students. In their understanding, caring for students is what their institution already does or should be doing. It was therefore common for respondents to make sense of Prevent and make it sensible through claims about what the university has always done, characterising their institution as "caring". By adopting care as a 'narrative of continuity' (Busher et al. 2017), implementers could present Prevent as an unexceptional extension of ongoing practices – a 'non-issue'.<sup>106</sup> In this way, counter-extremism can be made to blend in, 'donning the colours of localised practice' (Bastani and Gazzotti 2021, 533). For both enthusiastic and reluctant implementers, a ritualistic nod to

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<sup>106</sup> Interview 8, January 2018, Cambridge.

narratives of continued care becomes a way of permitting the presence of Prevent on campus. This permission also depends on a belief in institutional happiness, since narratives of continuity can only function as proof that Prevent is a ‘non-issue’ if the maintenance of the status quo is also understood as a non-issue.

The rhetoric of continued care becomes a way of circumventing or assuaging concerns about and resistance to Prevent. Some respondents like Dr. Warren and Ms. Smith presented this continuity in care as a re-branding of Prevent, in light of its ‘toxic brand’<sup>107</sup> and ‘difficult history’.<sup>108</sup> Others, like Dr. Finch and Dr. Watson, could only reluctantly reconcile themselves to their legal obligation and the feeling of being used as ‘an arm of the state’<sup>109</sup> by arguing that they could contain Prevent to existing care practices. Rather than being the passive audience of a securitisation move then, as the ‘vigilant public’ is understood to be in securitisation theory, these non-traditional security actors navigate their obligation through reiterations of the university’s commitment to care.

This tactic for normalising Prevent’s presence in universities can be understood as that of ‘caring whiteness’, a term I borrow from Ahmed (2012) and expand here. In her research on diversity work in higher education, Ahmed identifies caring whiteness as the tendency for whiteness to be ‘occupying through or as care’ (2012, 36). Ahmed exemplifies this by showing how the attestation of a white person that they care about racism and are sympathetic to those facing racism can give them permission to take up space in conversations about racism. In my research, this tactic of attestations of care recurred in a slightly different way but with the same consequence of allowing whiteness to claim authority in discussions about racism. In this case, implementers were not always claiming to care about the racism that Prevent is accused of perpetuating; rather, their ritualistic utterances expressed care about those Others within their institution who are “vulnerable” to extremism. One function of rituals, like the conventions of a genre, is masking the conflicts within an institution (Dancin, Munir and Tracey 2010) to maintain institutional happiness. The tactic of caring whiteness achieves this function by shifting the conversation away from universities’ complicity in a racist policy and toward their participation in the universally appealing work of care. The universities’ ethic of care is presented as an indisputable good, diminishing concerns that such “care” is being enacted in ways that perpetuate anti-Muslim racism. For the neoliberal university, maintaining institutional happiness also has a marketing appeal, enabling ‘the university to sell itself, by presenting itself as a happy

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<sup>107</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

<sup>108</sup> Interview 7, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>109</sup> Interview 12, February 2018, Cambridge.

place' (Ahmed 2009, 44). Re-branding Prevent enables the university to maintain its brand as a caring place, while also allowing the Home Office to sell Prevent products like its training packages to universities as safeguarding resources. This marketing appeal is betrayed by my respondents' repeated references to the central problem of implementing Prevent as one of remaking a toxic brand. Ritualistic utterances that characterise the university as a caring place thus give implementers a way of permitting themselves to implement the policy without disrupting institutional happiness. These ritualistic citations of care permit the university to shed association with Prevent's 'toxic brand' as a racist policy and to represent itself as an ethical institution.

### **Critical whiteness**

The second type of claim cited ritualistically by my respondents is that criticism of Prevent can be managed through "better" thinking. This claim draws on and adapts a major normative value of higher education institutions – advancing "better" ways of thinking and thus higher understanding. It is also closely related to ritualistic utterances of caring whiteness, since some respondents present managing Prevent by managing how people think about it as a way of also caring about the policy's discriminatory potential. Respondents mobilised in two ways the claim that implementation and criticisms of it should be managed through "better" ways of thinking about Prevent.

First, for some respondents, like Mr. Adams, Dr. Park, and Mr. Williams, managing "misperceptions" of Prevent is part of the university's legal obligation. This interpretation echoes the WRAP training, which cautions implementers about the danger of such "misperceptions" and tasks them with managing this risk. The assumption informing such an approach to the policy is that those who criticise Prevent have simply misunderstood it. The respondents taking up this approach therefore presented themselves as having a better critical understanding of Prevent. They also presented themselves as experts in the changes that the policy has undergone, in contrast to the policy's critics, who appeared as ignorant in the respondents' commentary. For example, Mr. Williams' claim that Prevent is 'a bit of a misnomer'<sup>110</sup> suggests that he understands something about the policy that others do not. His claim to a higher understanding suggests that those without this deeper knowledge are likely to misperceive it. This assumption of epistemic

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<sup>110</sup> Interview 11, October 2020, Zoom.

superiority is a long-standing feature of whiteness, which continuously grants itself a position of critical objectivity (Abu-Bakare 2022, 240).

Furthermore, this claim cites a convention of ethico-cognitive Man, namely, a sense of ownership over the mind of others, his to improve and fine-tune. For example, Dr. Park's anecdote about correcting the "misperception" among members of the university's Islamic Society about Prevent requirements for prayer rooms shows how a sense of fear can be dismissed as a misunderstanding. This misunderstanding was resolved, according to Dr. Park, by magnanimously bestowing higher knowledge about the policy – 'we just said, that is just not the case'.<sup>111</sup> This "resolution", however, gave no consideration to how the concerns raised about Prevent indicated that the policy was in fact already fostering fears of discrimination. Rather, the implementer mirrored the logic of Prevent in assuming that the distressed Muslim students were "vulnerable" to "misperceptions". Dr. Park's "resolution" shows his assumption that through credulity and a lack of critical thinking, Muslim students had simply misunderstood their own situation. As Abu-Bakare has argued, 'the process of [counter-extremism] practitioners making knowledge claims about British Muslims is akin to making a claim of ownership over ... their experiences' (2022, 23). Claims like that of Dr. Park then similarly reiterate the convention of ethico-cognitive Man that deems the dominant ethnoclass more knowledgeable about vulnerable cognitive subjects and their experiences than the latter are about themselves.

However, as Suhaimah Manzoor-Khan and Rizwan Sabir, scholar-activists writing and mobilising against counter-terrorism laws in the UK, have argued, not every single Muslim needs to be directly threatened by counter-terrorism policy in order for such policy to foster a sense that any Muslim person could be its target (Sabir and Manzoor-Khan 2022). Instead, the arbitrary nature of how such policy is applied, given its reliance on individual and institutional discretion, makes every counter-terrorism intervention enacted upon a Muslim person into a warning that any other Muslim could be next (Sabir and Manzoor-Khan 2022). While Dr. Park dismissed Muslim students' perception of Prevent as a threat by indicating that 'there was nothing we could find about that being written down'<sup>112</sup>, he did not consider how there was also nothing written down in university policy to *stop* someone from referring Muslim students to Prevent on the basis of what language they read religious texts in. There is also nothing written down in his university's Prevent policy to stop the university from acting on such a referral. Similarly, there had been nothing written down in his university's policy neither to explicitly

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<sup>111</sup> Interview 14, October 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>112</sup> Interview 14, October 2019, Cambridge.

require nor to stop the referral of a Palestinian Muslim chair of a BDS panel to Prevent, yet the university did receive and act on such a referral. Finally, in presenting this latter intervention as a mistake and a ‘learning opportunity’<sup>113</sup>, Dr. Parks did not consider how the incident may have signalled a threat to student activists, especially those who are Muslim. Rather, to perceive such a threat was to be deemed “vulnerable” to baseless ignorance and misunderstandings.

The second way in which my respondents cited the belief that criticism of Prevent can be managed through critical thinking was through the notion that implementers can mitigate negative consequences of the policy by adopting a personal ethic of care and in turn reflecting critically on the policy and their relation to it. This mobilisation enacts an insidious cultural belief of “critical” whiteness, which is that “white progressives” can learn and care their way out of racism by simply practicing “critical” reflection on their position and power (L. M. Jackson 2019; 2020). Critical literature has thus far pointed to the following characteristics of a neoliberal context as enabling conditions for the implementation of Prevent: a ‘deficit in criticality’ (Panjwani et al. 2017, 4), ‘a culture of compliance’ (McGovern 2016) and ‘an environment of pragmatism’, motivated by self-interest and conducive to uncritical implementation (Qurashi 2017). The response of some implementers I spoke with, however, pointed to a markedly different impetus: a drive to take up an ethic of personal responsibility and critical self-reflection to resolve contradictory demands made on them and their institution.

Respondents who were reluctant to implement Prevent were caught between an institutional self-image of liberal non-discrimination, the neoliberal branding of universities as committed to “diversity” (Ahmed 2012), and a national legislative demand to nonetheless secure the dominant ethnoclass and its epistemology. As Peter Bloom (2019) has argued in *The Ethics of Neoliberalism*, while it is often assumed that neoliberalism requires and produces self-interested ‘market subjectivities’, it can in fact paradoxically require ethical, caring subjects. Bloom argues that while neoliberalism creates crises, it also requires ethical individuals to take up the task of mitigating them so that the conditions of neoliberalism can persist and reproduce themselves, maintaining business as usual (Bloom 2019, 61, 168). Some of my respondents tried to reconcile the contradictions within their institutional context through a personal commitment to engaging critically with Prevent’s discriminatory “potential”. Like Dr. Wesworth, Dr. Garner and Dr. Davis, they presented their own critical stance toward their position as white implementers of a potentially discriminatory policy as a way of mitigating the negative impacts of Prevent’s implementation. They tried to minimise Prevent’s impact on existing practices by ‘containing’ it

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<sup>113</sup> Interview 14, October 2019, Cambridge.

to administrative processes or jumping through ‘Prevent hoops’.<sup>114</sup> Busher et al.’s report on Prevent’s implementation similarly notes that educationalists

often expressed considerable confidence in their own abilities and in the ability of their institution to implement the Prevent duty in a manner that would effectively manage and pre-empt potentially negative impacts (Busher et al. 2017, 62).

On the one hand, we can think of this type of claim as, in Ahmed’s terms (2012), an utterance that is ‘non-performative’: it does not do what implementers says it does, insofar as a critical assessment of Prevent and the self-awareness of implementers does not necessarily mitigate the structural effects of the policy’s presence on campus. On the other hand, such utterances do in fact do something, albeit something other than what they say they do: they offer an imaginary resolution to Prevent’s negative impacts, thereby masking the irreconcilability of conflicting demands within the institution and allowing the policy’s implementation to persist.

### ***Dismissive whiteness***

The final type of ritualistic utterance I identified is the dismissal of the claim that Prevent perpetuates racism as nonsensical. These utterances presented such criticism as being “inauthentic” and not serious enough to even warrant engagement. This type of claim was inflected with a joking or teasing tone, suggesting mockery or ridicule. It was mobilised in three ways.

First, some respondents adopted this tactic to delegitimise the sources of criticism about Prevent. They claimed that critiques of Prevent in universities are made exclusively by “middle-class” white students who could not possibly know anything about the racism they protest. They are thus cast as the only and “inauthentic” sources of complaint to dismiss all complaints about the policy as inauthentic. Like Dr. Warren, such respondents characterised these students as “loud” and disingenuous “wanna-be politicians”<sup>115</sup> or as “misinformed allies” who purport to speak on disempowered students’ behalf. These characterisations were mentioned in response to my questions about criticisms of Prevent, and I got the sense that I was being scolded and teased for naively believing that these were real concerns of Muslim students. Dr. Johnson even told me off “jokingly”— ‘give me a fucking break!’<sup>116</sup>. This move to fix the “authentic” Other as absent or silent and uncomplaining is connected to how caring whiteness claims authoritative

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<sup>114</sup> Interview 13, May 2018, Cambridge.

<sup>115</sup> Interview 5, February 2020, Manchester.

<sup>116</sup> Interview 20, October 2019, Cambridge.

knowledge through an expression of concern. These respondents implied that they were concerned about white students speaking on behalf of Muslims. Dismissive whiteness also relates to the tactic of critical whiteness, which claims authority through self-avowed “critical thinking”: those who express dissent are characterised as not really knowing what they are talking about. Here, “real” and more critically-informed concern for the “authentic” Other gives implementers permission to dismiss “inauthentic” sources of complaint through the satirical image of the self-serving or clueless white ally. Again, implementers enacted ownership over the Other’s experience, through claims to care and higher knowledge.

Second, some respondents dismissed the claim that Prevent poses a problem for liberal education institutions because it instrumentalises education to promote a particular set of values (‘fundamental British values’). They did so through the claim that education is unquestionably necessary for changing values that lead to extremism, and an implicit assumption that the values promoted by Prevent are ethically superior. The values promoted by Prevent were taken as obvious goods and measures of progress, and thereby criticism of their promotion was dismissed as “politically correct” nonsense. These values were contrasted by Dr. Johnson with the supposedly more violent politics of Africa and the Middle East, suggesting that the “progressive” values of Prevent are “Western” values associated with whiteness. Dr. Johnson also argued that “we” of the liberal university should not be ashamed of promoting such values, because they are ethically superior values that can prevent violence. In this move, the “authentic” Other who is imagined as a vulnerable cognitive subject is also fixed as a lucky beneficiary of secular liberal education. The tendency to ridicule “political correctness” in such claims gave implementers the power to decide whether criticisms deserves serious engagement or not. Ridicule thus created an opportunity to enact a claim to both higher knowledge (through better cognitive capacity) and to better ethical discernment (through a concomitantly superior moral capacity).

Third, critics of Prevent were ridiculed for suggesting that the liberal university, as enlightened a place as it is assumed to be, could possibly be enabling racism through its implementation of the policy. Recall that after reminding me that ‘this is really such a liberal environment,’ Dr. Peterson added, exasperatedly, ‘It’s not like we are saying everyone with a bushy beard has to report at 9 a.m. to the porter’s lodge’.<sup>117</sup> Again, the tactic of dismissing the possibility that whiteness could be a problem “here” in the university overlaps with caring whiteness and critical whiteness. Dr. Peterson’s mockery takes for granted that the university “cares” and is concerned with racism, and that it is too critical an environment for racism to take

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<sup>117</sup> Interview 6, January 2018, Cambridge.



place at an institutional level. Cleverly, the charge of racism is dismissed through a joke that highlights the absence of racism in its most “laughable” forms.

The subtext of such ritualistic dismissals is this: “we” of the liberal university are much too smart, progressive and well-educated to be racist, because racists are stupid and ignorant. As Lauren Berlant (2017) has written, comedy from a place of power can be a way of making oneself ‘the boss of genre’. Joking from a place of power can be a way of enacting the authority to distinguish between what is a laughable matter and what is serious. Through this authority, a joke can reframe a situation in such a way as to force ‘the structurally vulnerable [...] to “choose their battles” or just act like a good sport’ (Berlant 2017). Dr. Warren’s claim that Muslims are uncomplaining and co-operative in face of Prevent’s implementation while the white students speaking on their behalf are disruptive and self-serving suggests that Muslim students fit well into the institution when they can act like good sports. Since the interview with Dr. Peterson over three years ago, I have repeatedly regretted my uncomfortable smile in response to his joke about everyone perceived as Muslim having to regularly report to the college. This joke swiftly erased structures of anti-Muslim racism, and I chose to be ‘a good sport’ and not choose that battle. As Berlant put it, jokes can make us feel ‘baffled or overwhelmed’ and they can make us feel our vulnerability. The tactic of dismissive whiteness can secure the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man by fostering this feeling among those who do not quite fit the genre’s terms. Dismissive whiteness reproduces the normative “we” of the university as educated and “progressive” white scholars who are caring and tolerant toward the vulnerable cognitive Others in their midst (in this case, Muslim students), so long as the latter do not disrupt the consensus of institutional happiness.

### ***Securing whiteness in the university***

The introduction of counter-extremism to UK universities provides an opportunity to examine how these institutions wield the tactics I have outlined because it brings these tactics out of the realm of mundane daily routines. These tactics are structured by the institutionally sedimented conviction that those whose mental well-being is cared for and who have been educated to think “better” are unlikely to become “extremists”. Since being taught how to think is assumed to lead to the inevitable adoption of “progressive” liberal values, these tactics are also shaped by the conviction that institutional actors at universities are unlikely to perpetuate racism (because they are educated and know how to think “better”). In explicating these tactics of whiteness, my approach follows Wynter’s indication that the power of pinpointing the governing sociogenic

principle is in the concomitant ability to illuminate the hidden mechanisms that maintain the dominant genre of being (Wynter 2003, 305). In this case, the ritualistic utterances discussed elucidate the collective reproduction of ethico-cognitive Man.

As implementers struggle to make sense of Prevent in light of rooted ideas about ‘how we do things here’, the institutional rituals discussed are thrown into sharp relief. The conception of counter-extremism as a form of educational care allows implementers to reconcile their role in implementation with their existing conception of the university and their role within it. The shared understanding of the role of universities as “watching out for” the mental well-being of students and improving how they think provides an imaginary resolution to seeming contradictions—between “watching out” for students and how they think versus “watching” them; caring for them and racially profiling them; and promoting critical thinking versus advancing pre-set parameters for permissible lines of thinking. Each of the tactics I have outlined as caring whiteness, critical whiteness, and dismissive whiteness are undergirded by the belief that the “we” of the university is highly educated and morally discerning, and therefore cannot be racist. In ‘Declarations of Whiteness’ (2004, 6), Ahmed argues that white claims to being anti-racist can in fact reproduce the very thing they claim to be moving against. One such declaration is that ‘I/We have studied racism (and racists are ignorant)’. There is an elitism in the notion that ‘racism is caused by ignorance’, which presumes that ‘anti-racism will come about through more knowledge’ (Sara Ahmed 2004, 6), or in counter-extremist terms through “better thinking” via improved cognitive capacity. While the “we” of the university is reproduced through these tactics as highly educated white people who could not possibly be racist, the university’s Others are imagined as vulnerable cognitive subjects who are either outside the university or quiet outsiders who “we” have, in tolerant fashion, graciously welcomed into “our” midst.

Together then, these ritualistic utterances that I call tactics of whiteness do the work of securing the over-representation of the ideal subject of the university, the unspoken “we” of the institution. The over-representation of the dominant ethnoclass genre of being takes place through the institutionalised understanding that the twinned provisions of psychological care for the mental well-being of the vulnerable cognitive subject and the education of this subject for cognitive advancement are rightful features of ethico-cognitive Man. Beyond maintaining the conception of the white, cognitively advanced, and ethically superior liberal scholar as the natural subject of higher education, these tactics also hint at a wider set of utterances and behaviours that are used to over-represent whiteness in higher education by naturalising it. Conversely, these

tactics fix the “authentic” Muslim other as always outside of or an outsider in the liberal secular university.

## **v. Conclusion**

In light of these mechanisms for the collective reproduction of the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man, this chapter has been framed in such a way as to resist them. This framing may appear to the reader as limited by the following intentional omissions.

Firstly, I have not provided here the “evidence” that some of my respondents demanded regarding the fear that Prevent inspires amongst Muslim students, although the following chapter does point to this fear by focusing on Muslim experiences. Nor have I attempted to show that such fear is reasonable, to disprove the commonly cited claim that if widespread fear exists, it is based on a lack of understanding of how the policy “actually” works. I have not done so because, as this chapter has shown, ‘a request for documentation’ about experiences of racism can be, as Audre Lorde has put it, ‘a questioning of perceptions’ with the purpose of denying or dismissing ‘a way of perceiving and formulating’ (Lorde 2017, 82). In the case of my analysis of how the ethico-cognitive genre is reproduced, to provide further “evidence” to prove that Prevent inspires fear amongst Muslim students would be to use one of the conventions of the very genre. By reciting such a convention, documentation of experiences that show fear is warranted would obscure more than it would reveal. It would, as Lorde puts it, ‘provid[e] a screen by which to avoid concentrating on the core revelation, following it down to how it feels’ (2017, 82). The core of what I elucidate here is that the perception of Prevent as a racist threat is not delegitimised due to a lack of “sufficiently rigorous” evidence of discrimination. Rather, I have shown that the ethico-cognitive genre secures the dominant ethnoclass against accusations of racism through the demand for more evidence, a feature of the tactic I have called critical whiteness.

Second, I have not indicated how implementers might make sense of their counter-extremist duty otherwise, in a way that is not bound up with securing whiteness through the over-representation of the ethico-cognitive genre. I anticipate however, that a reader, perhaps especially a white reader, might question this omission. However, it is precisely this belief that being enlightened about racism (“thinking better” about it) and adopting a personal ethic of care toward it can mitigate if not entirely transcend racism that this chapter has revealed as a convention of the ethico-cognitive genre. As Ahmed (2004, 8) has cautioned, the impulse to

follow critiques of whiteness with the question, 'But what are white people to do?' or even, 'What is to be done?' may in fact 'block hearing' in the rush to move forward. In the case of my analysis here, this impulse may be additionally motivated by a rush toward restoring institutional happiness. This impulse in face of critique can 'stop the message getting through' (Ahmed 2004, 8). The purpose of this chapter is to enable a hearing of the tactics of whiteness that secure the ideal subject of the liberal secular university.

By presenting these ritualistic utterances as tactics, my contention is that the over-representation of this way of being, that of ethico-cognitive Man, is reproduced in the struggle to secure the dominant ethnoclass. It is not the result of ignorance or uncritical thinking or an uncaring personal ethic. The "we" of the university speaks through the institution not because "we" have not yet critically grasped "the truth" of racism, nor because "we" do not care about Others (in this case, Muslims). Rather, the dominant ethnoclass and its Other are constituted by the ethico-cognitive genre, so that "we" of the university know and care for the Other through the genre's 'adaptive truth-for terms', which have been embedded within the institution through the sedimented beliefs discussed in this chapter (Wynter 2003, 269). Wynter (1999, 2003) describes 'adaptive truth-for terms' as truths that have been adapted *for* ensuring that our social world functions in a way that upholds (or, secures) the over-representation of the dominant genre of being as if it were the only "true" way of being human. The dominant genre over-represents itself as the only way of being human through 'adaptive truth-for' terms that appear as truths *tout court*. The function of adaptive truth-for terms in securing a 'genre-specific regime' is thus hidden (Wynter 2015, 32–33). By revealing the mechanisms for the collective reproduction of the ethico-cognitive genre and its Others, this chapter shows the invented-ness of the genre's regime of truth. To trouble the over-representation of ethico-cognitive Man, the chapter follows in the leap Wynter attributes to Fanon: 'introducing invention into existence' (2003, 331).

## Chapter V. Intimacies of surveillance

### i. Introduction

Preventive surveillance works by categorising people into flat and essentialised identities. In its targeting of Muslims as vulnerable cognitive subjects, anti-Muslim surveillance then also defines ‘being Muslim’, flattening and fixing its meaning. Given the pervasiveness of counter-extremism, Muslims too can struggle to see themselves outside its terms. In the recent collected volume, *I Refuse to Condemn: Resisting Racism in Times of National Security* (Qureshi 2020a), essays by Suhaimah Manzoor-Khan and Yassir Morsi eloquently speak about the difficulty of seeing oneself outside the dominant gaze. Manzoor-Khan writes that ‘we have more knowledge of how our identities are understood by others than we have of who we are on our own terms’ (2020, 88–89). Morsi writes of the Muslim as constructed by the “war on terror” as a shadow that follows him and with which he must constantly reckon (Morsi 2020, 137–48). I present here young Muslim women’s intimate relationship with how they are constituted as Other in the terms of the dominant genre. Counter-extremism, I argue, shapes a most intimate space for Muslims in the UK — that of self-perception, reflecting Muslims back to themselves through the lens of its ethico-cognitive terms. Their struggle to understand the self in different terms shows that the dominant genre’s claim to being the only way of being human is contingent on preventing the imagination of other modes of being.

The gaze of counter-extremism pierces and impacts intimate spaces in multiple senses. In the UK, the state has widely embedded its definitions of safe versus vulnerable (and therefore, risky) Muslim identity across society, along with the premise that the latter can be identified by anyone through “visible” signs like “too much” religiosity or signs of ‘identity confusion’.<sup>118</sup> The impetus to identify “vulnerable” Muslims has been institutionalised in the social sector, via legislation that impacts spaces like classrooms, university accommodation, and clinics. This gaze has also intruded upon and embedded itself in community groups via government funding that directs the priorities of Muslim organisations (Brown 2008; Thomas 2014). For decades, counter-terrorism has intruded into the intimate space of Muslim homes too, interrogating the parents of children reported to Prevent and knocking down doors of family homes to detain, deport or extradite, all on the basis of vaguely-supported suspicions (Fernandez 2018; Kapoor 2018). This chapter, however, grasps at a less tangible intimate impact of the reification of Muslim identity through the ethico-cognitive terms of current counter-extremism. I show that as the gaze of

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<sup>118</sup> Field notes on training, June-August 2018.

counter-extremism intrudes upon the most intimate spaces of Muslim lives, including community spaces and personal relationships, it also shapes an innermost relationship – the relationship with the self.

The intimacies of surveillance illuminated in this chapter point to how the dominant ethnoclass' genre of being structures how Muslims understand being Muslim. Following Khalili's previously cited argument that counter-insurgent claims to intimacy with the target population amount also to an 'assertion of the knowability and legibility' of the latter (Khalili 2014, 25), this chapter shows how counter-extremist narratives that claim intimate knowledge of 'being Muslim' shape young Muslims' intimate sense of self. Building on Lauren Berlant's (1998, 281) argument that 'intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way', Khalili argues (2014, 38) that intimacy then 'is also a way of acting on' others, 'or enacting upon them a fantasy of who we think they are and should be'. I show in this chapter that in navigating on the one hand institutionalised anti-Muslim narratives about what it is like to be Muslim and on the other hand the lived experiences of 'being Muslim', my interlocutors articulate a sense that the former structures the latter. Pervasive anti-Muslim stories about being Muslim act upon Muslim personhood. Crucially, my contribution is to show that the workings of this structuring force upon one's intimate sense of self is felt and articulated by my interlocutors with reference to a lack of space for imagination. They illuminate an intimate consequence of the dominant genre's anti-Muslim narration of being Muslim. They show an ongoing struggle to imagine and narrate a different story about themselves, to know themselves outside the terms of the dominant genre.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The next section shows how I approach the intimate relationship between counter-extremist narratives and young Muslims' sense of self through conversations with young Muslim women who are university students, recent graduates, or who do educational work about or aimed at young Muslims. Then, through these conversations, I show that for young Muslim women, existing in higher education spaces instigates a constant awareness and navigation of anti-Muslim narratives about being Muslim. While the impetus to evaluate Muslims and the "kind of Muslim" they are in order to assess their "vulnerability" and concomitant riskiness affects anyone perceived as Muslim in different ways, Muslim women are subject to particularly intense and incessant evaluations of this kind (Afshar, Aitken, and Franks 2005; Ryan 2011). As Tania Saeed puts it, 'Muslim women are more likely to be talked about rather than included in a conversation about their lives as Muslim women in Britain' (Saeed 2016, 5). Orientalising narratives about Muslim women precede the "war on terror" and counter-extremism (Abu-Lughod 2002; Dwyer 1999) and are also reproduced and strengthened by

counter-extremism's pervasive presence in everyday life. I show how my interlocutors who are (like me) young Muslim women make sense of the web of anti-Muslim narratives that ensnares them even as the counter-extremist imagination of young Muslims creates limits for the self-perception of Muslim youth. That is, counter-extremism's dominant definitions of being Muslim create obstacles to imagining this being otherwise. At the same time, some of the constitutive parts of the ethico-cognitive imaginary are refracted in Muslim spaces of resistance in ways that unsettle the dominant genre. In the most unsettling refraction of the genre's terms that I encountered, that which is diagnosed as needing a cure is not understood to be "vulnerable cognition" of Muslims; rather, the way of knowing and being – the genre – that constitutes Muslims as vulnerable cognitive subjects is itself understood as a source of illness. The last section points to such reimaginings that challenge counter-extremism's narratives of being Muslim and unsettle the conventions of the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man that counter-extremism secures through these narratives. This reimagination reveals ethico-cognitive Man as just one culturally specific, and thus not the only, way of being human.

## **ii. Approaching intimacy**

I approach the conversations cited in this chapter as conversations with interlocutors, not informants. As a Muslim woman and student myself, I largely reached out to interlocutors through my personal networks, including social, religious and activist ones, and networks I identified through mine using a snowball method. I looked for interlocutors and not informants because I was not looking for documentation as "evidence" of how (other) Muslims experience living in a counter-extremist order. I had in mind Lorde's caution that documentation does not help understanding: 'At best, it only analyses the perception. At worse, it acts as a screen' (2017, 82). To have set out to document Muslim perceptions and experiences would have brought my research too close to counter-extremism's own impetus to do so. I had already determined, through the research presented in the previous chapters (and my own experiences of living as a young Muslim in a counter-extremist state) that determining a generalisable and "authentic" experience of being Muslim in UK educational settings would be not only futile and reductive, but also dangerous.

These conversations were instead pursued with the aim of understanding how those of us impacted "as Muslims" by anti-Muslim racism broadly and counter-extremism specifically make sense of our being Muslim. I share some conditions of experience with my interlocutors –

being in our twenties or thirties, living in the UK, being a university student or recent graduate – and do not share many others – our racial constructions and degree of “visibility” as Muslim, our nationalities and citizenship statuses, our ways of practicing Islam, our socio-economic classes, and so forth. By presenting the diversely situated and distinctly articulated perspectives of my interlocutors, I elucidate the different and overlapping ways in which they/we make sense of being Muslim in the context of institutionalised anti-Muslim racism. In doing so, I show how our intimate imaginations of the self in face of all-pervasive structures of surveillance can reiterate or unsettle the dominant genre of being human.

### **iii. ‘They will only ever perceive me like that’**

It can impact students in two ways, either directly, where they’re literally just reported to a Channel officer, [or with] student societies not being able to bring the speaker onto campus or facing extra scrutiny. [...] And then the indirect way – I think it probably affected me most that way – was when you kind of silence yourself in lectures, where you’re just a little bit afraid to speak up.<sup>119</sup>

This is how Huma, who graduated from a university in Manchester in 2018, describes the impact of Prevent on Muslim students, which she experienced and witnessed during her time at university. The way counter-extremism’s presence on campus affected her the most, she tells me, was sensing how others drew on dominant narratives about being Muslim as sanctioned by Prevent to make sense of her identity. She sensed that she was being perceived through dominant anti-Muslim narratives. An intimate and constant awareness of the damaging narratives through which they were likely to be perceived turned out to be a shared experience amongst my interlocutors. They described feeling trapped in their daily lives by perceptions of Muslims — Muslim women especially — that are fostered by the surveillance gaze of policy like Prevent. This first empirical section of the chapter delves into this feeling – how they arrived at it and how they made sense of it.

I met Huma on a Saturday morning in November 2019, at a coffeeshop in Northampton. She had responded enthusiastically to a research call I had posted in the ISOC Facebook group for the university she had attended. Huma had studied at the University from 2013-2018. She had been heavily involved in student campaigning locally and nationally against Prevent with the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS), an umbrella organisation of Islamic Societies in the UK, and the NUS. When we met, I asked Huma about how she had

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<sup>119</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.



experienced the impact of Prevent on campus. She described the existence of the same “chilling effect” on free expression that university administrators in charge of implementing Prevent had presented to me as an unfounded myth. Recall that administrators also argued that if Prevent does have a “chilling effect”, then this is caused by widespread misperception of how the policy “actually” works and its “real” purpose of caring for those who are “vulnerable”. This line of argument, however, could not explain away the anxiety and fear Huma shared with me, because she was very knowledgeable about the details of the policy, due to her earlier activism. Drawing on her knowledge and experience of Prevent, Huma explained that she felt especially nervous expressing her opinions in classes about the “war on terror” and counter-terrorism, because she anticipated how she would be perceived. She noted that talking ‘about things like opposing foreign police and questioning the government’ was worrying. This was because she knew ‘that *literally* is one of the indicators of Prevent for becoming a radical’.<sup>120</sup> Quite the opposite of being based in a ‘misperception’, Huma’s felt experience of fear was informed by her in-depth familiarity with the Prevent policy.

Moreover, Huma described frightening social consequences of counter-extremism that went beyond those of being reported to Prevent. While the low number of reports made to Prevent Officers by the university was sometimes used by administrators to “prove” that Prevent is a ‘non-issue’, Huma presented Prevent’s presence as frightening and constraining in and of itself, even without the experience of being reported. When I asked Huma whether the hesitance to speak that she described was caused by a worry about lecturers or fellow students reporting her to Prevent, she responded:

Sometimes it’s Prevent that’s caused me to self-censor, but then it’s [also] the fear of them [, students and lecturers]. Not that they’re going to report me, but that they’re just going to think I have these thoughts, which in itself is not nice. [...] Even [when] questions were posed to us in lectures, like, ‘What do you believe was the real reason that we [, the British,] went to the Iraq War,’ and in my head, straight away, I’m obviously [thinking] oil, and I just didn’t feel comfortable saying that. [Or] we were asked a question about BAE systems, and the answer was about producing arms, and again, I knew the answer, but I was just like, I don’t want to be the first one to be answering these questions, because people are just going to think, *how the hell does she know?* [...] Like, she’s the one who knows all these arms related things. She knows all the counterterrorism things... people may think I’m interested because I want to do something.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

<sup>121</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

Huma thus motioned to what the literature describes as the ‘vigilant public’ fostered by surveillance protocols (Amoore 2009). Her description went further than this too, elucidating how intimately personal the experience of such vigilance can be and feel, and how it can instigate the need to watch oneself.

There is a distinct intimacy in the kinds of relations in which Huma experienced the instinct to keep quiet. The image of a ‘vigilant public’ captures the suspicion toward Othered strangers that pervasive surveillance fosters – for example, the ‘see it, say it, sorted’ announcement on UK trains. Huma, however, was not speaking of anxieties about being perceived as suspect by strangers, but rather by her immediate peers, whose perception has immediate bearing on her social and professional life. University lecturers are often mentors for students, and classmates are potential friends, academic colleagues, and working networks. Huma’s description of her ‘self-censorship’ struck me as an attempt to resist being understood by those around her through narratives sanctioned by Prevent. She sensed that these narratives would lead to her being seen as a potential threat because of what she thinks about and how. On one level then, Huma described the social consequences of Prevent, those of being perceived as a threat. On a more intimate scale, her experience was indicative of a consequence of this consequence – the need to constantly anticipate and pre-empt the possibility of being perceived as “vulnerable” to extremist thinking.

This ‘weird’ process, to use the adjective of another interlocutor, Maha, of repeatedly evaluating whether one might be perceived as too extreme was shared amongst the women I spoke with. Maha had graduated from a university in Manchester in 2018, does not have British citizenship, and had moved to the UK with an international study visa. Maha told me that she was very conscious of the possibility of being reported to university administration for her political opinions back when she worked for the student newspaper. At university, she was interested in journalism and politics. As a news writer for the university paper, she explained that she tried to be ‘neutral’ in her reporting. Still, she felt worried when writing on topics like the Palestinian BDS movement. She explained that she wrote on those topics regardless, but noted:

To be honest, I don’t think I comprehended fully the magnitude of how scary [Prevent] can be, and I just didn’t think of myself as such a big risk. I thought, it’s not that bad, nothing about me is very extreme. But the fact that my brain was even doing that [risk-assessment] was weird.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Interview 24, October 2019, Skype.

In Huma's experience, only active resistance to Prevent fostered spaces where such self-vigilance did not seem necessary. For example, she described how educators who explicitly opposed Prevent allowed her to pursue her research interests. She explained:

Knowing that my academic advisor was so *openly* opposed to it, that just obviously enabled me to just know that I can do this. I specifically chose him for my classes [...] because I knew that I would feel comfortable in his classes.<sup>123</sup>

Huma made note of this trusting relationship repeatedly. She highlighted that because her advisor openly critiqued Prevent, she was able to trust him and relay her interests and activist involvement in resisting the policy.

It was important to Huma that her supervisor did not just permit her critical voice, in the "tolerant" sense of allowing a "balance" of views as prescribed by the kind of cognitive expertise discussed in Chapter II. Rather, he validated her grounds for critiquing Prevent as a legitimate way of understanding the policy, which made her feel comfortable in pursuing further research on the topic. Huma recalled:

He put me in touch with the sociology and criminology lecturers that were doing some research into [Prevent] in Manchester high schools. So, they took me along to do some projects. And that was really interesting as well to gain an insight into how students think and also to speak to teachers who've been on the training.<sup>124</sup>

While official university policies tend to "manage" Prevent by camouflaging it in existing safeguarding and pastoral care policies (see: Chapter IV), this tactic ultimately serves to invalidate critiques of Prevent, which appear then as critiques of an invisible 'non-issue.' In contrast, The kind of resistance Huma pointed to as enabling her to pursue her critical inquiry entailed making Prevent visible by vocally standing against it.

When my interlocutors encountered Prevent in a space where such resistance was absent, they in turn experienced a shift in how they saw themselves and how their close peers perceived them. Nina, a Master's student at a university in London and a Student Union officer when I spoke with her, recalled her first encounter with Prevent as one that undid her trust of her educators and friends. Nina was, when I spoke to her in October 2020, involved with campaigning against Prevent at her university. She told me that she could trace this activism back to this first direct encounter with counter-extremism's presence in an educational setting in Year 12:

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<sup>123</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

<sup>124</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

I remember when you'd get the Ofsted [Office for Standards in Education] inspectors that'd come into school, to see how bullying is, how teaching is, [to] monitor the progress of the school. And I remember sitting there... it was a room full of at least 20 of us, and the inspector turned to me, and I was the only person of colour in the room. And meeting me, it's not obvious that I'm Muslim or anything, but I was the only kind of minority student in the room because I went to a very white school. And the lady said to me, 'So what's your opinion on radicalisation and extremism?' And I looked around the room, and they were all friends and colleagues, and I was shocked.<sup>125</sup>

Nina described the moment as creating a shift in her perception of herself, and her understanding of how she was perceived by her peers. She explained:

I had never really experienced being the Other necessarily... Having grown up going to that school, I was kind of white enough and palatable, because there was nothing obviously different other than my skin tone.

She recalled that after this incident, she sensed a change in how her peers treated her in a way that echoed the inspector's line of questioning: 'Attitudes had started changing. People *did* start asking me to justify, [asking] like, "You don't agree with these terrorist attacks, do you? You're not like them?"' She explained that 'there was a shift, because I'd been associated with that kind of idea and violence'. Nina recalled the experience as 'a strong switching point' in her consciousness and in her 'awareness of the Prevent agenda and the kind of changes that were being made in education'.<sup>126</sup> Her recounting of her experience pointed to how counter-extremism's focus on the education sector has embedded racialisation through counter-terrorism into spaces that are intimately formative for youth – both youth like Nina, who were associated with violence, and youth like her peers, who thus began to associate "people like her" with violence.

The influence of such anti-Muslim sentiment in UK higher education spaces is palpable according to Yasmin, who was an international postgraduate student (PhD candidate) at the University of Cambridge when we spoke in January 2021. She expressed a sense of surprise in encountering the force of this sentiment when she moved to the country. Comparing her experiences in the UK to her earlier experiences in Canadian universities, Yasmin explained that she sees 'a specific pathologising of [Muslims] in this country' and that she believes 'that filters down into how universities allocate space and how people understand their place within the university'.<sup>127</sup> While Prevent requires the monitoring of student spaces and student-organised

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<sup>125</sup> Interview 25, October 2020, Zoom.

<sup>126</sup> Interview 25, October 2020, Zoom.

<sup>127</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

events, Yasmin and I spoke about something more intimate than this. In speaking of how Muslims understand ‘their place within the university’, Yasmin, like Huma and Nina, spoke of understanding one’s place as an outsider in accordance to how one is perceived by proximate peers.

Yasmin pointed to the consequences of encountering an all-pervasive anti-Muslim imagination in close relations within the university. Yasmin, who now observes hijab, explained that because she ‘wasn’t a hijabi’ when she started studying in the UK, she ‘wasn’t hyper visible’ as Muslim. A consequence of not being immediately perceived as Muslim or as a “practicing Muslim”, she explained, was being privy to her peers’ anti-Muslim sentiments. She explained:

people felt more comfortable sharing things with me about Muslims, because they either thought that I wasn’t Muslim, or they thought that because I wasn’t wearing a hijab, that I had particular political viewpoints about my own community, and therefore was one of the ‘good ones’ or one of the ‘safe ones’.

Yasmin recalled a close friendship at university ending ‘after a heated altercation’ that followed from the friend revealing ‘that they thought that Muslims, at least hijabi Muslims shouldn’t be in public-facing public service roles’. The friend was surprised that Yasmin, who the friend had perceived as ‘one of the good ones’ did not agree.<sup>128</sup> The loss Yasmin described was personal and painful.

Another experience that Yasmin shared showed how presumed familiarity with ‘one of the safe ones’ is used to assert the ‘knowability and legibility’ of Muslims (Khalili 2014, 25), as counter-extremism more broadly does (Abu-Bakare 2022) and as claims to intimacy can do. Yasmim recounted ‘being cornered’ by a member of the donor society for a prestigious scholarship she had received at a celebration dinner. The member in question engaged her ‘for to *two to three hours...* to start up a conversation around the oppression of hijab’. She recalled ‘trying to get out of the conversation’ while the individual in question continued to speak to her as one of ‘the good ones’. She recalled that the conversation had ‘a sense of like, come on, you know how it is’<sup>129</sup> – a sense of forced intimacy through joking whiteness, an invitation to be ‘a good sport’ and accept the validity of how being Muslim is perceived through counter-extremism’s gaze (see: Chapter IV). This claim to knowing Muslims in the same way, if not better, than how they know themselves asserts a sense of cognitive superiority and ownership over the minds of

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<sup>128</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>129</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

Muslim Others. What's more, the 'false implication of intimacy' (Khalili 2014, 25) with 'one of the safe ones' suggests the supposed ethical goodness of this superior knowledge.

The assumptions Yasmin encountered in an ultra-elite and overwhelmingly white university reflect a kind of cognitive dissonance: the very existence of a Black Muslim woman who seemed, on the one hand, like a Good Muslim, by virtue of her presence in an elite education institution and her "secular appearance" (by virtue of not wearing hijab), and who on other hand does not oppose the observance of hijab appeared impossible to her interlocutors. They continued to assume she could not be such a person even when they met her, spoke with her, and became her friend. Yasmin described encountering this dissonance as feeling 'a sense of structural erasures, combined with individual prejudices'.<sup>130</sup> Even as she existed in the space of an elite university, it felt like there was no space for her there, not unless she adhered to the dominant imagination of how 'one of the good ones' should think and behave.

Huma, who has lived in the UK her whole life, described an incident of encountering a similar dissonance, where the dominant narrative of Muslim women as homogeneously oppressed overrode a long-time family friend's intimate knowledge of her. She recalled how the mother of a friend – 'a lady whose daughters I've known since I was 11', she noted – had reacted when Huma, then 21 years-old, had told her that she had been elected as a Community Officer for the Manchester region through a cross-campus election. Her friend's mother reacted by exclaiming, 'Oh, my God, you're doing *so* well for the women in *your* community'. Huma recalled her own surprise at being perceived as part of a different community:

It's just like, number one, what community, frankly? Because you literally live down the road from me. And "the women" [comment]..., obviously, underlying there, what she's saying is the Pakistani community, and [that] "the women" must be held back [in that community].<sup>131</sup>

Huma expressed her resignation about being seen as an outsider in these terms. Making sense of experiences like this with reference to current events, Huma referred here to the widely publicised case of Shamima Begum, a young British girl who had travelled to Syria to join IS and subsequently had her citizenship revoked, even though British citizenship was the only citizenship she had, making her stateless (Johnson and Fernandez 2019). A case like that, Huma said, 'basically shows you that I'm not a British citizen'. For Huma then, being a Muslim woman in the UK meant that neither her social nor her legal "insider" status were guaranteed. Even in

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<sup>130</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>131</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

the (mostly white) community where she had grown up, she said, ‘they will only ever perceive me like that’,<sup>132</sup> which is to say, as racially Other and ethico-cognitively inferior.

For my interlocutors, the link between feeling Other at a university where the Prevent Duty exists and the greater context of anti-Muslim sentiment and structures in the UK was obvious and undebatable. Maha further clarified that while she was aware of Prevent, she would not link her concerns about whether she might ‘come across as extreme’ to that policy directly. Maha, who wears hijab, would be immediately coded as Muslim. She explained: ‘I think my concerns are a bit wider than Prevent, they’re also more general concerns of, Will I get deported? Will I get to the airport, and they’ll look me up?’.<sup>133</sup> Prevent then appeared as just one of many reasons for going through the ‘weird’ process of anticipating how one is being perceived and whether this can lead to violent consequences, like deportation.

Several initial conclusions begin to emerge from this first section of the conversations with my interlocutors, which has focused on how Muslim women experience being seen and understood within university spaces through reductive anti-Muslim narratives that precede them and delimit how they are perceived. Firstly, while those in charge of implementing Prevent often presented their implementation as harmless because of its continuity with earlier practices of care in the university, my interlocutors saw Prevent as dangerous precisely because of its expansion of the status quo. That is, in contrast to the educationalists I spoke to (as discussed in the previous chapter), the young Muslim women I engaged with spoke about the policy and its presence in the university with reference to a continuous hostility toward Muslims both within and beyond their institution of higher education. Thus, the characterisation of Prevent as a ‘non-issue’ because it does not change the status quo of higher education institutions provides no comfort to young Muslim women who are all too familiar with a status quo of being assessed through myriads of narratives that aim to evaluate how ‘good’ and ‘safe’ they really are. They described Prevent as continuous with their broader experiences of being placed outside of their educational environment, even as they existed and formed intimate relationships therein.

As they spoke of how they were and were not encountered “as Muslim” and “as Muslim women” within the university and beyond, there was not much in our conversations about rules and regulations, nor about academic freedom and religious freedom as abstract rights. The university administrators I spoke with had emphasised their efforts to ensure that the management of panel events and prayer rooms were not discriminatory, and to ensure that everyone was aware of the non-discriminatory nature of the university’s rules and regulations

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<sup>132</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

<sup>133</sup> Interview 24, October 2019, Skype.

(see: Chapter IV). In contrast, these young Muslim women spoke more about intimate encounters with essentialising narratives than they did about rules and regulations. They recalled disorienting experiences in personal relationships with colleagues, lost friendships, and close encounters with how they were perceived in hostile educational environments. They spoke of constantly navigating anti-Muslim narratives that were used to make “ethical” assessments of “what kind of Muslim” they are and whether they belonged in the university specifically and in the country more broadly. And no matter “what kind” of Muslim they were deemed to be, they experienced being perceived as out of place enough to require such an assessment.

In narrating their experiences then, my interlocutors conveyed a sense of seeing themselves being perceived and examined through a multitude of narratives that served to categorise them into Good (Safe) Muslims or Bad (Dangerous) Muslims. This secular impetus to evaluate and order how Others inhabit religious subjectivity has an extensive history in counter-terrorism’s fascination with moderate Islam and Muslims (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2006; Mamdani 2002). As Mamdani (2002, 767) puts it:

Certainly, we are now told to distinguish between good Muslims and bad Muslims. [...] We are told that there is a fault line running through Islam, a line that separates moderate Islam, called “genuine” Islam, from extremist political Islam.

The pervasiveness of Prevent in educational settings fosters this impetus to always seek to determine, ‘What kind of Muslim are you?’. Bad Muslims are envisaged by policy like Prevent and the psychological expertise underpinning it as unable to think in the right ways, and therefore vulnerable to acting in extreme ways. The policy’s guidance to perceive (for example) changes in religious dress or religious behaviour, such as men not shaking hands with women, as signs of potential “vulnerability” to extremism<sup>134</sup> constructs the right ways of thinking and being via adaptive truth-for terms that maintain the ethic of the secular liberal order and its ethico-cognitive genre of being. Accordingly, the pervasive imagination of a Good Muslim is synonymous with an educated Muslim whose “genuine” faith is paradoxically signalled by neither looking nor acting “too religious”, which is taken as a testament to cognitive and ethical advancement.

In recounting their encounters with this impetus to evaluate their way of being Muslim, my interlocutors also described how these adaptive truths-for of counter-extremism could supersede their reality. That is, when they expressed beliefs or experiences that did not align with

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<sup>134</sup> Field notes on training, June-August 2018.



accepted truths about what educated Muslim women are like (and how they think and behave), they faced reactions that denied how they understood themselves. My interlocutors even recounted facing claims from those they encountered in intimate spaces that they knew them (and Muslims generally) better than they (and Muslims generally) knew themselves. In expressing the exhausted sentiment that ‘they will only ever perceive me like that’, which is to say, according to the adaptive truths-for that uphold the counter-extremist order, my interlocutors pointed to a lack of space for being Muslim otherwise. They drew attention to the lack of space for imagining being Muslim in terms that are not determined by the secular liberal ethic and its counter-extremist mode of enforcement.

#### **iv. ‘Something for which data does not exist is not real’**

My interlocutors further shared an understanding that while they were ‘always already’ preceded by Othering narratives that shaped how they were perceived, these same narratives seemed to vanish into thin air when they tried to point to them. When they pointed to their experiences of being perceived in pre-determined ways that flattened and pinned down their identity, their understanding and moral evaluation of their experiences were often challenged and dismissed. They were facing the wall of critical whiteness (see: Chapter IV). In the previous chapter, I elucidated critical whiteness through the institutional tendency to “manage” criticism of Prevent’s anti-Muslim nature by guiding the plaintiff to re-evaluate their complaint through “better” thinking. Critical whiteness dismisses complaints by reframing them as misperceptions or misunderstandings that are caused by insufficiently critical thinking. In calling attention to institutional and personal dismissals of the existence and consequences of the narratives that shape how they are perceived, my interlocutors expressed varying degrees of optimism and pessimism about whether their experiences of anti-Muslim racism could ever be “proved” to the higher education institution.

While those charged with implementing Prevent often claim that there is only – and never enough – anecdotal evidence to support the claim that Muslims feel systematically targeted and watched at an institutional level, one of my interlocutors narrated the institution’s intentional limitation and erasure of evidence. Nura had recently completed her PhD at Cambridge when I spoke to her in November 2020. Like Huma, Maha and Yasmin, she described being watched as the Muslim Other at her university as a confusing and disorienting experience. She recalled, for example, an incident wherein a study group she was convening with fellow students in her college room was interrupted by the college porters. The reading group focused on thinking about epistemological questions relating to the postgraduate students’ research from an Islamic

perspective. She explained that the group was mostly ‘quite visibly Muslim, either because they were Muslim women who wore the hijab, or Muslim men who “looked Muslim,” whatever that means’. While they were gathered for discussion in her room, the porters ‘came to investigate what we were doing’, knocking on the door and asking about what event was happening. The porters then filed a complaint to the college about Nura for having too many people in her room. She received a letter from the college’s dean, and ‘was made to do community service for having people over to study’.<sup>135</sup>

Caught off-guard by these events, Nura recalled meeting with the Dean to discuss the matter. She recounted:

I was like, “Why are you doing this to me?” And she [the Dean] said, “Well, we discipline others too – just the other day, I had to discipline somebody for drinking too much, getting drunk, and vomiting.” I was like, yeah but... that action and me having a group of people to study, can you not see the difference?

Nura relayed the experience as one that she struggled to make sense of. She said that even while trying to give the college actors the benefit of the doubt and not assume that things had escalated because the reading group had been perceived through a racist lens, she found it ‘very difficult to not see the weirdness’ of the situation. Nura, who is Bangladeshi and has lived most of her life there, explained that she does not want to assume racism as the cause of incidents like this. She told me that she does not want to ‘impose an explanation for somebody’s behaviour on them’ and that she does not think ‘punishment’ of individuals is the solution. At the same time, she believes strongly that evidence should be collected from students who feel they have been racially targeted.<sup>136</sup>

Therefore, instead of asking for anyone to be punished, Nura recounted reaching out to multiple senior staff members at her college to ask that data be collected about incidents like the one she had experienced. She recalled:

I kept going to various big shots, like the Senior Tutor of [the college], and trying to convince them [to collect the data. I told them] I don’t want anything. Can you just have some sort of reporting mechanism? Not because I believe something should be done in these instances. [...] But I feel the data should be collected [to show] that there are students who feel uncomfortable in their day to day life. Because if the data is collected, it’s real. Something for which data does not exist is not real.

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<sup>135</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>136</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.

Nura stressed that she was not asking for the data ‘in order for the university to take any [further] steps’. Rather, she explained, ‘I’m asking for the data so that it is known that it happens’. She was asking for data to be collected so that her experience and similar ones would be recognised as real. And repeatedly, her proposal was refused. She was eventually told that she and other students could use the same reporting mechanism used for anonymously reporting sexual assault, if they wanted to file a report about incidents of Islamophobia. Faced with this experience, Nura said, ‘I could see I was talking to a wall at the institution level’.<sup>137</sup>

Nura’s attempt to gather data to make the existence of experiences like hers “real” struck me as an appeal to the institutional habit of critical whiteness (see: Chapter IV). If one of the adaptive truths-for the reproduction of the ethico-cognitive genre is the Truth that superior ways of thinking depend on “hard proof”, like a record of reported incidents, then Nura’s efforts amounted to an attempt to convince the institution of the reality of anti-Muslim racism on the institution’s own terms. Speaking with Nura, I was again reminded of how the administrators I had spoken with dismissed critiques of Prevent’s “chilling effect” on campus by claiming a more critical epistemic status, which they contrasted to student campaigns’ mistreatment of anecdotes as “evidence” (see: Chapter IV). A staff member in charge of organising Prevent trainings at the University of Cambridge, for example, told me that the student union and activists ‘don’t really have evidence to back up [the] claim’ that Muslims students feel ‘they’re going to be monitored or scrutinised in some way’.<sup>138</sup> There was a widespread (though not total) consensus amongst implementers that ‘feelings and perceptions’ (in the language of Prevent policy and the expertise that informs it) of discomfort are too nebulous to sustain a claim of institutionalised anti-Muslim racism. “The facts”, they often argued, need to be assessed through a more critical lens (see: Chapter IV). Nura anticipated this kind of reasoning, explaining:

You could say, well, these [experiences like mine] are anecdotal incidents. But if you were to put [these incidents] together, you might have some understanding of what is happening [more generally].<sup>139</sup>

Yet, even as Nura appealed to the institution’s preferred mode of reasoning, her attempts to gather evidence more systematically, or to elevate anecdotes to the level of evidence, were repeatedly dismissed. Her experience then points to a double-bind. On the one hand, personal experiences of anti-Muslim racism are dismissed as anecdotal or one-off incidents of individual prejudice that do not prove the presence of racism at an institutional level. On the other hand,

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<sup>137</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>138</sup> Interview 15, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>139</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.

attempts to gather evidence of anti-Muslim racism as a distinct type of institutional discrimination are dismissed as unfeasible or unnecessary. Thus, while some administrators defended Prevent's implementation by arguing that 'it's very difficult to provide evidence' that Muslim students feel targeted,<sup>140</sup> Nura's thwarted attempt to set up a system for gathering such evidence suggests that providing the demanded evidence is not incidentally difficult. It is intentionally *made to be* difficult.

Huma spoke about her personal experience of this double-bind too, expressing in turn her scepticism about whether more research and evidence could "prove" and challenge the existence of institutionalised anti-Muslim racism. She argued that what needed to change was the constant demand for those experiencing Islamophobia to prove its existence and to do so via methods deemed legitimate by the accused institution. She explained,

I went to university, then got my Masters [degree] and now I'm doing law, and no matter how much I progressed, I know that no matter what, as soon as I step into the office, I'm Muslim. In my role, I'm not just [Huma], I'm [perceived as] a Muslim female in my role and that's not something I can change.

When I asked Huma about Prevent's claim that "vulnerable" Muslims need to be educated so as to perceive the world and think about it in "better" ways that are not conducive to extremism, she retorted: 'I can be as educated as I want, [...] I'm [still] the Other'.<sup>141</sup> Her claim resonated with a sense of exhaustion that other interlocutors also expressed and that I have felt too—that no matter how educated, how 'critical', how able to back their claims with scholarly citations or verified data, Muslim women can only be perceived as an Other of ethico-cognitive Man when assessed through the terms of this same genre.

Huma indicated a need to trouble the terms of engagement if Muslim women are ever to break free of this double-bind. She pointed to how 'the onus is always on ethnic minorities to basically show that we are good people'. She further argued that it this is a framing that needs to change. Instead of Muslim women trying to "prove" that they/we are "good enough" because "educated enough" and "critical enough" for their/our claims to be accepted, Huma then argued that 'education has to happen on the other side'. That is, she proposed that instead of Muslims trying (futilely) to "prove" their/our status as 'one of the good ones' by engaging with the institution on its own terms, those who assess Muslims in these institutionalised terms should be educated to do otherwise.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Interview 15, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>141</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

<sup>142</sup> Interview 23, November 2019, Northampton.

This section of my conversations with interlocutors suggests the near impossibility of making visible the suffocating lack of space for being Muslim that was introduced in the previous section. The conclusion of the previous section began to indicate a lack of space for being Muslim in terms that are not pre-determined by ethico-cognitive narratives about being Muslim. Building on that conclusion, this section has shown how attempts to reveal the institutionalised nature of anti-Muslim racism are dismissed as unnecessary, while personal experiences of anti-Muslim racism are prone to being dismissed as only anecdotal. In the case of Nura, even a Muslim woman appealing to the ethico-cognitive genre's Truth that knowledge requires empirical data as evidence could only be perceived as a cognitively inferior Other pursuing a dead-end project. The ritualistic impetus toward an assessment of Muslim women and their experiences echoes critiques within race studies of 'white Westerners who believe it is their prerogative... to police none-white experiences' (Abu-Bakare 2022, 239). It points also to what I have described as ethico-cognitive Man's cognitive dominion (see: Chapter III). The women I spoke to then saw themselves being treated as out of place yet, when they pointed to this experience and tried to show the collective production of their Otherness, the validity of their claims was denied through the insistence that they had misunderstood their own situation.

In resistance to these tactics of critical whiteness, that is, claims to higher knowledge about the meaning of their experiences, my interlocutors adopted different approaches but faced similar obstacles. Nura advocated for more evidence regarding anti-Muslim behaviour, while Huma believed that changing such behaviour was only achievable if instead of requiring Muslims to "prove" that they can think more critically about the status quo, those who Other them were taught to do so. My interlocutors were squeezed between the claim that their complaints of systemic discrimination were overgeneralisations of encounters with individual prejudices and that their personal and nuanced experiences of being Muslim women could best be understood through pre-determined and epistemically superior generalisations. On the one hand, Muslim women's experiences for which no data exists is deemed not real; on the other hand, any data they provide is at the mercy of evaluation through the terms of the ethico-cognitive genre. My interlocutors thus related the experience of existing amidst social practices that both demanded and dismissed evidence of their being treated as Other.

## **v. "To rate yourself on your own terms"**

As my interlocutors spoke of their struggle to be Muslim without being written off through powerful narratives beyond their control, I felt a shared sense of prevented possibility. Alongside the suffocating feeling of being written over with more powerful narratives beyond their control,

the women I spoke with also mentioned the thwarted possibility of understanding being Muslim in (different) terms that felt like their own. They echoed one another in their frustrations regarding the lack of space to understand being and becoming Muslim in terms that felt like theirs. In contrast to Prevent's characterisation of counter-extremism, the expertise that informs it, and the institutional echo of it at universities, the Muslim women I spoke with did not describe counter-extremism as setting up the room for balanced and tolerant debate that allows for complex cognition and deeper understanding. Rather, they spoke of having no room at all to think on terms that felt like theirs. Even their relationship to themselves and to their faith felt intervened upon by the dominant anti-Muslim gaze.

This constraining of space for being Muslim is acutely felt in academic spaces. One of my interlocutors Ayesha, explained that she felt most constrained by the narratives that preceded her in academic spaces because of how truth is understood in such spaces and who is allowed to speak it. Ayesha is an artist and educator whose creative work often reflects on the condition of being Muslim in the UK. She recently graduated with a Master's degree from a university in London, and she often engages in public education about state surveillance of Muslims. When we spoke, she recalled speaking on a panel at King's College London with other 'visibly Muslim' women 'about feminism and Islam and disrupting and revealing the histories and context there'. The attendees were 'primarily a non-Muslim audience of academics [or] people within academia'. Ayesha described this as 'such a difficult experience'. She recalled that after the panel, a woman from the audience came up to her to say, 'at the end of the day, the question is just, are you a Muslim, or are you a feminist, or are you a human?' Reflecting on this, Ayesha recounted her surprise: 'I just thought, how wild, [that] human is obviously something I have to pick, right? It's not assumed. It's not a given.' She elaborated:

In academic spaces, [...] there is this really weird phenomenon where truth is posited as the form of knowledge that's presented in the most persuasive way, by the most "legitimate" voice. So that's always informed by a million different dynamics [and] very colonial white supremacist histories where we give authority to some voices and sources of knowledge. [...] So I think if you're trying to present knowledge of the violence of the state, and your references are just the embodied reality of being surveyed, your references are [then] completely delegitimised, because your source of knowledge is your racialised communities that have been looked at through this weird rustic lens for years by academics. And academia is built on the back of this on this kind of anthropologist [lens].

Muslims, Ayesha explained, are perceived through this lens as objects of debate and not subjects who can partake in it. They are then written off as not even human enough to engage with seriously when trying to intervene in how debates around Muslim identity are being conducted.<sup>143</sup>

Ayesha went on to elaborate that in academic spaces, where 'legitimate knowledge is so hierarchised' and where the premise is that 'this very kind of Oxford-Cambridge union style debating leads to the truth', she finds herself locked into age-old orientalist debates about Islam and Muslims. She feels herself trapped in questions about whether 'they' (Muslims) can think critically and behave ethically, like those who are fully human. She observed that 'even before being allowed to shine a light on something' there is an expectation of rehashing these old debates: 'It's like, first the audience has to debate and decide, is or isn't Islam a barbaric civilization?' Institutionalised habits of engagement demand for basic truths about the extent of the humanity of Muslims to be re-established at the beginning of every academic conversation, so that there is little space left for thinking more deeply or in other terms about being Muslim. Such framings predetermine the limits of engagement with Muslim knowledge and experiences so that there is a sense of, as Ayesha put it, 'always starting on the back foot'.<sup>144</sup>

One consequence of being constantly threatened with the dismissal of one's ability to think in the right ways is a perpetually lurking feeling of being on guard. Ayesha described feelings of constant alertness and concomitant exhaustion. She elaborated,

Where can we be safe? And where can we exist on our own terms? [...] If you think about being a Muslim, within a university, or any institution, really, that is bound up in this [Prevent] duty, or even if you're not legally bound by the Prevent duty, you're still in this context of national security as a discourse, I think what that does is it means [...] there is not a second of the day in which you're not performing. [You ask yourself] are you kind of performing just the right amount of, secular, not too religious, but you know, still prov[ing] that you're intelligent, that you're civilised, but also you do want to show people that you are religious, and [that] you do care about religion, [but that] it's not dangerous, and it's not weird, and also you're not like *those* people. Imagine, internally in your mind that conversation is going on *all* the time, not consciously, [but] subconsciously. It's so normalised. It's so ingrained.

This hyper-alert attention to and awareness of performing oneself, Ayesha argued, is the consequence of a 'coercion that hangs over your head' when living as a Muslim in a context where Muslims are predominantly understood through pervasive security discourse. She lamented that 'there are so few spaces you can manoeuvre into where you are able to rate

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<sup>143</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>144</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

yourself on your own terms’. Even the very intimate relationship with oneself is precluded by the sense that ‘somebody else’s gaze is involved’ and that there is an overpowering ‘truth you can be playing into’. Ayesha expressed that this ultimately equates to feeling like there is nowhere she can ‘just 100 per cent let my guard down’.<sup>145</sup>

Even spaces of Muslim community can be shaped by both internalisation of the dominant gaze and fear of it. My interlocutors shared a common feeling of sensing the presence of ‘somebody else’s gaze’ in spaces shared with other Muslims too. Ayesha told me that she thinks for Muslim students ‘there is that tendency to socialise together, to be in space together’ because ‘that’s where you are perhaps least vulnerable to somebody else’s idea of what Muslim is’. Still, she noted that she feels the dominant anti-Muslim gaze can be, and often is, reflected and reproduced by its Others.<sup>146</sup> As Nura put it, ‘the University does not sit inside the prayer room, and yet we are careful to not break Prevent rules. [...] The agent does not need to be present in the room for the gaze to exist’.<sup>147</sup> The sense of being watched and assessed into different essentialising categories of being Muslim – vulnerable or safe, extremist or moderate, practicing or secularised – does not disappear in Muslim-only spaces. Yasmin similarly noted that because of an awareness and internalisation of a hostile and anti-Muslim gaze, university Muslim spaces often only allow Islam to be practiced in “safe” cultural terms.<sup>148</sup>

Yasmin explained that the internalisation of a hostile and anti-Muslim gaze often amounted to focusing on externally oriented aspects of Muslim identity, which could be “safely” classified as cultural instead of religious practice per se. She shared accounts of friends and acquaintances who, however, felt like they did not belong in *the* institutionalised space for Muslim community at universities, ISOCs, because of this focus on outward-oriented cultural codes and because they were not part of the majority culture. Yasmin felt that such spaces often ‘confuse’ the distinction between ‘what’s religion and what’s culture’, and that she got the impression ‘from second-hand accounts, and some of the few ISOC events that I’ve been to, [that the space] is really culturally mediated’. She elaborated:

Many people have spoken about the ways in which ISOCs in the UK have a very South Asian focus. [...] The ways in which you access these kinds of spaces, and what Muslim is defined as, and the kind of cultural anchors that Muslims are oriented around are also exclusive in that regard as well. There’s been lots of conversations around how people feel. Even if they do feel like they live up to those kinds of aesthetics of Muslim-ness and

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<sup>145</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>146</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>147</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>148</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.



want to gain entry, [some people] still don't feel comfortable because there's a cultural barrier there.

She thus summed up her experience of ISOCs in the UK as tending to be an 'outward focused' social setting. She observed that there is often a strong emphasis on 'the demonstrable trappings of Muslim-ness,' such as, 'attire, speaking and saying things in a certain way.' Contextualising this, she elaborated that she understands this partly as a 'political response to the social context' because of 'the fact that Muslims are specifically pathologised' in the UK. She understood the focus on these externally-oriented or 'visible' aspects of Muslim identity as 'the ways people have found to navigate that [pathologising] and still identify with Islam [...] and make an active claim towards the faith'.<sup>149</sup> Yasmin's narration of her observations then suggested that Muslim identity was often expressed in institutionalised Muslim spaces through its outward distinction from whiteness and secularism. This manifested, she claimed, in making claims to Muslim identity through 'distancing yourself from particular ways of being in the world', which are dominantly coded as non-Muslim, Western, white, or secular. Yasmin expressed dismay that this way of claiming Muslim identity against dominant social identities often left little space for developing shared understandings of religious belief and practice.<sup>150</sup>

Much of the little space there is for discussions about religious belief and practice appears overshadowed by institutionalised habits of evaluating Muslims to determine "what kind" of Muslim they are. Ayesha explained that 'those external kind of gazes also impact the internal ideas we have about Islam and what kind of Muslim you are, what kind of practising you are, what kind of mosque you go to.' She described this experience of 'constantly looking at yourself through everybody else's eyes' as 'such an intimate violence'. She clarified this claim as referring to a kind of psychological violence, elaborating:

I honestly think there's levels of trauma, the effect that has on the psyche...I don't know, I think, historically, it's just such a tragic phenomenon.<sup>151</sup>

Yasmin similarly noted that the focus on evaluating "what kind of Muslim" one is makes it is hard to have the space to cultivate 'an understanding of what our religion is practically meant to do in the world' and 'how we as Muslims are supposed to show up in the world'.<sup>152</sup> In different ways, they both lamented that student Muslim spaces were being bordered off from religious and

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<sup>149</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>150</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>151</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>152</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

political discussion and from discussions about how religion and politics relate to one another. Ayesha explained the absence of such conversations by pointing to a fear of political organising among Muslim students, while Yasmin also pointed to a related fear of politicising Islam by thinking about political organising in Islamic terms.

Gesturing toward a fear of political organising among Muslim students, Ayesha explained that this fear is fostered by policies like Prevent and the consequences they threaten. Policies like this make the idea of engaging in political activism particularly frightening for Muslim students. Having worked with ISOCs across the country to provide education and raise awareness about Islamophobia, counter-terrorism, and Prevent, Ayesha said she senses that many groups do not take an active stance against counter-extremism on campus because they are ‘avoiding putting their heads above the parapet, avoiding being that problem [student] society’.<sup>153</sup> This lack of an active stance is often discussed in the realm of student politics as a question of, ‘Why are Muslims at university so apolitical?’. Ayesha, however, believes this framing ‘misses the mark’. Even ‘without doing anything overtly political’ and in just hosting ‘prayer rooms or student lists’, Ayesha explained, ISOCs face ‘so much surveillance’. When put in this context, she sees the lack of political organising as ‘not apathy’ but rather a consequence of having ‘been made to fear resistance before even beginning to resist’.<sup>154</sup>

A related but distinct fear outlined by Yasmin is that of being seen to engage in specifically ‘Islamic’ politics. She explained that this is a ‘fear around what political organising in this space [of ISOCs] could mean’. She understood this as a fear around collectively thinking about how Islam guides Muslims to engage with worldly politics. This is not only a fear of the consequences of resisting as Muslims – as Ayesha had described – but also fear of the potentially even more dangerous consequences of taking political action on specifically Islamic grounds. Accordingly, Yasmin noted, events organised by ISOCs are often limited to ‘specific identity concerns, like being Black in Muslim spaces’ or ‘Islamophobia Awareness’ or ‘Black History Month’. She explained:

For one thing, there’s no consensus around whether [political organising in this space] is acceptable or permissible in the deen. So that’s an important question. And then there’s the question around if we were to politically organise, what would it be for? And what would it be about?

Yasmin noted that because the space to discuss these questions is constrained by fear, a lot of ISOC activities end up being ‘oriented towards particular visions of charity [and] questions of

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<sup>153</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>154</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

[social] inclusion'. She added that while she thinks 'that's great' and she is 'not knocking it', there remains a different vision of engaging with the world through the religion's political prescripts that is precluded.<sup>155</sup> This constraining of the space for collectively thinking through the experience of being Muslim otherwise in religious and political terms struck me as a particularly intimate consequence of anti-Muslim surveillance. The constant awareness of what Ayesha described as the 'million scripts that you are being read through... as soon as you act, speak, breathe, and move' intervened not only on a Muslim individual's relationship with herself, but also her relationship with her religious community and her faith.<sup>156</sup>

Ayesha further expressed cynicism about gaining serious recognition for the ways in which anti-Muslim sentiment shapes intimate aspects of Muslim lives, including their sense of self and community. She explained: 'institutions don't understand this [experience], in particular, white academics and white people occupying those positions of power'. She elaborated:

You know, people want [Islamophobia] to be something very *touchable* and *tangible*. I think if we can just talk about surveillance and racism, or white supremacy, or colonial white supremacy as this thing that really, I think, limits the fullness of your ability to live. [...] I think that's just not seen as a legitimate kind of worry or concern, but I think that's probably the one that is most present for everybody.<sup>157</sup>

Ayesha thus showed how what she had described as 'intimate violence' and 'levels of trauma' would likely be confronted with a critical whiteness. Ayesha explained that 'it reveals something of the nature of how we're allowed to have resistance, that we're allowed to resist Islamophobia [only] on certain grounds'.<sup>158</sup> Claims about the intimate pain caused by anti-Muslim racism would likely come up against the expectation on the part of institutions, especially academic institutions steeped in notions of "objective" evidence-based knowledge, that valid problems must have discrete and tangible causes and symptoms. That is, pain must have lesions.

A tangled web emerged when I spoke with my interlocutors about any attempt to speak about being Muslim on terms that felt like theirs. As another interlocutor, Leila, pointed out to me, attempts at resisting reductive anti-Muslim narratives are also highly prone to co-optation by those same narratives. At the time of speaking with me, Leila was the director for projects regarding public education and the education sector at a non-profit organisation that aims to 'resist and change conditions that marginalise Muslim communities.' The non-profit Leila worked for at the time describes one of their objectives in their approach to tackling the

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<sup>155</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>156</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>157</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>158</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

inequalities faced by Muslim communities in the UK as fostering a climate wherein those who are marginalised can be ‘understood with all of their nuances’. Still, she spoke of a constant fear that stories about grassroots projects led by Muslims, especially Muslim women, would be co-opted to reproduce Othering narratives about them. For example, she spoke about one project she was involved in that aimed to increase accessibility to sports for Muslim girls and women who wear hijab, and to foster space for them to disrupt ‘assumptions and narratives’ about their ‘gender, racial and religious identities’ in ways that are ‘physical and creative’. Leila explained that with a project like this,

if we don’t [forefront our politics], then it will be co-opted, you know? Some random [person], like, a high up sports person is going to be like, “Look, whoa, [this project] has empowered the Muslim woman and got the Muslim woman out of the house and moving,” or, you know, these kinds of [reductive] narratives.<sup>159</sup>

Reflecting on the organisation’s concern with how Muslims are understood in the ‘public imagination’, Leila was conscious and cautious of the threat of a gaze that could claim more critical and intimate understanding of Muslim women than the nuanced understandings she set out to promote.

This haunting sense that stories about Muslim women could and likely would be interpreted through the dominant terms was also felt at a deeply personal level for Leila. She explained that she was hesitant about taking public facing roles in projects centring Muslim women, because she was conscious of how her own appearance would be perceived as particularly co-optable. She described herself as someone who ‘wouldn’t be visibly identified as a Muslim’ and who is ‘white passing’. She explained that someone might look at a project where she has a particularly visible role and say,

Those are progressive Muslims, they’re secular, they’re this, they’re that. If someone looks at it and thinks...whether they think I’m a convert or whether they think I’m white-passing or whatever, there’s a palatability there that I don’t think is helpful in the context of the existing issues.<sup>160</sup>

While working on projects that aimed to foster ways of self-perception for Muslim women that resisted the limitations of the Good Muslim / Bad Muslim, or in this case, Liberated Muslim Woman / Oppressed Muslim Woman binary, Leila was intimately conscious of how the dominant gaze could use her personal appearance to reduce the projects to these very binaries.

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<sup>159</sup> Interview 29, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>160</sup> Interview 29, January 2021, Zoom.

Her perception and performance of her own identity was then never separate from an instinctual awareness of the adaptive truths-for that her way of being could be used to “prove”.

The intimate pain that arises from lacking the space to cultivate a shared understanding of being Muslim then is made doubly painful for young Muslim women by the difficulty in making such a pain legible. The limitation of legitimate complaint to the most obvious types of anti-Muslim behaviour erases the more elusive intimate harm that Ayesha for example argued is ‘the most present for everybody’.<sup>161</sup> As Leila explained, even projects that create space for grappling with the less obvious consequences of anti-Muslim racism are extremely vulnerable to co-optation, that is, to being understood through the adaptive truth-for terms of the dominant genre.<sup>162</sup> In wrestling with this paradigm, my interlocutors expressed the intimate pains of an absence, that is, the absence of space for creating a relationship with oneself and one’s faith on terms that feel like one’s own. Precisely because this deeply felt pain refers to something that has been prevented from coming into being in the first place, a space intervened upon before even beginning to exist, it is also rendered invisible by ethico-cognitive tactics.

## **vi. ‘Trying to define the boundaries’ / ‘Going beyond the bounds’**

In different ways, my interlocutors attempted to create space for individual and collective exploration of being Muslim. They sought to do so in terms that do not feel externally imposed or constrained by dominant anti-Muslim understandings of what it means to be Muslim. This section juxtaposes and reflects on some of these attempts. At times, even the attempts to create such space struck me as oddly reflecting the anti-Muslim terms that limit space for exploring Muslimness. I present a conference on ‘Being Muslim’ as one such example. In other instances, where ethico-cognitive tactics are not reflected, they are also not completely evaded. I present a Muslim-created zine as an example of how the terms and tactics of the dominant genre can be refracted so as to redirect conversations about being Muslim elsewhere. In juxtaposing these two attempts at making space, my aim is to highlight what they have in common, whilst being motivated by different political concerns. In doing so, I attempt to avoid creating another Good Muslim / Bad Muslim boundary through my examples and analysis. At the same time, I also attempt to avoid homogenising my interlocutors in a way that might reductively suggest a uniform Muslim experience. The two examples I take up here both throw light on the boundaries that spaces created for imagining being Muslim in terms other than those of the dominant genre must confront. They thus render visible the intimate pain of feeling unable to

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<sup>161</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>162</sup> Interview 29, January 2021, Zoom

explore being Muslim ‘on our own terms’ and some of its secondary consequences. Still, those involved with creating these spaces make sense of and navigate the boundaries they confront in different ways. These differences attest to the range of politically distinct encounters between the dominant genre and attempts to imagine being Muslim otherwise.

### ***‘Trying to define the boundaries’***

My interlocutors confronted in different ways the lack of space for exploring ‘being Muslim’ and did so with differing motives. Nura for example pointed to a lack of space for Muslims to speak with each other about “contentious” issues as one of the ‘guiding motives’ for taking part in organising a one-day conference on ‘Being Muslim in the Modern University’. Nura, who expressed similar concerns as Yasmin and Ayesha with regards to the lack of space for conversations about how Islam relates to navigating present politics, argued that it was not state-backed institutional surveillance that obstructed such a space in the university. Rather, she made sense of this lack of space as a response to a different gaze of ‘social policing’. She presented this as the gaze of Muslims’ ‘progressive allies’ in the university. She explained that while she finds that ‘the Muslim student community’ has no problems with aligning with left-leaning student politics on issues such as challenging anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant policy, ‘people who are active in [the Muslim student community] and myself, have sometimes found it difficult to have non-progressive values and to be open about that’. From this observation she concluded, ‘if the Muslim community within Cambridge may feel discomfort, it is more coming from our allies in the left [than the University]’. Nura expressed that this is especially the case ‘with issues like gender and sexuality’, about which she thinks ‘there is need for a conversation, but there’s no room for a conversation within the institution’. In Nura’s description, the ‘left allies’ of Muslims appear as the most restrictive actors within the institutions, with the power to turn Muslims who disagree with their politics into ‘social pariahs’.<sup>163</sup> Therefore, while some of my interlocutors believe that a lack of space for making sense of ‘being Muslim’ amongst Muslim students is caused by fear of counter-extremism policy and the surveillance state, others believe that non-Muslim ‘left allies’ of Muslim students also restrict space for such conversations.

These two seemingly opposing explanations of restricted space, however, can be understood as having the same root cause. This is how Ayesha understood them and she explained it to me as such. Ayesha, who is used to speaking publicly about Islamophobia,

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<sup>163</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.

lamented not having room to speak honestly and in nuanced terms within Muslim spaces about topics of gender and queerness. She told me:

If I'm really candid, it's not something I feel comfortable to speak about publicly, because I just feel like there's too many different gazes that you're trying to... It's almost like, the way I imagine it is that you're trying to spit out a million things [but] you don't have time before those gazes consume and what you've said.

She thus described the feeling of needing to make so many qualifications before speaking that there is no room left to say what she would like to set out to say. Elaborating on this lack of space, Ayesha explained:

If you as a Muslim are disrupting this [gender] binary, [it is taken] almost as complacent, like you're playing into Islamophobia, because you're buying into like a secular liberal ideology. And there's no space to kind of talk about what is secularism, what is liberalism, [to ask] actually, is our construction of those things bound up with our construction of gender and gendered norms? And I think that that's something that frustrates me is just around not being able to have nuance.<sup>164</sup>

In this way, she presented Islamophobia and the limited options it creates for 'being Muslim' as one of the causes for this inability to hold and express nuanced beliefs. What I understood from Ayesha's framing of the problem is this: the anti-Muslim requirement for an intimate understanding of 'what kind of Muslim you are' in reductive terms is defensively mirrored in Muslim spaces through the demand to know whether you are 'playing into Islamophobia'.<sup>165</sup> Even in Muslim community spaces then, a Muslim can either be perceived as resisting 'Islamophobia' or 'playing into' it, as being "authentically" Muslim or "Westernised"/"secularised". It is difficult to question these binaries before being consumed by the demand to declare what kind of Muslim you are.

While drawing on different reasoning then, my interlocutors arrived at a shared conclusion that Muslims must find a way to make communal space for developing their sense of being Muslim through terms that feel like their own. Accordingly, the conference Nura co-organised aimed to indirectly address some of the "contentious" questions she had in mind indirectly. She recounted getting involved with organising the conference as such:

At the end of the first year I was here [at the university as a student], ISOC had a whole debate within itself about whether ISOC should be political. [...] If we take a stance that we are political, then we'd have to talk about issues where there might be strong contention within the community about what is the right position to take. And I think, certainly, progressive issues would have been one of those things that ISOC felt was debatable. And because [...] there is not room for these conversations where you can

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<sup>164</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>165</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

openly share any view and get away with it, right? The modern university certainly isn't like that. That doesn't mean within the Muslim student community these questions [went] away, they existed. [...] And we thought, well, can we potentially raise these issues, without raising them directly?

Nura believed that facilitating space for Muslim students specifically to discuss questions of gender and sexuality was important because, she argued, if the broader student union were to organise such a space, 'the Muslim community isn't going to turn up to that [and] it is the Muslim community that needs to have the conversation'. Nura then concluded that by facilitating discussions about Islamic epistemology and how it may guide the experience of being Muslim in the university, the conference could present 'some ways of thinking about various issues' without taking these issues head-on.<sup>166</sup>

Still, even efforts to create space for conversations amongst Muslims about what it means to be Muslim can repurpose some of the ritualistic utterances I described in the previous chapter as ethico-cognitive tactics of whiteness. For example, it struck me that some of Nura's reasoning for wanting to facilitate such a space was reminiscent of a type of utterance I attribute to the tactic of dismissive whiteness. Nura told me that the lack of space for Muslims to express "anti-LGBTQ" views also amounts to a lack of space for 'LGBTQ Muslims' to speak about queerness with fellow Muslims or 'within Muslim communities'. She explained:

We shouldn't just look at it from the point of view of [how] Muslims who disagree with these positions don't have a room to speak. If you don't give *them* a room to speak, it also means within Muslim communities, LGBTQ Muslims also don't have a room to speak. So, these are I believe, interconnected issues at which point LGBTQ Muslims, and through no fault of their own, then end up speaking in more hospitable left spaces, left ally spaces. That's fine, but then they're speaking to a converted crowd. [...] The problem again [is that] within liberal spaces, like the university, the pushback isn't coming from the right, it isn't coming from necessarily religious Muslims having a meltdown.

I understand Nura's reasoning as suggesting that queer Muslims are gravitating toward left non-Muslim allies of Muslims, because of the lack of opportunity to speak to 'their own' community. This framing struck me as repurposing the trope of loud misled white allies to dismiss the concerns of LGBTQ Muslims as having been presented to the wrong audience. As discussed in the previous chapter, administrators implementing Prevent often dismissed criticism of Prevent in universities as baseless and "inauthentic" by attributing such criticism exclusively to 'loud white allies' who do not really know anything about the racism they purport to contest. Here, in Nura's reasoning, the spectre of 'loud white allies' dismissed criticism of and complaints

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<sup>166</sup> Interview 27, November 2020, Zoom.



homophobia by suggesting that the concerns of 'LGBTQ Muslims' were only being voiced to the already 'converted crowd' of 'left allies'. As in the discourse of dismissive whiteness then, "white left allies" seem to function as a red herring here. In the former instance, the trope of white allies explained away the possibility of anti-Muslim racism within a liberal higher education institution; in the latter, it dismissed the concerns of queer Muslims as not having been voiced yet 'within Muslim communities', to an "authentic" audience.

At the 'Being Muslim in the Modern University' conference, which I had attended before speaking with Nura for my research, I witnessed other ways in which Muslim efforts to define 'being Muslim' within Muslim communities can echo counter-extremist efforts to do so. The event was a buzzing space – a large lecture hall was packed with Muslim scholars and students from across the country, some who had travelled for hours on the train to spend their Saturday sharing this space. One speaker (henceforth, the scholar) especially struck me as mirroring what I have described as tactics of critical, caring and dismissive whiteness. The scholar, a renowned white Muslim professor of Islam, spoke to his concern about young Muslims who feel alienated in not just the university, but in "the West" generally. This was presented as a caring expression of concern about young Muslims' experiences of alienation during their education in "the West". Shoring up his authority as a scholar, he argued that if we think critically about this alienation, we can see that it is 'only natural'. It is natural, he contended, not because of anti-Muslim structures such as counter-extremism generally and Prevent in universities specifically, and rather because of the inherent out of placeness of Muslims in "the West." The scholar then stated in a dismissive tone that 'unsurprisingly', feelings of alienation are less likely to occur in Muslim-majority countries where 'you don't have kids in school being taught about non-binary gender and homosexuality'.<sup>167</sup> Here, the scholar was referring to the 2019 protests by Muslim parents of students at Birmingham schools where the students were receiving 'LGBT equality' lessons as part of their curriculum. He did not mention that these lessons were being offered as part of a counter-extremism programme that de facto serve to alienate Muslims in the UK.<sup>168</sup> With no mention of the alienating political force driving these lessons, the scholar thus insisted that young Muslims feel alienated in the UK because they 'naturally' belong outside of 'the West,' where they supposedly do not have to learn about ways of being that 'don't exist' among "authentic" Muslims.<sup>169</sup> With a few phrases, the speaker reproduced the limited understanding of 'being Muslim' as being the foreign Other of "the West" and its dominant ethnoclass.

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<sup>167</sup> Field notes, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>168</sup> For an insightful critical engagement with the Birmingham schools protests, see: [Khan 2021](#)

<sup>169</sup> Field notes, November 2019, Cambridge.

The scholar's understanding of why young Muslims feel alienated in "the West" oddly mirrored the explanation offered by discourses of educational counter-extremism. His presentation exemplified how Muslim-led efforts to define the "authentic" Muslim too can echo the counter-extremist definition of 'being Muslim'. The framing of educational counter-extremism presents young Muslims in the UK as "vulnerable" to dangerous "black and white" thinking due to "identity confusion", and the scholar presented Muslim students as "vulnerable" to "un-Islamic" thinking due to their being inherently out of place in "the West". These claims share two underlying assumptions. Firstly, they assume that young Muslims are uniquely and dangerously "vulnerable" to the sinister influence of incorrect ways of thinking. Second, they assume that this unique vulnerability is caused by the supposedly inevitable or "natural" Otherness of Muslims in "the West". To grasp the ways in which these discourses mirror one another, consider how the scholar invoked a (racist) assumption of policies like Prevent – that young Muslims are "naturally" inclined toward "extremist" intolerance, like homophobic beliefs. Educational counter-extremism policies mobilise this homonationalist assumption to mark Muslims as out of place vis à vis "progressive" values and present them as needing to be educated in such values.<sup>170</sup> In the scholar's assumptions about 'being Muslim', queerness and acceptance of it is similarly misattributed to "the West", its dominant ethnoclass and the latter's way of thinking and being. This understanding presents being not queer and unaccepting of queerness as necessary characteristics of the "authentic" Muslim; according to the scholar, authentic Muslims see queerness as foreign and feel out of place in "the West" because of the prevalence of queerness and its inclusion in their education. This understanding also disappears the inauthentic Other, the figure of the queer Muslim, whose very existence may trouble the habit of understanding being Muslim in "the West" only through its supposed differences with characteristics attributed to the dominant ethnoclass. Like the understanding embedded in educational counter-extremism, the scholar's understanding of 'being Muslim' was mediated through the dominant ethico-cognitive white gaze. 'Being Muslim' was understood to mean being an Other of whiteness and the ethical values dominantly associated with its way of knowing.

At the conference, there was a curiously silent consent to this scholar's discourse, my own heavy silence included. As I listened to the scholar, I was aware that a number of people in the room full of critical academics did not share his understanding of 'being Muslim' and some

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<sup>170</sup> Homonationalism refers to the ideological imagination that "the West" has progressed beyond the unique and "backwards" homophobia of its "uncivilised" others (Puar 2017). For an elucidation of the developmental temporality assumed by this paradigm, see also: Rao 2020.

would strongly oppose this underhanded homophobic and racist view in other contexts. Yet, no one raised their voice to oppose it. I later spoke to Yasmin who had also attended the conference about the event, and she expressed that she had felt the silence too. She told me:

I think that's part of the way that Muslim spaces are constructed – there's an expectation that you'll self-police. [...] There's an implicit kind of acceptance, a consent that's being asked of the straight individuals and a silence that's being asked of the queer individuals in [the room]. It's kind of like, wink, wink, nudge, nudge, we're on the same team. And for everybody who's not, well get yourself together.<sup>171</sup>

While I cannot speak to the reasons of others' silence, Yasmin's sense-making resonated with my own reasons for keeping quiet. I felt in that moment that to have raised my hand and expressed a critique would have outed me as queer and worse, would have consequently revoked my access to the space as an "authentic" Muslim.<sup>172</sup> Yasmin noted a feeling that across the panels, there were 'conversations that were trying to define the boundaries implicitly around who the Muslim student in the university was'.<sup>173</sup> Ayesha, who has a lot of experience with participating in events aimed at discussing the experience of 'being Muslim' and of anti-Muslim sentiment, noted that this kind of boundary-setting around the "real" Muslim 'is an issue' and 'it's one of perhaps the most troubling ones in terms of long term'.<sup>174</sup>

Yasmin's observations show that drawing the boundaries of 'being Muslim' in this way also maintains the dominant habit of understanding Muslimness through a set of abstract ideas about how Muslims think. The theorisation of being Muslim was mainly executed by speakers at the conference through contrasting how Muslims think with the epistemological norms of a 'modern and secular university'.<sup>175</sup> Yasmin observed that theorising 'being Muslim' in this way, with an exclusive focus on how Muslims think, misses out on 'fleshing out the human being within that'. She elaborated:

Muslim [students] are embodied human beings who are attached to particular kinds of ideas that might be in conflict with one another and [they] need a way to talk about those things so that they can make sense of it, make peace with some of the resolutions that they've made, and make repentance for the ones that they're just not at peace with. That's what needs to happen. But the [conference] space wasn't amenable to that.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>172</sup> Field notes, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>173</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

<sup>174</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>175</sup> Field notes, November 2019, Cambridge.

<sup>176</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

The dominant way of understanding ‘being Muslim’, which I have presented as characteristic to the ethico-cognitive genre, pays no mind to Muslims as living human beings with nuanced interiority, and leaves no space for imagining ‘being Muslims’ otherwise.

Nonetheless, the conference is also instructive with regards to how Muslim-led conversations about ‘being Muslim’ can disrupt ethico-cognitive norms. At the same time as noting some of its limitations, Yasmin praised the conference for pushing her to think of being Muslim beyond ‘a social identity’. She recalled that she was most interested throughout the event in an idea alluded to by several speakers – that the way in which ‘an individual Muslim should show up in the university space [...] isn’t just about Muslim as a particular additional identifier.’ She explained:

you know, like, I’m Black, and I’m Muslim, and I’m a woman. But that [being Muslim] actually is not an additional identifier but instead is a totalizing kind of way of understanding your life. [...] It was a fantastic experience because it started me asking a lot of questions that I felt like I needed to start asking for my individual faith, to start coming to terms with the fact that, you know, it’s not a social identity in the same way. I needed to build some more interiority.

As an example of how the conference facilitated her thinking about being Muslim beyond an additional social identifier, Yasmin noted that the conference was ‘one of the first academic events that I’ve ever been to that had prayer times scheduled into the event’. There were also specific rooms prepared for prayer in the building the conference took place in. This thoughtful feature of the conference incited Yasmin’s thinking about Muslimness as a ‘totalising’ way of *being* that encompasses a way of knowing and interacting with the world as embodied beings.<sup>177</sup> In this thoughtful feature of the conference, Yasmin glimpsed the making of space for the ontological experience of being Muslim. Glimpsing such a space surprised her. Her surprise is indicative of the extent to which embedding time and space for prayer into the schedule of a conference unsettles the institution’s sedimented habit of setting the bounds of Muslimness exclusively through how ‘they’ think and through contrast with the ways of thinking and being associated with the “the West” and its dominant white ethnoclass.

### **‘Going beyond the bounds’**

To consider ‘being Muslim’ in terms that unsettle the dominantly institutionalised ones requires then moving against and beyond the habit of reducing Muslimness to ‘how Muslims think’.

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<sup>177</sup> Interview 26, January 2021, Zoom.

Ayesha, like Yasmin, also spoke with me about the importance of considering the embodied lives of Muslims. This is especially necessary, she explained, for making sense of ‘being Muslim’ in the context of an environment that is hostile to this way of being. Having seen Ayesha perform poetry about the psychological strain of being ‘always already’ construed as Other, I asked her to expand on this line of thinking. Building on what she described as ‘the trauma’ of constantly perceiving oneself through the dominant gaze and being bound by its reductive narratives, she explained:

there have been real moments where I’ve had to in a very embodied way acknowledge that, okay, my body is not coping with all of this violence that I’m aware of, and resisting.

She described living in a state of constantly being watched and assessed as a Muslim woman as physically ‘unsustainable’ – ‘we can’t keep up with this level of hyper vigilance’. She added, ‘I’m a person with a body too, a person with a heart and with emotions’.<sup>178</sup> She thus motioned to the necessity of thinking about being Muslim as an embodied experience, and one that in this state of constant surveillance requires healing. Unlike the expertise underlying educational approaches to counter-extremism and its echoes in the statement of the scholar at the above-discussed conference, Ayesha did not present young Muslims in “the West” as “vulnerable” to dangerous ways of thinking and therefore as requiring educational care. Rather, she presented them as having been harmed in psychological and embodied ways and therefore as requiring healing. She explained that she sees state violence as a major cause of physical and mental health issues amongst Muslims and noted that ‘it’s such a tricky situation, because you can’t heal apart from state violence, but you also can’t end state violence to then be healed’. From Ayesha’s articulation, we can see that one advantage of remembering that ‘being Muslim’ is an embodied experience is that this in turn illuminates that ‘healing is essential’.<sup>179</sup> It is essential because of ongoing state violence against Muslims and all-pervasive surveillance of them and for the sake of sustaining resistance against these forces.

This need for healing, therefore, need not lead to counter-extremist prescriptions of care that individualise Muslim experiences of harm caused by institutionalised racism and state violence. For example, Ayesha explained that one benefit of large-scale student campaigns against Prevent (such as, the 2015 NUS Students Not Suspects campaign<sup>180</sup>) has been their ability to act ‘as a reminder’ that state violence and surveillance work to ‘remove hope’ and ‘exhaust us,

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<sup>178</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>179</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>180</sup> See NUS Campaign page: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/preventing-prevent-we-are-students-not-suspects>

remove our energy'. She finds this kind of public reminder useful, because it 'denaturalises' the feelings caused by state violence and surveillance and makes it clear that the source of these feelings is not an individual shortcoming – 'it's like, well we're not just exhausted for no reason; there is a concerted effort here'. She explained that learning 'more over the years about Islam' has also helped her make sense of the need for healing, elaborating:

Islam is inherently holistic, you know, you can't serve others if you're not serving yourself. You can't seek justice in the world if you're not being just. And the first justice that is talked about in Islam is justice of the soul; are you being just to your soul, fulfilling the rights of your soul, the rights that the world has upon you and that you have upon it?

Clearly conscious of the dominance of individualistic and individualising ethics of care, Ayesha added: 'I don't want to separate it out. It's not like heal yourself and heal the world. It's just, those two things have to be in tandem.' She highlighted this 'tricky situation' as an area that Muslim communities need to consider more thoroughly, adding that 'there's a deprivation of imagination right now' with regards to the topic of healing.<sup>181</sup> In contrast to educational approaches to counter-extremism that present Muslim individuals as "vulnerable" to extremist thinking due to a lack of critical cognitive capacity, Ayesha highlighted the need to think creatively about addressing individual suffering without erasing its systemic causes.

The language of healing and recovery is frequently called upon in grassroots spaces created by and for young Muslims more generally. For example, the Khidr Collective, 'a UK-based multidisciplinary arts collective which curates and platforms the work of Muslim artists',<sup>182</sup> themed the second issue of its zine 'the Shifaa' Issue', meaning, the healing issue. The very title of the Khidr Collective, in its reference to the character of Khidr, troubles the terms of the dominant ethico-cognitive genre. The latter maps out degrees of being human through a developmental scale from those who are less than fully human because of their underdeveloped cognition and those who are fully human and therefore cognitively superior and ethically obliged to care for and improve the cognition of the less developed. In contrast, the character of Khidr recalls a different kind of distinction between ways of knowing that is not based on a hierarchy of being human and is rather based on the will of God.

The Collective presents the story of the prophet Moses and Khidr<sup>183</sup> as a reminder of a different kind of distinction between types of knowledge. The Collective's introduction of the

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<sup>181</sup> Interview 28, November 2020, Zoom.

<sup>182</sup> See Khidr Collective's 'About us' page of the collective: <https://www.khidrcollective.co.uk/about-us>

<sup>183</sup> The Collective narrates the story as such: 'On a journey of divine testing, Moses witnesses this wise man commit acts that he cannot understand. So he jumps to accuse him of sinning, only to learn that

character of Khidr notes that Khidr's story speaks to a distinction between worldly human knowledge and 'a special kind of knowledge endowed directly from God, *'ilm ladunni*' (Akhtar n.d.). The distinction emphasised is then between 'the boundless knowledge of God' and the bounded nature of human knowledge (Akhtar n.d.). The collective's account of the story notes:

For the modern man [sic] —or specifically the modern Muslim— [Khidr] reminds us, as he did Moses, that in a society which seeks *to know and define everything* with a sense of arrogance towards knowledge and faith, we in fact know very little (Akhtar n.d. my emphasis).

By de-naturalising the urge 'to know and define everything', this recasting of the story of Khidr speaks to and against the social impetus toward knowing and defining Muslimness in narrow terms that my interlocutors spoke of and lamented. I spoke to one of the editors of the Khidr Collective's *Shifaa*' Issue, Halima, who explained to me,

I think a big part of this issue [of the Zine] and all the issues is always about reimagining the future, and going beyond the bounds which we feel society has created for our communities.<sup>184</sup>

The Collective's work presents an approach to creating a space for 'being Muslim' that resists the urge to know and pin down definitions of Muslimness. Instead, the stated aim is to imagine a space 'beyond'.

The Editor's Note in the *Shifaa*' issue also undermines the understanding of care embedded in the dominant ethico-cognitive genre, which I have presented in the previous chapters as rooted in a white cognitive dominion (Chapter III) and as perpetuated through the tactic of caring whiteness (Chapter IV). This dominant ethic of care, I have argued, aims to "domesticate" humankind by "improving" how Others think and thereby reducing their "vulnerability" to unethical behaviour. In practice, this ethic erases how harm is perpetuated. It promotes a cure that targets individuals' way of thinking, problematising this latter instead of institutionalised sources of harm. By contrast, the Editor's Note of the *Shifaa*' issue argues that we live in a historical moment where,

mental health is hurled around as a buzzword, divorced from politics and the way our societies are governed, which so often shapes our individual and communal well-being.

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each act has an inner truth, which the human intellect is unable to appreciate.' (Akhtar n.d.). See the page 'About Khidr' on the collective's website: <https://www.khidrcollective.co.uk/about-khidr>

<sup>184</sup> Interview 30, November 2020, Zoom.

Alongside our personal struggles, we are confronted with structures of power that invalidate the suffering of vulnerable folk in a variety of violent ways (Akhtar 2018).

This reframing of care and healing challenges the naturalisation of Muslim feelings of alienation in the UK. Bad feeling, the Editor argues, is linked to ‘cycles of suppression’. The latter make it necessary to find a way to ‘re-focus healing’, both for ‘collective survival’ and for ‘encouraging our communities to flourish [...] in the face of injustice’ (Akhtar 2018). By highlighting the link between injustice and the need for care, the latter is posited against its adaptive truth-for meaning in the dominant genre. In the dominant genre, care is understood as a process of improving how vulnerable Others think so that they may become more resilient to “extremist” thinking. This adaptive truth-for upholds the hierarchical distinction between the dominant ethnoclass and its vulnerable cognitive others. The *Shifaa*’ issue presents care and healing instead as processes of ‘restoring’ or ‘recovering’ (Akhtar 2018) in face of societal harm. This latter understanding upholds a vision of vulnerability as collectively reproduced by the ‘bounds society has created’ and ‘the way our societies are governed’ (Akhtar 2018). Care is directed not toward some inherently vulnerable Other. Care is directed towards those *made* vulnerable by state surveillance, violence, and neglect.

Halima presented the *Shifaa*’ issue as both a response to ‘the daily trauma that young Muslims are carrying’ and to ‘a blanket way’ of conceptualising mental health. She explained:

I think in the last five to 10 years, the concept of mental health has really become quite popularised in Western societies, [while] really not acknowledging the role of societal structures on mental health. [...] So, you know, you’re talking about mental health awareness, but not acknowledging the fact of the stress of day to day life and how increasing poverty in this country is going to have an effect particularly on migrant communities and people of colour.

She recalled that the *Shifaa*’ issue was being putting together around the time of the Grenfell Tower fire,<sup>185</sup> and that this event felt like ‘a climax of just how many people are suffering in this country’. She added that ‘there was just the collective sense that a lot of people were looking for answers and suffering and finding it hard to put it out there’. She recalled a desire within the editorial collective to ‘have more open, honest conversation about the societal intersections that

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<sup>185</sup> For context: ‘The atrocity that struck the Lancaster West Estate in the early hours of 14 June 2017 was one of the most deadly preventable disasters in recent British history. From a simple refrigerator malfunction, a fire began which would turn Grenfell Tower, a 24-storey block built as social housing between 1972 and 1974, into a ‘burnt matchbox in the sky’ (Okri). At least 72 from Grenfell Tower were killed and at least 70 were injured.’ (Bulley, Edkins, and El-Enany 2019, xii).



can affect their mental health'. With the fire at Grenfell Tower dramatising the horror of institutionalised neglect, Halima also indicated a desire for 'acknowledging the daily trauma' that may seem more mundane and that young Muslims deal with regularly in encountering hostile institutions and institutionalised hostility. She described 'simply putting on the news and hearing their faith... how pretty much every day there's something to be said [about it]' as an example of 'the daily struggles' and hostility young Muslims encounter.<sup>186</sup> Halima's contextualisation of the *Shifaa*' issue thus rooted the need to imagine ways of healing within the historical and social specificity of the harms at hand. She pointed to the need to understand the need for Muslim healing in the context of constant social and economic harms faced by Muslims in the country on the one hand and the erasure of the link between racism and mental health in popular discourse on the other hand.

The Collective's vision for linking mental health problems with the structures that exacerbate them can be seen vividly in one piece in the zine, which Halima pointed to as her favourite. The piece, a photo essay titled 'Healing Hands' by Sana Badri, shows a series of photos focused on hands – hands washing a child's hair, hands putting on another's nails, hands playing an instrument, hands playing a community game. The first passage of the photo essay reads:

We've all heard them or read them. Tales of miraculous moments where a person bestowed with special favours from God or nature lays their hands on the afflicted and relieves them of their pain and suffering. Stories about healers allow people to hold on to hope for a better future (Badri 2018, 70).

The text accompanying the next photo, however, shifts from the miraculous to the mundane, or the miraculous in the mundane. Badri writes, 'Although healing does not happen that way for us, it's no less miraculous that we survive the world with the odds stacked against us so cruelly' (Badri 2018, 71). Badri describes the stacked odds encountered in the 'daily grind to pay rent and make ends meet, to hold our loved ones and make the best of time as it passes by us' (2018, 71). She describes these 'seemingly mundane tasks' as no less miraculous, insofar as through them, 'we heal ourselves and each other' (Badri 2018, 71). In reflecting on Badri's piece, Halima told me that the editorial collective wanted to highlight 'those mundane acts' that remind us daily 'that actually for people of colour and Muslim communities, the odds are stacked against every dollar returned to you'. Halima carefully clarified that the Collective's intention was not 'to

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<sup>186</sup> Interview 30, November 2020, Zoom.

romanticise' an ideal of resilience within oppressed communities. Rather, she explained, the aim was to 'capture the sense that it's a unique time we were living in'.<sup>187</sup>

Consideration of the zine and of Halima's reflections on it shows what a space for young Muslims' healing might look like. In contrast to what Yasmin observed at the conference as an effort to 'define the boundaries' around being Muslim, the Khidr Collective's zine presents itself as a space for moving beyond the narrow boundaries that delimit understandings of Muslimness. The scholar at the conference space echoed the counter-extremist effort to correct how "naturally" alienated and therefore "vulnerable" Muslims in "the West" think. In contradistinction, Halima described the Collective's zine as a space for grappling with the social context that shapes difficult and alienating experiences of being Muslim in the UK. Badri's piece thought-provokingly presents the struggles of daily life as miraculous acts of survival and healing in the face of socially structured vulnerability, instead of framing them as individual vulnerability to sinister influences on how one thinks. A space for healing then need not acquiesce to narrow boundaries that reduce being Muslim to being the cognitive Other of the dominant ethnoclass.

## **VI. Reaching for the sociogenic principle**

So far, I have shown how even in the intimacy of their friendships, spaces of Muslim community discussion, and their own internal exploration of their faith, my interlocutors struggled to articulate 'being Muslim' without feeling trapped by a counter-extremist gaze. At times, even attempts to navigate and escape the bounds of this gaze reproduce the tactics that maintain these bounds. This last section of the chapter reflects on one poem in the Khidr Collective's *Shifaa'* issue that speaks particularly well to the concerns raised by my interlocutors about the lack of space to imagine themselves and their being Muslim in terms that felt like theirs. I present an analysis of this poem with the constraints my interlocutors pointed to and the ethico-cognitive tactics of whiteness that I have identified in mind. I show how the poem challenges these constraints and the tactics that create them. The poem, I argue, elucidates a route toward resisting the over-representation of the dominant genre. My analysis of the poem therefore illuminates some ways in which the over-represented genre of being human and its construction of Otherness can be unsettled.

The poem is titled 'Funeral of the "Authentic" Muslim Woman', by Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan. It is a eulogy for the essentialising trope of the Authentic Muslim Woman, beginning with:

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<sup>187</sup> Interview 30, November 2020, Zoom.

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to bury the memory of the one who never was  
who was written by others  
made for others  
and imposed on us.  
Today, let us stamp on her grave and the world she was made to hold us in  
(Manzoor-Khan 2018, 63)

Immediately at its start, the poem presents the trope of the “authentic Muslim woman” as oppressive, because it was ‘imposed on’ Muslim women. More importantly, the poem presents this trope as socially created and reproduced, and thereby denaturalises it: it was ‘written by others’. That which the poem contests, crucially, is not the others who wrote this trope into being, but rather the trope itself, which has gained a life of its own. This framing of the problem pre-empts a response of caring whiteness, which might be to individually distance oneself from the perpetuation of the trope. What is required and called for is more difficult than a personal ethic of non-racism, which may include ‘unlearning’ Othering perceptions that perpetuate harm. The personified target of the poem, the Authentic Muslim Woman, points to a broader organising principle that must be unsettled, because this principle gives such tropes a life of their own. That is, the poem targets the socio-politically instituted impetus to define and assess “what kind of Muslim” each encountered Muslim is.

Whereas securing the dominant ethnoclass relies on tactics and adaptive truth-for terms that naturalise or erase the social (re)production of racial difference, the poem pushes back against this process of ‘unseeing’.<sup>188</sup> Throughout the poem, the trope of the Authentic Muslim Woman is contrasted with stanzas that list different experiences of being Muslim, alluding to the ways in which Muslim women are constantly examined and assessed to determine ‘what kind of Muslim’ they are. At the same time, the poem repeatedly rejects this impetus to evaluate in order to hierarchise different ways of being Muslim. For example, one stanza reads:

This is for the women who have been spat at for their faith  
had people cross the road over their faith  
had people fill buses with hate over their faith  
and the ones not noted as connected on the bus  
the overlooked-as-ones, the asked-if-they’re-drinkers  
the drinkers  
(Manzoor-Khan 2018, 64)

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<sup>188</sup> I take this phrase from Ali’s article (2020), which similarly critiques the ways in which counter-extremism’s racialising effect is erased.

Most stanzas begin with the phrase ‘this is for’ and dedicate the poem and ‘the funeral’ to all Muslim women, regardless of how they may be evaluated. The funeral called forth by the poem thus presents the constant assessment of Muslim women through narratives that precede them as the source of harm experienced by Muslim women. In staging a funeral for the Authentic Muslim Woman, the poem calls for an end to ‘the world she was made to hold us in’ (Manzoor-Khan 2018, 65). The poem therefore offers something akin to what Fanon describes as a true ‘situational diagnosis’ (Fanon [1952] 1988, 10). Unlike the purpose of ‘complex thinking’ in educational counter-extremism, which is the prevention of “extremist” violence, the purpose of pointing to complexity in this poem is to reveal violence, to enable the reader to see it. The point then is to illuminate the governing sociogenic principle that fosters institutionalised harm. The violence of being spat at, the threat of violence that makes one cross the road – these are presented as tied up with the ethico-cognitive surveillance imperative of sorting Muslim women into narrow categories so that they may be rendered ‘knowable’ and assessed in ethical terms.

In contrast, the poem presents its knowledge and elucidation of the social reproduction of the surveillance gaze and its consequences as openings for care and comfort. After multiple stanzas that list all the Muslim women the poem and its funeral are dedicated to, the poem concludes:

When two hands reach out to offer us either  
victimhood, or the total refusal of it  
May we find comfort in our own hands  
May we find comfort in the space between our hands  
where cameras never flash and stories do not weave themselves  
(Manzoor-Khan 2018, 64)

Against the dominant dichotomies that Muslimness is “understood” through – Good Muslim / Bad Muslim; Vulnerable Muslim Woman / Empowered Muslim Woman; et cetera – the speaker of the poem suggests that ‘we’ need not understand ourselves by choosing between essentialising and narrowly bound definitions of being Muslim. The prayer for finding ‘comfort in our own hands’ is more than a call for claiming agency. It is a call to reject the ways of ‘being Muslim’ that the dominant genre has on offer. The poem thus invites imagination of being Muslim beyond the terms determined by the dominant genre of being. The comfort the speaker of the poem prays for appears contingent on making the governing sociogenic principle visible. To ‘find comfort in our own hands’, we must see how the social demand to pick one of the identities on offer, to choose between being one rigidly defined type of Muslim or another, to choose for

example to be identified with ‘either victimhood, or the total refusal of it’, perpetuates anti-Muslim harm.

Reading this poem alongside the conversations with my interlocutors makes visible the functioning of the governing sociogenic principle of ethico-cognition and its consequences. In turn, Wynter’s concept of the governing sociogenic principle enables us to make sense of the restrictive force of racialising surveillance and its occupation of the most intimate space of being – our intimate senses of self. Wynter presents her conceptualisation as an extension of Fanon’s thought on socioegny, which she presents as an extension of the thinking of Dubois on double consciousness. Sociogeny, as Wynter understands it, provides an ‘explanatory cause of this “double consciousness”’ (Wynter 1999, 2), that is, of experiencing oneself as being both human and less than human, ‘as being both norm and Other’ (Wynter 1999, 22). Dubois, who wrote enthusiastically after the Universal Races Congress about the potential for experts to finally refute any *scientific* basis of inherent or ‘biological’ hierarchical racial difference, was of course acutely aware of the power of the cultural foundation of ‘the colour line’. He observed how ‘the white world’ around him restricted his being and ensured that he was ‘kept within bounds’, writing then that

All this made me limited in physical movement and provincial in thought and dream. I could not stir, I could not act, I could not live, without taking into careful daily account the reaction of my white environing world (Dubois [1940] 2007, 135–36).

Fanon’s explanatory concept of sociogeny gives reason to this experience of perceiving that one’s subjective (or in Wynter’s terms, ‘first-person’) experience is almost wholly determined by an external ‘third-person’ perspective that seems to fix objective truths about one’s being (Wynter 1999). Dubois’s account then, of the inability to think, act, move, and even *dream* ‘without taking into careful daily account the reaction of [the] white environing world’ is explained by Wynter’s understanding of Fanon’s sociogeny as such: all ‘first-person’ or subjective experiences will ‘law-likely function’ according to the perspective of the dominant ethnoclass, in this case, bourgeois white man (Wynter 1999). This chapter has been informed by these theorists of race and Blackness in making sense of how the intimacies of surveillance racialise Muslims. I have highlighted then that which is pre-empted for young Muslims in their experience of feeling like there is no space for being Muslim or making sense of being Muslim whilst feeling always watched through another’s gaze and ‘always already’ evaluated in ethico-cognitive terms. In the case of ‘being Muslim’ in the UK, religious sense-making is almost entirely overdetermined by racialisation. There is little space for young Muslims to navigate their/our religious beliefs in face of an onslaught of racialising anti-Muslim narratives and structures.

The over-representation of the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man and its racialisation of Muslims as vulnerable cognitive subjects that require constant monitoring and evaluation prevents the intimate space to imagine being Muslim in terms other than being a racial Other. This explanation is deepened by Wynter's concept of the governing sociogenic principle, which shows that the dominant ethnoclass' perspective is instituted as if it were the only perspective through an organising principle that ensures the genre of being human associated with the ethnoclass is over-represented as the only way of being (fully) human. The sociogenic principle, in Wynter's terms, is the overall organising logic of a culture that ensures

a genre-specific regime / program of truth will law-likely function to semantically-neurochemically induce the performative enactment of our ensemble of always already role- allocated individual and collective behaviours (Wynter 2015, 32–33).

The governing sociogenic principle of ethico-cognition institutes an impetus for the dominant ethno-class to claim its better knowledge of what it is like to be Muslim vis à vis how 'they' (Muslims) know 'themselves'. This impetus is intertwined with the socially instituted drive to "improve" the cognition of "vulnerable" Muslims so that they may think in better ways and thus act more ethically. The art and conversations discussed in this chapter illuminate how this impetus creates among young Muslim women a suffocating sense of having no space to imagine their being Muslim, and thus their selves, on terms that feel like theirs.

In conclusion, this chapter presents the following insights regarding the experience of and resistance to the harm caused by the intimacies of surveillance. Efforts to resist the dominant anti-Muslim terms for understanding 'being Muslim' sometimes rely on drawing the bounds for "our own" notions of being "authentically" Muslim. These attempts seem to merely mirror the evaluative impetus of counter-extremism by echoing its imagination of Muslimness as the Other of the dominant ethnoclass. However, the genre of being imposed by the governing sociogenic principle is not totalising. The poem discussed here demonstrates one way of imagining Muslimness without flattening it into an ahistoric imaginary of the Other of "the West". The poem's imagination of being Muslim allows for the confusion and messiness of being embodied humans who are also the favoured target of a hostile surveillance gaze that seeks to assess the "vulnerability" of Muslims in accordance with the extent of their assumed "identity confusion". A healing comfort may be found in refusing the premise that confusion and uncertainty make Muslims risky/at risk and that to be perceived as "safe" they/we must assert their/our certainty in "what kind of Muslim" they/we are. This premise is how the ethico-cognitive genre restricts space for imagining Muslimness. By making this restrictive force visible as a source of harm, young Muslims create space for imagining 'being Muslim' otherwise.



## VI. Conclusion

[...] a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors, and ‘bewilderers’ separate the exploited from those in power. – *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon [1961] 2021)

The idea for this project began with the following puzzle: how had anti-Muslim counter-extremism become integrated into higher education institutions, despite the latter’s proclaimed secular liberal commitments to advancing “better” ways of understanding the world? As the dissertation has shown, this question is saturated with assumptions that need to be questioned in themselves. In sum, these are assumptions that erase the bewildering role of education in liberal secular society. By questioning these assumptions, I have shown that it was not *despite* but rather *through* existing ethical commitments within higher education that counter-extremism has become embedded therein. Similarly, it is through already common beliefs about the work of education that education has become embedded in counter-extremism globally. Looking closely at the terms of the alliance between education and counter-extremism has also elucidated an important third corner of this puzzle: the role played by psychological expertise on improving the vulnerable mind of Others in the formation of counter-extremism. Together, liberal belief about education and psychological expertise on “vulnerability” to extremism shape an ethic of care that is characteristic of a broader ethic or way of being, that of the genre of ethico-cognitive Man. In tracing the features of this ethic and its concomitant ethic of care, this dissertation has demonstrated how one genre of being human is over-represented as if it were the only way of being so. In other words, it shows the principle through which racism operates to institute whiteness as the fully human norm and being Muslim as one of its less human Others. This is the principle of ethico-cognition, which contends that whiteness entails a cognitive superiority and thus an ethical duty to develop and improve the minds of Others, as if it owned the latter. The main contribution of this dissertation is therefore the elucidation of this principle. Instead of showing that counter-extremism perpetuates anti-Muslim racism, which has already been done convincingly and extensively in the literature, or illuminating another way in which it does so, I have illustrated the organising principle that shapes the ways it institutes anti-Muslim racism *en toto*. This concluding chapter first provides a brief overview of my contributions, proceeding through the chapters, and then indicates three directions for research opened up by this project.



## ***Overview of contributions***

To fill out my contribution and flesh out the workings of the ethico-cognitive principle, each chapter questioned underlying assumptions of the initial puzzle, which as I argued in the first introductory chapter, have also remained unquestioned in similar research. The second chapter began with scepticism toward the liberal belief that “better ways of thinking”, sanctioned as such through characteristics like “critical” and “balanced”, lead to better ways of being. The contribution of this second chapter was its illumination of the need to trouble assumptions of “cognitive complexity” that may seem innocent enough, especially to social scientists — such as the assumption that a lack of “critical” and “balanced” thinking is a root cause of undesirable ethics. The following chapter (III) then questioned how changing how Others think has historically come to be understood and accepted as pre-political care and to function as a dominant logic of racialisation. Through consideration of the development of a proto-cognitive psychology in the British Empire, I re-presented psychology as a science of race that continues to inform how the difference between the dominant ethnoclass and its Others is imagined and reproduced.

The last two chapters in turn considered the collective reproduction of the dominant genre of ethico-cognitive Man. These chapters fleshed out my contributions by providing a situated picture of some of the ways in which the dominant genre of being human and its vulnerable cognitive Other are collectively reproduced and troubled. The fourth chapter considered how the dominant genre is secured within higher education institutions today through already institutionalised conventions that shape tactics of whiteness. Finally, the fifth chapter engaged with young Muslim women within universities and their intimate encounters with the dominant genre and its tactics. This chapter revealed potential routes for unsettling the dominant genre and its ethic of care within the constraints of a counter-extremist order.

## ***The temporality of care***

Much of the political theorising on a desirable ethic of care for achieving, broadly, a more just society has focused on pinpointing the ideal orientation of care. This is succinctly summarised by Ella Myers’ (2013) overview of critical theories of care ethics, wherein she considers first, Michel Foucault’s (1988) conception of self-care through ‘technologies of the self’ as a way of evading the totalising nature of discursive power and second, Judith Butler’s conception of an other-

oriented Levinasian ethic based on the recognition of the Self and Other's shared interdependence and thus precarity and vulnerability to death. Against the notion of orienting caring toward the self or the notion of a dyadic ethic,<sup>189</sup> Myers' own conception of 'worldly care' argues for an ethic of care directed toward building a shared planetary home. Such an ethic is more likely, she argues, to provide the basis for political solidarity as different actors come together to politically organise and direct their care toward shared concerns. This dissertation opens up a related but distinct direction of research for theorists of care and solidarity.

As I have shown in this dissertation, counter-extremism practically prescribes a particular ethic of care, and analysis of it reveals existing conditions for how such an ethic is understood and engaged with. My analysis of Muslim activists and artists' engagement with the idea of care whilst living in conditions of anti-Muslim counter-extremism shows a turn toward healing as an essential aspect of a radical politics of care. While counter-extremism's prescribed ethic of care in the UK demands that cognitively developed subjects take care of and improve the cognition of those vulnerable to extremism, resistance to anti-Muslim racism entails an articulation of care as intertwined with healing from the consequences of counter-extremism and its prescribed ethic. Healing opens up a new direction for research in 'the ethical turn' by highlighting the importance of considering not only present but also past harm in articulating an ethic of care.

Educational and psychological approaches to counter-extremism can locate vulnerability in the less developed cognition of alienated Muslims because they disavow sociogeny, that is, the history of social relations and the phenomena they shape. They can thus present a framework of care that aims at preventing future violence as if past and present violence do not matter or even exist. The focus on future harm distracts from the violence of racism, which persists as an intrinsic part of current political and social structures. It enables, in the words of bell hooks, which this dissertation began with, a fantasy wherein 'there is no representation of whiteness as terror, as terrorising'. In contrast, the resistant articulation of care that I have discussed in the previous chapter situates itself in a particular moment in history, which is to say, in past and ongoing state-sanctioned hostility and violence toward Muslims. Healing from past and ongoing harm then puts the focus of care on recovery instead of prevention. The presentation of such an ethic in response to decontextualised and decontextualising prescriptions of education and

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<sup>189</sup> Myers engages with Butler's *Precarious Life* (2004); more recently, Butler has explicitly clarified that they are proposing a political ethic aimed at solidarity building, and not an ethic of care, which risks shoring up paternalistic habits of saving the other (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016).

mental health care is particularly suggestive of its potential for unsettling the erasure of past and present institutionalised harm.

An ethic of healing offers a promising window for re-viewing the question of the temporality of care ethics. Healing is temporally expansive: it implies a present process aimed at recovering from (past or current) harm and injury and a new becoming in moving toward a (future) alleviated state. Taking temporality into consideration for normative theories of care ethics will also have implications for how the orientation of care is understood and imagined. For example, if healing were to be taken into consideration, a political ethic of solidarity based on an understanding of shared interdependencies such as Butler's would need to consider whether solidarity can not only aim at making all lives grievable as lives, but also entail the making of space to grieve lives already lost without being grieved, or lives currently being made unliveable through the past violence of unequal interdependencies. In other words, such theory would need to grapple with whether solidarity in face of present harm is enough whilst those already harmed by an unequal world carry with them the marks of violence past. My analysis suggests that alongside discussion of the *orientation* of such ethics, there must also be discussion of its *temporality*.

At the same time, as is clear from how my interlocutors articulate healing, the latter brings with it some psychological baggage worth questioning. My intervention in this dissertation does not aim to condemn psychology to being always a science of race, although I show that in many ways it has been and continues to be. After all, Fanon's critique of ethnopsychiatry and Wynter's adapted notion of the governing sociogenic principle, both of which I draw on heavily, indicate thinking in psychological terms that can be socially transformative and unsettling of racism. Rethinking psychology as a science of race entails considering the extent to which it can also be an anti-racist science. I have pointed to this possibility both in my historical analysis, such as in Dubois' praise of the psychological research presented at the Universal Races Congress, and in the chapter on the intimacies of surveillance, such as in Muslim women's experience of counter-extremism and the work of resisting it as causing somatic harm — exhaustion and embodied trauma. While the latter expression is substantially different from counter-extremism's diagnosis of Muslims as cognitively vulnerable, it nonetheless directs care toward a problem of health and wellness. Healing then suggests both a temporal orientation and a substantive one, insofar as it tends to maintain the establishment of health and psychological well-being as the aim of a care ethic. This purpose parallels that of the care ethic prescribed by counter-extremism, albeit perhaps in more collective than individual terms.

The question arises again: to what extent can this shared purpose of healing be transformative, or to what extent is it bound to logics of racialisation? Research on this question could take an instructive cue from Butler's work on vulnerability (2004; 2021). Butler reimagines the political usefulness of the concept in its pointing to structures that make people unequally vulnerable. In doing so, they resist the concept's tendency to invite paternalism. In a similar fashion, is it possible to imagine healing in a way that invites neither a paternalistic ethic of care nor one that inadvertently accommodates racialising conceptions of the healthy and the ill?

### ***From the bio-economic to the ethico-cognitive***

This dissertation has argued that the dominant terms in which racial difference is produced today concern cognitive superiority and its supposed link with an ethical imperative to domesticate "the human race" by improving the minds of Others. This argument is developed through an analysis of contemporary trends in counter-extremism, a globally popular element of governance today. This argument, however, remains a hypothesis. If the genre of ethico-cognitive Man is truly the dominant genre through which the dominant ethnoclass is secured, its conventions and the tactics of whiteness used to reproduce and secure it should be analytically retrievable in other areas of government and of social life. In other words, the logics of the genre, such as the belief that knowing more critically leads to ethical superiority, should be pervasive. Further research could consider whether this is in fact the case.

Beyond the scope of this project, everyday observation and conversations with colleagues in related fields suggest to me that the genre is indeed dominant. For example, consider how racist violence and resistance to it that gain visibility in the media often lead to calls for white people (and in some instances, non-Black and non-Indigenous people of colour) to 'educate themselves' and share the knowledge with their racist uncles at holiday dinners. Reading groups sprout up everywhere. We share listicles of Must Read books to 'unlearn' racism (L. M. Jackson 2020). Sales of *White Fragility* (DiAngelo 2018) or *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (Eddo-Lodge 2017) spike. With no intended dismissal of such efforts, in which I also partake, it is worth noting the logic sustaining and reactivating these movements. The assumption persists that if people knew better and thought more critically about racism, they would be less racist, and the collective consequence would be a broader decrease in racism.

As another example, consider the more recent deployment of counter-extremism to target "far-right extremists" (the polite, race-erasing term for white supremacists and

misogynists). On the one hand, these extremists are also described as vulnerable by virtue of their mental capacity, though in slightly different terms: white “extremists” are often described as depressed or lonely, their cognitive capacity supposedly dimmed by their mental health. As Ali (2020) has argued, this understanding maintains the dissociation between ‘mainstream’ or ‘normal’ whiteness and violence. I suspect it also maintains the imagination of whiteness as cognitively superior and therefore more ethical, distancing whiteness from visible violence by de-linking the thinking capacity of perpetrators from whiteness. On the other hand, liberal efforts to distance whiteness from such violence is rendered increasingly difficult by “far-right” claims that their thinking is morally superior because it is more critical. For example, Jordan Peterson’s description of accusations of racism as “low resolution thinking” on a BBC interview that went viral shows a striking similarity to counter-extremist concerns with “low complexity” thinking. How such actors trouble or reinforce the ethico-cognitive genre and its dominance offers a direction for research that can deepen understanding of how the genre produces racial difference while erasing its process of production.

Wynter’s insights about the dominant genre of being human and its institution through the governing sociogenic principle themselves are in large part derived from advancements in cognitive sciences. In the latter discipline’s discussions of how lived experience can be at once objective and subjective, Wynter finds a convincing parallel to Fanon’s concept of sociogeny. The latter, which Wynter considers a ‘cognitive frontier’, poses that subjective experiences are conditioned by an organising logic (the sociogenic principle) that can be objectively observed and analytically grasped. Perhaps because she was so deeply engaged in the possibilities of cognitive science, this rising subdiscipline is not to my knowledge discussed by Wynter as potentially constitutive of a new dominant genre. The Fanonian revolution, as triggered by the concept of sociogeny, follows the Darwinian revolution, as triggered by the concept of evolution. What Wynter calls the Third Event (that is, the Fanonian revolution), remains in her thought as of yet not fully grasped at large, its implications not as yet embedded in the dominant understanding of being human. It is a limitation of this dissertation that this overlap between the sources of Wynter’s theory and my formulation of the dominant genre are not put in conversation. An intellectual history project could take up this question of how Wynter’s own grounding in cognitive sciences relates to a governing sociogenic principle constituted in part by the subdiscipline and its history.

A related limitation of this dissertation is the lack of engagement with how the dominant genre of being human hypothesised here relates to the dominant genre of being human theorised by Wynter. Wynter argues that the current dominant genre is that of bio-economic Man,

constituted by evolutionary logics of survival of the fittest and natural selection. In the third chapter, which provided a historical narrative, I showed that the proto-cognitive psychology that took shape in the British Empire marked a shift from the logic of natural selection to that of “rational selection”. Within the latter framework, the dominant ethnoclass linked its own presumed cognitive superiority with an ethical duty to improve and domesticate “the human race”, assuming a cognitive dominion. Whether my analysis then means that the ethico-cognitive genre overtakes the bio-economic one at this juncture and becomes the dominant genre, or whether the former conjoins with the latter in some way, is not clear, and difficult to verify in a project that is not dedicated entirely to this historical and theoretical question. In Wynterian terms, it is not clear whether my analysis suggests a genre that we may call Man<sub>3</sub> (following Man<sub>2</sub> as bioeconomic Man, which followed Man<sub>1</sub> as rational political Man), or whether it suggests instead a significant modification of bioeconomic Man. An answer to this question matters for deepening understanding of how racial difference is produced and verifying the scale of its being produced in ethico-cognitive terms.

### ***Rethinking critical thinking***

A far-reaching implication of this dissertation’s questioning of ethico-cognitive norms is a necessity to rethink critical thinking and its relationship to ways of being. The phrase “ways of knowing and being” is common in social scientific research, implying a shared understanding of how closely the two are related. A way of knowing, it would seem, has a concomitant way of being. As I have shown, an assumption that critical ways of thinking lead to morally superior (more just) ways of being is also prevalent. Even “us”, myself and fellow critical scholars, are surely far from immune from this belief. In fact, many of “us” pride ourselves on this “truth”, which supposedly grants us ethical superiority by virtue of our critical scholarship. Like any taken for granted belief, this one too may be well worth questioning.

One more insight from Wynter is useful here. Wynter highlights that the shifts in dominant genres of being she pinpoints were not only epistemic shifts. She writes:

...these shifts in epistemes were not only shifts with respect to each episteme’s specific order of knowledge/truth, but were also shifts in what can now be identified as the “politics of being”; that is, as a politics that is everywhere fought over what is to be the descriptive statement, the governing sociogenic principle, instituting of each genre of the human (Wynter 2003, 318).

Wynter offers a theory for understanding how these different orders of knowledge enact different ways of being, creating a political struggle over the dominant genre of the human. They do so, she argues, through their adaptive truth-for terms. Each episteme provides ‘adaptively true’ ways of normatively knowing the ‘Self, Other, and social World’ (Wynter 2003, 269). Such adaptive truths-for are ‘the condition of the continued production and reproduction’ of a dominant genre of being (Wynter 2003, 269). To rethink critical thinking then might entail considering the truths-for that are arrived at through such thinking, and the extent to which they maintain or unsettle the dominant genre. For example, the tactics I describe as tactics of whiteness all make a claim to knowing in critical ways, and yet all of them reproduce rather than unsettle the presumed superiority of the white ethnoclass as more cognitively developed and thus charged with an ethical duty to provide pre-political care to Others. A litmus test for gaging whether critical thinking and claims to it unsettle the dominant terms for understanding the human then might be to assess whether an actor’s critical thought inconveniences the actor and the institution they are embedded in (see also: Tsui and Bastani 2021). Whereas critical thought is mobilised in counter-extremism and the university as that which resolves contradictions and allows the continuation of business as usual, perhaps a key characteristic of critical thought must instead be the revelation of unresolvable contradictions.

A possible conclusion from here then could be that “we” (critical scholars) should narrow down what we mean by critical thinking so as to better navigate the conditions of possibility for mobilising the term and to direct the term toward revealing contradictions that lay bare the mechanics of the dominant genre. This dissertation does provide some suggestions in this regard. The psychological framework of critical thinking as a cognitive metric for assessing vulnerability to extremism supports the habit of forgetting that often goes hand in hand with unquestioning belief in the moral superiority of liberal society and its dominant way of being human. For example, as presented in the second chapter, while the Lab presents the “situation” that supposedly makes Muslims vulnerable to extremist thinking as that of “rapid globalisation”, its report has little to say about the social relations between those who are marginalised by and those who benefit from the historical movements involved in “globalisation”. Contra this presentist habit, thinking critically should be contingent on thinking historically about social relations.

Accordingly, thinking critically about critical thinking would seem to mean that we must also think about the term’s own past and presents without overlooking or discounting inconvenient continuities and relations. We must consider the truths-for that the project of

critical thought has shaped. Therefore, the most troubling and I think the most promising implications of my research can be summed up as the need to follow the following questions: How might the difference in different ways of thinking matter differently than we have assumed them to? If the liberal assumption that more critical thinking will always lead to the adoption of the liberal ethic is a tautology that must be tossed out, and if even the less ideologically-bound assumption that thinking more critically leads to a more just way of being (whatever this way of being might be) does not hold, then how do ways of thinking relate to ways of being in more complicated ways? Relatedly, if “we” as critical scholars and sometimes as activists have also overstated the value of critical education, where does that leave the project of critical thinking?

## ***Epilogue***

The concerns of this dissertation have at times crashed into the concerns of my life, an intimacy that signals scholarly failure by the objectivity and distance standards of critical whiteness. Instead of verifying my experiences against the analysis I have set forth here or vice versa, I would like to briefly present a back-and-forth movement between the two. I do so to highlight one last contribution of the dissertation.

In searching for the dominant genre of being secured by counter-extremism, I expected that the answer might be found entirely in popular and institutionalised beliefs about education. This expectation was informed in part by my experiences as a university student and in part by the literature I have discussed, especially Mahmood’s (2006) claim that Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ has come to be understood as a problem of Muslim misreading, a matter of rudimentary hermeneutics. It was also informed by my own movement from Tehran to colonially-settled Squamish territories (“Vancouver”) as a child, and the felt-awareness that my parents’ tentative acceptance by the parents of other children was contingent on their level of education, which was judged to be high enough, and their level of religiosity, which was judged to be low enough. I did not quite grasp their experience in these terms until I was older, and I began to hear in open and frequent terms how my parents were described as ‘well-educated’, and often described as being so ‘despite’ their religious commitment, by the parents of white peers whose own education and religious beliefs were never so frequent nor casual topics of conversation. So I came to learn in felt terms, before grasping it in scholarly terms, that being a knowing Muslim was a way of making being Muslim tolerable in secular liberal society.



However, as I began to research what made a knowing Muslim perceivable as such, I encountered psychological language of mental health and wellness at every turn. I ended up at the conflict prevention lab that focused on cognitive complexity. Accordingly, I learned that a knowing mind was imagined also as a healthy mind, and my attention turned to cognitive psychology. A few months after I had conducted research with the lab, the tangled knot of psychology, education, and anti-Muslim racism collided with my life once more in full force. I was stunned into silence when my beloved mother, who was at the time pursuing a Master's degree in child psychology, reacted to my telling her that I was queer by informing me that she had spoken to one of her professors about the psychology of sexuality. She went on to tell me that the professor was 'white and educated at Oxford' and she agreed with my mom that if her child was to tell her she was queer, she would be heartbroken, devastated, and ashamed of what had gone wrong in the child's development. Hearing this, I was in turn heartbroken by the assignment of authority from my mother: her professor was to be trusted as thinking and knowing better than the both of us, because she was white and Oxford-educated. In retrospect, the incident is also enlightening: the ethico-cognitive genre reveals an alliance between education and psychology in the production of hierarchical differences.

This research is limited to the study of race as a category of difference, but a dominant genre of being can tell us about how other categories of difference are produced as well, sometimes together with or through race. While the focus on Muslim women in the fifth chapter of this dissertation has hinted at how gender and race interact in the genre of ethico-cognitive Man, fuller discussion of such interactions is beyond the scope of this project. Moreover, if one purpose of critical thinking is to come up with adaptive truths-for unsettling the dominant genre and its over-representation, then the alliance between beliefs about education and psychology in the production of racial difference as such a truth elucidates a site of potential solidarity between Muslims who are treated "as if they were mad" and the violent treatment of those perceived as mad more broadly. In other words, it reveals a site of potential alliance between those resisting racist violence and those resisting psychiatric violence.

This dissertation then lastly calls for rethinking all that enables the practice of prescribing educational development with varying degrees of violence to those who do not think in the "right" way, which is to say, all that allows "us" to excise undesirable thoughts from the political arena by deeming them pre-political and "vulnerable" because they are supposedly not yet developed enough. The analysis of educational counter-extremism presented here demands that those deemed educated critical thinkers not shy away from the mirror.



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