‘Either a sell-out or an extremist’:

Examining the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners implementing Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham

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Table of contents

Contents

Abstract vi

Acknowledgements vii

Abbreviations viii

Glossary of non-English terms x

Chapter 1 – Introduction 1

Research topic 1

The locality 2

The subject 3

Research questions 4

Theoretical considerations 5

Thesis structure 5

A note on terminology 8

Chapter 2 – Literature review: Mapping policy and routes to engagement 10

Introduction 10

Mapping policy 11

CONTEST – an overview 13

Origins of Prevent: 2006-2011 14

Forsaking cohesion: 2011-2015 17

Focus on 'extremism': 2015 – the Prevent Duty and the roots of the CES 18

Current scene: 2018 and 2023 reviews and the Independent Review of Prevent 19

The Counter-Extremism Strategy – its underpinnings, structure, and workstreams 21

Prevent and the CES – policy spirals? 26

Criticisms of policy 27

Prevent 27

CES 29

Routes to engagement 31

Muslim-state engagement – a background 31

Responsibilisation 33

Active citizenship 33

Impact of austerity 34

The CT/CE industry 35

Street-level bureaucracy 35

The development of agency beyond street-level bureaucracy 37

Grey area 39

Role of religion 40
Motivations 42
Conclusions 43
Chapter 3 – Methodology: Reflexivity and the research process 45
Researcher background and origins of the study 45
Research design 47
Ethics 48
Data set 48
Sampling and gaining access 51
Anonymity 54
Reflexive thematic analysis 55
Ontological and epistemological assumptions 55
A note on theme construction: domain summaries and central organising concepts 57
Phases of analysis 57
Data 'saturation' 58
Reflexivity 59
Researcher positionality 59
Insider/outsider paradigm 62
Conclusions 65
Chapter 4 – The local scene: Unpacking Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham 67
Prevent in Birmingham 67
Projects and practitioners – a typology 67
Structure of local authority Prevent 71
Packaging Prevent – institutional approaches 74
Partnerships 77
Structure of WMCTU Prevent 79
Local authority Prevent initiatives 81
WMCTU Prevent initiatives 84
Comparing WMCTU Prevent and BCC Prevent 87
Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham 90
Counter-Extremism Strategy work 90
Comparing Counter-Extremism and Prevent 95
Significance of Birmingham as a site 98
Conclusions 99
Chapter 5 – Motivations for engagement 101
Personal 102
Religious obligation 102

Personal experiences of radicalisation 104
Skillset and positionality 107
Collective 110
Empowering people 110
Helping communities 111
Policy-related 116
Improving perceptions of Prevent and the CES 116
Having a steer 117
Conclusions 120
Chapter 6 – Perceptions and practice: Interpretations of local policy 123
Perceptions of policy 123
Prevent as a positive 123
Prevent as an industry 125
Approaches and practices 133
Grey area 133
Intentions 137
Boundaries drawn 139
Religion as a framework 143
Conclusions 146
Chapter 7 – In the field: Practitioners' experiences of implementation 148
Challenges 148
Types of challenges 149
Impact of challenges 152
Resources 156
Support 156
Training 164
Agency 168
Expressions of agency in the field 168
Evaluating agency in the field 175
Conclusions 178
Chapter 8 – Tensions encountered in the local space 180
Problems on the ground 181
Unsuitable activities 181
Unprofessionalism 185
Transparency 187
Corruption 189
Fraud 193

Impact 196
Accountability and evaluation 196
Sustainability of work 202
Competition and cohesion 203
Pandora's box 203
Disengagement and alternative work 204
Conclusions 207
Chapter 9 – Conclusion 209
Introduction 209
Overall findings and contribution to the field 211
Limitations 214
Future research 214
References 216
Appendix 1: Mapping Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy 247
Appendix 2: Encounter with ethics 248

Abstract

Over the last twenty years, minoritised practitioners have been commissioned to deliver on the government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism (CT/CE) strategies in attempts to successfully engage target communities to which they are perceived to possess access. While much research has been carried out into the operational failures of the UK's CT/CE policies from a top-down level, and the stigmatising impact this has had on Britain's Muslim communities from the ground up, there remains a limited body of research on the experiences of practitioners, particularly those from Muslim and minority ethnic backgrounds, who often find themselves 'stuck in the middle' navigating spheres of both community and policy. This thesis seeks to address this gap by investigating the experiences of Muslim and minoritised individuals involved in the implementation of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham, a longstanding Prevent priority area dually administering the strategies through its local authority and regional police counter-terrorism unit.

Based on ethnographic and interview data of city council employees, police officers, civil society organisations, and independently commissioned practitioners conducted over a two-year period, the study attempts to offer insight into the operationalisation of local policy and examine how its nuances and idiosyncrasies affect the experiences of those tasked with its implementation. It considers how a 'middle space' is created and resisted, how religion and other frameworks are drawn upon to guide and limit engagement in the field, and how ambiguity and fractures inherent in policy centrally create fissures in activity on the ground locally. It argues that within these apertures practitioners are able to exercise agency, shaping – but not necessarily subverting – policy for the fulfilment of myriad communal, personal, spiritual or financial ambitions. The study is situated within literature acknowledging both the pernicious effects of CT/CE policy as well as recognising the possibility for individual agency on behalf of those who engage. Its central tenet argues that Prevent has become a Frankenstein policy; revised, augmented, interlinked with efforts such as the Counter-Extremism Strategy, framed in the vernacular of contemporary discourses and then reshaped back to a version of where it began – multiple times in multiple ways – and that this is reflected in the local space.

The conceptual framework adopted draws together various mid-range theories to respond to the rich and nuanced data captured. Literature on critical community practice grounds an understanding of the practitioner at the heart of the study. Concepts from scholarship on governance, responsibilisation, active citizenship, street-level bureaucracy, and agentive action are complemented by research on motivations and the intersections of religion and political participation, social action and citizenship to form a theoretical repertoire which is instrumental in providing a reflexive dimension to data analysis. This repertoire, and the data it makes sense of, can be understood within significant broader discourse around the engagement of Britain's Muslim communities with the state and debates on policy development and design.

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Abbreviations

BCC	Birmingham City Council
BCM	Birmingham Council of Mosques
BSBT	Building a Stronger Britain Together
CBCT	Community-Based Counter-Terrorism
CCE	Commission for Countering Extremism
CE	Counter-Extremism
CIC	Community Interest Company
CRG	Community Reference Group
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CT	Counter-Terrorism
CE	Counter-Extremism
CES	Counter-Extremism Strategy
CTAG	Counter-Terrorism Advisory Group
CTIU	Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Unit
CTLP	Counter-Terrorism Local Profile
CTP	Counter-Terrorism Policing
CTPHQ	Counter-Terrorism Police Headquarters
CTU	Counter-Terrorism Unit
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FBVs	Fundamental British Values
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HBV	Honour-Based Violence
IRP	Independent Review of Prevent
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
OCST	Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (now Homeland Security Group)
PEO	Prevent Engagement Officer
PIP	Partnerships, Insight and Prevention Directorate
PSD	Professional Standards Department within West Midlands Police
RICU	Research, Information and Communications Unit

RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
TACT	Terrorism Act 2000
UREC	University Research Ethics Committee
WMCTU	West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit
WMP	West Midlands Police
WRAP	Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent

Glossary of non-English terms

Arabic, unless otherwise stated.

Alhamdulillah	An Arabic phrase meaning "praise be to God," often used to express gratitude or acknowledgment of God's blessings.
Akhirah	An Arabic term referring to the afterlife.
Biraderi	Urdu - networks based on kinship ties, significant within the British Pakistani diaspora.
Da'ee	A person engaged in *da'wah*, which is the act of inviting others to Islam or conveying its message.
Da'wah	The act of inviting others to Islam or conveying its message to spread the faith.
Dars (pl. duroos)	Urdu - a lesson or teaching session, often related to the study of Islamic texts or principles.
Deen	The religion of Islam; encompassing its beliefs, practices, and way of life.
Dua	A prayer or supplication to God, often made to seek guidance, assistance, or blessings.
Fard kifayah	In Islamic jurisprudence, it refers to a collective obligation that, if fulfilled by a sufficient number of people, is not required of others.
Fi sabilillah	An Arabic term meaning "in the path of God," often used to describe acts done for the sake of God, such as charity or community service.
Hadith	A collection of sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, considered a significant source of guidance in Islam.
Haram	An Arabic term meaning "forbidden" or "prohibited" in Islamic law, referring to actions or substances that are unlawful in Islam.
Hijab	A headscarf or modest covering worn by some Muslim women as an expression of modesty and adherence to Islamic values.
Imam	Leaders of mosques who possess religious knowledge, lead congregational prayers and provide spiritual guidance.
Jihad	A term with various interpretations, often referring to the struggle or effort to uphold one's faith and values in Islam.
Jilbab	A loose-fitting, modest clothing item worn by some Muslim women, typically covering the entire body.
Khalifah	An Arabic term for leader, also referring to the concept of humans as stewards responsible for the earth.
Khilafah	A caliphate, referring to the Islamic political leadership system.

Khutbah(s)	Sermons delivered during the Friday prayer in a mosque, usually containing religious teachings and guidance.
Madrasa	An Islamic school or educational institution focused on teaching religious texts and principles.
Masha'Allah	An Arabic phrase meaning "God has willed it," commonly used to express appreciation or praise.
Masjid (pl. masajid)	A mosque or place of worship for Muslims.
Maslaha	An Arabic term referring to the common good or public interest, considered in Islamic jurisprudence when making decisions.
Munafiq	A religious hypocrite, someone who outwardly professes faith but conceals disbelief or hypocrisy.
Niyyah	An Arabic term referring to intention or the purpose behind one's actions, particularly in religious practices.
Qadr	The divine preordainment or destiny, associated with God's will in Islamic belief.
Qur'an	The holy book of Islam, believed to be the literal word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.
Rizq	Sustenance or livelihood provided by God, often associated with blessings and provisions.
Sabr	An Arabic term for patience, particularly in the face of adversity or difficulties, emphasised in Islamic teachings.
Sadaqah	Voluntary charity or acts of kindness, often given to those in need.
Sadaqah Jariyah	Ongoing and continuous charity, often seen as a form of charity that continues to benefit others over time.
Sheikh	An honorific title for a learned or respected leader, used in Islamic contexts.
Ummah	The global Muslim community, representing the collective body of Muslims worldwide.
Wali	A guardian or protector, often used in Islamic jurisprudence to refer to a legal guardian.
Zakat	One of the Five Pillars of Islam, it is a mandatory form of almsgiving or charity intended to help those in need.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Research topic

Over the last twenty years, practitioners from Muslim and minority ethnic backgrounds have been contracted and commissioned to deliver on the government's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies in attempts to successfully engage target communities to which they are perceived to possess access (Briggs et al, 2006; Spalek, 2011; Baker, 2012; Cherney and Hartley, 2017; Huq, 2017). While much research has been carried out into the operational failures of policy from a top-down level (Thomas, 2012; Silverman, 2017; Martin; 2019), and the stigmatising impact this has had on Britain's Muslim communities from the ground up (Bonino, 2012; Alam and Husband, 2013; Mythen et al., 2013), there remains a limited body of research on the experiences of practitioners, particularly those from Muslim and minority ethnic backgrounds, who often find themselves 'stuck in the middle' navigating spheres of both community and policy.

This thesis seeks to address this gap by investigating the experiences of minoritised and Muslim practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham, a longstanding priority area in national efforts to counter terrorism and extremism. The study attempts to offer insight into the operationalisation of policy locally and examine how its nuances and idiosyncrasies affect the experiences of practitioners whose cooperation is crucial to its enactment. It considers how a 'middle space' is created and resisted, how religion and other frameworks are utilised to guide engagement in the field, and how ambiguity and fractures inherent in policy centrally may create fissures in activity on the ground locally.

This inquiry is significant, not only to improve provisions for practitioners and safeguard their wellbeing, but also to develop an understanding of how endeavours such as the recent Counter-Extremism Strategy take shape at a local level and interconnect with existing programmes and initiatives to impact upon the experiences of practitioners working in the space. It seeks to contribute to debates on the efficacy of the UK's counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies, contemporary understandings of Muslim civil society in Britain, and scholarship on active citizenship, street-level bureaucracy, and creative applications of agency to consider how policies are constructed and reinterpreted on the front-line.

From the initial pathfinder phase of Prevent (2007-2008) through to its expansion between 2008 and 2011, local authority areas with a qualifying demographic of Muslim residents acquired resources for the purposes of promoting more 'moderate' forms of Islamic practice, building relationships with Muslim youth, and developing Muslim civil society (Thomas, 2016). Many local authorities distributed money to Muslim community bodies (Kundnani, 2009) and this model paved the way for a plethora of individuals and organisations to pragmatically interpret Prevent funding streams as a means by which they were able to source money for communities in a climate of austerity that forced major cuts to public services (Choudhry and Fenwick, 2011). Referred to as 'poverty pimps' by participants in an empirical study conducted in the West Midlands, minoritised practitioners have been accused of obtaining funding, utilising it ineffectively, and

adding to the 'tainted brand' that has stymied Prevent since its inception (Innes et al., 2011: 33). It is against this backdrop that participants of this study engage.

Nevertheless, the UK is considered something of a 'market leader' in counter-terrorism policy (Heath-Kelly et al., 2015: 3), and the British government has long called upon Muslim communities (El-Awa and Spalek, 2012) and their presumed knowledge of local nuances (Powers, 2015) in its battle against extremism. While it is claimed that Muslim practitioners are keen to engage despite initial scepticism (Pilkington, 2018), little academic attention has been paid to the cohort (Shanaah, 2022a) to the detriment of policy efficacy (Fitzgerald, 2016). The value of understanding the experiences of such critical yet under-researched individuals is now beginning to emerge as a consequential site for contemporary analysis (Schlegel, 2022).

This study centres the Muslim and minority ethnic practitioner, whose motivations and intentions are inextricably linked with processes and outcomes of implementation (Banks, 2007), and who, in the course of their critical engagement, must balance a responsibility to effectively communicate with local policymakers against the maintenance of their community connections and credibility (Henderson, 2007). The administration of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies is said to rest on the shoulders of frontline workers (Osorno Hernandez, 2021), but the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners are of particular salience, not least because the recent Independent Review of Prevent signals a return to a focus on 'Islamist' extremism (Shawcross, 2023) likely to further implicate Muslim practitioners in the objectives of policy. This study is distinct from similar nascent scholarship in its focus on the Muslim and minoritised practitioner as research has thus far considered grassroots practitioners exclusive of actors engaged at other levels (Lehane, 2017), evaluated the work of Muslim practitioners within prominent national organisations (Ahmad, 2021) and offered scrutiny of practitioners that speaks more to policy than experiences (Andrews, 2020). This developing body of literature has informed this qualitative investigation into the first-hand experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners, drawing together innovative accounts that seek to problematise the binary 'top-down/bottom-up' understanding of strategies like Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy and individuals involved in their implementation. In so doing, it will contribute to literature on the 'exploitation' of national policies by local actors (Thomas, 2012) and broader debates within critical terrorism studies.

The locality

Birmingham has long been a site of exceptionality for counter-terrorism and counter-extremism efforts on a global scale and its distinctive complexities constitute a key role in shaping the experiences of local practitioners. Objectively, the city is the largest local authority in Europe (Swerling, 2023), is home to the UK's second biggest police force (Awan, 2012b), boasts the most populous Muslim demographic in Britain according to the 2021 Census (MCB, 2022) and has historically been in receipt of the greatest Prevent budget nationally (Thomas, 2010). A place in which Muslim presence is animated, its longstanding status as a migrant

destination (Hussain, 2013) and its framing as a 'multiethnic, multicultural milieu' (Mohammad, 2013: 1802) positions Birmingham at the centre of British counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policy. For these reasons, a localised approach – deemed necessary by scholars (Durose, 2009; Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; Grossman et al., 2016; O'Toole et al., 2016; Innes et al., 2017; Silverman, 2017; Tammiko, 2018; Abbas, 2019; Brown, 2019) – is even more pivotal for accommodating the particular needs of the city, as the data will show. Some of the consequences of a subjective stance on policy implementation, however, and the ways in which these define and govern the experiences of practitioners, will also be examined.

Scholars argue that a racialised discourse associating geographical locations with heightened concerns sparked by prominent events catalyse a media hysteria that construct the figure of the Muslim, and cities such as Birmingham, as anti-Western anxieties (Miah, 2017). Crucially, Birmingham has been the site of a number of significant terrorist and counter-terrorist spectacles such as the infamous Trojan Horse affair, Project Champion (surveillance scheme in which over two-hundred 'spy cameras' were installed in predominantly Muslim areas of the city), Operation Gamble (foiled plot to behead a Muslim soldier) and, more recently, the campaign surrounding LGBT-inclusive education programme 'No Outsiders', recognised as part of the broader counter-extremism agenda to reduce radicalisation and promote British values amongst purportedly 'inherently illiberal' groups (Khan, 2021: 138).

I have chosen not to anonymise the location as its complex and documented history, and its equally contentious and multifaceted ongoing relationship, with counter-terrorism policy and the notoriety this encompasses is paramount to understanding the experiences of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism practitioners that work in its arena. Participants reflect on the journey and junctures of strategies such as Prevent in Birmingham, attributing elements of their own interactions with policy to the broader landscape, making reference to how direction, implementation and reception continue to evolve over time. Anonymising the city would render the significance of this data void.

The subject

Individuals that identify as minority ethnic are included in the sample alongside Muslim practitioners as a result of the pervasive racialisation of religion, conflating 'concerns about the religious Other with race and ethnicity', that has provoked the widespread misrecognition of non-Muslims as Muslim in the context of the global war on terror (Hunter and McCallum Guiney, 2023: 4014). The racialisation of Muslims impacts non-Muslims who, because of markers such as skin colour, dress, accent or name, are misrecognised as Muslim (Hunter and McCallum Guiney, 2023) and simultaneously re-racialises converts to the religion as 'not-quite-white' owing to the trope that Islam is a 'non-white' religion (Moosavi, 2015: 41). Here, the bodies of its presumed followers become associated with terror threat (Cainkar and Selod, 2018) in the construction of Muslim identities through processes of racialisation that are rooted in broader understandings of

Islamophobia (Garner and Selod, 2015). Non-Muslim minoritised practitioners working on counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policy in Birmingham, therefore, are often racialised as Muslim in the pursuit of their engagement with strategies that are intrinsically bound to the nation's Muslim population.

Research questions

Research thus far has not looked in-depth at Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners across the board; recent scholarship has considered Muslim women in relation to Prevent (Qureshi, 2021), youth work practitioners (Osorno Hernandez, 2021) (but not specifically Muslim or minoritised and not exclusively in relation to state-led counter-terrorism efforts), and the involvement of Muslim practitioners but from a partially quantitative perspective (Shanaah, 2019). There has also been little to no empirical research undertaken on the experiences of practitioners engaged with the Counter-Extremism Strategy or the interplay of this with those of Prevent practitioners.

In addressing the primary aim of this study, to examine the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham, the following research questions have been devised to frame the analysis:

1. What motivates practitioners in Birmingham to engage with Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy?
2. How do practitioners interpret the implementation of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy locally and how do these perceptions guide their practices in the field?
3. What problems and opportunities do practitioners identify in the course of their engagement with Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham and how are these navigated?
4. To what extent are local practitioners able to shape their own personal and professional objectives and how are these fulfilled and measured?
5. How do perceptions, practices, problems, opportunities, levels of autonomy, methods of evaluation and general experiences of engagement differ across the primary authorities administering Prevent in Birmingham (Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit) and across the two distinct strategies (Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy)?

To answer these questions, in-depth qualitative research is required. I carried out ethnographic research observing Prevent and Counter-Extremism workshops and activities in Birmingham over a two-year period and conducted forty-seven semi-structured interviews with thirty-nine practitioners engaged in myriad ways, including individuals with operational responsibilities, strategic oversight and independently commissioned providers. The research questions informed the methodology selected, and data collected via these methods is suitable to fulfil the aims of the study in answering the problem. The thesis cannot make universal claims, speak to the experiences of non-Muslim/minority ethnic practitioners, or generalise regarding other case

study locations within the UK context; its aim is to problematise existing narratives about the structure and operationalisation of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies and the local actors that interact with them to implement elements of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy on their own terms.

Theoretical considerations

In addressing the above aim, the theoretical perspective adopted draws upon multiple mid-range theories, rather than relying upon a single paradigm or meta-level theory, to best make sense of the data and the complicated landscape it captures. The focus of the study is to contribute to debates around policy through understanding the experiences of practitioners and I have therefore attempted to bring together a range of arguments and positions in the formation of a useful conceptual framework to achieve this objective.

Literature on critical community practice situates the practitioner at the heart of the study (Banks, 2007), describing an 'open-minded, reflective and thoughtful' individual who engages in 'continuous professional enquiry and development' (Henderson, 2007: 9-10). Intersecting with research on counter-terrorism policy, the critical community practitioner is cast as the 'connector' in contentious contexts (Spalek, 2014) that can be understood through spaces defined in governance literature as contested sites of participation (Cornwall, 2004). Theories of responsibilisation (Howell, 2015; Jusué, 2021) and active citizenship (Peucker, 2016, Mustafa, 2016) aid an understanding of policy engagement and concepts from scholarship on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Vedung, 2015) and the study of agency in relation to practitioners' ownership over, and potential subversion of, policy (Pearson, 2020; Qureshi, 2021) additionally help unpack the findings. Literature that speaks to practitioners' personal frames of reference, from motivations (Lehane, 2017; Shanaah, 2021) to the intersections of religion and political participation, social action and citizenship (O'Toole and Gale, 2013; Mustafa, 2016; Barylo, 2018) also complement the midrange theoretical repertoire which is instrumental in providing a reflexive dimension to lessons drawn from the data. This repertoire, and the data it frames, can be understood within significant broader research around the engagement of Muslim communities with the state (Meer, 2015; Ragazzi, 2016; Elshayyal, 2018) and literature on policy development and design (Thomas, 2010; Skoczylis, 2015; Walker, 2018; Martin, 2019), brought together to support an analysis of practitioners' experiences in the local counter-terrorism/counter-extremism space.

Thesis structure

Chapter 1 has briefly outlined the study; arguing the value of its focus, acknowledging its limitations and identifying the research questions it seeks to address.

Chapter 2 synthesises literature relevant to the study, providing an overview of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy; outlining historical developments, intersections of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy, and

evaluating key criticisms. An original contribution will be made to the scholarship on British counter-terrorism/counter-extremism policy in the form of a mapping exercise which will illustrate the conflation of strategies and support the argument that the formation of policy and its objectives remain unclear. Once the broader policy context is established, discussion will briefly examine the history of Muslim/state engagement and the development of Muslim civil society in Britain. It will then incorporate research from governance literature to explore how concepts like responsibilisation and active citizenship, as well as the impact of austerity, can make sense of participation with policy. Focusing on the research questions, the chapter will conclude with an in-depth exploration of the role of practitioners in the enactment of policy, drawing upon theories of street-level bureaucracy and agentive action to consider how policy is negotiated and reimagined in the local space. This space is conceptualised as a 'grey area' where practitioners' motivations and guiding frames of reference are examined.

Chapter 3 outlines methodological choices to provide an overview of the research process. Discussion will cover the origins of the study, detail the qualitative and ethnographic research design, and provide an account of the thematic analysis of data. The chapter concludes with an in-depth reflexive exercise, engaging with issues of positionality to acknowledge my active role in the interpretation and reporting of data through the prism of my own cultural memberships, social positionings and theoretical assumptions.

Chapter 4 contextualises the Birmingham counter-terrorism/counter-extremism space, unpacking the intersections of local policy and their conflicts to argue that Prevent has become a Frankenstein policy; revised, augmented, interlinked with efforts such as the Counter-Extremism Strategy, framed in the vernacular of contemporary discourses and then reshaped back to a version of where it began – multiple times in multiple ways – and that this is reflected in the local space. It will first cover the models and techniques of engagement observed for this study, centralising the role of the practitioner by applying literature on critical community practice and broader scholarship on UK counter-terrorism policy to aid an understanding of individuals involved. An empirical overview of Prevent at the local authority will then be offered; detailing its structure, institutional approach, partnerships and initiatives, followed by a similar breakdown of Prevent within policing. After a brief comparison of Prevent at the two authorities, discussion will turn to the Counter-Extremism Strategy to examine its structure, logic and local implementation. This will enable scrutiny of the strategy's operations against those of Prevent and, in so doing, will offer insight into the comparison of experiences of engagement across the primary authorities administering Prevent in Birmingham and across the two distinct strategies (RQ5). The chapter sets the scene for exploring what this means for practitioners who engage and suggests that the instability of the local space creates a culture of autonomy for practitioners who mirror the policy spiral and its fluctuating philosophies.

Chapter 5 analyses the motivations held by practitioners engaging with Prevent and the CES in Birmingham (RQ1) and contributes to the existing literature through the analysis of primary data which will show how a diverse set of motivations – underpinned by various moral and pragmatic philosophies – is reflective of an

ambiguous and unpredictable policy space nationally and a dynamic scene locally. It argues that participants are able to transcend the conventional model of 'practitioner' and that their work may problematise normative notions of collective action by drawing upon scholarship on religion, policy, governance, and critical community practice. The data will contradict research that argues practitioners approach the field positively and with noble intentions (Schlegel, 2022) to suggest that some experience feelings of embarrassment or shame and can feel coerced into participating, and that others engage opportunistically rather than 'authentically' (Pearson, 2020). Also brought into question is the 'trusted' Muslim theorised in literature on Muslim/state engagement (Ragazzi, 2016) through the consideration of practitioners who shun exposure to conceal their engagement. Ultimately, the chapter's contribution to the central tenet of the thesis is that the data reveals a distinct middle space in which many practitioners, far from being wholly for or against Prevent/Counter-Extremism, assume an innovative stance from which to engage.

Chapter 6 seeks to answer RQ2, focusing on how participants interpret the local implementation of policy and how these perceptions guide their practices in the field. The chapter is split into two sections. The first considers how practitioners make sense of counter-terrorism/counter-extremism strategies at a macro level, varying from positive impressions and innovative evaluations to perceptions of policy operating as a nefarious and unjustified 'industry'. The second connects these positions to the personal approaches and practices adopted by participants to explore the boundaries they establish in the course of their engagement, the appropriation of religion as a framework, and their articulation of a turbulent grey area. The chapter contributes to literature on street-level bureaucracy and the application of agency to consider new and innovative ways that critical community practitioners implement policy on the ground, as well as speaking to broader debates in scholarship on policy that frame counter-terrorism as an industry appropriated by myriad actors. Literature on religion is also drawn upon here to help make sense of findings in which religious teachings feature heavily across a number of themes. The chapter argues that the fluidity and nuance of the local policy space (made possible by the ambiguity of central policy) enables practitioners to conduct engagement via their own moral, ethical and spiritual convictions. Discussion also problematises the concept of 'safe spaces' to propose that, rather than being closed down by policy or cultivated by grassroots practitioners, participants exploit the local scene to open up new spaces in which they are able to explore religion with their service users, fulfil their own personal objectives, pursue professional development, publicise the profile of their organisations or disrupt the polarisation of counter-terrorism/counter-extremism in Birmingham.

Chapter 7 delves into the practicalities of practitioner engagement; examining challenges faced by participants as a result of engaging with policy, forms of support and training available to individuals and concludes with an analysis of the expression of agency in the implementation of policy. The chapter seeks to address RQ3 and RQ4, considering the problems and opportunities participants identify in the course of their engagement and the extent to which they are able to shape their own personal and professional objectives.

It contributes to the overall aim of the thesis to expand the understanding of practitioners' experiences in Birmingham and demonstrates how the ambiguity of policy generates hostility, curtails resources, and fosters the conditions for agentive engagement. Discussion makes reference to literature on counter-terrorism/counter-extremism policy and its securitisation of Muslim communities, the implementation of street-level bureaucrats and, beyond the framework of street-level bureaucracy, the potential for individual agency to subvert policy objectives.

Chapter 8 investigates some of the problems and antagonisms encountered by practitioners in the course of their engagement with Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham. The first half of the chapter details some of the most substantial and critical issues identified, namely the facilitation of unsuitable workshops, unprofessionalism, opaque and nepotistic conduct, and purported instances of fraud and corruption. The second half of the chapter considers the impact of such tensions, offering insight into processes of accountability and evaluation, the sustainability of work, competitive practice, antithetical effects of counter-terrorism/counter-extremism, and disengagement from the space. It argues that these tensions are permitted to foster as a result of the gaps in the direction and governance of policy at a national level that are reconstructed in the local space. The chapter speaks to RQ3 in examining broader problems identified by practitioners in the course of their engagement and explores how these are navigated. The second half of RQ4, analysing some of the ways in which objectives are fulfilled and measured, and RQ5, comparing experiences across the different authorities and distinct strategies, will also be addressed. The chapter presents empirical examples to join threads previously considered in isolation and weaves together theories from literature on policy development, governance, street-level bureaucracy, agency, and critical community practice to apply a multilayered perspective that is most appropriate to understanding the data captured.

Chapter 9 summarises the study's main findings by returning to its research questions. Discussion considers its contribution to knowledge in the field, recognises limitations, and touches upon avenues for future investigation.

A note on terminology

I acknowledge that broader literature makes reference to P/CVE (Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism) programmes but in the UK context this is inaccurate as neither Prevent nor the Counter-Extremism Strategy are limited to violent understandings of extremism. I therefore only use the term 'P/CVE' when referencing literature that defines the field as such.

Prevent is a branch of the UK's broader counter-terrorism (CT) apparatus (see next chapter) but dominates discourse and for this reason, and for ease of reading, I employ 'CT/CE' when making reference to Prevent and/or the Counter-Extremism Strategy at the same time. I also employ this term in recognition of how

Prevent has been situated within Birmingham, framed within discursive shifts towards broader securitising measures and exceptionalised on a national scale. The Counter-Extremism Strategy (CES) is cited colloquially by participants as Counter-Extremism and so 'Prevent/Counter-Extremism' is also used interchangeably with CT/CE, though the latter is less cumbersome.

Policy documentation (and academic scholarship) has long spoken about Prevent in terms of countering extremism, as well as countering terrorism (fomenting the confusion that characterises the policy arena), and thus when counter-extremism is not capitalised, it does not refer to the Counter-Extremism Strategy but the wider discourse.

Historically, Prevent in the UK has transmuted from PVET (Preventing Violent Extremism Together) to PET (Preventing Extremism Together) to Prevent, narrowly escaping a rebranding to become known as 'Engage' at previous junctures (Home Affairs Select Committee, 2016). It serves as the inspiration for much of the 'CVE' industry globally, yet practitioners here in Britain engage with 'CE' and this, in and of itself, supports the fundamental claim of this thesis that the 'CT/CE' policy sphere is shrouded in ambiguity, subject to arbitrary reform, and operates in a state of constant fluctuation. In this regard, I also make reference to the local 'space', the conceptual field within which Prevent and the CES are implemented in Birmingham.

Chapter 2 – Literature review: Mapping policy and routes to engagement

Introduction

This chapter presents literature relevant to the scope of this study, beginning with an overview of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST), a plotting of the historical developments and intersections of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy, and an evaluation of their main criticisms. After establishing the broader policy context, discussion will briefly touch upon the history of the engagement of Muslim communities with the state and the development of Muslim civil society in Britain. Finally, research that will aid an understanding of individuals' engagement with policy, framed by arguments situated in governance literature, will be drawn upon to consider how theories of responsibilisation and active citizenship as well as the impact of austerity can make sense of participation with policy. Narrowing the focus further to address the study's research questions, the chapter will conclude with a critical exploration of the role of practitioners in policy enactment, engaging with scholarship on street-level bureaucracy and the study of agency more broadly to consider how policies are shaped and reinterpreted on the front-line. This contentious space, where policy is implemented, is conceptualised as a 'grey area' where practitioners' motivations and guiding frames of reference, namely religion, are examined. Discussion, therefore, seeks to provide a breakdown of the policy framework within which the study takes places, and a review of the relevant literature, to demonstrate the consequences of the continual conceptual and normative ambiguity of the policy space for local actors in practice on the ground.

These bodies of work are brought together in order to centre the experience of the practitioner, considering participation in a dynamic and integrated way from a unique perspective that – through the application of various theories and concepts – will attempt to aid an understanding of the experiences of practitioners, fulfil the research questions, and contribute to the field. Mapping policy is a significant undertaking for the comprehension of enactment at the local level and, to address this, an original contribution is made in the form of Appendix 1: Mapping Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy and its commentary. This is necessary context for the study and although I draw upon official policy documentation – alongside academic scholarship and media reports where necessary – the thesis does not seek to primarily contribute to the assessment of policy itself. The method of selection for the literature mentioned adopted a protocol to reduce bias or 'cherry-picking' in the identification and evaluation of sources. This involved determining the scope of the review and selecting keywords which helped structure the literature into specific areas related to, for example, policy, governance, agency (Winchester and Salji, 2016). Sources were identified through the university library, journals, government websites, and online portals such as Google Scholar, and keywords from principal sources were synonymised and modified to broaden the search (Bryman, 2012). The chapter synthesises relevant and reliable critical studies (Booth et al., 2016) that demonstrate the effects of policy in

a constant state of flux and establishes the exigency for a nuanced understanding of the experiences of practitioners.

Mapping policy

Much of the discourse around the national approach to countering terrorism and extremism focuses on 'lynchpin' Prevent (Rogers: 2008: 56). This is likely explained by its morphosis into a statutory duty for specified public authorities as mandated by the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTS Act), its penetration of both policing and local government networks (unlike other elements of the overarching strategy which remain security-centred), or perhaps its concern with 'pre-criminal' spaces (Goldberg et al., 2017; Heath-Kelly, 2017; Revell, 2019; Younis, 2021), interpolating the agenda into the daily lives of citizens more than other manifestations of counter-terrorism or counter-extremism (CT/CE) policy.

This amplification, at times, results in the misattribution of Prevent to broader CT initiatives and operations that have caused local tensions and national furores, such as the 2010 Project Champion debacle in Birmingham (Hussain, 2013). This is not to suggest that critique of Prevent has been unwarranted, simply that a lack of clarity exists around components of the UK's CT/CE structures (Skoczylis, 2015; Mastroe, 2016; Mythen et al., 2017), reinforcing the climate of obscurity that beleaguers these policies nationally (Birt, 2009; Sabir, 2017; Martin, 2019) and can result in 'paralysis' for practitioners (Abbas, 2019: 400).

Missing in the literature is a comprehensive dissection of the anatomy of Prevent, how it operates through CONTEST, and, crucially, its relation to the CES. While official documents on each element and strategy are accessible, and much academic research has been published exclusively on the ambitions and shortcomings of Prevent (Thomas, 2012; Skoczylis and Andrews, 2019), obsolete versions of CONTEST (Gregory, 2009; Gearson and Rosemont, 2015), and comparisons of P/CVE policies in Western countries (Shanaah and Heath-Kelly, 2022), there does not seem to be a coherent or comprehensive guide to the government's contemporary CT/CE strategies, in turn making unpacking which agencies and institutions then have jurisdiction over and responsibility for different workstreams and programmes more complex. In order to address this and grasp the scope of Prevent/CES work in Birmingham; at the outset of fieldwork I mapped the overarching strategies (Appendix 1), attempting to demonstrate how they interlink and are operationalised on the ground. The diagram, a form of policy organogram that offers an original contribution to the field, was devised through analysis of grey literature, academic sources, the submission of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, and primary data gathered during fieldwork. Once drafted, it was shared with participants in interviews (including those with strategic oversight of BCC and WMCTU) with any amendments or suggestions incorporated during the mapping process.

The diagram depicts the broad formation of CONTEST and the agencies through which Prevent, as a workstream, is delivered. It also details the newer Counter-Extremism Strategy, illustrating how the two were

linked structurally at the time this study was carried out. Although initiatives introduced, language employed, and individuals representing the strategies have emerged as issues of conflation among practitioner networks (Osorno Hernandez, 2021) and public perception (Home Office, 2019a), Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy are officially administered as separate approaches (CCE, 2018c). The former, having been around for much longer, appears more developed, more wide-reaching, and inevitably more convoluted. The latter possessed little to no legislative power, functioning largely as an intelligence-gathering and grant-funding entity but with potential to develop, if afforded the powers it sought, into a broad and securitised 'solution' to myriad sociocultural issues within civil society. Prevent can be read as a joint venture between local authorities (in charge of steering multi-agency deradicalisation programme Channel) and regional CTUs. In the case of Birmingham the relevant CTU is the WMCTU which covers West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Mercia but is strategically based within West Midlands Police (WMP) in proximity to the second city and its status as a longstanding 'priority area' (HM Government, 2011: 97) that has historically been the largest single recipient of Prevent funding nationally (Thomas, 2010). This study seeks to understand how the approaches adopted by BCC and WMCTU in the implementation of Prevent affect the experiences of practitioners involved with both authorities.

Connecting the two strategies (Prevent and the CES) is the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT) – since rebranded the Homeland Security Group – established in 2007 as a consolidation of the government's CT apparatus (Parliament, 2009b) in a bid to overcome cross-departmental confusion (Thomas, 2010) and support the Home Secretary (responsible for CONTEST) in developing security measures to combat the threat of terrorism (HM Government, 2018). The Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) is one of the OSCT's six directorates and is responsible for implementing ideological counter-narratives to prevent radicalisation (Parliament, 2009b), though it has been widely condemned and acknowledged in the official Prevent reviews of 2011 (Thomas, 2012) and 2023 to be considered by its critics as a form of 'government propaganda' (Shawcross, 2023: 179). The innovative tactics employed by RICU are indeed modelled on a disbanded propaganda unit established in 1948, and it employs individuals with experience of classified information operations in Iraq to disseminate messages 'through the use of subterfuge' in order to enforce attitudinal change on Britain's Muslim communities (Cobain et al., 2016: para 17). It was reported to be funded £17 million for 2015/16, after which time its budget disappeared from public scrutiny (Cobain et al., 2016) and the activities undertaken by the PR company it contracts to produce much of its work, Breakthrough Media, additionally appear to be protected by the Official Secrets Act (Hayes and Qureshi, 2016). Breakthrough Media, which also enjoys a lucrative partnership with the OSCT (Cobain et al., 2016) and is explored further in Chapter 1, went on to set up its own separate PR company, Horizon PR, in affiliation with M&C Saatchi in 2015 who the Home Office later commissioned to handle its Counter-Extremism account (McCabe, 2016; Khomami, 2017), detailed later in the chapter.

The purpose of this interjection has been to contextualise some of the information depicted in Appendix 1, particularly the connections between, for example, Prevent at the local authority and Prevent at the CTU as well as ties between the CES and the Prevent strategy as a whole. Assertions that the two strategies operate in entirely different spaces (CCE, 2018c) are contradicted by the evidence presented in the diagram.

The remainder of this section will attempt to outline the history of these distinct strategies and how they interlink, contributing to the emerging literature on how the CES has springboarded from Prevent into the policy sphere (Aked et al., 2019; Lowe, 2019; Elahi and Hargreaves, 2022; O'Toole, 2022). It will also consider the conflation of these strategies with other policies such as cohesion (Aly, 2013; O'Toole et al., 2016) and provide a summary of how the developments described result in a destabilisation conceptualised by scholars as emblematic of a 'policy spiral' (Walker, 2018).

This exercise endeavours to provide the reader with a grounding in the relevant policy issues and lay the foundation for the rest of the thesis to be understood, speaking to the root of all research questions, particularly the overarching objective to compare experiences of engagement across the primary authorities administering Prevent and across the two distinct strategies.

CONTEST – an overview

Prevent is one arm of CONTEST, the UK's four-pronged approach to countering and preventing terrorism. The terms 'countering' and 'preventing' are applied interchangeably in official documents and the wider discourse on Prevent, however, some scholars call for a distinction between what they perceive as 'harder' approaches to countering terrorism and 'softer' approaches to the prevention of extremism (Osorno Hernandez, 2021), based on the logic that extremism leads to terrorism. This points to the first of many layers of ambiguity encountered in unpacking these policies. Research references the lack of distinction between understandings of violent and non-violent extremism (Faure Walker, 2022), between separate policy approaches to countering terrorism and extremism (Onursal and Kirkpatrick, 2021), conflation with other policies (Richards, 2011) the blurring of the Prevent and Pursue workstreams (Birt, 2009; Sabir, 2017; Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022), uncertainty as to whether Prevent should function as a securitising endeavour or an attempt to bring about community cohesion (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010), and, crucially, the initial confusion ingrained in Prevent's dually-funded origins (Thomas, 2009; O'Toole et al., 2016; Martin, 2019).

Appendix 1 depicts the fifth published version of the overarching strategy (updated in 2018) which, as illustrated, is made up of the 'four P' workstreams. In late 2022, the government announced CONTEST would undergo a 'wholesale refresh' to protect its citizens from emerging and persistent threats (Home Office, 2022); a process informed by a selection of security experts and significant investigations such as the Manchester Arena Inquiry and the Independent Review of Prevent (IRP). The updated version was published in July 2023 (Home Office, 2022) with minimal apparent structural change. While the police and security

services claim responsibility for Protect, Prepare and Pursue; Prevent is the only strand to also operate under local government and permeate civil society. In summary, Pursue seeks to detect and disrupt individuals with intent to commit acts of terrorism, Protect aims to reduce the UK's vulnerability to an attack, and Prepare works to mitigate the impact of terrorist incidents (Malik et al., 2017). Prevent focuses on the building of partnerships with communities, civil society organisations and public sector institutions to safeguard individuals against exploitation and radicalisation (HM Government, 2018).

Having briefly outlined the structure of CONTEST, the following section will delve further into the development of the Prevent strategy, beginning with mention of policies that preceded the strategy.

Origins of Prevent: 2006-2011

There is a wealth of academic literature mapping Prevent; its origins and phases, aims and objectives, and successes and failures (e.g., Kundnani, 2009; Skoczylis, 2015; Mastroe, 2016; Martin, 2019). Paul Thomas has published arguably the most substantial corpus of research, charting the strategy's genesis in government (2009), its conceptual direction, development, and controversies (2017; 2020), relationships with other policies (2019), partnerships with youth services and local authorities (2017), and its effects on targeted communities (2010; 2014a; 2016) to ultimately question how effectively Prevent has achieved it stated aims (2012). Overall, Thomas concludes that while credit is due for its ambitions to resource and develop alliances with sections of communities, the ways in which the strategy has been 'designed, operationalised and managed' amount to a monocultural focus on British Muslims and that its clumsy attempts at socially engineering this demographic have deepened divides between the state and Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike (2012: 139). Thomas's body of work has generated and contributed to significant debates around how the current CT/CE scene should be contextualised by the analysis of multiculturalism, cohesion and integration policies and their impact on the practice of preventing extremism in Britain's Muslim and white working-class communities (Thomas, 2007; Thomas, 2011; Thomas, 2014b; Thomas and Sanderson; 2012; Thomas et al.; 2018, Pilkington and Hussain, 2022).

Prevent and the CES cannot be considered outside of the broader policy context of multiculturalism and its transition to community cohesion following the riots that took place in Oldham, Bradford and Burnley in 2001 (Thomas, 2014b). Subsequent inquiries concluded that multiculturalism policies had failed to integrate Britain's ethno-religious minorities (Qureshi, 2021) with the Cantle report's now infamous concern with 'parallel lives' (Cantle, 2001) resulting in a shift to a cohesion model that scholars attributed to the death of multiculturalism (Kundnani, 2002) and a regression to assimilation (Alexander, 2004). The approach sought to cultivate a 'common vision and sense of belonging', encouraging 'cross-cultural encounters' between communities of divergent backgrounds (Cantle, 2005: 166) and emphasising the promotion of 'Britishness' through, for example, English language and citizenship tests (Thomas, 2011; Ahmed, 2018). It has been

extensively criticised for its reductive problematising of cultural difference as a potential condition for emergent disorder (Martin, 2019) and summarised as a flawed paradigm that served to essentialise ethnicity and undermine equality (Ratcliffe, 2012). In 2006, the cohesion agenda was usurped by Prevent, pushing local authorities nationwide to withdraw funding from 'many deserving non-Muslim projects in favour of Muslim-focused Prevent initiatives' (Roohi Ahmed, 2015: 270), the effects of which will be discussed later in the chapter. Cohesion was to remain entangled in the policy narrative of Prevent, however, and more recently respawn in the objectives of the CES and its reimposed commitment to the building of cohesive communities through initiatives such as English language classes and employment interventions for women (HM Government, 2015a).

Examining Prevent and the CES in light of multiculturalism, cohesion and integration policies is integral to understanding local nuances and provides a rich tapestry from which to consider the research questions. This piece of research, however, is not an analysis of policy and will synthesise prominent discussions but not extensively detail the minutiae of policy development already established by scholars mentioned in this section. I would like to bring together a range of arguments and positions in the formation of a new conceptual framework that will aid an understanding of the experiences of practitioners in order to fulfil the research questions.

Announced in October 2006, Prevent – then called Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) – was thought to be a response to the 7/7 bombings in which fifty-two commuters were killed in four co-ordinated attacks on London's public transport (Thomas, 2011). In fact, it was first introduced by the New Labour government in 2003 as part of CONTEST (Gregory, 2009) and remained secret until its publication three years later (Skoczylis, 2015), with the attacks marking a critical juncture at which policymakers would begin to focus inward on the domestic radicalisation of Muslim citizens and address the prior underdevelopment of the Prevent workstream (Ahmad, 2021).

The following period, from 2006 until 2011, marks the first developmental cycle of Prevent's existence. Scholars designate 'phases' (Osorno Hernandez, 2021), 'streams' (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023) or 'eras' (Andrews, 2022) of the strategy; structured and shaped by its official reviews and updates, namely in 2006, 2009, 2011 and 2018. Though not instigating a remodelling of Prevent explicitly, the introduction of both the CTS Act and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in 2015 also had considerable impact on the implementation of the 2011 Prevent strategy (Andrews, 2020). Boundaries of the phases are disputed, though, as some consider the 2015 juncture to be a demarcation in the lifespan of Prevent (Osorno Hernandez, 2021), whilst others perceive the 2018 version to be a broad continuation of the 2011 strategy (Andrews, 2020) and analyse the 2015 additions as annexations. What is agreed upon, however, is that the main objectives of Prevent have remained steadfast (O'Toole, 2011) but changes have been made to the epistemological considerations given to how these should be achieved, specifically the approach for understanding and tackling radicalisation.

Generally, it is accepted that the 2006 and 2009 iterations centred on cohesion-based approaches to tackling radicalisation and exclusively targeted Muslims (Spalek and McDonald, 2009; Awan, 2012a; Bonino, 2012). Initially, seventy local authorities in England with a minimum five per cent constitution of Muslims in their local demographic were funded through the £6 million Pathfinder pilot fund (Thomas, 2014); a process described as 'spatialising Islamophobia' (Najib, 2021) and treating Muslim presence itself as a security risk (O'Toole, 2022). This was increased significantly in 2008 with a three-year £45 million allocation for all local authorities with at least two-thousand Muslims and the creation of three-hundred new dedicated police posts (Thomas, 2010), some of which were attached to the newly established regional Counter-Terrorism Units as illustrated in Appendix 1. This amounted to a budget of £140 million for 2008-2011 Prevent, dually derived from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Home Office (Thomas, 2011).

The binary grounding of Prevent fostered a sense of ambiguity around policy objectives that infiltrated its implementation (Richards, 2011; Alam and Husband, 2013; Qureshi, 2021). Local authorities were anxious about its potential to damage relations with Muslim communities (Thomas, 2011) and practitioners, unsure whether they were delivering cohesion or security-centred initiatives, became wary of expectations imposed upon them to act as providers of information to police and authorities (Kundnani, 2009). Its community-friendly veneer and 'hearts and minds' approach (IRR, 2010; Thomas, 2010; Lakhani, 2012) funded a variety of 'bewildering' (O'Toole et al., 2011: 3) 'broad and unfocused' arts, sports, and leisure activities that were subject to little independent evaluation and attended almost exclusively by Muslim young people (Thomas, 2011: 170). Individuals were deemed eligible for Prevent funding 'purely because they were Muslim' (Roohi Ahmed, 2015: 197) in an approach that lacked clarity, disregarded the theory that there exists no causal relationship between integration and radicalisation (Rahimi and Graumans, 2015) and underscored the position that policy measures developed with little empirical underpinning (Nouri and Whiting, 2015) fail to produce a nuanced understanding of the concept of radicalisation (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2009; Kundnani, 2012; Heath-Kelly, 2012). This period of Prevent has thus been characterised by its imprudent attempt to securitise community cohesion (Skoczylis, 2015; Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023).

Before enforcing a policy overhaul, the government attempted to maintain that PVE and community cohesion policies were 'separate but linked approaches' (Turley, 2009: 10), although practitioners struggled to distinguish the two operationally (Thomas, 2009). This confusion exposed antagonisms between the government departments in charge of administering the strategy, the DCLG and the Home Office, whose dissonant methods problematised the strategy's implementation and further exacerbated local anxieties regarding its intent (Thomas, 2010). Referred to as trapped 'between two stools' (Thomas, 2009: 282); Prevent, which was intended to be built upon principles of community partnership and engagement (Bleich, 2010; Gregory, 2010; Hardy, 2015), was instead deemed destructive in its bid to combine security with attempts to foster cohesion (Kundnani, 2009; Lakhani, 2012; Rashid, 2013). Its 'cohesive' activities were in fact capacity-building initiatives for Muslims only, contravening the cross-community ethos of Cantle's

cohesion project (Thomas, 2014b). Critics lambasted an approach that lacked transparency, induced corruption and was conversely counterproductive in reducing the risk of violent extremism (IRR, 2010); ultimately leaving Prevent 'failed and friendless' (Thomas, 2010: 443).

In addition to a renewed (and ill-fated) commitment to cohesion, the 2009 review acknowledged that Prevent had been receiving detrimentally less resources than the other three workstreams (Malik et al., 2017) and recognised its trust deficiency with Muslim communities (Skoczylis, 2015). It was at this stage that the 'PVE' brand was replaced with the more 'enigmatic' title, 'Prevent' (Thomas, 2011: 184), in an attempt to limit the stigmatisation endured by Muslim communities (e.g., Qureshi, 2015; Boukalas, 2019; Taylor, 2020; Kaleem, 2021) and broaden the strategy's remit to encompass non-violent forms of extremism. Non-violent extremism – posited by policymakers to precede violent extremism in a linear process (Miah, 2017) often referred to as the 'conveyer-belt' theory (McNeil-Willson, 2021: 164) – interprets (conservative) Muslim values and beliefs as 'anti-social' and 'radical' (Spalek and McDonald, 2009: 123). In this way, changes made to address the stigmatisation experienced by Britain's Muslim communities simply shifted from one vernacular to another; while the association of 'violence' was revised, many prosaic practices became recast as problematic and extreme. Research has shown that the effects of such constructions of Muslim expression not only impact how the Muslim is viewed externally but are productive of an 'internal suspect body' that fractures relations within Muslim families and communities as internalised fears police the adoption of Islamic identity markers such as the growing of a beard or the wearing of a hijab (Abbas, 2019a; Abbas, 2019b).

Forsaking cohesion: 2011-2015

2011 is another agreed-upon juncture in the lifecycle of Prevent (Andrews, 2020; Ahmad 2021, Osorno Hernandez, 2021) at which the Coalition government, in conceding the consequences of previous attempts to conflate cohesion and integration with counter-terrorism (Aly, 2013; Malik et al., 2017), prioritised the tackling of extremist ideology and identifying those at risk of radicalisation (Skoczylis, 2015) over cultivating cohesion. Then Prime Minister David Cameron declared that multiculturalism had failed and that British Muslims lived segregated lives guided by un-British values (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022). Conceptually, the strategy broadened its scope from Muslim communities to a whole-society approach (Andrews, 2020), recognising other forms of extremism (such as right-wing) despite continuing to prioritise 'jihadi' terrorism as the greatest risk to national security (Skoczylis, 2015). It also emphasised its earlier shift in focus from violent to non-violent extremism (Sabir, 2017; Martin, 2019; Faure Walker, 2022), with a further-developed definition of extremism referencing ambiguous British values that scholars argue rendered the new term as 'meaningless as that of violent extremism' (Skoczylis, 2015: 62) and conversely served to increase opposition to the strategy (Mastroe, 2016). Interestingly, in terms of partnerships, this conceptual move meant Prevent could no longer enter dialogue with organisations previously championed as successful Prevent projects that

had been recast as 'non-violent extremist' (Barclay, 2011; O'Toole et al., 2012) in an arbitrary process of active disengagement (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022).

Structurally, evaluations that condemned the intersection of cohesion work with Prevent were addressed in the 2011 review by the severing of ties with the DCLG, placing central management of the strategy with the OSCT within the Home Office (Thomas, 2014b; Osorno Hernandez, 2021). The OSCT reduced the number of Prevent priority areas – local authorities in receipt of additional funding to implement Prevent; non-priority areas were still required to deliver but through their own budget and staff without support from central funding (Mastroe, 2020) – and modified their identification process to an OSCT-sanctioned risk analysis as opposed to a crude appraisal of local demographics (Andrews, 2020). Comparable to the conceptual move from violent to non-violent, though, this shift in assessment made little material difference as the newly defined areas remained the most Muslim-populated locales in the country (O'Toole et al., 2011).

Thomas empirically analyses Prevent's structural 'divorce' from cohesion to suggest that at the local level, the separation was superficial and unsuccessfully realised, leading the two approaches to 'continue to co-habit in an unequal and loveless relationship' (2014: 472). Overall, he suggests, the 2011 review produced a version of Prevent that remained dogged by claims of securitisation, ambiguity, and ineffectiveness while producing the 'worst scenario possible' for the Prevent/cohesion relationship in that national support for cohesion was removed – though cohesion functions would still likely be expected of partners (HM Government, 2011) – and local authorities' autonomy of Prevent activity reduced as they became subject to the OSCT's evaluation and funding criteria (2014: 490). Despite this centralisation, and a somewhat 'downsizing' in the role of police (Thomas, 2012: 141), local authorities and policing were identified in strategy guidance as key sites of delivery (HM Government, 2011), emphasising the significance of this piece of research in considering the implementation of Prevent for practitioners through both the local authority and policing body of a longstanding priority area.

Focus on 'extremism': 2015 – the Prevent Duty and the roots of the CES

Though not differentiated by an official review, 2015 advanced some of the most substantial developments in the CT/CE policy sphere (Ahmad, 2021) justified by significant events of the preceding years such as the 2013 killing of Fusilier Lee Rigby, which resulted in the Prime Minister's Task Force on Tackling Radicalisation and Extremism (HM Government, 2013), the now debunked 2014 Trojan Horse plot to allegedly 'Islamise' Birmingham schools (Miah, 2017; Awan, 2018; Holmwood and O'Toole, 2018) and the increasing number of British Muslims travelling to join the so-called Islamic caliphate in Iraq and Syria between 2013 and 2015 (Peresin, 2015; Peresin and Cervone, 2015; Silverman, 2017). These events prompted the introduction of the statutory Prevent Duty under the CTS Act 2015 (which also restricted travel for the purposes of conflict

participation) and, crucially for this study, the establishment of a new Extremism Analysis Unit which would inform the government's emerging Counter-Extremism Strategy (detailed in upcoming section).

The duty mandated that public sector staff at specified authorities practice 'due regard' in preventing individuals from being drawn into terrorism (HM Government, 2015b), resulting in the training of millions of citizens to spot the signs of radicalisation (Andrews, 2020). Studies reveal this has led to a culture of disproportionate and inappropriate reporting (Aked, 2020; Heath-Kelly and Strausz, 2018) which has contributed to the institutionalising of racism (Younis, 2021) and the securitisation of care (Aked, 2021), education (Winter et al., 2021), social policy (Ragazzi, 2017a) and even the home (Fernandez, 2018). The duty is touched upon here to contextualise policy developments in the realm of Prevent and the CES but is not focal to this study which centralises the experiences of practitioners who choose to engage and deliver as opposed to those individuals on whom the duty became mandatory in 2015.

The duty did, however, in tandem with the CES, promulgate the concept of Fundamental British Values (FBVs) (HM Government, 2015a) as the antidote to extremism. It is worth noting that the definition of extremism – as well as much of the CT/CE lexicon – is considered inherently problematic and generally esoteric (see Appleby, 2010; Richards, 2011; Githens-Mazer, 2012; Antunez and Tellidis, 2013; Schmid, 2013; Lowe, 2016; Stronach and Frankham, 2020; Faure Walker, 2022) and thus the notion of FBVs as the antithesis to extremism is, too, deemed intrinsically problematic (Martin, 2014; Aked, 2021), particularly in its role within the national curriculum (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022). The very notion of FBVs, besides discounting Northern Ireland, fails to consider Britain's diverse makeup and is reflective of the broader 'subjective' and 'awkward' basis of definitions that drive extremism policy (Lowe, 2017: 918).

Current scene: 2018 and 2023 reviews and the Independent Review of Prevent

Reviewed and updated in 2023, the current version of Prevent (as well as the preceding 2018 version) is regarded as a broad continuation of 2011, distinguished primarily by the responsibilisation of front-line workers imbricated by the duty (Heath-Kelly and Strausz, 2018), a new commitment to tackling online radicalisation (Andrews, 2022) and the rehabilitation of individuals with terrorism-related convictions through the novel Desistance and Disengagement Programme (Elshimi, 2018). Here I would argue that the development of the separate CES has meant that Prevent endured its two most recent reviews with minimal reform (notable updates include 2023's refocus from vulnerability to 'susceptibility') which, as has been evidenced, is incongruous with the ever-changing CT/CE climate in the UK.

IRP

In August 2019, the government announced that Lord Carlile, who carried out the 2011 review, was to undertake the role of the new 'Independent' Reviewer of Prevent. His self-professed bias and reputation for discrediting critics of the strategy (Faure Walker, 2022) was met with widespread criticism from human rights

groups (Hooper, 2021) and the decision was taken to reverse the appointment. Carlile was eventually replaced by William Shawcross, another controversial figure recognised for his hostile remarks about Islam and Muslims and connections to right-wing thinktanks (Oborne, 2021) whose selection further undermined the review's credibility (Townsend and Raja, 2019). A coalition of more than five hundred organisations, representing thousands of British voices, officially boycotted the review (Grierson, 2021) and, through the advocacy initiative Prevent Watch, academics and activists mobilised to undertake the People's Review of Prevent (PRoP) (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022), an evidence-based report offering an alternative to Shawcross's 'rubber-stamping' exercise (Amnesty International, 2021).

Marred by controversy and subject to a number of delays (Faure Walker, 2022), the IRP originally set out to review how effectively Prevent was achieving its aims, operating at local and national levels, and interacting with safeguarding strategies, as well as consider implementation of the duty and future development (Home Office, 2021a). It was finally published in February 2023 and suggested a number of areas for improvement; principally a move from a local to regional model of delivery, updated duty guidance and extension of its mandate to wider settings, and a closer working relationship with the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) (Home Office, 2023). All thirty-four of its recommendations were accepted by the Home Secretary and the Home Office committed to fulfilling implementation of all actions within twelve months (HM Government, 2023a).

The review has been accused of exacerbating tensions and delegitimising critics (Malik, 2023), attempting to redefine the boundaries of acceptable Islam, thus contributing to a 'good Muslim/bad Muslim' binary (Qureshi and Younis, 2023), being ideologically-driven (Holmwood, 2023), and, ultimately, demonstrating a poor level of analysis by basing findings on only a handful of cases (Townsend, 2023) that provide a 'journalistic' contribution to the inquiry (Katwala, 2023b). It was based on an analysis of only fifteen CSOs across the country (with primary research conducted with only six), for example, while this piece of research examines more in Birmingham alone (a comparison of Shawcross's conclusions against the arguments put forward by this study will be explored in forthcoming chapters).

One of Shawcross's main convictions is that Prevent has been 'overloaded and/or unfocused' (2023: 144), paying, what he purports to be, undue attention in recent years to extremism related to the far-right and to mixed or unclear ideologies, such as the misogynistic and violent incel (involuntarily celibate) movement described by scholars as increasingly popular and worryingly neglected (Hoffman et al., 2020; O'Malley et al., 2020; Tomkinson et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021; Hart and Huber, 2023). In the IRP, Shawcross calls for an ideological return to a prominent focus on Muslims and 'Islamist' extremism. I quote 'Islamist' to acknowledge the perspective that, despite widespread justification for its usage (Thomas, 2012), the term is deemed harmful to Muslim communities (al-Azami, 2020), and to recognise attempts made to limit its use. The National Association of Muslim Police initiated a campaign to replace the terminology in line with countries such as New Zealand (after the 2019 attack on a Christchurch mosque) (Oldham, 2022); a motion

adopted locally by WMCTU until the IRP declared the term to remain part of the official lexicon. Critics have highlighted the report's many inconsistencies, drawing parallels with the paradoxical new version of Prevent that it recommends (Katwala, 2023a). I argue that the confusion and ambiguity that continues to impair Prevent, compounded further by the recommendations of the IRP, creates the space within which participants of this study are able to exploit complexities to tailor their engagement in ways which will be explored in empirical chapters.

Shawcross's ideological reversion to Muslims as the focus of Prevent, a move condemned as parochial by the Local Government Association (LGA, 2023) and complicit in the rise of far-right terrorism (Hussein, 2022), means the data in this study is more significant than ever. As Muslim practitioners will be increasingly called upon to deliver on a Muslim-centred strategy, it is pertinent that we understand their experiences, motivations and requirements in the field, as well as considering gaps they identify and challenges they may face in order to mitigate and improve conditions for their participation.

Another significant outcome of the IRP is its motion to deeply embroil the CCE and RICU in the oversight and operationalisation of Prevent moving forward, despite the government having always maintained that CT and CE were wholly separate entities (Home Office, 2019a). The next section will provide an overview of the CES (including how the CCE is situated within it) in order to examine its context and consider its framing in the wider discourse (including its relationship to Prevent), thereby contextualising the research questions and facilitating an understanding of the data pertaining to the Counter-Extremism Strategy.

The Counter-Extremism Strategy – its underpinnings, structure, and workstreams

In a blog on the official government website, the CCE concedes that 'few people' are clear on the distinction between the CES and CONTEST and that confusion is 'repeatedly expressed' about the CES and its benefits (CCE, 2018: para 13). Despite this, and the acknowledgement of 'grey areas of overlap between integration and extremism; and extremism and terrorism' (CCE, 2018: para 14), elucidating a key criticism of the UK's approach to CT/CE and confirming the aforementioned literature citing a climate of ambiguity nationally, the Commission insists that policy is 'clearly divided' into three distinct areas addressing terrorism, extremism and integration (CCE, 2018: para 12).

This section begins with a brief chronology of the Counter-Extremism Strategy and its alleged unravelling from Prevent and then details two key bodies, the Commission for Countering Extremism cited in the previous paragraph and the strategy's main programme of work, Building a Stronger Britain Together (BSBT). A discussion on the imbrication of the OSCT and RICU with BSBT and similar counter-narrative initiatives will conclude a review of the historical developments and conceptual objectives of Prevent and the CES.

In October 2015, shortly after the introduction of Prevent Duty and in a speech addressing a school in Birmingham, then Prime Minister David Cameron set out the UK's plans to counter extremism through a new

strategy (Prime Minister's Office, 2015b). The four-year programme of work was to be managed through the Office for Counter-Extremism, established four months prior, which set out to lead the government's work on understanding trends in extremist attitudes through its Extremism Analysis Unit (see Appendix 1). The CES identified four 'pillars' of work: countering extremist ideology, supporting mainstream voices, disrupting extremists and building cohesive communities (HM Government, 2015a), with Cameron advocating for the emergence of 'reforming and moderate Muslim voices' (Prime Minister's Office, 2015a); implicating Muslim practitioners and contributing to the good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy in which categories of 'moderate' and 'extremist' are tactically appropriated (Cherney and Murphy, 2016) in so doing. Though posited as exceeding Prevent in its concern with non-violent extremist ideology and British values, the strategy mobilised the same vernacular of its predecessor and demonstrated 'impressive disregard' for its history (Martin, 2019: 45) as well as appearing to realise a full circle back to the ill-fated community cohesion approach of Prevent's early iterations. This would substantiate earlier theories of a 'divorced but still co-habiting' relationship status between Prevent and cohesion (Thomas, 2014b: 472), though reimagined through the thin veil of the CES.

The strategy was borne out of two pieces of proposed legislation, the 2015 Counter-Extremism Bill and the 2016 Counter-Extremism and Safeguarding Bill, which sought to strengthen powers to close venues, target groups, censor content, regulate out-of-school settings for children and expedite the integration agenda, for example (Parliament, 2015; Malik et al., 2017; Travis, 2017). Neither Bills were passed, however, with parliamentary lawyers unable to produce a legal definition of 'extremism' robust enough to trigger criminal liability (Elahi and Hargreaves, 2022) and a general consensus of opposition to perceived infringements on civil liberties from a broad range of groups and individuals (Malik et al., 2017), including the government's own Joint Committee on Human Rights (Ahmad, 2021).

This stumbling block led the government to abandon a legislative route and instead develop the Commission for Countering Extremism in 2018 (Martin, 2019) to build on the programme of work set out in the CES (Cage, 2019).

CCE

The Commission, a non-statutory 'transparent body operating independently' (Home Office, 2021c: para 4) set out to 'support the government in stamping out extremist ideology in all its forms […] so it is denied a safe space to spread' (CCE, 2018a: para 3). While its remit is extremism, the Commission makes clear that although it will cover matters of integration, it draws the line at terrorism which it claims falls within the scope of Prevent – a strategy it describes as being 'very specifically about safeguarding those at risk of becoming or supporting terrorists' (CCE, 2018c: para 16). Acknowledging that previous versions of Prevent were committed to challenging non-violent extremism before the creation of the CES, the Commission attempts to differentiate between the strategies by claiming that the 2018 version of CONTEST 'leaves the job of countering extremism that doesn't lead to terrorism to the Counter-Extremism Strategy' (CCE, 2018c: para 17).

This effort to distinguish the strategies operationally and discursively has been construed as 'hollow' (Cage, 2019: 15) and 'muddled' (Martin, 2019: 48); not helped by the appointment of Sara Khan, former director of Prevent-funded organisation Inspire, as the initial Lead Commissioner (Home Office, 2018). Sara is considered an outspoken supporter of Prevent who has received RICU funding for campaigns at Inspire (Aked et al., 2019), appeared in training videos for Prevent (Hooper, 2016b), co-authored a book with a consultant at Breakthrough Media (Faure Walker, 2022), is the sister of the deputy director of RICU (Massoumi, 2021) and has been branded a government 'mouthpiece' (Iqbal, 2018) who lacks credibility and impartiality (Hamid, 2019). Other members of the Commission are also accused of being 'deeply embedded within the global Islamophobia industry' (Cage, 2019: 4), maintaining connections to right-wing thinktanks such as Policy Exchange, Quilliam, The Henry Jackson Society, and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (Hamid, 2019). Khan was replaced as Lead Commissioner in 2021 by Robin Simcox who possesses similar 'strong links' to neo-conservative and far-right thinktanks (Holmwood, 2022).

Nevertheless, under Khan's direction the Commission formed an additional 'Experts Group' (CCE, 2018b) and set out to build on the government's legal definition of 'extremism' (CCE, 2018d). Acknowledging a longstanding 'top-down' approach to counter-extremism policy and polarising 'overuse of the E-word' (CCE, 2019c: 1), the Commission proposed to replace the 'very unhelpful' current definition of extremism with the newly coined 'hateful extremism' (CCE, 2019c: 4). It considers this work 'flagship' (CCE, 2020a) though the terminology has not yet been widely adopted despite the Commission's calls for the creation of a legal and operational framework to elevate the concept of hateful extremism as a priority threat alongside terrorism (CCE, 2021).

The Commission also identifies abuse and intimidation faced by practitioners (CCE, 2019b) – of particular significance to this study's research questions – indicating a difficult terrain for engagement with CT/CE. Interestingly, this is elaborated upon by Sadek Hamid, an academic who in 2019 became one of the subject specialists commissioned by the CCE to produce a paper for its collection of peer-reviewed articles on extremism (CCE, 2019a). He describes the initial dilemma he faced as to whether or not to engage and how, after conceding, his paper was withdrawn for 'non-compliance', leading him to conclude that the CCE has 'no real appetite for considering different perspectives' and has ultimately failed to secure the co-operation of Britain's Muslim communities (Hamid, 2019: para 9). Questions pertaining to the neutrality of the CCE's Experts Group, Lead Commissioner and body of curated work fuel comment that, despite protests of transparency and independence in order to distance the Commission from Prevent, its cynical efforts (Faure Walker, 2022) are in fact governed by the Home Office (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023) and tied to greater attempts at manufacturing an 'acceptable' version of Islam (Cage, 2019) that upholds the good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy (Mamdani, 2004) and confirms the difficulty of existing in the grey area (to be explored by the data).

This section has offered an overview of the CCE, a significant branch of the CES and later subsidiary body of Prevent. The following section will briefly outline the strategy's main programme of work, BSBT.

BSBT

Launched in 2016 as part of the CES, BSBT granted £8.5 million to over two-hundred and fifty projects, delivered over a hundred 'in-kind' communication support packages through M&C Saatchi on behalf of the Home Office, produced multiple local and national campaigns worth £12.8 million, and funded forty Community Coordinators (who also worked with M&C Saatchi to deliver tactical support to the BSBT network) to cultivate 'credible' voices, challenge extremism and promote British values (Home Office, 2021b). M&C Saatchi, the agency appointed to handle the Home Office's initial £60 million Counter-Extremism account, previously collaborated with Breakthrough Media to promote counter-radicalisation narratives on behalf of Prevent (McCabe, 2016); detailed in a later section.

Though an integral arm of the CES, BSBT's vague title, along with its ambiguously named Community Coordinators regularly confused those it engaged in a method of delivery that left individuals feeling 'duped' and condescended (Uddin et al., 2021). The programme, 'leveraged against the background of austerity cuts', and via methods that lacked transparency (Birt, 2019a: para 8), attempted to mobilise (particularly) Muslim citizens (Shanaah, 2019) and in so doing served to racialise and securitise Muslim civil society (Ahmad, 2021) whilst simultaneously normalising and desecuritising Counter-Extremism (Faure Walker, 2022).

There is much anecdotal evidence (reported in the media) about the effects of BSBT programmes on unwitting individuals that may have utilised a service or attended an event and been unaware of the source of its funding, as will be explored in an upcoming section, but there is little empirical research on practitioners that have worked on BSBT or engaged with the CES more broadly. Currently, there seems to be only one PhD thesis that includes any participants involved with the CES (Osorno Hernandez, 2021) and this study therefore seeks to contribute to this significant and nascent area by investigating the experiences of CES practitioners and presenting their reflections on the strategy, as well as attempting to answer the research questions comparing engagement across Prevent and the CES in Birmingham.

CES and integration – Prevent and cohesion 2.0?

Alongside BSBT and the CCE, by 2019 the work of the CES had expanded to include the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme (providing funding for measures such as CCTV), the publication of the Hate Crime Action Plan, the Independent Sharia Review, reviews of integration and 'Islamist' extremism in prisons, the introduction of new powers through the Digital Economy Act 2017 to monitor media content, the strengthening of safeguarding regulations for schools, and the exclusion of fourteen individuals from the UK (Home Office, 2019b). The launch of the Academic-Practitioner Counter-Extremism Network (APCEN) was announced as an addition to the CCE the following year (CCE, 2020b).

Much of the work carried out through these initiatives has served to bring cultural practices 'into the purview of the counter-extremism apparatus' (Cage, 2019: 11) through the strategy's focus on issues like forced marriage, honour-based violence, female genital mutilation and even English language training (HM Government, 2015a) that would previously have belonged to the realm of integration. In an examination of the impact of the evolving security agenda on the accommodation of Muslims in British society, Therese O'Toole suggests that the 'muscular liberal' approach of the CES (Dobbernack, 2016) 'implicitly asserts an identitarian form of Christian majoritarianism that limits the conditions for the political inclusion of British Muslims' and evidences how, in the expansion of Counter-Extremism across policy domains, integration is pitted as the solution for extremism (O'Toole, 2022: 589). This approach, then, contributes to the contention that the advent of the CES marked a return to previous iterations of Prevent spearheaded by cohesion, as previously suggested, and that despite attempting to dissociate from Prevent, Counter-Extremism simply picked 'up the baton' from its predecessor (Cage, 2019: 11).

In this framing of counter-extremism, Muslim women are simultaneously viewed as inherently peaceful sites of femininity and motherhood (McDonald, 2012; Andrews, 2020), in need of rescue and empowerment (Rashid, 2013), as vehicles for transmitting cultural values (Allen and Guru, 2012; Bassel and Khan, 2021) and as moderating forces capable of 'civilising' and 'liberalising' British Islam (Brown, 2008: 473; Lorentzen, 2021), thus rendering them useful to CT/CE strategies. This is in contrast to the portrayal of Muslim men as 'global bad boys' (Mac an Ghaill and Haywood, 2022: 427) and 'dangerous brown men' from backward and misogynistic cultures 'addicted to honour killing' (Bhattacharyya, 2008: 97) that the CES proposes Muslim women are to be rescued from (O'Toole, 2022). Though these essentialising views are considered to shape gendered experiences of Muslims with CT/CE policy in Britain, empirical evidence of agency, particularly through Muslim women's engagement with Prevent, will be considered in an upcoming section.

This review of the CES has attempted to chart its development and elucidate its relationship with Prevent to frame an understanding of the research questions of this study. The government pitched the CES as 'the first of its kind anywhere in the world' (Home Office, 2019b: para 10), but this discussion has shown that the 'bifurcation between Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy exists in name only' (Ahmad, 2021: 268) and that preventing terrorism, countering extremism and fostering integrated communities are presented as sides of the same coin (Martin, 2019). Not only does the CES operate in a similar capacity to previous iterations of Prevent but its logics are said to build on those of Prevent in that it seeks to contribute to the theoretical underpinnings of the latter (by redefining 'extremism', for example) while distancing itself from Prevent's toxic brand (Cage, 2019).

In March 2021, much of the Counter-Extremism workstream came to an end – despite a promise only months earlier that a refreshed version of the CES was to be published in 2020. The Home Office agreed to pilot a revised programme refocusing all Community Coordinators on a crime-related agenda, thus becoming known as Crime Coordinators. After a year, this deviation was discontinued and funding for coordinators was

ultimately terminated in April 2022. The strategy was determined to be unfocused and lacking the 'legislative teeth required to have real impact' (Shawcross, 2023: 38). Interestingly, however, this departure has not necessarily signified an end to the Counter-Extremism agenda nationally as the IRP has implicated the CCE in the future of Prevent more significantly than ever, contradicting the Commission's own initial pledge that it would 'not be reviewing the Prevent Strategy, or commenting on the effectiveness of Prevent' (CCE, 2018c: para 18). Counter-Extremism has in fact been promoted to fulfil a number of new and overbearing functions such as: overseeing Prevent products, reviewing all Prevent boards and panels, developing new training packages for Prevent practitioners, providing expert scrutiny for the strategy, and assessing recruitment processes for Prevent intervention providers (Shawcross, 2023) in a development deemed dangerous and authoritarian (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023). The restructuring also appears to have brought the Office for Counter-Extremism's Extremism Analysis Unit (EAU) into Prevent under the guise of the Extremism Disruptions Unit (EDU) with an amended remit to refocus on 'disrupting' the activities of radicalisers (Orton, 2023). This remains unclear, however, as an FOI request made for this study contradicts this claim (despite the IRP clearly stating that the EDU moved from Counter-Extremism to Prevent) to suggest that the EAU and EDU have always been separate and that the EAU is now integrated into the Home Office Analysis and Insight team.

The following section will provide a summary of Prevent and the CES, drawing together arguments made throughout the discussion and underlining the ongoing relationship between the two policy approaches.

Prevent and the CES – policy spirals?

This exercise has attempted to map the constitution of Prevent and the CES, plotting their ideological and structural developments since inception and relationship to each other in order to facilitate an understanding of how practitioners experience these strategies at a local level. It argues that the CT/CE scene is dynamic and continuously changing, unlike P/CVE policies of other countries which are considered comparatively more stable (Ahmad, 2021), thus allowing fissures – and with these, opportunities – to form and flourish. Mapping policy in this way in order to expose the holes and inconsistencies I argue are present helps to make sense of how practitioners experience policy locally. Are these apertures exploited? Do practitioners continue their work largely unaffected by such developments and ideological determinations or do they, in practice, revise their objectives to align with transitional policies? If so, how do they adapt and modify their engagement and what is the sum of this?

In summary, Prevent set out to counter terrorism by cultivating cohesive communities, then abandoned the approach to focus on ideology, responsibilised public sector workers through the Prevent Duty, and was then 'complemented' by the introduction of the CES and its return to integration and cohesion. This approach was again discarded only to be succeeded by the IRP which returned to a renewed focus on 'Islamist' ideology and Muslim communities in the present day. This vacillation is indicative of a policy that that was quite literally

‘dreamt up in the bath’ and developed by feuding ministers as a result of a messy inter-departmental ‘turf war’ (Cobain, 2018: paras 15 and 9).

It is evaluated by Clive Walker to be emblematic of a ‘policy spiral’ (2018). The antithesis of a ‘policy cycle’ in which processes such as consultation, coordination, implementation, and evaluation would be considered in the archetypal formulation of policy (Bridgman and Davis, 2003), a ‘policy spiral’ describes policy which lacks clear purpose, direction, progression, control or reflection and is ‘therefore susceptible to unresolved contradictions or gaps, dramatic direction changes, and uncertain outcomes’ (Walker, 2018: 725). Walker argues that deficiencies in the policy cycles of Prevent and the CES have resulted in their destabilisation into ‘spirals’, spinning out of control both internally, as they lack solid agenda-setting, and externally, as the two strategies collide and intersect without clear parameters, thus sparking conflict rather than reinforcement (Walker, 2018). I would contribute that the spokes involved in the deformed cycles of these strategies represent authorities and institutions that are implicated (throughout the data) in engagement such as the DCLG, the Home Office, the local authority, and the regional police unit, and that within these are fissures in which practitioners may find opportunity to exercise agency and pursue their own objectives, or find themselves restricted and redirected, as this study seeks to investigate.

As detailed, Prevent has developed in a reactive fashion that has often lacked coherence and consequently rendered its implementation obscure, even to those involved with its delivery (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023). Its relationship to the CES is ambiguous (Elahi and Hargreaves, 2022), in support of Walker’s theory, and the IRP is concluded to have only added ‘further twists to the spiral’ (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023: 74). This discussion of the CT/CE sphere provides a substantive base from which to examine the data. The following section is a brief outline of the strategies’ prominent criticisms and concludes the review of policy.

Criticisms of policy

Prevent

There exists a wealth of literature exploring in detail the many adverse effects of Prevent – and to a lesser extent, the CES – some of which, such as the seeming lack of adequate planning and evaluation involved in development processes, have been alluded to in the discussion on the progression of CT/CE policy. Research on the efficacy of policy is pertinent for contextualising the study as many of the common criticisms will inform practitioners’ experiences; influencing the dilemmas they face regarding engagement and challenges they endure first-hand.

Within academic discourse on Prevent, positions of advocacy (Gearson and Rosemont, 2015; Pantucci, 2015; Parker et al., 2019; Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2022) and some acknowledgement of its utility despite recognition of inherent flaws (Bleich, 2010; Silverman, 2017; Busher et al., 2017) are overwhelmingly outweighed by the

following criticisms of a strategy that has permeated social institutions and reshaped practices and norms (Kaleem, 2021).

The homogenisation, securitisation and alienation of Muslim communities remains the principal concern (e.g., Kundnani, 2009; Cantle, 2012; Lakhani, 2012; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Richards, 2011; Bonino, 2012; Qureshi, 2015; Hussain, 2013; Ahmed, 2018; Taylor, 2020; McNeil-Willson, 2021) as Prevent is considered to operate through generalised suspicion (Boukalas, 2019), scapegoating Muslims (Alam and Husband, 2013) and exacerbating Islamophobia as a result (Abbas, 2019; Thomas, 2019). This is said to recast Muslims in Britain as the new 'suspect community' (see Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Awan, 2012a; Breen-Smyth, 2014) and uphold the good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy (Mamdani, 2004) in which 'good' or 'trusted' Muslims who share the values of liberal society – an identity that is fluid and subject to change alongside aforementioned policy developments (Miah, 2017) – are the antithesis of 'bad' or 'suspicious' Muslims (Spalek and Imtoual, 2007; Breen-Smyth, 2014). Attempts made to 'moderate' Muslims (Thomas, 2012) through this paradigm, by their construction as simultaneously 'risky' and 'at risk' (Heath-Kelly, 2012) and through the 'creation' of Britishness (Martin, 2020) disrupt Muslim communities internally, producing the internal suspect bodies previously described (Abbas, 2019a; Abbas, 2019b). This feeds into an overarching climate of self-censorship (Maira, 2020; Ahmad, 2021) and self-surveillance (Mythen et al., 2013) that undermines British Muslims' social and political agency through the policing everyday actions (Coppock, 2014; Guest et al., 2020; Abbas, 2021) and appearance as Prevent is accused of visibilising particular subjects as threatening (Spalek and McDonald, 2009; Martin, 2018).

Externally, the strategy's Muslim-specific funding has also incited tension between communities, fostering 'virulent envy' (Birt, 2009: 52) from non-Muslim groups while simultaneously pathologising its target demographic (O'Toole et al., 2011; Thomas, 2012; Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022). Through its simplistic understanding of radicalisation (Dudenhoefer, 2018), it is accused of failing to recognise structural issues such as the role of foreign policy (Ganesh, 2015; Klein 2015; Stevens and O'Hara, 2015; Mythen et al., 2017; Younis, 2021) as well as wider sociopolitical factors like catalysing desires for romance (Peresin and Cervone, 2015), adventure (Van San, 2015), individual self-expression (Cottee and Hayward, 2011), political recognition (Duyvesteyn, 2010) and an escape from Islamophobia (Abbas, 2012) in its myopic and Eurocentric focus on religious ideology as the a priori cause of extremism (Francis, 2015).

It is considered to close 'safe spaces' for dialogue in the public sphere (Mythen et al., 2012; Ragazzi, 2017b; Ramsay, 2017; Stanley et al., 2017; Spiller et al., 2018; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Pilkington and Acik, 2020; Younis and Jadhav, 2019) which may counterproductively contribute to radicalisation (Vertigans, 2010; Richards, 2011; Cantle, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2016). Scholars apply an etymologically medical term that denotes illness caused by the adverse impact of treatment to posit that preventative approaches to extremism may inadvertently yield 'iatrogenic' effects (Lindekilde, 2012; Cherney, 2016; Pilkington and Vestel, 2021), thus precipitating the very problem they seek to address.

Overall, Prevent has come to be known as a 'toxic brand' (Halliday and Dodd, 2015) that lacks transparency (Dudenhoefer, 2018; Andrews, 2020), represses civil liberties (Shor et al., 2017) and operates reactively through a top-down model (Silverman, 2017) that exercises poor management (Roohi Ahmed, 2015) and oftentimes 'clumsy and overblown' methods of engagement (Thomas, 2012: 141). The next section will briefly consider whether the CES, which was introduced over a decade after Prevent and vowed to learn 'constructive lessons' from the mistakes of its predecessor (CCE, 2018c: para 18) has operated in a more ethical and efficient manner.

CES

The most publicised failing of the CES, aside from its ambiguous relationship with Prevent as has been discussed, is its practice of 'astroturfing', a term coined to describe the cultivation of state-funded and directed activities disguised as grassroots initiatives that are designed to appear as community-led, bottom-up enterprises (Birt, 2019b). In order to reflect on how the CES is implicated in this approach, it is first significant to understand how Breakthrough Media (on behalf of Prevent, RICU and the OSCT) was exposed as the creator of 'This Is Woke', a social media news network whose activities are protected from Freedom of Information requests in the interests of national security (Cobain, 2019). Other purportedly organic initiatives that drew upon similarly youthful colloquialisms and were revealed to be the work of the state include 'We Are Stoosh', 'Help for Syria' (which presented as a charitable venture but was in fact a strategic communications platform) and myriad other projects targeting Britain's Muslim communities through films, local radio and even freshers' fairs at universities (Cobain, 2019; Zaidi, 2019; Cobain and Osman, 2020). It is reported that participants recruited to appear in these campaigns were often unaware of any connection to Prevent or the Home Office (Cobain, 2019) while former Breakthrough Media staff members have since described a toxic work environment in which (after having been forced to sign the Official Secrets Act) they were encouraged to target young British Muslims (Hussain, 2019) through such initiatives. Horizon PR (joint enterprise between M&C Saatchi and Breakthrough Media, see Appendix 1) was also revealed to be promoting the work of groups funded through Breakthrough Media without disclosing governmental involvement (Cobain et al., 2016) and an FOI request made for this study confirms its involvement in both Prevent and Counter-Extremism activity. The lack of transparency shrouding the work of Breakthrough Media has been widely disparaged as pernicious (Birt, 2019a) and in keeping with the reputation of 'shadowy propaganda unit', RICU (Cobain et al., 2016).

The CES, through its ambiguously named BSBT programme, became embroiled in a similar scandal as it was revealed to be behind 'SuperSisters', an online Muslim lifestyle platform that was allegedly constituted of, other than a single Muslim writer who claimed to be used as a puppet, a team of middle-aged white men pretending to be Muslim women (Birt, 2019b). Scholars have described the work of BSBT as a development from the more clandestine activities of RICU and Breakthrough Media; suggesting that while the latter

operated ‘in the shadows’, the amplification of the extremism discourse has enabled BSBT to openly co-opt CSOs and produce counter-narrative messaging as an expansion of the neoliberal project (Faure Walker, 2020) to cultivate networks of supposedly credible grassroots Muslim voices (Hayes and Qureshi, 2016).

BSBT also caused controversy when it was revealed to be a funder of the annual Bradford Literature Festival, resulting in a boycott of the event (Wolfe-Robinson, 2019) and the creation of an alternative space in which racialising connections to Counter-Extremism could not be accused of stifling creativity (Birt, 2019a). The infiltration of these grassroots spaces has caused outrage and upset in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities (Zaidi, 2019) and Breakthrough Media has subsequently rebranded as Zinc Network (Iqbal, 2019), though the transition is widely considered to be a shallow attempt at distancing its ongoing counter-narrative work from ‘toxic brands’ (Birt, 2019b).

Campaigns and initiatives detailed in this section have attempted to shape and moderate British Muslim identity under the covert management of Prevent and the CES and the intersecting arms of the PR companies they commission. Though the CES was promoted as an entirely different space to Prevent, its programmes given obscure titles and its work quite literally ‘glam-washed’ in the pages of Vogue (Fernandez, 2019); it operated in largely the same way, often through the same channels, and ultimately fell victim to the same toxic associations. To complement the ambiguity established between the dual roots of Prevent as a standalone strategy, between Prevent and the CES, Prevent and cohesion/integration, and the CES and cohesion is the additional layer of ambiguity present behind initiatives associated with these strategies and the means by which they were funded. This raises the question, then, as to whether this ambiguity plays out in the experiences of practitioners engaged in delivery?

The chapter so far has provided a contextual overview of Prevent and the CES; covering the historical developments, ideological underpinnings, and key criticisms of the policies and how they intersect. In order to investigate the personal experiences of practitioners, the remainder of the chapter will present literature relating to the engagement of individuals with policy. After briefly outlining the history of Muslim-state engagement in the UK, arguments pertaining to the mobilisation of citizens through processes of responsibilisation, the promotion of active citizenship, and the effects of austerity will be discussed. This will be followed by a section on the actions of individuals once they are engaged – are they able to exercise agency in the implementation of policy at a local level? The chapter will conclude with a brief consideration of other factors governing the experiences of practitioners involved with CT/CE policy, namely the role of religion in, and motivations for, their involvement.

Routes to engagement

Muslim-state engagement – a background

There is a significant body of literature analysing the relationship between Britain's Muslim population and the state (Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Meer, 2010; Jones, 2013; Bowen, 2014; Meer and Modood, 2016; Bonino, 2017; Elshayyal, 2018; Knott, 2018). Scholars focus on the political participation of British Muslims (Akhtar, 2013; O'Toole and Gale, 2013; Mustafa, 2015; Peace, 2015), Muslim civil society (O'Toole et al., 2013; Bunglawala, 2017; Massoumi, 2021), the governance of Muslim communities (Birt, 2008; Jones et al., 2014; Hamid, 2017; Allen, 2022), the politics of multiculturalism (Abbas, 2005; Brighton, 2007; Meer and Modood, 2009; Jones, 2015; Miah et al., 2020; Qureshi, 2021) and debates around citizenship in relation to Britain's Muslim demographic (Hussain and Bagguley, 2005; Geaves, 2005; Sobolewska, 2010; Jarvis and Lister, 2013; Manning and Akhtar, 2021). Principally, this research shows that Muslims are pathologised as insufficiently British (Cowden and Singh, 2017) and that CT/CE policies in particular have constructed Muslim communities as governable sites that are subject to regulation (Ali, 2014) and punitive intervention (O'Toole, 2021). These arguments dominate the field, despite some literature suggesting that Muslim organisations have benefited from the war on terror by exploiting opportunities to attain power and influence state policy (Pedziwiatr, 2007). The history of this engagement is not the focus of this study and thus will not be detailed at length, however, a brief overview can help contextualise an understanding of the involvement of (some of) of this study's participants with state-driven CT/CE policies which, as argued, are in a state of constant flux.

Key junctures in the development of Muslim-state relations that pertain to this topic begin with the impact of the 1989 Rushdie affair (see Modood, 1990; Asad, 1993; Werbner, 2010; Ahmad and Evergeti, 2010) followed by the events of 9/11 and the aforementioned riots of 2001 (Bagguley and Hussain, 2005) that signalled a shift from race to religion in which the British Muslim emerged as distinct to the British Asian (Allen, 2005; Saeed, 2016; Bonino, 2017; Miah et al., 2020; Back et al., 2022) to detrimental effect (Rajina, 2022). These events, coupled with the introduction of the religion question in the 2001 Census, contributed to the recognition of a 'new' faith-based identity for Muslims (Akhtar, 2005), giving rise to mobilisations informed by Islamic identity characterised as the rise of 'Muslim-consciousness' (Meer, 2015: 58).

The creation of bodies such as the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group and the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board reshaped representations of Muslims, bypassing existing structures to enable direct Muslim-state engagement (O'Toole et al., 2015). Essentialised as the unified voice of Britain's Muslims, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) discounted the demographic's heterogeneity (Birt, 2005; McLoughlin, 2010) to become the government's 'preferred interlocutor' with its Muslim citizens (Braginskaia, 2015: 209) in an attempt by the state to engineer 'acceptable' forms of leadership intended to have a moderating effect on Muslim communities (Thomas, 2010). Despite being named the single entity that Prevent was to engage in the 2003 CONTEST strategy (Shawcross, 2023), the MCB was subsequently dismissed under the Coalition government in line with the aforementioned changes to policy (Khan et al., 2020) and British Muslim

communities were advised to self-organise to tackle Islamophobia and radicalisation (Abbas, 2019). The devaluing of the 'community leader' figure, previously endorsed by organisations such as the MCB and often unrepresentative of the UK's diverse Muslim population, enabled individual actors and smaller CSOs to advocate on behalf of their communities.

This decentralised approach advanced the development of Muslim civic engagement, though individuals and groups were faced with negotiating the legacy of ineffective attempts at representation alongside the duality of practising community advocacy while cooperating with state policies that impact Muslim communities (Allen and Isakjee, 2015). While some contend that Muslim community organisations act as accessible entry points for Muslims' civic participation (Peucker, 2016), others argue that government funding administered to Muslim-led organisations has produced quasi-CSOs to act on behalf of the state, therefore stifling democratic debate (Massoumi, 2021) and supporting the contention that Muslim CSOs are simultaneously pragmatic and problematic (Lillevik, 2020).

As a progression from ineffective top-down approaches to CT, the introduction of 'community-based counter-terrorism' (CBCT) – implicating Muslim communities in CT/CE more broadly – marks another significant development in the relationship between the state and its Muslim communities (Briggs et al, 2006; Briggs, 2010; Spalek, 2011; Baker, 2012; Griffith-Dickson et al., 2014; Cherney and Hartley, 2017; Huq, 2017; Lambert and Parsons, 2017; Silverman, 2017; Spalek and Weeks, 2017; Jones, 2019). Guided by the principle that CT efforts without the active engagement of Muslim communities conversely increase the risk to national security; authorities are encouraged to invest in people, rather than projects, to build longstanding community knowledge and partnerships (Briggs, 2010). Distinctions are drawn within CBCT between 'community-focused' strategies that account for consent and participation and 'community-targeted' strategies that are deemed coercive (Spalek and McDonald, 2012) but some community-based organisations remain reluctant to engage with CT/CE as a form of resistance (Choudhury, 2016) or as a result of paralysis, trapped between state cooperation and community loyalty (Fitzgerald, 2016). It is acknowledged, however, that documentation of Muslim actors' experiences in such engagement processes is often overlooked (Spalek and Lambert, 2008) and argued that CBCT endeavours construct Muslim CSOs as sites of contestation (Peucker and Ceylan, 2017), ultimately contributing to the securitisation of community (Noxolo, 2009; Bonino, 2013; Saeed, 2016). Scholars now advocate for more nuanced community participation that is designed locally and critically in place of top-down approaches that 'incapacitate' CSOs with myopic perceptions of local contexts (Silverman, 2017: 11).

This section has provided a brief overview of the ways in which the state has engaged its Muslim communities; illustrating fluctuation as the direction of policy has changed. As concluded, nuanced local approaches to CT/CE emerged as the contemporary model of engagement, rendering the findings of this study significant in the present landscape. The study is situated within the body of literature that explicates how, currently,

Muslims and non-Muslims are responsibilised into performing as active citizens. The following sections consider how Britain's Muslim communities are particularly implicated in this discourse.

Responsibilisation

Rooted in governmentality literature (see Dean, 1995; Rose et al., 2006; Foucault, 2007; Lemke, 2007), the concept of responsibilisation describes the transfer of responsibility from the state to the subject by responsibilising the latter to actively govern and resolve society's increasing uncertainties (Howell, 2015). There is significant research on the responsibilising efforts of CT/CE measures (Mythen et al., 2009; Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; Martin, 2014; Thomas, 2017; Mesok, 2022b), specifically in relation to Britain's Muslim communities who have experienced differentiated citizenship since 9/11 (Spalek, 2013). Scholars have developed idiomatic phraseology to describe the responsibilising process and its implications; for example, O'Toole writes about the 'sousveillance' (surveillance from below) of British Muslims (2022), Emerson refers to the 'vigilant subjects' responsibilised into monitoring themselves and others against radicalisation (2019), Jusué describes the promotion of 'CT citizens' in the securitisation of everyday life (2021) and Sliwinski inverts the focus to construe the 'civilianisation' of security in conjunction with the mobilisation of society to counter extremism (2013). The internalising effects of responsibilisation are determined to have securitised relations with authorities, controlled Muslim political agency and reinforced the good Muslim/bad Muslim dichotomy (Qurashi, 2018) that, as previously stated, scholars have ascribed to the production of the 'internal suspect body' (Abbas, 2019a; Abbas, 2019b).

Overall, the literature explores the insidious effects of the responsibilising of Muslim communities against their own networks (Andrews, 2020; Ahmad, 2021; Kaleem, 2021), though it is suggested that the notion underestimates the role of the subject in the process, discounting individual agency (upcoming section) in the shaping of participation with policy (Howell, 2015). Inextricably linked to the concept is the theory of active citizenship as responsibilised citizens are encouraged to become 'active' and 'empowered' individuals (Jusué, 2021).

Active citizenship

The notion of the active citizen emerged in the 1980s (Kearns, 1995; Coffey, 2004) as an antidote to traditional understandings of (passive) citizenship that failed to account for mobilisation and active engagement (Peucker, 2016). Through this form of participatory governance, the alleged transference of state functions to networks and partnerships (DeHanas et al., 2010) paved the way for the development of aforementioned bodies such as the MCB and Muslim civil society more broadly. In the sharing of risks and responsibilities between citizens and the state (Jochum et al., 2005), it is argued that central government is seen to superficially support active citizenry without committing to any actual redistribution of power (Marinetto,

2003). In contemporary debate, active citizenship is understood as an advancement of neoliberal rationalities which expect self-reliance of citizens (Mustafa, 2016) and the management of communities allegedly susceptible to radicalisation is crafted through such 'citizenship empowerment' (Altermark and Nilsson, 2018).

This language of empowerment and the mobilisation of individuals as active citizens has profoundly implicated Britain's Muslim demographic (Spalek and Lambert, 2008) and whilst the proactive political and societal engagement of Muslim communities is lauded (Peucker and Akbarzadeh, 2014), Francesco Ragazzi argues this has created a climate of 'policed multiculturalism' in which the category of the active 'trusted' Muslim is impelled to govern the conduct of the wider community (2016). Ragazzi builds on Mamdani's good Muslim/bad Muslim paradigm (2004) to elevate the original 'good Muslim' from a passive figure to perform an active function, drawing upon 'authentic' cultural capital to actively police 'hard-to-reach' Muslim communities in matters of counter-terrorism. Ragazzi is not alone in aligning the good/bad Muslim with labels of moderate/extreme (Spalek and Imtoual, 2007; Peucker and Ceylan, 2017) but advances the theory in articulating the governing of even the trusted Muslim through a logic of entrepreneurship: 'their cooperation is enacted through calls for tenders and projects, such as those of Prevent' (2016: 734). The trusted Muslim is key for the state's claim to legitimacy but is not safe from falling out of favour, evidenced by policy changes that ousted the MCB, as the precarious border between 'trusted' and 'suspect' is constantly negotiated (Ragazzi, 2016). While the state profits from the participation of allegedly authentic Muslims in the countering of extremism, it is suggested that engaged individuals benefit by converting their 'linguistic, cultural and social capital into economic and symbolic capital, under the form of funding and employment which might increase their social status and ranking in society' (2016: 734). Emerging research on the motivations of CT/CE practitioners, while limited, will be considered in an upcoming section and explored empirically in this study.

Impact of austerity

The economic capital sought by this category of engaged practitioners becomes more significant than ever in a climate of austerity that has affected the public sector since the 2010 Coalition government (see Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011; Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013; Reynolds, 2019), substantially reshaping partnerships between CSOs and local authorities (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015; Rex and Campbell, 2022). Studies claim that a growing disconnect has materialised between groups and local government (Clayton et al., 2016) and that controversial funding streams such as Prevent have emerged as a last resort option for CSOs to stay afloat (Osorno Hernandez, 2021). In his ethnographic analysis of infrastructures of surveillance in Muslim communities, Fahid Qurashi (2018) explains how Prevent officers would attempt to exploit the financial insecurity of Muslim-led organisations to adopt Prevent and depicts the ease with which such funding could be accessed by individuals and groups with little experience and only tangential links to extremism-related work. Research suggests that the advantages of mitigating cuts by partnering with CT/CE

are outweighed by the co-optation of service users in security apparatuses (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022) and the reputational damage this causes (Thomas, 2017) in arrangements that exclusively benefit the state as it strives to 'embed' Prevent in Muslim communities (Qurashi, 2018). This study seeks to empirically examine these themes further by considering austerity as a basis for cooperation. The following section connects the impact of austerity to individual agency by reflecting on the conceptualisation of Prevent as an 'industry'.

The CT/CE industry

The exploitation of CT/CE under austerity measures lends itself to the broader interpretation of counter-terrorism as an 'industry' (Stampnitzky, 2013; Roohi Ahmed, 2015; Faure Walker, 2022) that is constituted of 'experts' (Miller and Mills, 2009) tasked with managing the 'overblown' threat of extremism (Mueller, 2006). The industry serves to instil and uphold previously discussed notions of active citizenship and FBVs (Brown, 2019), thus contributing to the disciplining of targeted communities and domesticating of British Islam (O'Toole et al., 2016) while individuals and groups appropriating the emerging marketplace of CT/CE are permitted to profit (Mechai, 2019). In the IRP, Shawcross acknowledges the reputation of Prevent as a 'cash cow which any enterprising Muslim group could tap into' (Murray, 2010 as cited in Shawcross, 2023), providing examples of CT-funded rap workshops, food festivals and football tournaments (TaxPayers' Alliance, 2009 as cited in Shawcross, 2023).

On a macro level, the industry is interpreted as an international technology exporting British counter-extremism training to draconian governments accused of persecuting their minority Muslim populations (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022). This study is concerned with how local actors in the UK factor into this enterprise – are they able to exploit the industry on a micro level (for the interests of themselves, their organisations, or their communities) or are they the subjects of exploitation? Considering individual agency in the analysis of CT/CE implementation in Birmingham, alongside motivations of practitioners (upcoming sections), will attempt to contribute to this field of study and answer the research questions. The following section, touching upon the theory of street-level bureaucracy, begins the discussion on agency.

Street-level bureaucracy

The impact of agency on the implementation of CT/CE in Birmingham can be framed through an understanding of Michael Lipsky's prominent theory of street-level bureaucracy (1980, revised in 2010) which states that front-line practitioners, or street-level bureaucrats, operating at the intersection of government and citizens exercise agency and discretion in their enactment of policy to become the ultimate policymakers. These practitioners, or mediators (Hudson, 1989), are able to distort and shape policy in their (relatively autonomous) application of it, divorcing what is constructed at the top from what is enacted on the ground.

The theory acknowledges the power possessed by frontline practitioners, as well as the dilemmas they face in resource allocation, to suggest that the decisions, actions and interactions of practitioners effectively become the policies carried out (Lipsky, 1980) – although this claim was recognised as an overstatement in the revised publication which accounted for the effects of managerialism on the restructuring of local government (Lipsky, 2010; Alden, 2015).

Within literature on public administration and beyond, Lipsky's work generated a field of scholarship that built on the original argument (May and Winter, 2007; Evans, 2011; Piore, 2011; Hupe et al., 2015; Gofen et al., 2018; Chang and Brewer, 2022), highlighting emerging areas of interest such as decentred security governance (Bevir, 2016), implementation theory (Hill, 2003), and the significance of practitioners' local knowledge (Durose, 2009), coping mechanisms (Vedung, 2015), and discretion in policy enactment (Tummer and Bekkers, 2014; Alden, 2015).

Scholars have also connected street-level bureaucracy to the topic of CT/CE to make sense of how practitioners interpret policies such as Prevent (Ragazzi, 2017a; Thomas, 2017; Miah et al., 2020; Osorno Hernandez, 2021; Qureshi, 2021), arguing that individuals in the field modify and mediate CT/CE agendas to suit their own 'professional and community realities' (Miah et al., 2020: 15). Thomas (2017) applies the concept of responsibilisation to distinguish between the street-level bureaucrats that he proposes were initially responsibilised to deliver the agenda (Muslim CSOs) to contemporary street-level bureaucrats responsibilised under the Prevent Duty (public sector practitioners). This study seeks to investigate whether the presence of Muslim CSOs is still significant and sets out to consider whether individuals belonging to both categories (voluntary and Duty-bound) exhibit street-level bureaucrat behaviours. In her study, Abeeda Qureshi (2021) found that Muslim women, acting as street-level bureaucrats, were able to exert considerable influence on policymaking through the agency they exercised in their engagement with Prevent. This study will explore these claims in the Birmingham context – are Muslim practitioners able to transform central policy as Qureshi asserts, or are the effects of any agency they employ more locally and individually centred?

Fernan Osorno Hernandez (2021) transcends outlined theories in his analysis of youth work practitioners and Prevent, arguing that while responsibilisation downplays individual agency, street-level bureaucracy overstates the power that frontline practitioners execute in their marginal adjustments to policy and also fails to adequately capture the complexity of actors involved with the enactment and modification of CT/CE policies. Utilising a decentred security governance approach that explores how individuals respond to policy design to forge their own practices (Bevir, 2016), Osorno Hernandez draws upon the work of Prior and Barnes (2011) to suggest that the assemblage of actors (beyond simply frontline practitioners and policymakers) at play – the aforementioned active citizens, service users, managers, supervisors, professionals in non-governmental organisations and regulators – all contribute to co-produce mediated policy outcomes. This study will examine the experiences of practitioners in the Birmingham CT/CE space from different fields – the police, the local authority, the youth service, registered CSOs and CICs as well as informal community groups

and individuals who engage with policy in an independent capacity – and so a framing of policy and agency beyond a binary understanding of street-level bureaucrats and policymakers is most applicable to support analysis.

Empirical evidence conveying the ways in which policy is 'understood, practiced and contested' (Thomas, 2017: 311) is crucial to furthering an understanding of how policy is implemented by practitioners in Birmingham and how significant the local context and all of its nuances are for their experiences of CT/CE. While the role of practitioners and their agency has begun to emerge in the literature (Lehane, 2017; Qurashi, 2018; Shanaah, 2019), the focus has thus far centred largely around women (Qureshi, 2021) and those who are Duty-bound such as youth workers (Osorno Hernandez, 2021). This study seeks to go beyond these categories to provide a fuller picture of the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners working on CT/CE in Birmingham, considering and problematising the similarities and differences that may exist between categories of practitioner, those who are Duty-bound and those who choose to engage, local authority and police-led implementation, and Prevent and Counter-Extremism policy.

The development of agency beyond street-level bureaucracy

The wider body of literature that indicates the inadequacy of street-level bureaucracy in the study of contemporary social policy contexts examines how the agency demonstrated by actors effectuates the constant adaptation and negotiation of policy that can, at times, bring about its subversion (Prior and Barnes, 2011). It is proposed that individuals implementing policy often lack access to the resources that teach about policy delivery, hence the diversity of interpretation (Hill, 2003), though this itself undermines agency and ignores the growth of 'hybrid practitioners who are neither wholly professional nor wholly lay' whose 'negotiative' perspectives (Prior and Barnes, 2011: 276) contribute to divergent practice in policy implementation. Participation in CT is shown to shift from 'qualified cooperation, to appropriation of aspects of Prevent (including funding) for more autonomous objectives, to participating after renegotiating the terms of engagement offered by government' (O'Toole et al., 2016: 172) and this study seeks to explore these varying positions and the different experiences they provide for practitioners in Birmingham.

The literature articulates the ways in which Muslim actors, despite exercising agency, can find engagement problematic (Iacopini et al., 2011; Thomas, 2017), particularly in relation to Prevent's intended 'empowerment' of Muslim women as stated in official policy documentation (Andrews, 2020). Empowerment discourse, where empowerment is defined as the processes by which women gain power through increased access to education, healthcare and political participation, contributes to racialised and gendered tropes (Mesok, 2022a) and in this field manifests in, for example, the government's £20 million campaign to teach Muslim women English (Lewicki and O'Toole, 2017), as previously mentioned.

Drawing upon Ragazzi's theory of the 'trusted' Muslim practitioner (2016), empowerment is cited as a technique of the state, rooted in neoliberal governmentality, that is directly connected to the production of active citizens (Cruikshank, 1999) whereby 'trusted' Muslims are encouraged to utilise their capital of 'authenticity' to empower other Muslims (Ragazzi, 2016). Many Muslim women however, disproportionately affected by austerity and undermined by dominant and misrepresentative discourses (Emejulu and Bassel, 2015), have wilfully accepted the state's offer of empowerment (Wadia, 2015) and embraced opportunities for alternative realisations of their agency, refusing to embody the idealised 'good Muslim' (Brown, 2008) thus problematising Ragazzi's theory. Research suggests that Prevent's empowerment project created a political opening for many women who surpassed the strategy's remit (O'Toole et al., 2016) and the binary through which it perceived them as either empowered or instrumentalised to harness available funding (and power) and cultivate the CT/CE space as a site of agency and negotiation (Mesok, 2022a).

In her empirical analysis, Elizabeth Pearson describes the space as a realm of women's leadership, participation and resistance, claiming that the local knowledge and power possessed by Muslim women is appropriated for their personal and collective advantage through 'ambiguously agential' forms of engagement that challenge the narrative of co-option and exploitation that exists in relation to Prevent and Muslim communities (2020: 91). It is through agency, 'the ability to make choices and enact them', that women's empowerment should be understood (Pearson, 2020: 97). The study notes that practitioners' critique of Prevent did not limit their participation; instead they were able to contemporaneously develop meaningful relationships with practitioners overseeing the agenda, expressing agency while resisting the policy's 'macro manifestations' (2020: 106). Pearson interprets the 'ownership' of CT/CE demonstrated by women in her study as a form of self-empowerment that 'gives them power over state security itself' (2020: 97), thus in support of the policy subversion argument outlined at the start of this section and asserted by other scholars who suggest that agentive capabilities redistribute power to the hands of local actors (Qureshi, 2021). This contradicts the position that the evidence of agency with regard to Muslims and CT/CE does not, and will never, equal ownership of policy as 'trusted Muslims' are likened to local leaders acting on behalf of the colonial power (Grossman, 2014; Ragazzi, 2016, Shanaah, 2022a). The scope of this study restricts a formal analysis of policy to conclusively explore these claims, however, researching practitioners' experiences can provide insight into whether individuals believe they are able to 'shape policy' locally (Pearson, 2020: 93).

The local context (dynamic between local-level policymakers and Muslim communities) is crucial to understanding the ways in which the power demonstrated by practitioners in accessing and shaping governance spaces and resources can generate creative outcomes (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010). Research portrays how some practitioners (particularly Muslim women) felt unable to manipulate their engagement with Prevent in their locality and were instead pigeonholed (Brown, 2008; Rashid, 2013) while others were able to tweak their organisational remits by adding buzzwords (Ragazzi, 2016; Ahmad, 2021), enabling participation in order to generate income and/or raise their profile (Qurashi, 2018). This type of involvement,

demonstrative of the 'new sites of agency' opened up in the state's attempt to construct governable subjects (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010: 139) problematises the argument that local ownership of CT/CE policy is the 'opposite' of tick-box provision if implemented by communities and from within communities (Pearson, 2020). Muslim involvement does not signify the antithesis of 'disempowering' top-down tick-box participation (Winterbotham and Pearson, 2016) that is often considered to frame the field (Giscard d'Estaing, 2017). Instead, communities are able to manipulate the new governance space to their advantage, though considerable sophistication is required (Taylor, 2007).

The ideas presented in this section problematise the body of literature that perceives CT/CE policy as a securitising mechanism which is restrictive in its understanding of agency. Those studies that have evidenced agential capacity in the implementation of Prevent, however, predict that future (Home Office-led) iterations of the policy will threaten the creative agency of communities (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010). This study is situated within this literature, acknowledging both the pernicious effects of CT/CE policy as well as recognising the possibility for individual agency on behalf of those who engage. It seeks to explore these tensions and consider the complexities bound up in the interpretations and negotiations that constitute local implementation in Birmingham.

The next section articulates the symbolic space between policy and community in which many of these tensions play out for practitioners.

Grey area

The dichotomy between top-down implementation and the application of agency intersects other binaries that frame the CT/CE space for Muslim practitioners in Britain. The division of Muslims post-9/11 into categories of good/moderate and bad/extremist has been theorised over the ensuing period (Mamdani, 2004; Spalek and Imtoual, 2007; Cherney and Murphy, 2016; Birt, 2023) to conclude that politically obedient Muslims (characterised as moderate) are selected by governments and promoted over critical (extremist) voices who may be subject to vilification and stigmatisation (Gabon, 2022).

These categories are problematised by the discernible 'grey area' in the middle, occupied by practitioners straddling dual roles between the state and community representation (Allen and Isakjee, 2015; Pearson, 2020; Osorno Hernandez, 2021; Qureshi, 2021). Cynically perceived as 'predetermined interlocutors' incapable of authenticity by some (Abbas, 2019: 407), the limited research available elucidates the dilemma faced by individuals from Muslim and minority ethnic backgrounds who choose to engage with CT/CE. Sadek Hamid (2019) was torn between legitimising a potentially harmful policy or gatekeeping his specialist knowledge when asked to engage with the CES. Sara Khan, former Commissioner of the CCE, describes the 'painful rejection' she felt from all sides in her endeavour to fight for a middle space capable of engaging with voices across the spectrum (Khan and McMahon, 2016: 21) and Salwa El-Awa and Basia Spalek describe the

emotional and existential crises faced by Muslim police officers troubled by their participation in (what they worried was) a politicised attempt at denigrating Islam through the countering of terrorism.

The interaction of Muslim practitioners with the security agenda can be such a 'challenging and sensitive undertaking' that it can become neither desirable nor possible (McDonald, 2012: 106). The practitioners who do engage, often negotiating and reshaping policy objectives as discussed in previous sections, are subject to the burden of representation from both realms (Husband and Alam, 2011) which can, at times, lead to the concealment of Prevent affiliation (Ahmad, 2021). This mitigating mechanism, of course, is more available to detached practitioners who may, for example, receive funding but work under the name of their organisation and is an important distinction to explore in this study; how, if at all, do practitioners from different institutions engaging in varying ways understand or experience the grey area mentioned in this section? 5Pillars is a British Muslim news platform that publicly called upon Muslim Prevent practitioners, distinguishing between what they deem the 'hardened neocon bootlickers' embedded within the Home Office and the cohort of Muslim individuals who work as Prevent officers, coordinators, mentors or community workers, to reconsider the 'treacherous position' they operate from in the grey area (Hussain, 2022: paras 3 and 5). The article presented an 'Islam-conscious' appeal for disengagement (Hussain, 2022: para 7); interesting because, for many, the middle space or 'grey area' is considered in harmony with Islamic principles, 'Muslims are supposed to be a middle-path community treading the 'middle way' (*wasatiyya* in Arabic) of life' (Abdul Bari, 2018: 85).

The next section interrogates this principle further to reflect on how religion factors into the involvement of practitioners with CT/CE; from initial motivations to participate to frames of reference for ethical conduct throughout engagement.

Role of religion

The government is perceived not to 'do God' (Bloom, 2023), instead recognising religion as something to be harnessed by the state (Andrews, 2020), but how does this correlate to the practices of individuals commissioned to enact its policies? As this study is particularly concerned with the experiences of Muslim practitioners, it might be significant to investigate whether religious identity plays a role in their involvement with policy and, if so, how.

The Islamic belief system is intertwined in the everyday lives of many Muslims (Peucker and Kayikci, 2020) who draw from its framework to cultivate ethical subjectivities and engage in practices of piety (Mahmood, 2005). While 'faith actors' are considered a 'disruptive presence at the urban governance table' owing to the perceived disharmony between faith and the instrumentalism of policy (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008: 841), some suggest that in the field of CT/CE; religious actors, able to understand the role of religion in radicalisation, can only be beneficial in the implementation of policy (Mandaville and Nozell, 2017).

Literature exploring the intersections of religion and political participation (O'Toole and Gale, 2013), volunteerism (Sunier, 2020), social action (Barylo, 2018) and citizenship (Mustafa, 2016) depicts how many Muslims are driven to various forms of activism by the principles and ethos of Islam. Practising Muslims are shown to enact citizenship through Islamic conceptualisations of morality, generosity and responsibility (Johns et al., 2016), particularly in the context of countering misconceptions of the religion (Peucker and Ceylan, 2017). This activism is framed by theological teachings such as the Qur'anic duty placed on humans to act as *khalifahs*, conscientious stewards responsible for the wellbeing of everything and everyone on earth (Hancock, 2020; Keskin and Yucel, 2020), and upon the concept of *maslaha*, the responsibility one has toward public interest and the common good (Jouili, 2015). Anisa Mustafa's research participants invoked the notion of the *ummah*, the global community of believers, in their performance of active citizenship, embedding it within aspirations to correct misrepresentations of Islam by demonstrating the positive contributions that can be made in its name (2016). Muslim practitioners are inspired to work *fi sabilillah* (for the sake of God), considering their work a form of *sadaqah* – charity which transcends the common understanding to encompass any act that benefits creation (Keskin and Yucel, 2020). In his study of grassroots Muslim charities, William Barylo notes that even smiling is emphasised as *sadaqah* amongst the Muslim volunteers he observes as mundane actions take on spiritual dimensions (2017). The concept of the *akhirah* (afterlife) provides insight as to why Muslim actors might embody such moral responsibilities to participate in forms of social action as these efforts become their investment in the hereafter (Cebecioglu, 2020).

This reinterpretation of citizenship as an active endeavour suggests that Islam is more than 'rituals and beliefs but a complex system of ideas providing an original perception of the society, the environment and the individual' (Barylo, 2017: 1). Barylo argues, therefore, that the concept of 'religion' is limiting and proposes an understanding of Islam as a 'matrix' which he defines as an environment of references (including beliefs, scriptures, rituals, values, and ethics alongside places, spaces and symbolic items) that take the shape of observable actions (2017). Here, Islam is not just interacted with as a faith, but as a frame of ethics and philosophy as Muslim actors demonstrate how religiosity is intimately infused in their daily lives. Nadia Fadil describes the individual at the heart of this matrix as an 'Islamic political subject', questioning dominant representations of Muslims to articulate an alternative identity which equates being a 'good Muslim' with active citizenship (2006). Fadil describes the ways in which Islam becomes a normative framework and value system in which the ultimate goal – the hereafter – must be worked for and not simply longed for. This universalising reference (the *akhirah*) symbolises the culmination and assessment of all earthly actions and Fadil's participants connect it to their civic involvement through the act of *da'wah*, the 'principle mode of modern Islamic activism' (Weismann, 2019: 505).

Da'wah, traditionally understood as religious proselytism, has been redefined to include myriad forms of social welfare activism (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996) concerned with the wellbeing of the *ummah*, and humanity, as a whole (Jouili, 2015). In responding to the Qur'anic duty to create balance and justice in the

affairs of people (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996), Muslim community workers and educators adopt the role of missionaries in the broadening of this significant concept. Scholars also describe forms of 'implicit' (Barylo, 2018) or 'representational' *da'wah* (Jouili, 2015), whereby the (everyday, mundane) positive actions of visible Muslims become a form of civic duty in contributing to the general perception of Islam in diasporic contexts, though this can also be experienced as a burden (Jouili, 2015).

By drawing upon these concepts, Muslim interlocutors in the aforementioned studies situate their actions within the framework of Islamic obligations and ethics (Fadil, 2006), infusing religious meaning into quotidian activities (Mahmood, 2005). If, in this understanding, 'daily life is religious, and religion is lived daily' (Barylo, 2017: 10), can engagement with CT/CE become a form of religious practice for Muslim practitioners in Birmingham? This study is not theological and thus makes no attempt to explore any conceptual gaps in the study of religion, but it is of interest to consider how, in the field of CT/CE, faith might be utilised as a framework or source of guidance for practitioners to draw upon. The literature presented in this section suggests that religion acts as a motivator (as well as presumably an ethical frame of reference for conduct) for individuals to enact their citizenship in ways they believe to be the manifestation of tenets of their faith. Literature on the motivations of CT/CE practitioners (religious and otherwise) has recently begun to emerge in the field; the following (and final) section will briefly synthesise the findings of these studies.

Motivations

Literature exploring the relationship between Muslims communities and CT/CE suggests that, despite the 'alienation narrative' described earlier in the chapter, many British Muslims trust CT/CE policies and show a high willingness to engage in action against 'Islamist' extremism (Shanaah, 2022a: 71). Research undertaken with specifically Muslim practitioners reveals motivations rooted in the moral obligations of Islamic as well as humanist values (Shanaah, 2021), though the contextualisation of their work 'Islamically', within the framework of their religious values, is central to many who engage proactively, but also reactively, to expose the non-Islamic elements espoused as doctrinal in extremist rhetoric (El-Awa and Spalek, 2012). Here, religious capital is deemed essential in fighting extremist ideology (El-Awa and Spalek, 2012).

Other studies that have investigated the motivations of CT/CE practitioners do not limit samples to those with Muslim identity and reasons for engagement described in this slightly broader literature relate to personal experiences or interest in CT/CE, anger at the injustice of extremism, the desire to positively impact society, perceived efficacy (of one's skills to combat extremism) and a general sense of personalised responsibility (Lehane; 2017; Schlegel, 2022). Research revealing the motivations for the political participation of Muslim women in Europe also draws parallel as responding to hostility such as Islamophobia and the rise of the far-right, fighting for social justice, perceived personal efficacy, and the moral principles of the Islamic faith are all found to be driving factors in involvement (Eesat-Daas, 2020). There is significant overlap in the conclusions

of these few studies and this will provide a contemporary empirical basis from which to compare the findings of this study.

It is also of value to situate the analysis within a broader literature that, drawing together many of the themes explored in this chapter, identifies how the misrecognition of Muslims in Britain (because of CT/CE policies amongst other factors) provides the impulse for social activism (Pilkington and Acik, 2020) and considers the ways in which forms of *da'wah* are enacted as a response to the hyperfocus on Muslim communities as individuals are shown to 'engage with the discourses and practices that seek to produce them as suspect bodies' (Hussain, 2022: 477). As intimated, Muslim actors are compelled to participate in politics, social activism or the countering of extremism for myriad proactive reasons, but the motivation to correct misconceptions about Islam can leave individuals feeling 'forced' into activism and therefore more careful about the parameters within which they engage (Peucker, 2021). This topic of 'boundaries' has not yet been considered in relation to Muslim practitioners in the CT/CE space and will be explored in the Birmingham context for this study alongside other themes explored in this section, namely the role of religion, agency and motivations for engagement.

Conclusions

This chapter has presented historical developments and prominent debates concerning Prevent and the CES; painting a picture of a volatile policy space – vacillating between approaches in ideological and managerial direction – that continues to be plagued by ambiguity and controversy despite numerous reviews, adaptations, and iterations. The mapping exercise (Appendix 1) has shown how the strategies are far from separate and, in fact, intersect in multiple ways – not only through implementation, but structural composition. Inevitably, there is (limited) support for Prevent and the CES, and critical voices who argue for their fundamental utility despite acknowledging flaws in design and execution, however, in recognition of their damaging effects on target communities and civil liberties, the analysis reveals overwhelming critique of CT/CE policies in Britain.

The review has also considered the role of practitioners in policy enactment, connecting theories of street-level bureaucracy and, more recently, empirical evidence examining the broader implications of individual agency to recognise processes of negotiation and reinterpretation of policy on the ground that are constitutive of new governance spaces. It is within this realm that practitioners navigate their place in the 'grey area', stuck somewhere between community and government and binary understandings of what it means to be British and Muslim that seek to constrain their subjectivities. Overarching governance trends towards responsibilisation and active citizenship or the impact of austerity measures may explain the involvement of some actors within the space, but in considering the experience of the practitioner further,

discussion has reflected on other factors that might prompt their participation and guide their conduct, particularly the application of religion as an ethical framework.

Framing the development of CT/CE in this way is an important undertaking in that it permits an understanding of the experiences of practitioners situated against the ambiguities of policy. While much has been written about Prevent, the same attention has not been paid to the CES or its practitioners, limiting comparative reflection between the strategies and their execution. Also missing is the foregrounding of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners (with the exception of recent scholarship on Muslims' engagement, see Shanaah, 2019 and Ahmad, 2021), though their experiences are often disparate owing to external community expectations and internal religious frames of reference that may inspire and restrict their actions and interactions. As the discussion on policy enactment and agency has sought to illustrate, understanding the local context is critically significant, as is a nuanced insight into how CT/CE policy is implemented in a longstanding area of priority for national security.

As identified by Osorno Hernandez in his 2021 study, policy research is predominantly articulated through the lens of top-down implementation which fails to account for practices on the ground. This study seeks to expand on the literature presented to examine the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners delivering Prevent and the CES in Birmingham, drawing upon critical analyses of CT/CE policy alongside governance literature that explores the tensions between policy and implementation, providing a framework for understanding heterogeneous experiences shaped through expressions of agency and creativity at the local level. In line with Osorno Hernandez's study of youth work in P/CVE, the basis of this research rests on the notion that a comprehensive understanding of CT/CE in the UK must be grounded in empirical accounts of its interactions with practitioners. While this will document the interpretation of policy on behalf of practitioners, it contributes little to conceptual analyses of policy itself, one of its many limitations. As a study centralising the experiences of a specific sample of practitioners in a UK city, the findings are not generalisable but may offer a starting point for further research and more in-depth examination, potentially comparing cities, countries, as well as policy itself against other instrumental theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: Reflexivity and the research process

As established, the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners implementing Prevent/Counter-Extremism in the UK context remains under-researched. To contribute to the emerging literature, this thesis seeks to explore the topic through ethnographic and interview data from the stated sample, adopting a reflexive approach to data gathering and analysis. This chapter offers an overview of the research process; outlining the research design, detailing reflexive thematic analysis as a method employed to make sense of the data and concluding by situating the self within the field in a discussion on broader reflexive considerations.

Researcher background and origins of the study

I joined Aston University in 2011 as a research assistant on a sociolinguistics project based in the School of Languages and Social Sciences. In 2013 I began a part-time master's degree at the university and, as a full-time member of staff, my postgraduate fees were waived for the first year. By the second year of my course, the sociolinguistics project was drawing to a close and my other work (smaller roles assisting other projects) in the research centre did not summate to full-time hours. I was preparing to look for external employment when a colleague approached me with a proposition to work alongside him as an assistant on a new project he had been asked to carry out at the university in conjunction with the city council. The project, concerning the government's Prevent strategy in Birmingham, was to be overseen by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the team would consist of an analyst and an assistant. As my background was in linguistics, I knew little of Prevent other than associating it with Project Champion – my opinion was not a positive one and I was therefore reluctant to become involved.

My colleague was somebody I respected a great deal, was learning a lot from, and worked well alongside. He explained to me that he, too, felt uneasy initially but rationalised potential involvement by suggesting that in order to better understand and effect change within harmful policies, we would be far better placed on the 'inside'. He also expressed a sense of duty in that if the project was not taken on by us, two Muslim researchers, then it would be carried out by others who might not endeavour to undertake such a complex piece of research as sensitively. He informed me that the project did not require us to deliver any Prevent work in communities or transmit the message of Prevent on behalf of the local authority or the Home Office. Instead, we would be required to carry out desk research, mapping exercises, and speak to communities in Birmingham to try and garner perceptions of Prevent on the ground. These findings were to be fed back to the city council's Prevent team whose job it then was to try and improve the implementation of Prevent by responding to community sentiment in an attempt to move away from the toxic legacy that lingered.

I was offered a full-time position on the Prevent Analyst project meaning I would remain a full-time member of staff in the research centre and that my second-year tuition fees would be waived; I would also be gaining insight into social policy in action which would complement my master's studies in sociology and social change. This forced me to evaluate my position on Prevent at the time against the practicalities of maintaining work in my current environment. Encouraged by colleagues, I chose to remain in the research centre and somewhat apprehensively began research for the Prevent Analyst project.

The lead researcher and I both struggled with feelings of guilt and responsibility while engaging, believing that we were trying to help improve implementation of a strategy (being delivered in local areas whether we were involved or not) and learn more about its nuances in order to reduce harm to local communities, while attempting to maintain the networks we had built within the city through previous research. We felt that if our work as Prevent analysts was to be publicised, sentiment towards us would no longer be favourable from all pockets of communities and we may in fact lose contacts that we had spent time establishing. It was these antagonisms that led to my PhD research topic. During the course of the project, we met many of the CSOs and practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent in Birmingham – most were Muslim and/or came from minoritised communities. Through these interactions, I began to realise that a handful of individuals I would encounter at weekly meetings were also struggling with the nature of engaging with Prevent work locally, attempting to balance delivering a pro-Prevent message with public scrutiny and the brunt of community backlash.

The relationship between CSOs and CT policy had in recent years begun to emerge as a complex and critical issue that I felt required urgent investigation and analysis, particularly considering the Home Office proposed to attain a sense of credibility by implicating grassroots community organisations in counter-radicalisation work more expansively than ever before (Home Affairs Select Committee, 2016). After two years of working on the project and developing my understanding of Prevent, I recognised that there was a body of academic literature, often situated within a critical space, that sought to investigate the origins and operations of strategy (Spalek and Lambert, 2010; Thomas, 2010; Skoczylis, 2015) as well as growing interest in the stigmatising effects of Prevent on (specifically) Muslim communities (Kundnani, 2009; Pantazis and Pemberton, 2009; Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Awan, 2012b; Heath-Kelly, 2012). It seemed that while research was addressing issues of policy from the 'top' in respect to the composition and approach of Prevent, and its marginalising and pejorative effects on target communities at the 'bottom', what was largely missing was information on actors in the 'middle'; practitioners and individuals that often live and/or work in targeted communities, attempting to engage under challenging circumstances. The government announced it would be increasingly drawing on these individuals moving forward, however, their narratives and experiences were largely absent from the discourse. I set out to investigate these practitioners for my PhD research.

Research design

I proposed to carry out ethnographic research in Birmingham across a number of sites key to the delivery of Prevent and the CES – youth and community centres where workshops were conducted, Prevent offices, civil society organisation spaces and businesses – and conduct interviews with practitioners, including individuals with strategic oversight, operational insight and those involved with day-to-day practical management and delivery. Semi-structured interviews that offer space for the co-production of knowledge between researcher and participant celebrate richness, depth and multi-dimensionality (Mason, 2002) and would provide the opportunity to question practitioners about workshops and events I had observed them deliver prior to interview. In-depth interviews are commonly used within ethnographic research that, on a broader level, seeks to present nuanced and holistic insights into the views and actions of individuals, as well the nature of the spaces they inhabit (Reeves et al., 2008), and could therefore complement the study's research questions.

I chose this methodological approach because from my own experience of working with Prevent, I understand that snap judgements are sometimes made about individuals who choose to participate. If I was to observe and document what I perceived to be happening in the delivery of Prevent/Counter-Extremism in Birmingham without facilitating the space for individuals to talk through their experiences, I would be adopting a similar approach to those that criticise practitioners and organisations without engaging in further discussion. Equally, if I were to simply interview practitioners without observing their work in action – how communities respond to their implementation of CT/CE messaging, as well as the locations, conversations and 'unofficial' supplementary work that often happens in these spaces – I would again be limiting my capacity to try and understand the local scene holistically. I was told on a number of occasions by practitioners I interviewed that they were pleased to see I had turned up to see them facilitating instead of arranging an interview with limited knowledge of their style of delivery.

An approach sensitive to flexibility and trust-building is essential when researching communities that may be research-fatigued or otherwise reluctant to engage, as has been ascribed to Muslim communities in Britain (Moosavi, 2013; Winterbotham and Pearson, 2016). Several practitioners I interviewed relayed their dismay at the number of researchers they claim ask for their help and offer nothing in return, something I then consciously tried to mitigate. It is also of note to acknowledge the problematic under-theorising of the population of 'non-organised Muslims' who choose not to have an official presence in physical spaces (Jeldtoft and Nielsen, 2010) and who the practitioners I spoke with felt responsible for representing. As youth workers and community activists, some of the individuals interviewed were often expected to speak on behalf of their communities and the burden of this, when faced with journalists and researchers who they perceived to be disingenuous, could be exhausting. It was important for me to respect this additional consideration and approach the research with sensitivity.

Ethics

Prior to collecting data, the process of obtaining ethical approval through the university for this study proved to be an unprecedented and problematic undertaking, enduring over a year of negotiations and resubmissions rather than the standard few weeks that was anticipated. My experience of the ethics process sits in stark contrast to differently racialised or non-Muslim counterparts. It holds significance in contextualising the rest of the project and also intersects with the central tenet of the thesis, highlighting the difficulty of existing in the 'grey area'. A full overview of the prolonged procedure – and its implications for the study and myself as a researcher – is included in Appendix 2: Encounter with ethics.

The final terms agreed upon with the university required Birmingham City Council (BCC) to perform its own assessment of the proposed study and myself as a researcher and to provide written ethical approval, crucial for the collection of data. BCC and its staff were extremely accommodating – permitting and facilitating access across all components of my fieldwork – and granted approval in July 2018. In order to carry out research with staff based at the West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit (WMCTU) within West Midlands Police (WMP), I was required to apply through the force's internal ethics department, Evidence Based Practice. My proposal was initially assessed and terms discussed prior to being forwarded to the Deputy Head of Prevent at the CTU (with whom further consultations were held) before access to interview staff and attend events was granted. I could only begin this process after receiving a favourable opinion from the university (also July 2018), and negotiations with WMP took a lengthy period of time subsequent to this, with written approval provided by WMP in November 2019. The terms and conditions agreed upon with WMP stipulate that I must share my thesis, or at least the excerpts of it that make reference to interviews with police practitioners, with the department for review prior to submission, although it was made clear this is to verify the anonymity of staff and does not constitute an editorial exercise. Interestingly, I encountered more obstacles from the university than the external, more security-centred, bodies I requested clearance from which could be suggestive of resistance against certain types of research topics welcome at the university or, as scholars suggest, the self is the key fieldwork tool and how we are perceived ultimately affects the ways in which the study proceeds (Reinharz, 1997).

Data set

The data consists of ethnographic observations constituted of a minimum fifty official Prevent/Counter-Extremism activities (as well as informal 'hanging out' with the local teams and practitioners) and forty-seven in-depth interviews with thirty-nine Prevent/Counter-Extremism Strategy practitioners carried out from 2018 to 2021.

Ethnographic data

I received a favourable opinion from Aston University's Research Ethics Committee in July 2018 and immediately entered the field, attending workshops and events as part of ethnographic fieldwork that

continued until March 2020, days before the UK entered lockdown which involved the closure of all public spaces. This twenty-month period (separate from the interviewing schedule which continued virtually post-March 2020 until March 2021) was spent attending workshops, consultations, roundtables, community briefings, regular meetings, sessions on specific issues and invitation-only events that were facilitated in the local space by Muslim and/or minority ethnic practitioners implementing Prevent or Counter-Extremism. Events for observation were selected in order to address the research questions and were therefore required to be carried out in Birmingham by local practitioners identifying as Muslim and/or minority ethnic implementing some element of the two strategies. I was invited by members of the BCC and WMCTU Prevent teams as well as independent practitioners and CSOs to events that fulfilled this brief and enabled me to observe actions and interactions that provided a sound empirical base from which to explore the research questions.

In addition to attending events such as monthly meetings for BCC-funded Prevent CSOs, closed WMCTU staff and stakeholder briefings, training sessions, community consultations, bespoke workshops and innovative initiatives, in the summer of 2019, I began working as an analyst on an unrelated Department for Education (DfE) funded project at BCC. The project was not connected to Prevent but was based in the same council division, situating me in the same open plan office as the Prevent team for around three days a week over a nine-month period (the length of time before lockdown enforced a home-working policy).

As well as attending the same work functions and departmental meetings, this meant regularly engaging with Prevent staff, projects, CSOs, CTU staff members and Home Office representatives who would congregate in the same office my job was located. Many of these practitioners were already known to me from previous work (through Prevent Analyst) or fieldwork and those that were not, I grew to know. Because I was engaging with this cohort of individuals through interviews and workshops on other days of the week, most seemed comfortable around me and made an effort to engage with me at work too. Sharing this space also provided many opportunities for members of the team to pull me over for a quick chat, ask me to lunch or invite me for a coffee so they could discuss Prevent/Counter-Extremism-related issues with somebody they felt was neutral enough to be impartial but knowledgeable enough of the local scene to understand circumstances and perhaps offer advice or support. I found that members of the team I had interviewed repeatedly turned to me when they were facing challenges at work or simply wanted to let off some steam. The physical proximity seemed to blur the boundaries for some Prevent staff as I was also asked to help with presentation content on a couple of occasions; politely declining and making clear my position as not part of the team. I was also asked to co-deliver sessions with the Prevent Youth Engagement Officer in different forums. I agreed in one instance; discussing the challenges of working as a Prevent practitioner with university students who were training as youth and community workers at a local university. I presented my own research findings and spoke as a PhD researcher, however, not as a council employee.

Over the twenty-month period, I attended a minimum of fifty official workshops/events facilitated by BCC's Prevent or Counter-Extremism team, Prevent/Counter-Extremism-funded CSOs/practitioners or WMCTU. That is independent of the informal 'hanging out', the initial meetings I carried out with practitioners to build relationships and trust, or the three days a week I spent in the same office. This equates on average to two-and-a-half workshops per week. I always introduced myself as a PhD researcher but sometimes comments were made by facilitators which implied that I was 'part of the team'. This will be explored further later in the chapter but occurred towards the end of time spent in the field when perhaps my presence was, by then, associated with BCC offices leading to my perception as more of an insider.

Interviews

The primary component of the data consists of semi-structured interviews with thirty-nine practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent or the CES in Birmingham. Eight official follow-up interviews were also conducted therefore the data set consists of forty-seven recorded interviews. These follow-up interviews occurred for a number of reasons; some were requested by me as initial interviews with participants had taken place early on in the data gathering stage and as new ideas and key themes became apparent from successive interviews, I felt it important to discuss these topics with all participants in the study. Sometimes participants asked if we could meet again if they had further issues they wanted to discuss and I regarded these types of follow-ups as informal conversations if they were slightly off-topic. Most of the follow-up interviews occurred because of the need to develop trust and rapport when discussing sensitive topics (Lee, 1993) and ultimately contributed to the collection of nuanced data (Goyes and Sandberg, 2024). If I was interviewing individuals that I did not know particularly well, it was not uncommon for them to begin by exercising caution in how they answered questions; completely understandable as the subject matter is personal and has the potential to cause controversy as well as trigger emotion. With these interviews, I found that participants often did not realise until nearer the end of the interviews that they were, at times, able to derive some benefit from the opportunity to 'vent' and began to open up as a sense of affinity and trust was slowly developed. When time allowed, these follow-up interviews then went on for much longer than originally planned, with several being around the three-hour mark. When there was something else in the participant's schedule, a follow-up interview was arranged to pick up where conversation left off.

Interviews were mostly carried out at venues convenient to practitioners that were kindly giving up their time – BCC offices, various police stations across the city and the main WMP headquarters, youth and community centres, offices and workplaces of CSOs, and two held at Aston University – and fulfilled in private or closed rooms as I was not permitted to conduct any interviews in public spaces, such as cafes, as stipulated in the ethical guidelines for my research (interviews with Prevent practitioners in similar studies were comparatively conducted in cafes, see Andrews, 2020, however). After the pandemic restricted social gathering in 2020, remaining interviews were carried out virtually over Skype, Zoom and Microsoft Teams. On average,

interviews lasted for around an hour and half and were recorded on a Dictaphone and a voice recorder application on a secondary electronic device as a back-up.

Sampling and gaining access

The process of identifying participants was grounded in the research questions – centring on investigating the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham – and therefore took on a purposive approach to sampling, attempting to source individuals who fitted these criteria, had been active in the space, and were willing to participate. After devising the research questions, I was able to consider the data needed to address the aims of the study and this provided a clear starting point from which I was able to develop a broader framework methodology and sampling approach suitable to the research objectives.

I began approaching participants to be interviewed by contacting practitioners that I knew were working in the field and would be able to provide knowledge suitable to address the research questions, adopting a purposive technique. As some of these individuals were members of BCC's Prevent team, they worked in partnership with WMCTU and had oversight of local CSOs working on Prevent and the CES Birmingham, establishing a wide scope. During these initial interviews, I asked for recommendations of other practitioners who qualified as Muslim/minority ethnic and requested introductions be made. This acted as a critical springboard; I was put in contact with a range of practitioners who invited me to workshops and events and from there I continued to practice the method of snowball sampling, asking participants if they could think of peers who might be open to a conversation and whose identity and engagement aligned with the focus of the study.

I sent information sheets via email and had many pre-interview conversations with participants to answer any questions they had, allay concerns and clarify the research aims. Practitioners appreciated that I had attended their workshops, often prior to interviews taking place, and this helped build some familiarity and connection. Some practitioners said they were not comfortable agreeing to an interview to discuss working in the Prevent/Counter-Extremism space and some did not explicitly state this but made excuses to not participate. Two participants agreed but needed reassurance during interviews (and after via phone calls) that nobody would know they contributed. Some participants disclosed they only agreed as a sort of 'favour' to me, while other individuals were extremely forthcoming; generous with their time and resources, happy to participate and recruit others from their network to add to the data set. I relied on handful of 'gatekeepers', who were well-known in the local space but had maintained a degree of credibility, and who became critical in facilitating access, particularly to individuals who had recently disengaged or become disillusioned and were not familiar with me or my intentions.

All participants were either currently working as practitioners in Birmingham in the areas of Prevent or Counter-Extremism or had recently been involved. Of the thirty-nine, only one practitioner was exclusively involved with work in the Counter-Extremism space and not Prevent, though many had experience engaging with both. Counter-Extremism was a newer, less-established strategy and its workstreams therefore narrower. Its footprint, for example, was so small it did not cross over into the world of police so did not exist within WMCTU. Disappointingly, the local Counter-Extremism Coordinator was not interviewed for this study. Though she never explicitly declined the invitation, she claimed to be too busy for the duration of the two years in which I attended all her events and repeatedly attempted to secure a conversation. She was based in the same department I worked in at the council and was friendly at the office and when we would see each other outside of work (competing in the same sports league) but seemed reluctant to want to talk about her role formally, despite being asked by her line manager (BCC's Prevent Coordinator) to cooperate with the study after the rest of the team had been interviewed. When the Counter-Extremism Engagement Officer joined the department, we arranged an interview after an initial coffee but he later withdrew with an unusual excuse, I suspect after a conversation with his manager. The data that supports the sections on the CES is provided by practitioners who facilitated Counter-Extremism workshops at their settings or were asked to consider engaging, were employed on BSBT programmes delivered in the city, worked alongside the Counter-Extremism team at BCC, or were otherwise working in the Prevent/Counter-Extremism space in Birmingham and encountering the CES in their work. I consider the Counter-Extremism Coordinator's reluctance to engage as indicative of the disordered and obscure nature of the strategy and its work. The Coordinator was possibly apprehensive about being scrutinised, as the data will show many of her peers felt they were relayed inaccuracies about her role, the strategy's remit, and its strategic and operational connections to Prevent. The strategy was obviously not as established as Prevent and it is possible that Prevent practitioners felt more capable of being open about the strategy's failings, as well as vulnerable on a personal level, because much has been publicised and reflected upon over a longer period of time. The CES had not only not yet reached that juncture but was frequently embroiled in controversy such as the furore detailed in the previous chapter.

Of the thirty-nine participants, twenty-three were male and sixteen were female. This is a result of the composition of practitioners in this space in Birmingham rather than a purposive sampling choice. Ten were from BCC, six were from WMCTU, sixteen were from a CSO and seven were independent of any of these and were carrying out work in the area informally. CSOs receive funding from both BCC and WMCTU and can function as short-lived endeavours, emerging and disappearing from year to year with funding calls, so it would make sense that they constitute the majority of practitioners interviewed. The police officers (henceforth, police practitioners) I spoke to make up the smallest proportion of interviewees for two reasons. The first being that a requirement for participating in the study stipulated that practitioners are involved or invested in the communities they work within in some way, whether that be that they identify as 'BAME', come from a Muslim background or are in some way part of communities that Prevent/Counter-Extremism

in Birmingham is targeted towards. The police force nationally is not representative of the ethnic makeup of Britain (Home Office, 2021) and so there were inevitably fewer individuals within WMCTU that fulfilled this criterion. WMP is also bound by more rigid institutional regulations than the local authority and as such has more permanent positions and less short-term, pilot or innovative teams and posts than BCC which means the *types* of individuals I could interview were significantly fewer, even if there were more of them. As my research objectives were to gain an understanding of the overall scene in Birmingham, it would not make sense to speak with twenty police officers that do the exact same job in the same department, even if that sample did exist within the force. The local CTU also works with other elements of the broader Counter-Terrorism Strategy (which I am not researching) so the remit of police staff is often broader than just Prevent.

As indicated, all participants of the study identify as coming from a 'BAME' or Muslim background except for one practitioner who is white British but lived in Pakistan for some years and so maintains a level of insider status owing to their knowledge of the language (allowing them to communicate with mosque elders, for example), and understanding of nuanced cultural and religious differences that are crucial for engagement in the space. I used the term 'BAME' informally when recruiting participants, interchangeably with minority ethnic, but acknowledge the deeply problematic connotations associated with such a broad and homogenising label (Fakim and Macauley, 2020). The sample includes racially minoritised individuals raised Muslim who continue to actively practise Islam, some who consider themselves lapsed, and some who no longer belong to any faith and might be considered 'ex-Muslim'. This includes individuals with Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Yemeni, Somali, Indian, Caribbean, African and mixed heritage backgrounds and those who now reside in Birmingham after relocating internationally. Also included are individuals who ascribe to different sects of Islam such as Shia Muslims and those considered to follow a Barelvi, Salafi or Deobandi denomination, as well as converts to Islam whose backgrounds may be described as white, Black, or mixed heritage, and followers of other faiths such as Judaism, Christianity and Sikhism.

In terms of access, the greatest obstacle faced was that enforced by the university. BCC, WMP and participants more broadly were forthcoming and receptive. Interviews were directed by a topic guide devised to learn about the practitioner and their personal experience and included questions about the kinds of CT/CE work implemented, any particular motivations they held for becoming involved and any challenges they face(d) (personally or professionally) as a result. I also asked about the policy side; whether participants' perceptions of Prevent had changed after engaging with the work on a first-hand basis and what the best approach should look like moving forward. Although I tried to cover questions from the topic guide in interviews, I did not restrict participants from sharing views on other points and encouraged them to bring up anything else regarding their engagement, policy or feelings about either. This offer was at times declined but sometimes met with interesting and nuanced perspectives. Over time, it became apparent that some questions were too convoluted (dichotomy between good/bad citizen), some were not yielding much response (what else needs to be part of the conversation?) and some appeared to no longer fit the topic (thoughts on terms like

moderate Muslim, radicalisation, extremism) as data gathering progressed. Other unanticipated themes and topics cropped up repeatedly through my observations at workshops and in the conversations that followed with practitioners. They were then incorporated into the topic guide and related to support and training provisions, or the differences between perceptions and approaches of the distinct authorities and strategies, for example.

I shared information sheets and consent forms electronically with participants prior to meeting if possible (offering full disclosure of the research aims, data handling procedures, ethical assurances, and contact details of various university associates), and hard copies were also provided to participants before interview, accompanied with a verbal summary, and a request that they take the time to initially read the information and sign the agreement. I also shared information sheets at workshops, was introduced or introduced myself, my research and the purpose of my presence to attendees, and where possible, placed a poster detailing the study and my contact details on the venue's noticeboard. At regular forums, participants were often informed ahead of time through the inclusion of my presence as an agenda item in correspondence.

Anonymity

Protecting the confidentiality of participants, their organisations, and communities while documenting and recording their contributions is a critical element of the research process, with particular care due for the discussion of delicate and contentious topics. For this reason, participants and places are pseudonymised throughout the thesis and given names rather than codes or numbers in an effort to humanise research practices (Lahman et al., 2023), with additional layers of cover included in specific sections where the individual might be identifiable by the nature of their position (if they were one of a small number, for example, they may be referred to as a 'member of the BCC team' instead of Prevent Engagement Officer, depending on context). In line with similar research, I also further anonymise in sections where there is potential for controversy (Osorno Hernandez, 2021). If participants disclose revelatory or sensitive information, I refer to them only as a 'practitioner' despite using their pseudonym in other parts of the thesis. The exception to this was the BCC Prevent Coordinator who was happy to be identified, though I have chosen to refer to him only by title and not his first name which would appear jarring and unnecessarily expository against the rest of the sample.

Echoing research on the dilemmas of anonymisation, while proper names of participants were redacted, I felt it important, where applicable, to 'retain the possibility for a reader to identify them as potentially perceived as Muslims' and to maintain the 'generic connotation that the names engendered and that indicated their belonging' to the groups previously mentioned (Kolankiewicz, 2021: 121). As stated, the sample is made up of a heterogenous set of individuals encompassing multiple ethnic, religious and cultural identities and for this reason neutral and nonspecific names that are used across diverse faiths and backgrounds were

purposefully selected for individuals who might otherwise be identifiable owing to their unique selfhood. The practice of selecting 'Muslim-sounding' names that are prevalent across ethnic and cultural groups is demonstrated in recent literature (Kolankiewicz, 2021). On reflection, however, I recognise that I could have included participants in the naming process, inviting them to choose their own pseudonyms. This is not something I considered at the time but is recommended in 'culturally responsive research' that considers the power of participant naming (Lahman et al., 2023: 678). Distinctive and idiosyncratic aspects of locations, organisations and participants' backgrounds are also removed and direct (at times, lengthy) quotes are included to ensure that, in the absence of self-identity, the perspectives and opinions of participants are reflected in the research with as much integrity and fullness as possible (Osorno Hernandez, 2021).

Reflexive thematic analysis

In 2006, Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke published a paper entitled 'Using thematic analysis in psychology'; the popularity of which 'exploded' (Braun and Clarke, 2019a: 589), with the method becoming widely utilised beyond the field of psychology and prompting a growing interest in and expansion of varieties of thematic analysis in social science research more broadly (Clarke and Braun, 2018). The authors sought to address a method of analysis that they felt was widely used yet 'poorly demarcated' (2006: 77), arguing for its accessibility and theoretical flexibility and providing clear instructions for its application in qualitative research. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) offers structure and guidance without limiting creativity or imposing arbitrary rules and additionally centralises reflexivity (fundamental to this study), to recognise meaning as 'contextual or situated, reality or reali*ties* as multiple and researcher subjectivity as not just valid but a *resource'* (Braun and Clarke, 2019b: 848). The flexibility of the method, as opposed to more rigid qualitative analytic methods such as grounded theory, conversation analysis or discourse analysis that are tethered to particular theoretical or epistemological positions, is what makes thematic analysis so widely applicable and capable of providing rich and complex accounts of data collected (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is this spirit of flexibility that the authors attempt to maintain while providing a vocabulary 'for people to undertake thematic analysis in a way that is theoretically and methodologically sound', emphasising that the guidelines are just that, and can be adapted to suit each piece of research (2006: 78).

Ontological and epistemological assumptions

The study takes an inductive approach in its endeavour to examine data without the constraints imposed by needing to test theory (Harding, 2013). This means themes generated, without attempting to fit into a pre-existing coding frame, are strongly linked to the data, but it is important to acknowledge that data cannot be coded in an 'epistemological vacuum' and my awareness of current debates in the area will have been reflected in the research objectives and questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84).

I came to reflexive thematic analysis after initially attempting to apply constructivist grounded theory but was uncomfortable with the position that themes 'emerge' from the data objectively without due consideration for the choices and subjectivities of the researcher. Reflexive thematic analysis offers value in its approach to constructing meaning out of data beyond iterative approaches to coding, speaking instead to a detailed engagement with the quality and content of data that encourages the researcher to acknowledge their position within processes of analysis and data gathering, reflecting on why we assign meaning to themes that form part of the overall story. For example, I did not pose any specific questions about religion to participants but many spoke in-depth about how the teachings of their faith inspired, limited and guided their engagement through answers to different questions and tangential conversations. In the process of analysis, I generated a number of different themes relating to religion, some of which was shared with me presumably because participants responded to my own visible religious markers, to construct arguments around the role of religion in the implementation of CT/CE policy locally.

Because thematic analysis is a method rather than a methodology, it is imperative to clarify the philosophical underpinnings of this piece of research, establishing that it sits firmly within an ontology classified by a belief in multiple constructed realities, rather than a single, objective truth which is comprehensible and can be accessible through the application of research techniques (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This ontological position is common in qualitative research and is complemented by a constructionist epistemological framework that regards the researcher as a 'sculptor', arguing that reality is not *discovered* through the process of research, but *created* (Braun and Clarke, 2013: 29).

Constructionism contends that meaning is 'culturally, socially, historically, and politically situated' and upholds the possibility of multiple co-existing meanings (Hathcoat et al., 2019: 103) over an observable external reality (Burr, 2019) in a paradigm that acknowledges the researcher's role in the co-production of knowledge and active involvement in all aspects of analysis as well as the interpretation and write-up of findings. The role of the researcher and concepts of insiderness and outsiderness are constantly negotiated and renegotiated in my data and I reflexively consider these elements of the research later in the chapter. Linked to the insider/outsider dichotomy that centralises the experience and impact of the researcher is the idea of the self and how we are 'produced' in and for the research. Social constructionism rejects the notion that an individual 'consists of a unified and stable collection of features or characteristics. Instead, the person is viewed as fractured and distributed across social relationships; we are "produced" on a myriad of different occasions and, in different ways, dependent upon the nature of the social situation in which we find ourselves' (Burr, 2019: 123).

Participants that have shared their thoughts and experiences for this study articulate the different 'selves' that they navigate and present in their personal and professional fields and it is therefore key that I not only consider my own subjectivities and positionality, but also acknowledge that the accounts provided to me in

the research are not 'essential' accounts of these practitioners' true selves, but a product of the circumstances present at the time of data-gathering.

Before exploring the method in further detail, the definition of key terms will provide a clearer picture of the analysis in progress.

A note on theme construction: domain summaries and central organising concepts

RTA advises against the conceptualisation of themes as 'domain summaries', an underdeveloped classification incompatible with a reflexive approach that is considered a surface level 'data reduction activity' (Braun and Clarke, 2019b: 846) where information is pooled into themes that consist of descriptive summaries without any sense of 'what underlying patterning ties the analytic observations together' (Braun and Clarke, 2018: 108). One-word theme names, often reflective of data collection questions, should be avoided so that themes are not organised around a shared *topic* but shared *meaning*. From my data, it would have been easy, but not particularly revealing, to have organised data into themes such as 'motivations' or 'challenges' to describe practitioners' responses to data collection questions. In order to avoid this, I attempted to consider core concepts that underpin and unite observations in an approach that has the potential to 'highlight shared meaning, as well as contrasts or disjunctures in meaning, more clearly than summaries which compile divergent views' (Braun and Clarke, 2018: 108). For example, rather than developing a theme labelled 'motivations' with the different answers I received to this question (e.g. practitioner passionate about countering extremism, funding is considered a justifiable income, funding obtained as a last resort), the answers provided were catalogued within other themes organised around core ideas such as 'recipients of workshops are needed by Prevent teams' or 'relationship between Muslim communities and the state'. These themes, that reflect patterns of shared meaning over the compilation of views offered by a domain summary, are termed 'central organising concepts' (Braun and Clarke, 2018: 108). The data may have later been repackaged in Chapter 5's focus on practitioners' motivations (for ease of reading) but the themes are arranged and structured around a narrative that aims to capture the essence and spread of meaning, uniting data that might otherwise appear disparate (Braun and Clarke, 2019b).

Phases of analysis

Developing central organising concepts began with coding which, in RTA, is an open process that is not pre-determined through codebooks or frames (Braun and Clarke, 2019a). The process began by familiarising myself with the data through transcription, immersion and 'repeated reading', actively searching for patterns and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). I acknowledge the interpretive nature of transcription, with the potential for alteration of meaning through placement of punctuation, and therefore attempted to transcribe verbatim where possible, accepting that I am not simply 'giving voice' but editing and interpreting, my

positionality shaping how I make sense of participants' words (Lainson et al., 2019: 6). Informal notes and ideas were made in the generation of initial codes across the data set, organising data into meaningful groups. The coded data was then collated and potential themes constructed through the consideration of 'how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 89). I used mind-maps and different heading formats in Word so layers could be indented and collapsed to visualise sub-themes. At this stage, some candidate themes were developed but did not progress further (e.g. 'foreign policy', 'conflation of Prevent with other issues', 'criticisms of Prevent', 'how young people become radicalised') and remaining themes reviewed, with some discarded and others merged into broader categories. The thematic map was considered in relation to the overall data set in order to ensure its relevancy to the research questions and themes were then given distinctive names.

It is significant to note here a key point that has developed with this method as it has been revised by the authors over time: themes do not emerge. They are built and given meaning at the intersection of data, researcher experience, subjectivity and research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2019b) and are not in existence before analysis. Themes are creative and interpretive stories told about the data and are actively generated as a result of a reflexive and thoughtful engagement on behalf of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2019a). My own positionality is part and parcel of the construction of themes and the account of the data is not 'correct' or in any way finite, it is simply the result of my reflexive engagement at the time I carried out analysis.

Data 'saturation'

RTA rejects the idea of data saturation as a rationale by which to measure sample size (Braun and Clarke, 2021); with emerging concepts such as 'conceptual depth criteria' (Nelson, 2017: 554) and 'information power' (Malterud et al., 2016: 1753) considered more applicable. Stemming from positivist-empiricist concerns with representation and generalisability, the notion of saturation speaks to a position of theoretical 'knowingness' incompatible with the underlying philosophy of this piece of research (Braun and Clarke, 2019b) and qualitative research more broadly (Constantinou et al., 2017). Instead, the sample is informed by norms about the appropriate scope of doctoral research in the discipline of sociology as well as the breadth of the research questions, diversity within the population of study, and the richness of data collected from each participant (Braun and Clarke, 2019b).

The type of data collected in qualitative research is typically 'messy' and codes are never finally fixed, meaning the potential for new themes to be developed will always exist (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Rather than identifying a point at which information becomes redundant, the researcher must make a situated, interpretative judgement about when to move from one step in the process to another (Braun and Clarke, 2021); which in this case was determined by the timeframe of the PhD.

Discussion has covered the background, research design and method of data analysis guiding the study. The following section attempt to make sense of my positionality within the process.

Reflexivity

Since the reflexive turn in the social sciences half a century ago (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), qualities such as objectivity and neutrality are judged at odds with contemporary sociological research and have been supplanted by the acknowledgement of subjectivities and researcher positionality. Reflexivity, or bending back on oneself through self-aware analysis (Steier, 1991; Finlay and Gough, 2003), is posited as a methodological tool that can and should be used to 'legitimize, validate, and question research practices and representations' (Pillow, 2003: 175). The aim of this section is to provide an account of my self within the research; considering how my positionality has affected the processes of design and analysis. Debates around insiderness and outsiderness will be explored, and my own position as a 'partial insider' will be contemplated, taking into account factors such as appearance, background, employment and affiliations. Finally, strategies that were drawn upon (in stages of both data collection and analysis) will be discussed in an attempt to illustrate how reflexivity has been operationalised throughout the research process.

Researcher positionality

The self in the field

In harmony with RTA, in *The Ethnographic Self* Amanda Coffey details how identity construction in fieldwork, including the writing and representing of fieldwork experiences in analysis, is far from a passive endeavour and often forces confrontations that can result in a fracturing of self-identity (1999). Coffey speaks of complicated interactions between the self and the field to describe the fieldwork self as fluid, negotiated and the product of 'culturally available and defined interactions, actions, meanings and values' (1999: 35). This casts the self as multiple and has consequences for the ways in which we interconnect with others in the field (Coffey, 1999), drawing into question how we are perceived as researchers; 'who are we for them?' (Reinharz, 1997: 4). Using these ideas as a framework and drawing upon the work of ethnographers that have explored their sense of self in the field (Kondo, 1986; Berger, 2015; Dodworth, 2018), I can begin to make sense of my own experience.

Reinharz (1997) claims that analysis of her fieldnotes revealed approximately twenty different selves which she categorised into three groups: *research-based selves* (being a researcher, a listener, a temporary presence), *brought selves* (relating to physical characteristics, religious affiliations, societal roles, prior interests), and *situationally created selves* (being a helper, a friend – sharing experiences necessary to understand participants in study). I came to the field with a number of *brought selves* as a British Asian, a hijab-wearing Muslim, a Brummie, a woman, and a previous Prevent 'colleague' for some. My female identity

allowed me to enter women's only spaces, attend women's events, workshops and forums, and also interview a number of female practitioners who work exclusively with women and who may have felt uncomfortable having similar intimate conversations with a male counterpart. Some of these women invited me to their homes, introduced me to their families and sustained relationships with me in ways that would have been denied to a male researcher. The means by which participants interacted with these embodied selves became the bases for my *situationally created selves* as I was often referred to as 'sister' by participants, presumed to be a council worker or part of the team presenting workshops I attended, and often perceived as someone with 'inside knowledge' of the local Prevent/Counter-Extremism scene.

Entering the field, we may classify 'being a researcher' as our most prominent self but Reinharz argues that our *brought* and *created* selves are the most relevant to our participants; shaping or impeding the relationships that are formed and thus the data that is gathered. Coming from similar ethnic backgrounds can help build rapport (Guru, 2012), as can 'religion-matching' (Abbas, 2010: 126), but some scholars describe how being non-Muslim can be advantageous when researching Muslim communities as participants may be motivated by Islamic principles to represent the faith as a form of *da'wah*; the practice of conveying the religion's message (Moosavi, 2013). It is also claimed that Muslim communities have grown increasingly distrustful of existing networks due to fears of covert intelligence gatherers (Lakhani, 2010), something I have experienced through involvement with other research but did not seem to encounter when interviewing practitioners for my data, perhaps owing to my partial insider status or changes to perception of policy as Prevent iterations have developed.

I recognise an 'appreciative understanding' that led me to research a group I empathise with (Lee, 1993: 136) and can relate to a 'recasting of the self' (Kondo, 1986) in which I embraced meaningful roles given to me because fieldwork is 'not accomplished in isolation from the physical and social setting' (Coffey, 1999: 25). My *research-based selves* also bled into *created selves* as I became a friend for some participants (invited to participants' homes, invited for lunches, invited to weddings), a helper (asked for help writing presentation slides, asked to speak at events or contribute to workshops, asked for help accessing courses, asked for 'inside' information on funding sources) and, most frequently, a listener beyond the interview. As Coffey (1999) points out, friendships with informants are common but not always equal or based on genuine commitment; she describes feeling compelled to say yes to socialising when she was tired and other scholars divulge similar struggles around 'fake' friendships and the guilt these elicit (Dodworth, 2018). At times I experienced similar interactions with my participants, for example, feeling compelled to answer calls when it was late or I was busy, but as they had contributed their time to my research or continued to facilitate access to individuals in the field, I made myself as available as possible. Reciprocity, such as baking cupcakes for a practitioner's wedding function, sourcing a female Qur'an teacher to teach free of charge at a Prevent-funded forum or providing lifts was my way of acknowledging the worthiness of my participants' time and was a means of 'giving back' (Oakley, 1981) that is common in ethnographic research (Kondo, 1986; Joseph, 1988; Huisman,

2008). Despite fieldwork relations beginning as fragile or 'false', they involve emotions and consequences, therefore cannot be regarded as purely purposive (Coffey, 1999) and while many of the relationships I developed with participants have dwindled since fieldwork came to a close, some have endured.

Nevertheless, the momentum of fieldwork meant that my selfhood was recast in some of the aforementioned ways and consequently, at times, I struggled with not always being openly critical or completely honest in order to maintain relationships that were beneficial for my research. At times I was recast as a Prevent insider or worker, a situated outcome, that I did not necessarily identify with.

Reflecting on my place in the local CT/CE space

Part of the reason I was so often cast as a 'Prevent worker' at events was owing to the research job I started in 2019 which placed me in close physical proximity to the local authority Prevent team in the BCC offices. It was my understanding that the DfE project was not connected to Prevent in any way and this is something I clarified before taking on the position. Nevertheless, both teams worked in a small open plan office in the former Equalities and Social Cohesion building and this brought about daily interactions. I struggled with the arrangement as our work did not overlap but the contiguity meant our team was sometimes perceived to be working alongside Prevent; becoming apparent through comments made by visitors to the office. The setup provided invaluable advantages, however. I grew familiar with the local authority Prevent team, staff from WMCTU and many of the practitioners and CSOs who would frequent the office on a regular basis, allowing me to become reacquainted with practitioners I had met previously and secure introductions to new ones. As individuals from these networks began to recognise and socialise with me, I was welcomed by them in other spaces I attended for research purposes. It also meant I was kept abreast of all Prevent/Counter-Extremism workshops and events that were happening in Birmingham, was privy to some 'behind-the-scenes' interactions and developed an understanding of the dynamics between staff members on the team and groups they worked with.

I was also invited to monthly meetings for local CSOs implementing Prevent as staff assumed they may be of interest to my research; an example of the kind of events I was able to attend which would have otherwise been inaccessible to me. At times however, lines became blurred. Despite referring to myself as a PhD researcher at workshops and not a council worker, I would sometimes be called upon by Prevent staff as 'part of the team' or facilitators would recognise me 'from the Prevent office'; something I tried to mitigate by reiterating my position as a research student in those spaces. Still, I was sometimes invited to pitch in, offer opinions and asked to collect sign-in forms from attendees as I would inevitably end up back at the same office as the Prevent staff member who introduced the workshop. While this made me feel slightly uncomfortable, I was not interviewing attendees so I did not feel it would impact my research should they have perceived me as more of an insider than an external student.

Fieldwork relations are negotiated between the researcher and social actors in a manner that is not always consciously or critically staged (Coffey, 1999) and while I did not set out to begin working at the council or in close proximity to the Prevent team and did not always feel at ease with the arrangement, I am appreciative of the opportunities it provided for my research. Positions of insiderness and outsiderness exist on a continuum around which they are constantly fluctuating and differentially experienced, shifting as relationships are negotiated and positions evolve in the field (Bolak, 1997; Naples, 1997). The next section considers the advantages and challenges associated with positions of insiderness and outsiderness before detailing the strategies drawn upon in the operationalisation of reflexivity.

Insider/outsider paradigm

There is a wealth of ethnographic literature exploring the pros and cons associated with being a perceived insider with regards to one's research subject (Abu-Lughod, 1988; Morsy, 1988; Shami, 1988; Berger, 2015). I will briefly present arguments from both sides and then contemplate my position as I consider it to be neither that of a full insider or outsider.

Advantages

The term 'indigenous', at times used interchangeably with 'insider', does not adequately capture the nuances involved with group membership in the field and 'non-indigenous' is not always synonymous with 'outsider' (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988). I present as a visibly Muslim and Asian woman but do not necessarily come from the same communities as many of the practitioners I interviewed, having grown up just outside of Birmingham. Similarly, my identity as a council employee who is perceived to work closely with Prevent may suggest that I would be of a pro-Prevent disposition, similar to many participants, but this would also be inaccurate. Despite this, I would conclude that being able to approach the study with a degree of cultural intuition and insight, including drawing upon common vernaculars and shared values, helps to build trust and develop rapport (Berger, 2015) and allowed me to quickly 'set up shop in the field' (Altorki, 1988: 49). I had affinities and connections with the research community which meant I was less likely to experience cultural fatigue (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988) – described as the mental exhaustion experienced by researchers involved in role-playing and impression management (Jones, 1973) – having been around Muslim communities all my life and Prevent insiders for the previous few years. This 'partial insider' status aided access to research subjects; as mentioned, BCC's Prevent Coordinator was extremely accommodating because he saw me as a previous Prevent colleague and member of Muslim and Prevent communities. Similarly, the Deputy Head of Prevent at WMCTU told me he receives many requests from researchers to speak with members of his team and cannot accept them all but that he initially agreed to meet upon seeing my female Arabic name because he wanted to help out a 'Muslim woman who might otherwise find it difficult [to gain access]'. It was not until I turned up to the meeting that he realised he recognised me from the BCC Prevent office which then afforded

me privileges from another facet of my identity. I enjoyed advantages associated with positions of insiderness but acknowledge some of the limitations and obstacles that being a perceived insider can carry.

Challenges

Familiarity can risk imposing the researcher's values and own experiences into interactions (Pillow, 2003), potentially projecting biases and pushing participants in certain directions (Berger, 2015); something I was conscious of and attempted to limit during fieldwork. At times I felt torn between conflicting demands, in parallel with other researchers who describe belonging to both 'indigenous' and 'progressive' groups within the field and the proclivity to switch modes for different audiences (Joseph, 1988). I was a community member, a concerned Muslim citizen, and somebody perceived to have knowledge of the apparatus of Prevent and I alternated between these dispositions sometimes subconsciously. For example, I would probably not have been as critical of Prevent in an interview with a CTU officer who had given up their time to talk to me as I may have been when listening to a practitioner lament that they did not feel supported enough by Prevent or listing its failings in their community.

While perceptions of insiderness led some participants to make reference to the mutual understanding we shared owing to similarities in faith and minoritised backgrounds, the responsibility of researching familiar communities can be greater in that participants may withhold details or beliefs they presume to be common knowledge for an 'insider'. 'Ethnoracialised sameness between researchers and their supposed 'own people' is not always complementary, ideal and productive' (Ademolu, 2023: 1), therefore, maximising the space for interviewees to tell their stories was paramount (Berger, 2015). Language contextualises everything in the field (Maturana, 1991) and is an invaluable research tool but 'insiders' may also overlook semantic nuances they are accustomed to hearing (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988). This blurring of boundaries can make it more complicated for researchers to maintain an emotional and social distance from subjects (Altorki and El-Solh, 1988) who may also have set expectations of the researcher as a result of perceived insider status. When the research community knows you, they may have formed certain opinions of you (in my case, for example, that I am pro-Prevent), and this can make it difficult to break out of patterns and may ultimately restrict data that is gathered (Altorki, 1988).

Before discussing some of the ways in which I tried to mitigate these potential challenges, the next section briefly considers an alternative to the insider/outsider dichotomy.

The middle way

In order to challenge binary understandings of group membership, scholars have argued for the recognition of a nuanced middle approach (Coffey, 1999) or a unique vantage point (Bolak, 1997) from which to understand the self as only ever a partial insider in the field. Identity formation is described as a 'continual, relational process that draws symbolically from discursive frameworks that include traditional markers such as race, but also temporal and spatial markers such as (assumed) shared experience' (Dodworth, 2018: 170). Groupings are in flux and cannot offer stable identities (Dodworth, 2018) and researcher positionality should

be viewed as 'ever moving, changing, adapting, nuanced, negotiated and socially constructed' (Baz, 2023: 14). Even the insider status of some participants within their own communities was called into question when they became involved with Prevent/Counter-Extremism and my own presence in the field was inherently transitory in comparison so I would not conceive that I could ever have complete insider status in the field.

Although some scholars convey the emotional exhaustion and dislocation associated with struggling to entirely fulfil roles given to them in the field (Kondo, 1986), I found the 'multipositionality' (Dodworth, 2018) to be in harmony with the nature of my topic and the findings I interpreted from my data. As I discovered that many of the practitioners I interviewed were not strictly pro or anti-Prevent but existed somewhere in the grey area, I felt that I, and also many of them, were not insiders or outsiders belonging to binary camps but that identities and group memberships were fragmented, negotiated and reconstructed continuously (Coffey, 1999).

Strategies drawn upon to practise reflexivity

Despite expectations now placed upon researchers to be reflexive about their actions and processes, there remains little practical guidance or discussion around how reflexivity can be operationalised in the field (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003).

A relatively simple but effective practice is to keep a research diary throughout the data gathering and analysis stages (Gough, 2003; Knight and Zempi, 2020) which I did in notebooks and electronically; writing down judgements, observations and emotional reactions. These also took the form of voice-notes I recorded on my phone or Dictaphone in the car immediately after leaving events in an attempt to detail reactions and snippets of information while fresh in my mind. I would then transcribe these and collate with the research diary notes which, upon revisiting, helped me to recognise prior assumptions I may have expressed and review my reasoning. I also found it useful to compare these thoughts against transcriptions of interviews as they often provided contextual material, helping to build a fuller picture. When reading transcripts in the analysis stage, I also re-listened to interviews to pick up on other cues and any subtleties I may have missed in transcription.

Seeking peer consultation, something I turned to regularly, is another practical measure through which colleagues can offer feedback on fieldwork events (Berger, 2015) and is a measure I found invaluable throughout the data gathering and analysis stages. Regular meetings with other researchers can enhance one's ability to be reflexive (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and personally helped to me make sense of some of the 'guilty knowledge' I was presented with (Coffey, 1999: 34) when I grew concerned that participants were confiding in me too much and felt unsure how to respond. I was able to continually reflect on the opportunities and drawbacks this sometimes effected by speaking with my supervisors and other researchers as well as revisiting my research diary.

Additional techniques employed in the pursuit of reflexivity include repeated interviews with the same participants, something I did with a number of practitioners, and prolonged engagement in the field (Berger,

2015). In her study on immigrant women's experiences, Roni Berger also gave an account of the preconceptions she brought to the field and her attempts to remain cognisant of how these might cause her to overemphasise certain aspects of the data and disregard others from the narrative. This resonated with me because I had a critical perspective on Prevent/Counter-Extremism entering the field and it was important for me to let the practitioners tell their own stories without offering my opinions. I made a conscious decision at the start of fieldwork not to express my own sentiments because the participant might not agree and I did not want to risk making them feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, if I failed to assure participants that I was not working on behalf of Prevent, I found that they often presented as initially reserved and would hold back criticism of the strategy and perhaps authentic accounts of their experiences until conversation progressed. Though I would explain at the outset my experience on the Prevent Analyst project and the reasons behind my interest in the subject, generally I would wait until after the interview, if asked, to reveal any personal feelings on the topic. On a couple of occasions, this resulted in a second, more frank, interview. If data analysis of these instances, or any others, revealed deeply personal or potentially problematic content, I contacted participants to confirm they were still comfortable with its inclusion and offered the opportunity for them to also reflect.

Change can occur over time and it can be useful to review interviews and notes through a 'new lens' after an interval has passed (Berger, 2015: 30). Distance and detachment from the research can aid reflexivity (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003) and I feel that my project benefited from me leaving my job at the council around the same time I concluded fieldwork so that I could revisit material without subconsciously absorbing more opinions from the practitioners I was in the company of at the office.

Though these methods offer some practical means of practising reflexivity, I do not believe it is possible to entirely grasp the unconscious filters through which we understand and analyse experiences in the field and as such recognise the limits to reflexivity (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003), for example, I acknowledge that I privilege some accounts over others by deciding whose stories to portray and ignore (Hertz, 1999). I believe that my research was co-constructed between myself and my participants and that meanings were negotiated contextually so that another researcher, or another version of my 'self', would unfold a different story (Finlay, 2003).

Conclusions

This chapter has provided an overview of the research process; detailing the origins of the study, an outline of its qualitative and ethnographic research design, an account of the thematic analysis of data and a reflexive consideration of issues pertaining to researcher positionality. In acknowledging my active role in the interpretation and reporting of data through the prism of my own cultural memberships, social positionings and theoretical assumptions (Braun and Clark, 2019b), the researcher becomes a visible component (Lainson

et al., 2019). This means recognising my presence in the undertaking; I asked participants questions in particular ways and my self-presentation impacted how and what they were willing to communicate with me. I constructed themes and I selected data extracts to illustrate reporting, and in writing up the data, I recognise that the account crafted is contextually bound and the product of my own interpretation; I do not suggest that another researcher (or myself at a different time) would have drawn the same conclusions. Arguments presented in the chapters that follow are derived from meanings I have understood because of my own subjectivities which are accepted as a resource rather than a potential threat to knowledge production (Braun and Clarke, 2019a).

Chapter 4 – The local scene: Unpacking Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham

This chapter seeks to establish the environment of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham, providing the context for the research. It will first cover the models and techniques of engagement observed for this study, centralising the role of the practitioner by applying literature on critical community practice and broader scholarship on UK counter-terrorism policy to aid an understanding of individuals involved. An empirical overview of Prevent at the local authority will then be offered; detailing its structure, institutional approach, partnerships and initiatives, followed by a similar breakdown of WMCTU. After a brief comparison of Prevent at the two authorities, discussion will turn to the Counter-Extremism Strategy to examine its structure, logic and local implementation. This will enable scrutiny of the strategy's operations against those of Prevent and, in so doing, will offer insight into the comparison of experiences of engagement across the primary authorities administering Prevent in Birmingham and across the two distinct strategies (RQ5). Finally, the significance of Birmingham as a site for investigation, synthesising arguments and reflections put forward in the body of the discussion, will conclude the chapter.

All of this will empirically demonstrate what has been laid out in Chapter 2's review of policy literature; that Prevent has become a Frankenstein policy that has been revised, augmented, interlinked with other policies such as the CES, framed in the vernacular of contemporary discourses and then reshaped back to a version of where it began – multiple times in multiple ways – and that this is reflected in the local space. The chapter sets the scene for exploring what this means for practitioners who engage – are they able to exploit this to their advantage or does this negatively impact work they seek to carry out? It is suggested that the instability of the local space creates a culture of autonomy for practitioners who mirror the CT/CE policy spiral and its fluctuating philosophies.

Prevent in Birmingham

Projects and practitioners – a typology

Practitioners at the heart of Prevent/CES in Birmingham are the nucleus of this study, though involvement is diverse and individuals are commissioned or employed through a number of different channels. This section provides an overview of the models of engagement that exist in the city and were observed during fieldwork, arguing that central policy creates a fluid local policy space which in turn shapes the experiences of the practitioners and impacts work undertaken.

Basia Spalek (2014) coins counter-terrorism practitioners working at the intersection of communities and authorities (in contexts lacking legitimacy and trust) 'connectors'. She describes state and non-state actors including youth workers, police officers and community members who, in drawing upon their wide-ranging

social networks, risk alienation from their communities and simultaneous friction with authorities but nevertheless exercise self-reflexive qualities to negotiate environments conducive to the delivery of counter-terrorism initiatives. In Spalek's understanding, connectors – a classification attributable to many participants of this study – possess authority and credibility in community networks but I would argue that achieving and maintaining legitimacy is far more nuanced than this suggests and that many practitioners are deemed to have 'sold out'. This suggests that connectors are not as holistically trusted as purported and offers an important development to the literature. These themes are explored further in Chapter 7's discussion on challenges faced in the field in answer to RQ3.

Literature on community practice informs the definition of practitioner applied in this context. Individuals may be employed by organisations briefed to undertake community work of some kind, they may be community educationalists, activists or organisers, they may or may not be professionally qualified in community work or a related field but the key objective of their work is to link current government policies to the communities in which they operate, often for the purpose of promoting active citizenship (Banks, 2003; Henderson, 2007). This brings professionals whose work has a community brief such as police officers, youth workers or local authority workers – and even managers and local policymakers with a community practice remit – under the banner of community practitioner (Henderson, 2007). The experiences of individuals that fit this description and who are involved in the implementation of CT/CE policy in the UK context is still relatively unknown; this study therefore seeks to contribute to this literature. Practitioners interviewed for this study, varying in levels of seniority and experience, were involved in the following ways:

- Individual employed by BCC (part of the Prevent team) or WMP (within WMCTU's Prevent division)
- Individual contracted by BCC as outreach worker (delivers Prevent but not part of the official team)
- Individual or CSO commissioned by BCC or WMCTU to undertake a programme of work over a fixed-term period
- Individual or CSO commissioned by BCC on a consultancy basis to deliver bespoke workshops
- Individual seconded to BCC from another public services sector, e.g., youth service
- Individual or CSO facilitates work at their centre or with their service users and is not primary conduit for Prevent/CES but has arranged delivery of a programme on behalf of BCC/WMCTU, receives funding and assists with workshops and discussions
- Individual employed by youth service and agrees to deliver Prevent/CES material themselves at their centre or with their service users (without assistance from other practitioners)
- Individual volunteers with a CSO or BCC/WMCTU-funded programme and assists with delivery
- Individual employed by company commissioned by Home Office to deliver on the Counter-Extremism Strategy's BSBT programme

Other arrangements encountered during fieldwork (but not included in the sample because individuals did not yet qualify as practitioners involved in the direct implementation of policy) included two women running

informal advisory and community services (such as coffee mornings) in their respective areas of the city who were encouraged by local authority practitioners to establish community interest companies (CICs) that could be funded to deliver Prevent. Converse to this approach is the example of another two individuals who proactively and voluntarily hosted unfunded Prevent events at their settings because they were advised to evidence a portfolio of corresponding work as they sought official status as commissioned CSOs. Actors also transitioned from one mode of engagement to another; for example, a practitioner who ran a successful BCC-commissioned CSO became a paid one-of-a-kind 'outreach worker' delivering all over the city (on behalf of the local authority) with a Prevent Engagement Officer, and a well-established BCC-commissioned CSO bypassed the local authority to be funded directly by the Home Office for a year. This arrangement, designed to centrally coordinate the work of CSOs operating across multiple local authorities, was replete with bureaucratic obstacles and short-lived, however, the experience of joining an extremely small cohort of 'national CSOs' deeply impacted its director (reviewed in Chapter 8).

Subcontracting is another example of creative engagement practised by a handful of local organisations who sometimes act as 'agents' or 'brokers', outsourcing workshops to independent practitioners for the following reasons: as a business model, the approach is a lucrative method of generating income; the CSO may not possess the expertise but has committed to deliver; the CSO may have access to individual practitioners who are uncomfortable being directly associated with authorities like BCC or WMCTU (or protocols that regulate BCC/WMCTU prevent the commissioning of certain individuals) and so the CSO acts as the intermediary body. This type of partnership is considered particularly effective when a practitioner with a 'story' – i.e., a former extremist – who may be perceived to lack the professionalism to run their own organisation is subcontracted by an experienced CSO in need of a unique product or presentation.

The models of engagement unpacked in this section illustrate a fluid CT/CE space in Birmingham that provides opportunities and routes for engagement to be pursued, dropped, potentially exploited, and, at times, shaped to the needs of the practitioner. The volatile and fluctuating nature of CT/CE policy, as elucidated in Chapter 2 is therefore reflected in this dynamic and nuanced space and its avenues for non-conventional participation. The capacity for agency, autonomy, and the shaping of practitioners' personal and professional objectives within this (in fulfilment of RQ4) will be explored in Chapter 7.

Distinctions between modes of engagement will be made throughout the thesis where relevant, for example, a youth worker obligated to deliver a Prevent programme as part of their duties will likely not approach the strategy in the same way as a practitioner from a self-motivated CSO borne out of the director's passion for the subject – what does this mean in terms of the practitioner's experience, motivations, and reflections? How do police practitioners differ to local authority-associated practitioners, if at all? What other influences affect how practitioners experience and engage with Prevent and the CES, and how does this differ across the various models of engagement? Discussion will endeavour to consider these nuances as different topics are introduced and explored.

The next section outlines a new approach to implementation adopted by BCC Prevent and observed during fieldwork.

Outreach approach

Typically, organisations apply for funding and then deliver work in private business settings, youth centres, rented community spaces or specific venues for sports, leisure or arts. Imaan, who runs a women's health and wellbeing network, was encouraged by BCC to take over the lease of a building (using local authority Prevent funding) with the aim of turning it into a physical hub in the community. This proved unsuccessful for a number of reasons; primarily the reputation it was ascribed by the local community for being Prevent-affiliated which forced her staff to 'have to make a lot of noise to get people in'. Imaan was also unable to secure funding for resources inside the building from any external streams because of its association with Prevent. The hub can be understood as an 'invited space', defined in governance literature as a site of public participation that, although framed by policymakers and powerholders, provides the potential for dialogue and transformation (Cornwall, 2004). Research applying the concept of invited spaces to the engagement of Muslim communities with Prevent (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; O'Toole et al., 2016) is contravened by the failure of the Birmingham endeavour, pointing to a disparate arrangement locally.

In response to the unsuccessful attempt at a Prevent community hub, the local authority developed an outreach approach to Prevent work. This model involved the partnering of members of the Prevent team (previously carrying out sporadic workshops) with organisations like Imaan's (attempting their own in-house workshops with smaller audiences) to establish forums, in the east and centre of Birmingham initially, in order to engage with new and diverse communities (in their domains) and increase the numbers of Birmingham residents in receipt of Prevent's 'awareness raising'.

Nasreen from BCC's Prevent team underlines the credibility gained by the council through partnerships with CSOs, 'it's about using them as ambassadors in the community, using them as stepping stones for us to do the work but get the buy-in'. This references Spalek's 'connectors' theory (2014) in which authorities (and practitioners who work for them) feel they lack legitimacy and call upon CSOs who are one step detached from authorities, and therefore perceived to be more 'credible', to transmit the agenda. As will be explored in Chapter 7, however, this is not always the case as detached practitioners can, too, be deemed inauthentic. The CSOs involved in these partnerships, nevertheless, are also able to engage with different cohorts of individuals than those around their base; Imaan explains the contrast in community response and uptake when her organisation transitioned from hub to outreach model:

> if you're going out to the community in **their** space, in **their** environment, it's a lot more successful to actually get them to come out of their comfort zones. To come into your centre to teach them something that they're already uncomfortable with, it just wasn't going down as well as it should. So the outreach model was a lot more effective and it was cost-effective as well for the council. So we agreed and we took the funding away from the centre and put it into outreach. We started to empower other smaller groups who've got access to communities and then deliver our message

> through them. And it worked a lot better because then everybody got a bit of funding to back up what they're doing.

Developing an outreach approach to elements of BCC Prevent work reallocated money from private physical spaces to smaller community groups and, according to Nasreen, allowed the team to work 'pan-Birmingham' in an inclusive and innovative way. As well as providing recipients with access to help without embarrassing them into seeking it out, Nasreen says the technique also establishes accessible networks that she is able to 'tap into' when the government holds community consultations on current issues. Other groups that receive Prevent funding also adopt outreach principles, accessing faith-based venues as well as community centres and informal settings to raise awareness around radicalisation and other issues of vulnerability in their remit. Rather than delivering to targeted or known audiences, this approach takes on a more ad hoc style and often means that individuals who turn up to an education centre for an ESOL class, or a women's centre for a gardening course, may be asked to attend a Prevent workshop – the suitability of these workshops will be explored further in Chapter 8. The model of 'empowering smaller groups' to deliver messaging on behalf of Prevent mentioned by Imaan will be detailed in a breakdown of BCC initiatives later in this chapter and the aforementioned forums that replaced the 'invited space' of the hub, and the appropriation and negotiation practised by attendees and practitioners in such settings, will be included in a discussion on agency in Chapter 7.

The practitioners described in this section whether authentic, conventional, adopting methods of outreach or delivering traditionally, are all associated with either BCC or WMCTU. The following sections will deconstruct these authorities as they relate to Prevent by detailing structure, direction, initiatives carried out on behalf of the strategy, and finally a comparison of the two authorities facilitating Prevent delivery in Birmingham. This will provide the basis from which the rest of the thesis is to be understood, contextualising the data and addressing all research questions, particularly RQ5 – comparing experiences across authorities and policies. The exercise begins with a breakdown of Prevent at the local authority.

Structure of local authority Prevent

According to the IRP, at the time of publication (2023), the Home Office funds forty-two local authorities (designated priority areas) to carry out Prevent work. Non-priority areas are also expected to deliver the Prevent Duty but without funding, support, or oversight from the Homeland Security Group (IRP, 2023). Birmingham, a longstanding priority area in receipt of substantial funding, has been the site of many pilot projects, including the hybrid academic-city council Analyst post previously detailed. There are fourteen local authorities in the West Midlands and while the WMCTU encompasses the whole region, Birmingham City Council caters exclusively for the city. At the time of data collection, BCC had seven funded posts: a Prevent Coordinator, two Education Officers, two Engagement Officers (one seconded from the youth service), a Family Support Worker (seconded from Birmingham Children's Trust) and a regional Higher Education/Further

Education (HE/FE) Coordinator. At the end of 2019, the Prevent Coordinator was promoted to Associate Director for Community Safety and Resilience in the rebranded Partnerships, Insight and Prevention Directorate (PIP) – maintaining oversight of Prevent albeit at a more strategic level – and was replaced in 2022 by a Coordinator one grade lower. In late 2022, PIP (Prevent's new base at BCC) was again reinvented as City Operations, indicative of a local scene reflective of the policy domain and demonstrating that Prevent, and the structures within which is operates, are subject to constant fluctuation.

The regional HE/FE Coordinator was appointed in 2013 as part of a small cohort of individuals who work nationally to deliver training and support to colleges, universities and private education providers and is the only post at BCC with a remit broader than the city of Birmingham (though initially hosted by BCC, the post is funded centrally and is no longer considered to belong exclusively to the Birmingham team). The workplan of the HE/FE Coordinator has previously been managed by the Department for Education and more recently determined by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BCC, 2015) – a further departure from the DCLG and the Home Office – and focuses on issues such as the Prevent Duty, gender segregation on campuses and risk assessment for external speakers. The Resilience Advisor (lead Education Officer) has been in post since 2014 and assists schools across Birmingham with matters relating to counter-extremism. The first Prevent Engagement Officer joined the team in 2015 and the Youth Engagement Officer was seconded from the youth service in 2018; prior to this BCC's official face of engagement was its commissioned CSOs. This is significant for this study in that BCC Prevent team members are therefore less familiar to communities than the city's longstanding CSOs; whether this will enable them to bypass the toxic associations of Prevent's early iterations or find themselves unable to penetrate established networks will be considered.

Structurally, the Birmingham CONTEST Strategic Board covers all four P strands of the overarching strategy and sits at the top of countering terrorism and extremism at BCC. The Birmingham Prevent Executive Board splinters from this to bring together strategic leads from 'different service areas and partnerships [such as WMCTU] to coordinate Prevent delivery on behalf of the CONTEST Board' (BCC, 2015: 6). The Prevent Executive Board provides strategic oversight of the operational arm of BCC Prevent, the Prevent Programme Board (formerly the Prevent Delivery Hub). This third level, key to understanding the implementation of Prevent at the local authority, is managed by the BCC Prevent team and is responsible for delivering a wraparound programme of multiagency work guided by the local Prevent Delivery Plan, which is itself informed by the Counter-Terrorism Local Profile (CTLP).

Developed in 2009, the CTLP (see Appendix 1) is an annual regional report produced by local police with input from local authorities and other public sector partners outlining the up-to-date terrorism-related threat and vulnerability of a specific area, aiming to develop a shared understanding and consistent approach to tackling radicalisation at a local level (HM Government, 2012). The document is used as a basis for the Prevent Delivery Plan which sets out the operational approach to Prevent in Birmingham.

Prevent at the city council convenes the Channel panel (in conjunction with WMCTU and other partners) to support the work of Channel; the multi-agency programme that aims to identify and deradicalise vulnerable individuals. Training to underpin the Prevent Duty is another of the city council's responsibilities and this primarily takes the form of WRAP – Workshop to Raise Awareness About Prevent – a 'train-the-trainer' product delivered by members of the BCC Prevent team at settings across the city. Channel and WRAP are mandatory Home Office initiatives that are mentioned in the structure and functions of the local authority's Prevent remit but are not formally researched for the purpose of this study.

Besides this prescribed training, BCC's Prevent staff outline their scope as raising awareness of the strategy in communities (with the aim of improving negative perception), providing tools and pathways to those deemed vulnerable or 'at risk', and supporting individuals (and the families of individuals) who have been radicalised, including returnees from Syria. The latter element has been introduced to Prevent in recent years, an example being a BCC Prevent Engagement Officer (PEO) facilitating English language classes for the grandmother (and now legal guardian) of a child taken to Syria by a parent. The bespoke and localised facets of BCC Prevent devised by individuals interviewed, such as workshops and the output of CSOs, are central to this study. Analysis will consider how the autonomy with which the local authority is permitted to design its own initiatives impacts upon the unique experiences of practitioners delivering in Birmingham, speaking particularly to RQ4.

The IRP states that in addition to financing the team's posts, the Home Office funds a number of CSOs in priority areas to meet local risks identified by the local authority and its partner agencies, namely CT policing (2023). In Birmingham, this number varies from year to year. When I began fieldwork in 2018, twelve organisations were funded by the local authority, an increase on the four from the previous year as the Home Office attempted to spread resources further but thinner in order to reach more residents. This number was reduced to ten in 2019 and again to eight in 2020/2021 (excluding practitioners who were commissioned to provide one-off workshops), igniting concern around the meaningful evaluation of projects (explored later).

Projects, programmes and initiatives will be explored in detail throughout the thesis but in summary, the city council funds a number of CSOs and practitioners to build women's resilience, tackle substance misuse, and educate around internet safety, the drivers of radicalisation, hate crime and far-right extremism. CSOs (particularly those deemed 'grassroots') are contracted on an annual basis to access Birmingham's 'hard-to-reach' communities while one-off and bespoke workshops are theoretically commissioned ad hoc. While talking me through the annual spreadsheet of workshops funded across the city, however, Nasreen explained that practitioners are often enlisted to deliver a set number of sessions before needs analysis has taken place to decide when and where work is required – the utility of which will be considered further in Chapter 8, as will the impact of the composition of BCC Prevent work. Does the practical arrangement thus described enable gaps and opportunities for practitioners to exercise creativity and agency in the course of their engagement?

An overview of the structure and functions of Prevent at the city council would be remiss without attention paid to the language of 'safeguarding' and 'resilience-building' that Prevent now espouses in Birmingham. The following sections briefly outline the significance of these approaches for the objectives of the study.

Packaging Prevent – institutional approaches

Safeguarding

Widely and nationally adopted (Dresser, 2015; Heath-Kelly and Strausz, 2018; Revell, 2019), the technique of packaging Prevent as a method of safeguarding is critical to its implementation in Birmingham, as articulated by the Prevent Coordinator at BCC who argues safeguarding is the 'natural place' for a strategy deemed 'problematic' outside of this understanding, 'the danger with Prevent work, people think you're only Prevent, you can't do anything else. That's what I don't want for my staff; I want them to be able to cross-pollinate, if that's a word, to see Prevent not in isolation but as part of wider safeguarding concerns'. The Coordinator expresses the autonomy with which he has been able to direct the programme of work under his management through the logic of safeguarding, perhaps an indication of the extent to which practitioners are able to shape their own activities and objectives; significant for investigating RQ4.

Safeguarding has transformed the delivery of Prevent in Birmingham, fostering successful engagement and enabling practitioners to feel less like 'Prevent workers' (Adam). Adam was seconded to BCC's Prevent team prior to the 2010 Coalition and left after the introduction of the Prevent Duty created an increasingly securitised work environment, resuming his role in the department only after the move to safeguarding convinced him to re-engage. The approach not only helps practitioners to feel more comfortable, but, according to participants, is necessary for successful community engagement.

> When we first started it was like, 'oh, you lot are sell-outs' and that was quite hard for us to take because some of the mosques weren't happy to work with Prevent. So we'd have to say we're not coming as Prevent, we're coming as safeguarding. We're here to raise awareness, not to plant Prevent in your mosque. (Nasreen)

Nasreen, part of BCC's Prevent team, describes couching her work in the language of safeguarding as a 'trick' akin to 'not going in like a bull in a china shop' but is the content of the agenda any different to what was delivered prior? Has only the language been adapted or are practitioners now delivering a notably different materialisation of the strategy? Most participants felt that the aims and objectives of Prevent remain unchanged and question why, if the work is indeed simply safeguarding, it exists as a standalone policy?

> everything else comes under safeguarding – drugs, criminality, all that is pulled together. As soon as you stood this [Prevent] on its own, you made the problem bigger than what it was. You victimised the whole Muslim community, they felt they were being highlighted and that's where the problem started. If you had just kept it mainstream from the beginning […] it would have been fine. But you made it a separate agenda, and yes by making it a separate agenda it has benefited some, but it's caused a lot of damage. (Rashid)

Rashid interrogates the status of Prevent within broader safeguarding programmes and suggests that its pejorative legacy is so ingrained within communities that the strategy will struggle to ever achieve success. Some practitioners have questioned the transparency of 'pretending' Prevent is safeguarding while others claim the move is a step towards 'thought police', questioning the semantics of a term that no longer refers to physical protection in mainstream discourse, instead referring to 'a duty to get inside your child's frigging head' (Sulaiman). In this respect, research suggests that Prevent has simultaneously co-opted and undermined safeguarding, attempting to legitimise the counter-terrorism agenda by marginalising genuine safeguarding concerns (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022) and paving the way for a 'malign securitised form' of the latter (McKendrick and Finch, 2017 :12).

This raises an interesting point about what safeguarding means, from policy to ground-level – when and how was it defined? Has this definition been co-produced with communities? Does a shared understanding exist? And why does Prevent remain a distinct and separate agenda if practitioners from the local authority and police claim that operationally it falls under safeguarding? These questions cannot be answered fully by the remit of this study but participants' thoughts on this debate factor into the discussion. Practitioners do link the adoption of safeguarding to the aforementioned move from securitised versions of Prevent to the embedding of cohesion frameworks ingrained into earlier iterations of the strategy, a shift bound up with deeply emotional discourse.

> the narrative changed, it went to more of a safeguarding perspective and it's about stopping young people from going to Syria and blowing themselves up and that kind of narrative stuck with me. Our kids are jumping on planes, going to Turkey, going to Syria and we need to stop this. I don't want my son to be like the three girls [from Bethnal Green], do you know what I mean? So that was almost our battle line, wherever we went. (Yasir)

The decision to approach Prevent work from a safeguarding perspective is often perceived as an organic move which affords benefits to those enacting policy as they are able to frame their work in language judged to be more community-friendly. The majority of participants preferred this direction and its ability to soften their presence within communities and diversify their remit; they are now expected to encompass more issues but not necessarily deliver as in-depth on terrorism as was once expected of Prevent workers. The Prevent Duty guidance acts as a baseline for public sector workers and this strengthens the ethos of the safeguarding approach with practitioners drawing upon the statutory duty as a standardised commonality, 'Prevent has grown and it has just become part of our normal safeguarding routine if you work in any public service, it's something in the back of your mind all the time' (Hanna).

Unintended consequences of the appropriation of safeguarding will also be touched upon in the analysis of the data; while 'cross-pollinating' is a deliberate strategic choice for some within Prevent, other practitioners can find themselves dealing with non-Prevent related issues such as housing and unemployment because official forms of support in these areas may not be accessible to their service users.

Significantly, the IRP very clearly condemns 'attempts by police and practitioners to characterise [Prevent] exclusively as [safeguarding] to obtain more buy-in locally' (Shawcross, 2023: 117) and stipulates a refocus from safeguarding (where it has recently shifted from the doctrine of extremist ideology) once more to the ideological causes of terrorism. This is yet another example of the constant oscillation in practice in the CT/CE policy sphere, which will inevitably impinge upon the experiences of practitioners. If Adam left his Prevent role as a result of the 2015 Duty, only to return under the safeguarding framework, how will the proscriptive recommendations of the IRP impact the engagement of local individuals and community settings more broadly? And how long until the pendulum returns?

In parallel with the move into safeguarding is the 'resilience turn' (Coaffee, 2013; Coaffee and Fussey, 2015), briefly introduced in the next section.

Resilience

Resilience discourse has gained traction in the realm of social policy, particularly in relation to CT/CE (Rogers, 2008), and despite little empirical underpinning (Ryan et al., 2018) has featured in Prevent's official objectives from 2008 onwards (Hardy, 2015). The 'palatable' and legitimising resilience approach (Coaffee and Fussey, 2015) is deemed a more optimistic and less securitising take on strategies like Prevent (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020), favoured by practitioners for its softer style (Stephens et al., 2021). The discourse correlates to governance arguments that emphasise individual duty (Joseph, 2013) as citizens are responsibilised into acting against negative forces such as extremism, and resilience is promoted more broadly through the education sector's mantra of FBVs and community cohesion policies that glorify connected and resilient societies (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020). Adam describes the resilience-building approach he takes to his work in the form of encouraging the development of civic participation,

> If you're getting funded to work in the Prevent space, it doesn't mean you've got to do this deconfliction of radicalisation with a person but you might want to do something that makes them feel more part of society. And then in there some nuance comes out around, is there anything impacting on you? What is it about this society? So it goes hand in hand. You have to develop a programme that makes them feel like they're part of the solution rather than the problem. And that's not preaching to them as if they're all radicalised individuals, it's talking to them about resilience, how important it is to shape society and how you can only do that by participating in certain things.

Participants advocate for a change in approach, not dissimilar to that of safeguarding, where the type of work is 'softer' and broader, with less focus on extremism and radicalisation. The distinction between safeguarding and resilience-building made by practitioners is that safeguarding is about protecting 'vulnerable' individuals and communities from harm whereas resilience is viewed as a much more proactive model that concentrates less on 'just putting things back together' after harm has already been caused (Nadia). Umair claims the framework also better complements his work from a theological standpoint, empowering individuals through religious underpinnings rather than relying on a proscriptive and prohibitive approach.

Although the vernacular of resilience has gained momentum in the CT/CE field, Yasir questions how policymakers progress the agenda to bring communities together rather than simply making them independently resilient, 'I think they're trying to tuck it behind this idea of building resilient communities – which is important – but as much as we need to make communities more resilient, we need to have a follow up from that to how do you make society more cohesive as well?' As the literature maintains the discourse is poorly-defined, difficult to operationalise and complicated to evidence (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020), it would seem that questions around the efficacy of resilience in CT/CE efforts remain unanswered given that objectives are opaque and problematic to define.

Working beyond the scope of radicalisation and extremism to address a multitude of issues that may, or may not, exist within local communities is mentioned by many participants who explain how Prevent does not restrict or limit them to extremism-related content, but rather enables them to address issues they face on the ground holistically. Whether this is successful, and the logic behind such an approach, speaks to RQ4 in particular and will be considered throughout the thesis.

Discursive approaches to Prevent, present at the city council and beyond, have been summarised in this section. The following sections outline BCC's partnerships with the local youth service and Breakthrough Media to contextualise how these relationships are harnessed and negotiated in the course of delivering Prevent in Birmingham.

Partnerships

Youth service

As established, the local authority works in partnership with public sector bodies such as WMCTU, the Home Office and educational settings in the local implementation of Prevent and the CES. The youth service has been engaged since Prevent was first established in the city and youth centres, and the youth workers that managed them, were called upon to undertake the first official Prevent packages. The unique experiences of these practitioners, arguably the first to encounter the complexities and challenges associated with delivering the strategy in communities, are explored later in the body of the thesis. Involvement with youth centres was then ad hoc until 2010 when BCC again funded the youth service to carry out a twelve-week programme on behalf of Prevent. Since then, a full-time senior youth worker has been seconded to the BCC Prevent team, some have been asked to consider joining the department in similar positions, and others called upon to facilitate not only Prevent programmes but, more recently, projects on behalf of the Counter-Extremism Strategy.

Senior youth worker Yasir says despite initial attempts to resist its incorporation, the agenda was ultimately imposed upon Birmingham's youth service and that Muslim youth workers were targeted (by BCC) to deliver in Muslim areas. Laura Zahra McDonald (2011) underscores the significance of Muslim youth workers in

positions of trust at a problematic intersection between policy and community, who, in their delicate approach to exploring contentious topics with young people, act as gatekeepers for the state whilst negotiating conflicting agendas alongside their own subjectivities to implement Prevent and simultaneously help young people resist its top-down narrative. The grey area within which they operate, and the ambiguous conditions of the fluctuating policy space, permit creative conduct in this endeavour, will be considered in later chapters.

Youth centres are perceived as distinctive sites due to the 'special relationships' established between young people and trusted facilitators already embedded in the settings, but how has this model affected the practitioners involved and the young people that use the services? Senior youth worker Kashif believes the independence of the service has been stripped away, creating a 'dirty cesspit of things that the youth service wasn't […] we're not as organic as we used to be, we're a genetically modified youth service!' Some participants claim to only agree to partnerships in order to secure resources and experiences for their young people in the face of funding cuts but explain how this decision can 'create a beast' as young people learn to regularly expect catering, activities and residentials that CT/CE funding can provide. To navigate potential harm that engagement is perceived to possibly inflict on their young people, participants describe the boundaries they draw to protect and safeguard their service users from the policies themselves (Chapter 6).

The next section outlines BCC's relationship with a body outside of the public sector, contextualising its significance within the Birmingham space.

Breakthrough Media

As stated, the Home Office engaged the services of PR company Breakthrough Media to promote, professionalise and build the capacity of over a hundred CSOs nationally. According to the account of a Birmingham practitioner, colleagues at the then-OSCT commissioned Breakthrough Media to assist with PR and in-kind support as a result of his recommendation to improve the impact and efficacy of Prevent-funded CSOs.

Participants whose organisations benefited from campaigns produced by Breakthrough praised the websites and media outputs that were created for them, acknowledging the popularity gained as a result, 'people loved the videos, they kept coming up to me on road saying – do more, do more, we love them' (Imaan). Faysal offers a more complex perspective and claims that while the partnership was great in principle, it was 'ballsed up' by the Home Office for several reasons; from unnuanced and uniform PR packages to simple technical blunders – 'IP addresses for all these different Muslim-led campaigns seemed to be sitting in one premises in the middle of central London' – that led to the exposure of Breakthrough's input (Hayes and Qureshi, 2016). Power struggles over control and direction also ensued as Breakthrough claimed ownership of campaigns and refused practitioners access to content, with Faysal even discovering that controversial individuals were determining narratives produced in the name of his CSO, 'the guy sat in the editing room

overseeing my organisation's campaign was actually one of the people involved in psyops in Iraq which were all about counter-propaganda, so a bank of fake content was being put out.' He describes the final 'nail in the coffin' as Breakthrough rebranding his organisation without his knowledge or input. Ultimately, Breakthrough Media overstepped the professionalising and capacity-building objectives it was commissioned to fulfil, and a critical lack of transparency was key to the breakdown in its relations with CSOs in Birmingham.

In order to contextualise the findings that pertain to Prevent at BCC, data collected has been synthesised in this section to provide an overview of the strategy at the city council; offering insight into the structure, functions and key partnerships involved in its implementation. This data has captured a variety of models of engagement with Prevent through the local authority alone, arguing that the dynamism and instability of Prevent at BCC reflects a strategy in a constant state of flux at a macro level. This begs the question: what does this mean for the experiences of practitioners? Is the dynamic site of BCC Prevent a help or hindrance to their work? Are they able to appropriate its changing nature to suit their objectives or is the inconstancy problematic? The section also connected Prevent at BCC to broader trends in CT/CE, namely the growing safeguarding and resilience discourse, in an attempt to situate the study in wider understandings of policy. The following section provides a similar overview of Prevent at WMCTU.

Structure of WMCTU Prevent

West Midlands Police is the UK's second biggest police force. Although part of WMP, WMCTU is one of eleven regional CTUs and CTIUs based across the UK that form the Counter-Terrorism Policing Network and covers the West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, and West Mercia forces, replicating the four strands of the government's central counter-terrorism strategy through its twenty-six functions (see Appendix 1).

The structure of Prevent within WMCTU is constituted of five core elements: safeguarding (preventing the wider networks of an individual involved with extremism from becoming radicalised), contact officer provision (providing practical support for families affected), consequence management planning (mitigating tensions caused within communities by arrests or wider terrorist-related events), community resilience building (raising awareness), and Prevent case management, with each area of work being carried out by a mixture of police officers and police staff as well as in partnerships with the local authority and community organisations. Work follows the current threat profile as outlined by the aforementioned Birmingham CTLP, a document which is shared with partner organisations to ensure consistency in attempts to counter terrorism across the city. The unit also works with the local authority and other public sector agencies to facilitate the delivery of Channel; supporting individuals identified as at risk of being radicalised.

Previously, Prevent in the CTU was embedded within neighbourhood functions and delivered by uniformed officers who would deliver talks at schools and work with 'vulnerable' individuals. In recent years, however, the remit has diversified, paving the way for innovative subsidiaries like the Community Resilience Team. The

team is of particular relevance to this study as it is the branch of WMCTU most engaged with communities on the ground, is Birmingham-specific, and does not involve restricted or sensitive casework, thus making it more accessible for analysis. Despite the five elements outlined, all members of the department (at the time of data collection) possessed the title of Prevent Case Officer unless part of the Community Resilience Team, 'we're not special but we are just given the freedom to do more community stuff […] it's quite dynamic' (Hanna). Not replicated in other forces and unique to WMCTU, one of the aims of setting up the team was to provide continuity and consistency to communities dealing with the effects of high staff turnover as police practitioners transfer departments and relationships on the ground restart from scratch. Such attempts at long-term approaches to interaction and trust-building are key for sensitive partnership work between communities and CT policing (Spalek, 2010). The team's remit is broad and flexible; they are able to support statutory partners such as teachers when needed but their main focus is to 'empower' communities, raise awareness and build and maintain networks.

In 2021, the branch rebranded to become the CTP Strategic Engagement Team, regionalising its scope in an attempt to produce a more cohesive message across the whole of the West Midlands. Though WMCTU is regional, the Community Resilience Team was citywide (with smaller outfits replicating community resilience work in other Midlands areas outside of Birmingham), whereas the newly formed Strategic Engagement Team is operational across the region. Community engagement remains a priority but a reduced capacity and concerns around controversy means the team concentrates more on cooperative work with the local authority and other agencies than maintaining a constant presence within communities.

WMCTU is less dynamic than BCC. It does fund CSOs and individuals to deliver on behalf of the Prevent agenda, but this does not form part of its structural Prevent work. It maintains fewer partnerships, focusing more on the statutory policing and multi-agency elements of Prevent than novel manifestations of the strategy. This lower profile is partly because workshops are not considered sustainable and therefore lack the desired element of continuity, and strategically may be a means of navigating the notoriously difficult terrain between Britain's Muslim communities and CT policing (Klausen, 2009). WMP's earlier securitised approach (Abbas and Awan, 2015) has evolved into forms of neighbourhood policing which require officers and staff to become skilled and sensitive practitioners (Cherney and Hartley, 2017), as demonstrated by the efforts of the Community Resilience Team. Prior to this, WMCTU adopted a 'three cups of tea' neighbourhood policing model in which regular meetings with community groups (each represented by a cup of tea) facilitates dialogue that, in theory, progresses from mundane social issues to the topic of extremism and radicalisation (Lamb, 2012). This approach is very much articulated by participants like Owais who conceptualises his work for WMCTU as nothing more than a form of neighbourhood policing.

The general structure and functions of Prevent at both BCC and WMCTU have been examined in order to establish the infrastructure of the local scene. In order to further contextualise the space within which local practitioners implement and experience policy, the following sections portray some of the more innovative

and experimental initiatives (separated into programme outputs and initiatives that act in an advisory capacity) that constitute Prevent across both institutions.

Local authority Prevent initiatives

Advisory initiatives

BCC Prevent has established a number of initiatives designed in an advisory capacity, the most ambitious of which was the Community Reference Group (CRG). The consortium was a collection of individuals deemed 'active within their communities' (Nasreen) who would act as critical friends to the Prevent team, advising on Prevent and Counter-Extremism initiatives by contributing to strategic and operational considerations and helping to build trust and confidence in policy at a community level. Dialogue was intended to be a two-way process, with both parties responsible for disseminating discussions within their wider networks, and the group was to oversee the aforementioned Birmingham Prevent Executive Board and Prevent Programme Board in an advisory role. It ran until 2019 when it was disbanded because of issues with membership and attendance, being replaced by quarterly community roundtable events hosted in different areas of the city and internal monthly meetings funded under BCC's remit. I was invited to attend a CRG meeting in 2017 before I officially began conducting fieldwork, though I was not actually aware it was a CRG meeting or indeed that the CRG existed. There were presentations from senior CTU representatives and national CSOs on threat overviews, new projects and training packages, and the group was asked to participate in discussions in which ideas were recorded on flipchart paper and collated by the Prevent team for feedback.

The Prevent Coordinator accepts that the group was reflective of a set of opinions but could not represent all perspectives and communities affected by Prevent and Counter-Extremism in Birmingham. He also links its demise to what he describes as a 'leadership deficit' affecting BCC more broadly.

> some people would turn up and some wouldn't and then it became so disparate we began to think okay, what are we gaining from this group? So that turned into the CSO group for people actually working on the ground, and we still had opportunity for other people to partake but that dwindled away because not many people took it as seriously as they could have. And this is my frustration, I feel like the local authority as a result of austerity has lost that role of being a leader in bringing communities together. There are many organisations out there who don't look to local authority for leadership anymore so the local authority in terms of its reputation now has a leadership deficit whereas community groups and voluntary sector organisations have grown their leadership, they probably now have a leadership surplus. So actually do people need local authorities anymore? I mean to facilitate cohesion type activity because they feel that government is also doing the BSBT funds where people can bid directly and then what it does do is indirectly give people the perception that the local authority would always favour people and that could give you a local authority deficit where people will always assume that, because we're all human, people will make judgements on the basis of who they know well.

There is much to unpack in this extract. The Coordinator describes how CRG members' infrequent attendance led to the abandonment of the group and the formulation of CSO meetings in its place. This was a monthly forum created for the local authority Prevent projects (ten at the time) to network and share information as

they often worked in different physical spaces though on the same agenda, and also an opportunity for Engagement Officers to hold projects to account. CSO meetings offered intimate (internal) insight into the performance of Prevent at BCC and the community roundtables allowed the local authority a somewhat diluted version of the two-way process of engagement with communities that was attempted through the CRG. The Coordinator claims that as a result of changes to funding structures and a wider climate of austerity, the local authority has lost the trust and respect of communities it governs, citing the CES's BSBT programme as a problematic direct link to central government preferred by individuals who believe that BCC practices nepotism and favouritism when awarding Prevent resources, a reputation explored further in Chapter 8.

Currently (in 2023), BCC is in the process of attempting to restart a version of the CRG based on WMCTU's Counter-Terrorism Advisory Group, detailed in the next section. During lockdown, when the Coordinator was still in post, he tasked his team with setting up a virtual advisory group but in order to mitigate the previous unsuccess of the CRG this was done in the name of Community Safety (a separate agenda located in the same BCC department as Prevent) which would incorporate issues around Prevent and extremism without the burdensome label of Prevent.

As well as resurrecting the CRG, the city council also carried out its own internal review of Prevent at the local level amidst the controversy surrounding the government's independent reviewer. The endeavour, entitled the Independent Review of Prevent Delivery in Birmingham, began in January 2021 and presented its findings to the Prevent Executive and Birmingham CONTEST Boards in 2022. Participants, however, were unconvinced by the impartiality of independent internal reviewers; some questioned principles of confidentiality which they felt had been betrayed and others referred to a document which was 'false', 'fake' and a 'stitch-up'. The report is a restricted document and not available for external analysis.

Programme initiatives

BCC has been responsible for establishing numerous initiatives in response to perceived community needs, for example, the Birmingham Council of Mosques (BCM) was set up in partnership with a police practitioner from WMCTU and brought together around fifty disparate mosques (catering for diverse ethnic, cultural, and denominational communities) across the city for the initial purpose of sharing CT/CE messaging and community concerns. Local authority practitioners also produced a bespoke version of compulsory WRAP training after concluding that Home Office-mandated WRAP sessions were inadequate and unsuitable for Birmingham's communities, delivering their localised version to partners at WMCTU in an attempt for other statutory bodies to improve dialogue with communities around extremism.

BCC Engagement Officers have also developed specific techniques within their remit. For example, in an attempt to foster cohesive work with WMCTU, Zayd takes members of the Community Resilience Team on 'walkabouts' in various areas of the city, a practice he learned at university to map out local profiles (understand key individuals, resources and idiosyncrasies of an area). Guided by principles of community

work, he felt that travelling by car to meetings and events was preventing police practitioners from gaining a comprehensive understanding of the city's districts and recommended a more hands-on approach be adopted.

Community outreach through regular consultation has also been implemented, as have initiatives that are deeply personal to the practitioners that create them, for example, a series of workshops designed to improve parenting skills (to be explored in later chapters) was devised by a PEO and carried out in centres across the city.

Prevent Champions is another BCC initiative intended to transcend the conventional model of community work to generate 'active citizens' able to 'disseminate, empower, and give those tools to others' (Nasreen). Prevent staff deliver training to groups of 'empowered' citizens or small groups by providing toolkits, scripts, and PowerPoints so that the cohort is able to relay the message of Prevent (within their own spheres) without the presence of BCC staff. The cohort is expected to work with a further handful of 'proactive' community members from their networks with the intention that these 'proactive' citizens become what BCC terms 'Champions'. The Champions should then be able to work independently, delivering Prevent messaging in so-called 'hard-to-reach' communities without the need for BCC involvement on an ongoing basis. The Prevent team will offer a nominal fee of around a hundred pounds for each initial training session to instruct Champions, and when Champions have successfully attended these workshops, the Prevent team will assist in facilitating 'graduation ceremonies' where certificates will be awarded to Champions. Champions may undertake further training offered by Prevent staff (for example, around emerging counter-narratives) in the expectation that this material will be used to develop their own workshop or product for independent dissemination in smaller networks.

Nasreen justifies the unique model as 'doing so much for so little, so much learning is going out. It's not just a classroom of forty people doing academia-type learning, you are devolving that down into something they understand, they can own, and they can disseminate and take further.' The work of Champions factors into BCC's impact profile as individuals are asked to report to the team numbers of individuals they have managed to 'train' with the material, 'we can measure it because we'll say here's a product, do your own workshops, tell me how many people you have now trained […] tell us where you are rolling this out outside of this community group' (Nasreen). Supervising only a handful of Champions enables the team to maintain contact and measure engagement, although Champions are often selected by chance, 'they're people from the community who attend that centre for sewing, lunches, bingo, English, then they started attending our programme' explains Nasreen, who advises them to impart learning to their friends, relatives and 'women they come across'.

This version of Prevent (Community) Champions is not to be confused with the Prevent Champions that are in place in every department of the local authority and essentially act as Prevent lead for their division

(concerns are reported to and by the individual, new training is circulated by the individual etc.). The Champions model detailed in this section is an explicit manifestation of attempts to create active citizenship in the name of countering terrorism and extremism explored in the literature. Also palpable is the localised approach taken by BCC Prevent. The IRP (2023) claims that communities uphold trust in Prevent at a local level but less so on a national scale. Shawcross ascribes this success to the diligent work of local Prevent leads and I would argue that community-based initiatives such as some of those mentioned (regardless of their necessity or utility) have contributed to the perception of Prevent in Birmingham as a more accessible brand than counter-terrorism or counter-extremism nationally. The next section details some of the initiatives in place at the CTU.

WMCTU Prevent initiatives

Advisory initiatives

The Counter-Terrorism Advisory Group (CTAG) was established to glean local input on key CT policing issues at a regional level. Though its remit covers the whole of CONTEST, according to its terms of reference, the group focuses predominantly on Prevent and advisors (community representatives) provide a sounding board, acting as critical friends helping to inform practice, operations, and future initiatives. West Midlands CTAG forms part of the Counter-Terrorism Advisory Network (CTAN), a national conglomerate of regional CTAGs, though notably, the first CTAG was developed in Birmingham in response to local circumstances and the model then developed out to form other regional groups and the overarching network.

The significance of CTAG also cuts across agencies and institutions, overshadowing similar models like the aforementioned CRG.

> The CTU will have lots of people put their hat in the ring. It's an interesting dynamic, I've never understood it. I can only think of it as people almost feel from a personal progression perspective that if they are involved with the CTU advisory group it looks great on their CV, it's a trust and confidence position, but if it's an advisory group for the local authority, well, where's the fun in that? It's actually quite boring. (BCC Prevent Coordinator)

Comparing perceptions of BCC and WMCTU is a nuanced topic to be explored further in the following section, but this insight indicates that policing is considered a more attractive domain for Prevent work than the city council; RQ5 will speak to whether this is the case for local practitioners.

Programme initiatives

Most of the work of WMCTU is carried out by police officers and staff but the unit does fund community organisations in a similar manner to BCC from a source called the Targeted Initiative Fund (TIF). Groups are expected to include an element of Prevent messaging in their work and disseminate this to 'hard-to-reach' communities that WMP might struggle to access. Projects may incorporate, for example, sports, drama or mental health awareness and are typically workshop-based, though in comparison to the local authority's budget for funding community organisations, the scope of the TIF is described as 'peanuts' (Zayd), often

supporting ‘young organisations that need a bit of nurturing’ (Hanna). The resource is valued to around fifty to seventy thousand pounds for the region, meaning each project receives approximately three thousand pounds, causing some participants to question the quality of work carried out in its portfolio. CTU staff, however, acknowledge that projects funded differ to those commissioned by the local authority and champion their attempts to develop new relationships and encourage creativity by offering resources to broader sections of communities, rather than funding established CSOs or holding lacklustre lunch events for Muslim women in the name of Prevent. This approach contradicts research that claims community policing initiatives tend to focus on a narrow selection of ‘hand-picked’ individuals or groups (Cherney and Hartley, 2017), as the data will explore in particular relation to the context of the local authority. It is claimed that projects assigned through the TIF are afforded ongoing support and guidance, ‘we want to oversee the project with them, make sure that we're building that relationship, not just give money then never see them again. We want to see how it works out but also support them if it doesn't go too well ‘cause we know it's controversial’ (Hanna), a theme investigated further in Chapter 7.

Other initiatives carried out by WMCTU include Youth Café, a workshop for students; Operation Explorer, a tabletop exercise designed to demystify the Channel referral process for multi-agency representatives; Prevent in Place (PiP), mental health support for referrals; the aforementioned BCM network of mosques; and, most recently, Synergy, an overarching training package aimed to increase attention to susceptibilities to radicalisation and instil confidence in the referral process. Synergy incorporates a youth element, an interactive theatre arm in partnership with Birmingham City University, and a full-day experience for multi-agency practitioners and safeguarding leads.

In 2020, mirroring the active citizenship ethos of BCC’s Prevent Champions, WMCTU developed its Prevent Ambassadors programme with the slogan, ‘Making every officer a CT officer’. The initiative, in the process of being rolled out as best practice across other forces, invites ordinary police officers to sign up as Prevent Ambassadors, undertake a curriculum of learning, and ‘think counter-terrorism’ in order to play a vital role in the work of Prevent in Birmingham. The language of upskilling and empowering, similar to Champions, frames this popular initiative which saw over two-hundred and fifty officers sign up at the launch event I attended at the start of 2020.

Its objective is for Ambassadors to ‘wear a CT hat’ in their daily role but some participants from within the force, as well as partner agencies, remain apprehensive about the opportunity’s potential for exploitation.

> I think a lot of people just came for the day off. And when there’s training available, it's a day off. That's what it is for them, from the rigours of their everyday job. (Zayd, BCC)
>
> [It would] be good if we manage to get the right people who are sincere about it and they're not doing it because it looks good on their CV. But if it's somebody that's looking to score a point for an upcoming promotion or looking to get a bit of time away from their response duties and it’s just a way of getting some afternoons off without the gaffer questioning where they are… it just needs to be the right people who are genuine and are going to stick with it for a little bit as well. Because if it's

> a turnover every twelve months it's not going to work either. And the people must be willing to make their own efforts to upskill themselves. So we've got a load of stuff I showed you on our app, I would expect that they would be gradually reading through a lot of that. (Zak, WMCTU)

Zak refers to an internal CT resource available to all WMP staff (to which he has contributed materials) to recommend that practitioners ensure their training needs are met independently, a topic to be picked up in Chapter 7. His perspective will be considered against other views on training in the field, but the position that the responsibility lies with the individual to upskill themselves in order to deliver on behalf of Prevent, rather than with structures and organisations that are tasked with facilitating the strategy, reinforces responsibilisation literature that describes the increasing demand for public participation in CT/CE and the promotion of 'CT citizens' as ideal subjects (Jusué, 2021). In this logic, the discourse of safeguarding is a responsibilising tool in the development of a model of active citizenship that encourages ordinary police officers and staff, including those with administrative and non-policing roles from accountancy to occupational health, to become a 'CT officer'. Once in place as 'active citizens who resemble security agents' (Jusué, 2021: 298), Ambassadors are expected, according to Zak, to also be responsible for their own training, a trend observed in the sphere more broadly as CT training is now offered from the comfort of one's 'kitchen table' (National Counter Terrorism Security Office, 2020). In this normalising of civilian-led CT/CE efforts, the boundaries between personal and professional become blurred and counter-terrorism becomes 'common sense' (Kaleem, 2021), further underpinning the ambiguities and dynamism of a policy space characterised by the constant changing of roles and broadening and compressing of responsibilities.

This detailed account of the organisation and structure of Prevent in Birmingham has illustrated examples of responsibilisation and active citizenship in its implementation through programmes such as Champions, Ambassadors, and even via membership of the CRG and CTAG, as well as participation in other initiatives mentioned. Insight provided into some of the nuances involved is a valuable contribution to the mapping of Prevent in the local context. It has been documented that local projects explicitly aim for active citizens as the recipients of their work (Hayes and Qureshi, 2016), thus extending the campaign from practitioner to attendee. Ahmed, a senior figure within WMCTU, confirms this blurring between practitioner and ordinary citizen in the pursuit of active citizenship by expressing his ambition (as a practitioner implementing Prevent) to 'create' further active citizens in Birmingham and to support those within communities already undertaking self-motivated work informally, suggesting that active citizens are the 'key to moving forward with Prevent'. This extension of the active CT citizen from practitioner to the rest of society is evidence of a continuously evolving space and demonstrates how CT/CE policy in the UK seeks to produce active subjects wearing 'CT hats'.

This venture sits in delicate balance with the discourse on Muslims and entryism in British society (Qurashi, 2018) as the Extremism Analysis Unit (see Appendix 1) was tasked with developing a counter-entryism strategy to tackle 'Islamism' and prevent Trojan Horse 2.0 (Travis, 2015). As a result of the hoax affair, Muslim governors and teachers in Birmingham accused by the government of 'extremist entryism' provided the

justification for the statutory Prevent Duty, a groundbreaking counter-extremism measure (Kimber, 2022) that ironically responsibilised swathes of the public sector.

The difficulty remains in the middle space. Muslims are encouraged to become active, but not too active. Raheem, who has engaged with Prevent on and off since its inception, remembers the incentivising of British Muslims to become active citizens by entering politics, engaging with school governance, and using the initial Pathfinder fund to finance projects with tangential links to cohesion; 'the irony is now if you try to do any of that you'd be accused, especially as a Muslim organisation, of being an entryist'. The tussle between activism and entryism is, again, another reflection of a constantly shifting and capricious policy space that has inevitable impact on the practitioners navigating it.

Functions of Prevent across BCC and WMCTU have thus far been considered in parallel. The following section offers a more nuanced analysis of what this amounts to for the experiences of practitioners, comparing implementation across the primary authorities administering the strategy locally and providing an overview of data that speaks to RQ5.

Comparing WMCTU Prevent and BCC Prevent

Evolving relationship

The local authority and WMCTU have worked together to deliver Prevent since it was established in the city in 2006. The relationship has continued to evolve and fluctuate with various iterations of policy, at times spearheaded by the CTU and at others by the city council. The data presented here contributes to the literature by providing accounts of this relationship on the ground and is helpful in contextualising the rest of the study's findings in response to the research questions. Many police practitioners feel detached from Prevent at BCC, describing a deficiency in 'joined up working' and information sharing in practice (Amar). This 'huge gap' caused by 'lack of communication and partnership because people think they're rivals' (Kamran) causes duplication of work and Owais is concerned with how communities perceive this dissociation,

> if we're all revisiting the same places, speaking to the same people, they're going to think, like, don't these people talk to each other? You've got the council working on one side and the police coming from the other. Even if it means working together on a project, what's wrong with that? Why can't the local police and council work together in relation to delivering the message?

Participants like Amar feel that individuals at the council attempt to distance themselves from CTU Prevent to protect reputations built within communities, but some police practitioners argue that communication between the authorities has been steadily improving in recent years. Ahmed accepts the critique of his colleagues, 'there was duplication and it was the first thing I picked up', but says this has since been addressed and he now even helps with CSO selection for BCC. Hanna credits recent improvements to the relationship her team has developed with a PEO with 'immense local knowledge worth his weight in gold', alongside the development of the Community Resilience Team which itself was characterised as an attempt to address

confusion and cultivate a uniform message of Prevent in Birmingham. As well as 'trying a lot harder not to duplicate each other's work and to say okay, you've got a good relationship with these people, we'll focus somewhere else, where haven't you reached?', Hanna says the authorities now deliver some activities jointly. A holistic approach where everybody takes responsibility and 'works together rather than in isolation' (Ahmed) translates on the ground into cross-supervision of projects. Hanna explains how she offers support to Prevent projects that are not part of her institution's portfolio.

> I'm not going to turn up with a clipboard and give them a mark out of ten but if there's something that we can offer them – some help or local knowledge or just anything – whether we funded it or they're a project that's not funded, or it's Home Office funded or local authority funded, either one, we'd like to make it work because it's in our interest to make it work. Prevent's this big machine and if we all work together we'll deliver great projects.

Though police practitioners advocate for unity in the supervision and direction of work, BCC's Prevent Coordinator raises concerns about the involvement of WMCTU with CSOs,

> police need to understand what their actual role is; yes, they've gotta do engagement but they shouldn't be funding activity, I've always said that, and that's why I want my team to be much more engaged with them because I want them [WMCTU] to be able to identify groups and put them forward, but if they start funding activity, that's the bit that doesn't make sense. And there are certain groups that don't like Prevent but are happy to take Prevent money from CTU, makes no sense to me at all.

Evidently, he believes the remit of funding projects should remain exclusively with the local authority, but in order to move toward this model actively encourages his team to continue to build links with Prevent at the CTU so that BCC is able to step in and take over working relationships with budding community organisations. Hanna interpreted her newly-built relationship with a BCC PEO in earnest, however, seemingly unaware of the underlying agenda of BCC. This further underscores the ambiguities and unknowns that surround the space for practitioners directly employed by authorities administering Prevent, much less commissioned practitioners one step detached.

Perceptions of implementation

Inevitably, the data captures a plurality of opinions around whether Prevent is best implemented by BCC or WMCTU. While the overwhelming majority of participants champion the approach of the local authority, some individuals preferred what they perceived to be 'less rigid feedback' procedures at the CTU which lightened their workload (Shazia) – though others claimed WMCTU was far stricter with evaluation than BCC and left no room for informality, indicating policing's purportedly more professional approach to conduct in general (explored in a section on unprofessionalism in Chapter 8).

On the whole, participants who have worked with both authorities suggest that the work of WMCTU is sometimes undertaken without cultural sensitivity (Malik), can be too heavy-handed (Nasreen), and is perceived by some practitioners and communities alike as 'clandestine' (Sulaiman). Conversely, BCC is able to transcend some of these inherent impediments by 'coming in purely through a community angle, sometimes

we don't say we're Prevent, we just say we're city council employees' (Nasreen), a cover inaccessible to police practitioners who are seen as 'law enforcement agents' that achieve engagement with communities only because 'people feel they have to demonstrate they are complying' (Idrees).

Youth worker Haroon believes the local authority team often bears the burden of unskilled and ineffective work carried out by WMCTU,

> Because I work for the system I understand that there are two teams [...] not a lot of people know that. It's people like the practitioners from BCC that are going around and picking up the pieces because as soon as you hear Prevent, it's got a bad name, no one wants to get involved in it because they think it's CTU and they're spying on you.

Haroon is not alone in ascribing the policy's problematic legacy to the leadership and direction of the CTU as Sulaiman compares his perception of a securitised police agenda to a local authority approach that 'cut across youth work and went into social and religious issues'. For BCC practitioner Adam, the work of WMCTU has transgressed traditional principles of policing and overstepped into the local authority's arena of safeguarding in its approach to Prevent.

> Police only own the risk around extremism and radicalisation but to me they've crossed over into other areas which potentially aren't theirs. I know they say that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility but we are the experts at safeguarding, they are the experts at policing and they have crossed over into our space and tried to make issues with some of our decisions.

Adam describes a disharmonious relationship in which the local CTU struggles to deliver a strategy posited as safeguarding, while acknowledging that the logic of safeguarding obligates all. He states that the other three strands of CONTEST are a natural fit for policing but that the local authority should lead on matters of safeguarding. This remains a unique and localised issue, however, as Faysal points out that while the Birmingham scene is dominated by the BCC Prevent Coordinator and 'the plinth his post has been placed on'; in Manchester, the CTU commands the scene and the city council is secondary. This is perhaps owing to the 2017 bombing of the Manchester Arena and the heightened security response it engendered.

In Birmingham, practitioners like Imran accuse the CTU of funding organisations to act as 'informants' gathering intelligence on communities, failing to source suitable groups to fund – 'the police don't have the expertise of commissioning, local authority does, leave it to them', and confusing the 'brand' of Prevent – 'it needs to be coordinated so that we're all singing from the same hymn sheet. They go off and do their thing and that causes suspicion and then that affects us'. Allegedly questionable work carried out for WMCTU can have significant consequences for practitioners delivering Prevent in the city through different funding streams. Managers also complain that relationships and rivalries between the two authorities are exploited by community groups who 'play politics' and switch allegiances when they fall out of favour or feel unable to penetrate the 'clique of contacts' funded at the city council (Prevent Coordinator).

In conclusion, relations between BCC and WMCTU in the implementation of Prevent have continued to fluctuate as the policy has undergone various reviews, iterations, and changes to central ownership.

Participants reported a general sense of distrust towards the CTU from practitioners and communities alike, overwhelmingly preferring the approach of the city council. This finding might be justified by the fact that many participants received their funding from BCC, maintained positive working relationships with the authority, or appreciated the hands-off approach that BCC is suggested to practise in the evaluation of projects (to be explored in Chapter 8). Other explanations point to the pejorative reputation that WMCTU still has in some sections of the city's communities, or the comfort derived by practitioners from the diverse composition of BCC staff which was, and remains, more representative of communities governed by Prevent than the CTU.

> The most stark difference was always the makeup of the personnel – they were generally always sort of white police folk on the CTU side, whereas in the city council we'd got accustomed to working with people like [names practitioners] and others who were brown people from the community. So the city council was much more about community. (Sulaiman)

Despite this perception, the CTU has attempted to develop its relationships with staff at BCC, practitioners in the city and communities more broadly, claiming an improvement in communication and management of commissioned organisations.

To provide a substantive base from which to understand data pertaining to the CES and offer insight into its structure and local operationalisation, discussion will now examine the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham and its relationship to Prevent.

Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham

'It was very confusing. I mean, as professionals and practitioners, if you find it confusing, then what about the lay community? I just didn't understand the purpose of Counter-Extremism.' – Zayd

Counter-Extremism Strategy work

The Counter-Extremism programme of work was in place nationally from 2015-2021. BCC had a Counter-Extremism Coordinator (see Appendix 1) in place from 2017 until 2021 when, after all Counter-Extremism Coordinator posts were withdrawn across the UK, alternative funds were sourced to keep the individual in place as Crime Coordinator at BCC for the subsequent year. Birmingham was the only authority nationally to be granted a Counter-Extremism Engagement Officer to assist the Coordinator, employed for one year from 2020 until 2021, and together they facilitated work primarily under the framework of BSBT.

Confusion

The Coordinator was located in the same department as Prevent at BCC and worked closely alongside the team, sharing an office and a line manager, as well as regularly crossing into the same community settings and drawing upon the same CSOs. An overwhelming majority of participants, the Coordinator's peers in the space, were uncertain about her position and accompanying programme of work, 'my staff are all confused about that role – why is it there? Forget my staff, the Prevent team are all confused!' (Imran, director of Prevent-funded CSO). BCC Prevent practitioners who worked alongside her daily claimed to have no clue what

the individual did, and practitioners delivering on a BSBT programme suggested the Coordinator's position was 'useless' and 'there for no reason'.

While some practitioners struggled to comprehend the role and determine its origins, other participants were actually oblivious to the Counter-Extremism Strategy and spoke about the individual as a Prevent practitioner who they believed to be part of the BCC Prevent team. Uncertainty around the purpose of the Coordinator is slightly less pernicious than practitioners who felt they had been purposefully misled regarding the proximity of Counter-Extremism to Prevent in their dealings with her, 'she's asked me to do some work with her and I kept asking her, are you Prevent? Because I don't want to be involved with Prevent anymore. She's telling me she's not but she knows full well […] it's highly dangerous' (Tahir). Sulaiman also points to a 'murkiness' in the demarcation of Counter-Extremism and attempts made to cover its structural links, 'she made a real big effort to tell me that it's nothing to do with Prevent', substantiating the argument that the CT/CE policy space is one of ambiguity on many levels – between strategies and authorities, and in relation to positions, funding, and evaluation processes, as discussion will show.

Confusion existed not only around the Coordinator's role but the remit of the policy itself, with participants concluding that the strategy conflated cultural and cohesion issues, such as addressing the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, honour-based violence (HBV), and the promotion of FBVs under the banner of extremism, to ultimately further securitise Britain's Muslim communities, 'it's there to deal with all Muslim-related issues and just put it under another title, it is Prevent under a different guise' (Sulaiman). Sara feels Prevent is 'confident about what it is and what it isn't', whereas Counter-Extremism's ad hoc approach serves to racialise social and cultural problems, making it difficult for practitioners to deliver a strategy that is unclear of its purpose.

> I think it's unhelpful to call it Counter-Extremism and I don't see what the point is. Like in the early days when [Coordinator] first came in, she said 'oh we're going to go into a school, and I'm going to get one of my friends who wears a hijab and we're going to have a tea party, like afternoon tea with the children. And we went 'just fuck off, go and fuck yourself'. It's ridiculous! I hate that. It just reminds me of the saris, samosas and steel-bands, you know that strategy that we used to have? Multiculturalism. How do you do multiculturalism? You just get dressed up in saris, eat samosas and get a steel-band playing in the background, bit of tokenism. Let's all dress up as Pakis. No, we don't want that. So I don't understand the Counter-Extremism issue, I think that it's competing for a space. (Nadia)

For Nadia, it is simplistic and condescending to presume that the juxtaposition of a quintessential English tea party in which visibly Muslim women represent a symbolic compatibility of Islam with life in Britain can amount to a meaningful attempt to counter extremism or cultivate social cohesion. This interpretation of the CES's approach is shared by many participants who questioned the inclusion of issues such as FGM and HBV within its remit and felt that the emerging strategy was committing similar mistakes to those made by Prevent in earlier phases.

Another BCC Prevent practitioner in close proximity to the strategy attempted to make sense of its objectives (after its dissolution in Birmingham) and the assertion of the Coordinator that Counter-Extremism was a 'pre-Prevent' space, her way of explaining that if the work of Counter-Extremism was carried out efficiently, there would be no need for Prevent because all forms of extremism would be deterred at an earlier stage.

> The whole thing didn't make sense to me because there was no clear direction, it was very subjective and not objective. I don't know how it sat strategically but my understanding of it was Counter-Extremism was a pre-Prevent space and it was totally separate. Where it got clouded was where Prevent and Counter-Extremism were at the same place doing the same thing… I'll give you a classic example, 2019 when the *masjid* [mosque] windows were broken, Prevent was all over it, Counter-Extremism was all over it and there wasn't a need for both parties. It was like they're almost competing against each other, kind of like who to take lead. (Zayd)

With the objectives of policy unclear, personalities competed in a 'tangled web' (Hanna) created by the 'splintering of Prevent into Counter-Extremism' (Kamran) and the conflation of disparate issues into matters of safeguarding, cohesion and preventing radicalisation, with some questioning whether this was a means for 'doing Prevent through the back door' (Sulaiman), i.e. employing a more 'soft-touch' approach.

Additional criticisms of the local implementation of the CES make reference to confusing initiatives delivered to unsuspecting audiences, duplication of Prevent work, '[Coordinator] goes into spaces that we usually go into and does a similar spiel' (Nasreen), and activities that lack nuance or meaning in general, with Counter-Extremism staff accused by multiple practitioners of 'tagging along just for the sake of being seen to do something' (Zayd). Findings relating to the alleged competition between the strategies' practitioners will be touched upon in later chapters.

Consequentially, in the IRP Shawcross admits that 'overlapping objectives of the two strategies have led to confusion on the ground among those delivering' (2023: 118), yet rather than offering clarity or calling for an evaluation of the CES post-cessation, further complicates the domain by intertwining Counter-Extremism's CCE in the future governance of Prevent. To contextualise the conflation and confusion surrounding the CES, the following section considers its rationale in more depth.

Rationale

If problems such as FGM and HBV are not considered extremism, and matters of extremism are covered by the work of Prevent, what is the logic behind the CES? The Prevent Coordinator oversaw the work of the Counter-Extremism Coordinator and the strategy in Birmingham and offers his insight, informed at the highest local level. In summary, his view is that Counter-Extremism exists because the cohesion agenda is too 'soft' to deal with challenging issues such as the illegal cultural practices mentioned in this discussion, and that when Prevent has historically attempted to address matters outside of the remit of violent extremism, has been accused of overreach.

> if you look at cohesion initiatives, they're all very soft, any cohesion practitioner isn't gonna wanna talk to you about grooming gangs or terrorism, they'd rather skirt it, they'd rather talk about how great it is that we can meet and have dinner together. So for government, that presents a dilemma.

> Who is it that enters a space that is basically then able to have those challenging conversations? So that's where CE sits. And that's where governments have flirted with – do we call it cohesion or do we call it integration? Integration is a harsher word than cohesion, on that spectrum it's another step forward, isn't it? And then CE is another step beyond that.

In contribution to the discussion on the evolution of cohesion, multiculturalism, interculturalism and integration policies, he suggests that integration is perceived as more stringent than cohesion but that the CES is more severe still. He admits that Counter-Extremism ultimately sat within Prevent in Birmingham and was 'not a fan' of the approach, instead suggesting that the strategy should become part of a broader cohesion agenda directed by the DCLG. He theorises that the DCLG has been so focused on austerity that it has forsaken integration and cohesion, forcing the Home Office to step in and tackle the topics addressed under the CES. Ultimately, he says, branches of the Home Office are left to 'pick up the pieces around radicalisation and extremism' which occur as a result of failing to address issues in their nascency in the preceding space, whether that be labelled Counter-Extremism, cohesion, or integration. Because the Home Office is responsible for security, it cannot lead on a cohesion strategy, hence why the CES is so called. He accepts that sensitive issues are rarely clear-cut and alleges that success in this area requires a 'multi-departmental dimensional response', though, as documented, when Prevent was initially delivered under a similar dual approach, was deemed failed and friendless (Thomas, 2010).

The Prevent Coordinator acknowledges the 'disunity in government' laid bare by the complicated and obscure aims and operations of a policy that is 'underdeveloped' and sits in a 'space that flirts with legality'. As well as implicating the Home Office in creating a strategy that is effectively cohesion in all but name because it must uphold a commitment to national security, he suggests that dissonance has been allowed to develop owing to the absence of a 'universally agreed definition of extremism', a conclusion also drawn by other practitioners who lament the lack of clear definitions and legislation.

I argue this is reminiscent of previous iterations of Prevent, not yet forgotten locally, which have caused confusion regarding the expectations of practitioners and generated the possibility for creativity, agency, and innovation on the ground. He describes the field as a series of grey areas; between Prevent and Counter-Extremism, between Counter-Extremism and cohesion, and I would argue more broadly encompassing the work of practitioners in Birmingham who feel torn between engaging with contentious policies and existing in Muslim and minority ethnic communities. Locally, the Prevent Coordinator says the CES attracts 'people who don't like Prevent and feel Counter-Extremism is a softer version', a trend encouraged by Counter-Extremism staff who distance themselves from Prevent, 'defeating the purpose of why they're there in the first place'. He also critiques the approach of BSBT, a programme he says individuals sourcing funding flock to because its connection with the CES is not made clear, a further ambiguity relating to transparency.

While participants acknowledge 'cross-vulnerabilities' that may interplay with extremism, they remain unsure about the rationale behind the strategy and its execution, 'it seems really disparate to put all the different

areas under one umbrella, I just don't see how it's extremism but also I'm really hesitant to label something as a cultural practice and then criminalise it because that feels like it's targeting a community' (Hanna). Hanna proposes a lexical reversion to cohesion as an anodyne alternative to tackling culturally-associated criminality but, drawing upon his experience with radicalised individuals and their families, Zak points out that cultural conservatism and extremism are far from homogeneous (accordant with Miah, 2017), and that changing the name of a strategy like the CES without confronting its structural and conceptual flaws would be insufficient,

> some of the most conservative people are so un-extreme and un-terrorist and the opposite is true – so many of the terrorist families I've seen, they weren't even pious or conservative in their family at all. And that was part of the problem, because anyone could teach them anything about their faith and they wouldn't have known any different.

For this reason, he says, the CES's 'lumping together' of incongruent matters is an inaccurate assessment of vulnerabilities that serves to further damage the reputation of Prevent in its ambiguous and entangled relationship with the CES on the ground. Similarly, the CES's commitment to opacity, in emulation of early Prevent, reverses trust built with communities and negatively impacts practitioners involved in wider implementation, 'it's just a clever way of changing the titles which misleads people, there are people out there who are told "it's not Prevent money" so they get involved and then they realise "oh shit, it is"'. (Tahir)

To conclude this discussion on the rationale behind the 'political football' (Umair) that is the CES, most participants reflect on a mechanism of policing Muslim and minority ethnic communities that has committed many of the mistakes made by Prevent in its nascency and mirrors the 'swinging of the pendulum' (Zak) between 'fluffy type work' (Idrees) and securitisation measures that have long framed the CT/CE policy space more broadly. Police practitioners in particular were confused by its function as the strategy had no basis within the realm of policing; issues under its remit at BCC were not paralleled by the CTU and were covered instead by other departments within WMP. Participants asked how, if individuals within the BCC department in which it was located failed to grasp the strategy's structure or purpose, communities were expected to understand activities delivered in its name. The Prevent Coordinator claimed Prevent was not a fit for issues within the scope of Counter-Extremism because the enactment of cohesion initiatives through a prism of national security is problematic. However I argue below that there are many instances of exactly that, suggesting that Prevent remains a site for individual agency to be exercised and perhaps in practice is not as distinct from the CES as some participants maintain.

The next section will briefly present some reflections offered after practitioners ceased engagement with the CES, critical to understanding and evaluating the work of the strategy from those who actively participated in its delivery.

Reflections

Strategically in Birmingham much of the work of the CES was picked up by the Community Safety team based within PIP at BCC, rather than Prevent (also in PIP) or cohesion/equalities agendas, located in other council

departments. This came as a surprise to participants who expected the latter to be the preferable, seemingly natural, choice in recognition of sentiments captured in this section. Aspects of the strategy still in operation in Birmingham, such as the Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme, were offered by the Home Office to BCC Prevent but have instead landed with the Resilience team in PIP, thus representing another form of splintering. Participants again feel confused by decisions taken in the reallocation of initiatives once part of the strategy. Zayd believes Community Safety would have been a better fit for a scheme about keeping communities (and their places of worship) safe. Overall, he is relieved that much of the confusion has dissipated now that Birmingham no longer has a forward-facing embodiment of the strategy, 'it clearly wasn't needed, nationally it wasn't needed, they were clutching at straws.'

Noor, who worked on a BSBT-funded project on behalf of the CES that she refers to as a 'fucking nightmare', regrets engaging after reflecting on the realisation of concerns discussed in this chapter. She believes the work reinforced the securitised lens through which Muslim communities continue to be perceived.

> I just feel like everything that we did was all pretentious, it didn't actually make a difference other than piss kids off, really and truly. It's like, 'why are you even chatting to me about this? You know I'm not an extremist.' I just think that everything done around BSBT is fake because rather than actually helping steer kids away from extremism it's making them feel more victimised for being Muslim in this society. Because anything they do can easily be perceived as extremism, like even if you're trying to research your religion online, you don't want to put in anything that might flag up something to somebody. Personally I wouldn't get involved with something like that again.

As well as touching upon the securitisation of Muslim communities, Noor's analysis also cites self-censorship and the closing down of safe spaces (which may in turn yield iatrogenic effects), reviewed in Chapter 2, as observable ramifications of Counter-Extremism implementation. Further evaluation of the project Noor delivered will be included in Chapter 8. This section has detailed the CES in Birmingham, considering its structure, attempting to understand its logic, and offering some initial reflections that point to the opacity and confusion under which it operated locally. As both strategies constitute the focus of the thesis, the final section of this chapter provides a more in-depth analysis of the CES in relation to Prevent.

Comparing Counter-Extremism and Prevent

Distinguishing between the Counter-Extremism Strategy and Prevent

'It's two cheeks of the same backside!' – Umair

While some participants maintained the importance of the two strategies working 'hand in hand' (Adam), many refer to the 'fudging of boundaries' (Shakeel), 'muddying of waters' and 'major problems' (Imran) caused by the proximity of the CES to Prevent in Birmingham, creating an impression of the separate agendas as 'two sides of the same coin' (Sulaiman). This is further evidenced by Noor's account of the BSBT project she worked on attempting to embed BCC Prevent in its work for the CES, Zayd allowing Birmingham's Counter-Extremism Engagement Officer to regularly co-present with him as part of his BCC Prevent duties, and Faysal's

criticism of Counter-Extremism Coordinators (nationwide) who would request the delivery of his Prevent workshop but insist on the omission of the Prevent label, something he says he refused out of principle. Confusion between the strategies, at both a structural and operational level, is also highlighted by participants in Osorno Hernandez's research (2021).

Malik receives Prevent funding from the local authority to support his project but actually believes that 'ninety per cent' of the work he carries out falls under Counter-Extremism and only ten per cent is related to Prevent. The reason he is funded in this way, he says, boils down to an arbitrary administrative issue, 'I feel more confident in approaching [Prevent Coordinator] and saying I want to do Prevent work and give me an application form. I don't know how it works with [Counter-Extremism Coordinator's] team. Do I contact her and say, do you have an application? Can I apply for some funding? I don't know.' Malik's experience exemplifies the conflation of the strategies at implementation level locally; ultimately, he is unbothered which strategy funds his work – the content would remain unmodified regardless.

Sofia also recalls difficulty in reaching out to Counter-Extremism practitioners and questions the distinction of its approach – something she has been unable to officially ascertain despite attempts – surmising that the CES is designed to appear softer to mistrusting communities while 'creeping into many areas of life',

> when they set up and they said, 'we're not Prevent' (laughs), I was like yeah, but you have the same name, right? If you look at the bigger picture, you're doing the same thing. And if the motivation behind this was to make sure that people are actually happy to work with CE because it's not Prevent, well, people are not that stupid. (Sofia)

The CES is deemed to exploit the toxic legacy of Prevent in Birmingham, presenting itself as the 'good cop' to be engaged with in a comparative estimation of Prevent as the 'bad apple' (Umair). In the next section, participants disclose which strategy they believe to be more effective and why, a topic tied to practitioners' essential reading of the CES and its objectives.

Perceptions of implementation

Despite efforts made to construct the CES as a benign and unrelated agenda, the majority of participants interviewed for this study preferred the approach of Prevent, describing the CES as a harsher interpretation of CT/CE that set out to 'police the thoughts' (Shakeel) of Muslim and minority ethnic communities in 'intangible' and 'dangerous' ways (Sulaiman). Practitioners claim that Prevent operates more transparently now as a result of its previous mistakes (though this study will argue this is not necessarily the case across the board) and this commitment to openness has resulted in the recent 'coming around' of communities to Prevent (Shakeel). The 'covert' work of the CES is accused of not only committing itself to failure but jeopardising the progression of Prevent.

> I'm in a fortunate position to know that these lot [CES practitioners] are more dangerous. But I know for a fact that communities think that Counter-Extremism are alright, they're the good guys. Prevent over the years has got such a bad name but these lot are much more dangerous than Prevent is. Because what they are saying, like Building a Stronger Britain Together, is very appealing to the eye

> but it is camouflaged by something else behind it. The way I look at it, it's a thought process. Do you know that film, Minority Report? So before the crime has even happened, they've actually more or less got them done for the crime. I find Counter-Extremism very similar to that. It's intelligence gathering. (Umair)

Sulaiman is another participant to regard the CES as a form of 'thought management' but underlines how the concept of extremism is reserved for 'predisposed' communities on the basis of inherent cultural or religious values (inferred through its focus on cultural practices). Rashid also points to a racialised element of the CES he believes to be less prevalent in Prevent in which anything deemed incompatible with British values is considered extremism. Providing the example of a young Muslim man who may refrain from shaking hands with a member of the opposite sex, Rashid believes such an individual might then be considered, through the conveyer belt theory he says underpins Counter-Extremism, on a trajectory toward joining ISIS.

Shakeel perceives the CES to place limits and labels on individuals it targets in a manner that Prevent manages to circumvent. The terminology alone, he suggests, is inflammatory and unhelpful, 'non-violent extremism has also been a good thing in this country, you always have extremist views but sometimes those extremist views actually challenge the status quo and become absorbed into the establishment's thinking so we shouldn't see extremism as an entirely negative thing'. Though Prevent, too, inevitably seeks to tackle extremism, Shakeel implies that its innocuous name is a technique worth adopting. Mistakes identified by participants such as the naming of the strategy, its obscure processes, unclear objectives and focus on cultural practices are simply inexcusable for Sofia who expects the government to have learnt from the mistakes of Prevent and approached Counter-Extremism in a more informed and nuanced manner,

> I look at what they do, and I'm like, who advised you? Because what you're doing just doesn't make any sense, it just baffles me. It's been almost twenty years, they've had so much time to think about the topic and come up with proper strategies and we still are where we are, really?

Resistance to and denunciation of a contentious policy is not surprising, but it is consequential that critique is offered by Prevent practitioners who work in the field of extremism and radicalisation but draw the line at the government's understanding of Counter-Extremism. And while few participants favour the approach executed by the CES, some admit to exploiting the cover provided by its vague and non-Prevent associated name. Others argue that a move toward softer cohesion initiatives could be less harmful than consistent involvement with a counter-terrorism strategy that has a stronger legislative base and can enact powers of 'enforcement' (Hamza).

This section has presented key initial observations and perceptions of the strategies operating contemporaneously in Birmingham, revealing problematic central policy in a local imagining. Within the abstruse terrain of CT/CE policy in Birmingham, the CES is predominantly understood by practitioners as an inept, uninformed agenda with underhanded methods of engagement that attempt to misguide communities targeted. The shroud of obscurity under which it operates creates the conditions for ambiguous implementation and while it is scrutinised as an imitation of early Prevent, this thesis will show that perhaps

Prevent has not developed as much as is attested. Now that discussion has covered some of the intricacies of the policy space, the final section of this contextualising chapter is a note on the exceptionality of Birmingham for CT/CE globally, in the words of the participants who comprise the space. The locality and its distinguishing complexities constitute a key role in shaping the experiences of local practitioners.

Significance of Birmingham as a site

Small Heath is the khilafah!' – Rashid

Birmingham, considered a 'safe place' to which Muslims gravitate (Adam) by some and the supposed epicentre of radicalisation (Zayd) by others, is an unquestionably unique environment. Rashid recalls how European partners would joke that the ward of Small Heath was a global caliphate – owing to the number of convicted terrorists that had passed through the suburb in south-east Birmingham – and claims his Brummie status translated into a form of cultural capital in the sphere of Prevent, yielding invitations to exclusive events on international stages. While participants may enjoy the benefits of this hyperfocus, scholars argue that the racialised discourse associating the city with an increased terror threat produces the pejorative tropes previously discussed and forces those working on strategies like Prevent and the CES to confront these narratives. For some, the positioning of Birmingham at the centre of British CT/CE policy aggrandises its practitioners as 'the most outstanding in the country' (Nadia).

Historically, the Prevent agenda in Birmingham was overseen by WMCTU and it was the juncture at which the local authority became lead in 2009 that practitioners began to acknowledge a sense of 'autonomy over it' (Zayd). For two years it was managed at BCC by a seconded counter-terrorism police officer, another 'fundamental error' (Rashid), and it was not until 2011 when a Muslim policy advisor took charge (and would remain for the following eight years) that trust was 'slowly rebuilt' with Birmingham's Muslim communities (Imran). Unlike the reluctancy paralysing some local authorities (Thomas, 2010), Muslim organisations in Birmingham are said to have cooperated with the city council in the implementation of Prevent (O'Toole et al., 2016). Multi-agency partnerships were developed (e.g., youth service collaboration) and a more community-inclusive approach, perceived to empower Birmingham's Muslims, was established citywide. Previous 'insensitive and damaging' (Haroon) versions of policy that undermined Muslim communities through a preoccupation with intelligence-gathering, and the 'historical baggage' (Nasreen) and 'visceral hatred' (Haris) this generated, were gradually replaced with activities that allegedly sought to build resilience, challenge injustice, and defend identity.

The approach, which supposedly prioritised a commitment to transparency, is claimed by senior local authority practitioners to have afforded BCC the respect of communities and, in turn, a degree of autonomy from central government, 'in Birmingham we deliver Prevent slightly differently to others, we are more sensitive to issues and try and develop things bottom-up. So when a lot of people say Prevent is heavily

government-focused; it's not, it's actually down to the local authorities' (Prevent Coordinator). While the individual influence of practitioners with strategic oversight is critical to local implementation (Ambrozik, 2019) (as the data will explore), in developing localised versions of policy (Thomas, 2017), the Coordinator embodies street-level bureaucrat behaviours by incorporating the values, knowledge, and experience of his team into processes of decision-making, supervision and evaluation. BCC practitioners also felt they were able to actively shape and enhance policy at a national level by raising matters of contention centrally, 'as a consequence of that they [Home Office] would change tack, they would change the strategy accordingly. So we were not only delivering on the agenda, but we were actually informing the agenda' (Shakeel). Practitioners attribute (what they perceive as) success in transforming policy to the involvement of Muslim actors with the Prevent strategy in Birmingham. These individuals, acting as 'good brokers on both sides' (Shakeel), exist within the grey area that this study seeks to address and are claimed here to have used their capacity to build the trust of local communities which in turn improved policy on a national scale.

Birmingham, described by the Prevent Coordinator as 'possibly the hardest but most interesting' space owing to its position at the top of the national risk profile, remains an exceptional site for CT/CE policy.

Conclusions

This chapter has mapped Birmingham's CT/CE policy space – detailing its structure, partnerships, functions, approaches and initiatives – contextualising the main claim that incoherent central policy is reimagined locally. Initial reflections, tensions and comparisons of BCC and WMCTU, and of Prevent and the CES, have also been explored and this has laid the foundations for understanding the remaining chapters and the differences in practitioner experiences across strategy and institution. In so doing, it has revealed that while the engagement of Muslim communities with CT/CE efforts is complex, WMCTU appears to consider the impact of continuity in greater depth than BCC, and indeed policymakers at a macro level. This is an important distinction that may derive from the propensity for personnel turnover in the realm of policing but that, nevertheless, is not significant enough to counterbalance the ambiguity and instability that pervades the entire local scene.

The chapter has shown how Prevent has become a Frankenstein policy; deconstructed, revised, entwined with other policies, embellished with add-ons, framed in the vernacular of contemporary discourses and then reshaped back to a version of where it began – multiple times in multiple ways. Is it a cohesion project or a bulwark against religious ideology? Is it a mechanism of safeguarding or a security endeavour? Is it concerned with non-violent extremism or exclusively radicalised individuals? Should it focus on Muslim communities or broaden its scope? Is it governed via a local, regional or central model? Prevent no longer resembles a coherent strategy or appears to function in an adequate or credible manner. Its historic failings were a contributory factor in the introduction of the CES, which itself flatlined and subsequently bequeathed some of its displaced objectives to Prevent. William Shawcross attempted the most recent intervention (2023),

reattaching old appendages to its already misshapen structure and restructuring delivery toward a regionalised model that will imitate the policing paradigm in an attempt to improve collaboration, consistency and professionalism (to be picked up in Chapter 8) and satisfy critics who advocate for a police-led strategy eschewing cohesion and targeting terrorism (Bartlett and Birdwell, 2010).

Why, then, would individuals choose to engage with Prevent or the CES? In the first instance, as indicated in this chapter, the instability demonstrated has created a culture of autonomy for practitioners, arguably emboldened to mirror the ever-changing policy spiral they operate within in the knowledge that structures or philosophies are likely to fluctuate (explored further in Chapter 6). The next chapter interrogates the motivations of CT/CE practitioners.

Chapter 5 – Motivations for engagement

As addressed in Chapter 2, nascent literature on the motivations of CT/CE practitioners has attempted to contribute towards filling the lacuna in our understanding of the personal underpinnings of CT/CE engagement (Lehane, 2017; Shanaah, 2021; Schlegel, 2022). One study focused specifically on Muslim practitioners, incorporating a quantitative approach and relying upon a social-psychological theoretical framework of motivations for collective action (Shanaah, 2021). Other research was conducted across a number of sites internationally and predominantly with university-educated professional practitioners and academics (Schlegel, 2022). The findings of this unique, systematic and detailed investigation, therefore, centring on a broad selection of practitioners and 'connectors' in an in-depth analysis of a specific UK context, will complement the emerging field with the rich, textural accounts of local practitioners.

This chapter addresses the motivations held by practitioners engaging with Prevent and the CES in Birmingham (RQ1) and contributes to the existing literature through the analysis of primary data which will show how a diverse set of motivations – underpinned by various moral and pragmatic philosophies – is reflective of an ambiguous and unpredictable policy space nationally and a dynamic scene locally. Analysis does not emulate a theoretical framework similar to the existing literature mentioned above. Instead, it attempts to understand how participants operating in an unpredictable local space may transcend the conventional model of 'practitioner' and how their work may problematise normative notions of collective action by drawing upon literature on religion, policy, governance, and critical community practice. The data will contradict the motivations literature that argues practitioners always approach the field positively and with noble intentions (Schlegel, 2022) to suggest that some experience feelings of embarrassment or shame and can feel coerced into participating, and that some engage opportunistically rather than 'authentically' (Pearson, 2020). Also brought into question is the 'trusted' Muslim theorised in literature on Muslim/state engagement (Ragazzi, 2016) through the consideration of practitioners who shun exposure to conceal their engagement. Ultimately, the chapter's contribution to the central tenet of the thesis is that the data reveals a distinct middle space in which many practitioners, far from being wholly for or against Prevent/Counter-Extremism, adopt an innovative stance from which to engage.

Motivations provided by practitioners are organised into three categories on *personal, collective* and *policy-related* bases, the first of which is further broken down into sub-categories on religious obligation, personal experiences of radicalisation, and skillset and positionality. While the title of the chapter is reflective of a domain summary classification, data analysis produced categories organised around shared meanings (as opposed to topic), with the chapter being repackaged as such for the clarity and coherence of the structure of the overall thesis. In this vein, themes that were developed from data pertaining to this research question fragmented into connected arguments around the setting of intentions, the utility of religion as a framework, and the development of agency, all of which intersect with the topic of motivations but are interpreted as part of the narratives of later chapters.

Personal

Religious obligation

In accordance with the findings of the aforementioned literature (Shanaah, 2021; Schlegel, 2022) and broader research on the active citizenship of Muslims in Western societies, motivations centred around religion – for example, upholding religious teachings to act benevolently and responsibly (El-Awa and Spalek, 2012) or correcting misconceptions about Islam and Muslims (Peucker, 2021) – constitute the greatest stimulus for practitioner engagement with CT/CE. A significant addition to the existing research is captured in the ways in which some participants who frame their engagement in the language of a religious obligation remove the active participatory element and refer the root of their CT/CE work to the concept of *qadr*, a belief in predestination. After missing the signs of her brother's radicalisation (detailed in the following sub-category), Imaan established her organisation in an effort to safeguard others from the same path. She does not lament that her brother's situation escaped the family before it was too late, citing her belief in *qadr* as a reason for her presence in the space now, 'this is part of our journey, *qadr* Allah [it is the decree of God], so we can't have regret.' She believes that her Prevent work, and motives for engaging, were not necessarily decided on by her, but by her Lord, 'I knew I wanted to help people but I never thought it would take face like this. And I do believe it's all from Allah because He wants us to do something, He wanted us to obviously be involved and help in some way'.

Others also reference *qadr* as the catalyst for their engagement, at times applying the concept more broadly to explain outcomes in the field and as a means of accepting forms of CT work that are unsuccessful (i.e. 'it is not in my control'). Raheem refers to a belief in *qadr* as way of understanding practitioners' place and purpose in relation to Prevent, 'you're never going go like that [clicks fingers] and change anything because ultimately it's the will of Allah, but what you have been given the ability to do is save some lives and change society'. The appropriation of notions like *qadr* and other religious teachings in the conduct of practitioners' engagement (beyond motivations) is explored further in the following chapter.

Distinct from the somewhat passive starting point of *qadr* ('Allah decided I would do this work'), practitioners proceed to draw upon religious motivating factors that often employ the language of responsibilisation and active citizenship, to proactively (and reactively) seek engagement with CT/CE as a manifestation of their religious convictions ('it is my duty to do this work'). Haroon speaks of a religious obligation to engage with CT/CE as a method of subverting negative portrayals of Islam, 'as Muslims, we know our job is to protect our community. Islam is a religion of beauty and harmony and because I'm into my religion, if someone is misleading with some information I know I have a duty to challenge that'. This reactive stance is echoed by others like Yasir, who is inspired to convey what he feels is the true Islam, and Zayd whose mission is to expose groups like ISIS as un-Islamic,

> for me, somebody who sees myself as practising [term used to denote somebody who is not just Muslim by name but upholds the pillars of faith and adheres closely to religion in all matters], I

> wanted to make sure that our young people didn't get caught up in it and it's about safeguarding them but also as well it's to make it clear to the people who don't understand Islam, to say, you know what, Daesh, Al-Qaeda, these people, scholars say they're not Muslim, they don't practice and teach Islam that we know. And the world needs to know that whatever they're preaching is their doctored interpretation of Islam.

Others approach CT/CE as a more proactive endeavour. Jamil actively promotes Muslim participation with programmes like Prevent and seeks to challenge extremist ideology using Islamic scriptures. His interpretation of religious obligation involves working with the state in an effort to counter extremism,

> This is something that from day one the scholars say you should take part in. Even if your government is non-Muslim, it is your religious obligation to support them fighting extremism because of the safety of the whole society, it's nothing to do with [society] being religious or not, it's the wellbeing of the community overall.

The obligation can be understood as an example of *fard kifayah*, the prescribed communal responsibility placed upon Muslim communities to fulfil societal needs such as the building of hospitals and the training of professionals in all fields, personal needs such as the burying of the dead, and spiritual requirements such as enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, according to teachings of the faith. This means that in all communities, some individuals should uphold the civic and Islamic duty to carry out what the practitioners mentioned here have described – to protect others in the community from coming to harm themselves, from causing harm to others and from harming representations of the faith. If no Muslims undertook this duty in some capacity, the community would be considered sinful, and these practitioners rationalise their work as part of a holistic approach to fulfilling a religious obligation understood by many as a *fard kifayah*, a concept connected in broader literatures to Muslim volunteerism (Keskin and Yucel, 2020).

Hamza criticises those within Muslim communities whose answer to social problems like radicalisation is to 'do *dua'*, referring to the act of supplication in which Muslims call upon God through personal invocation. To make *dua* is generally a private action and Hamza explains how his perspective, which he grounds in Islamic teaching, transgresses the personal space and requires collective action.

> Some things you can't pray your way out of. *Illa al-ladhina amanu wa amilus saalihaati* [excerpt from a verse of the Quran meaning 'except those who have faith and do righteous deeds'], there's an *amil* in the *ayah* [verse], an action. The belief is in there, the *amanu*, but there's an *amil*, so where's the *amil*? Do you understand? The answer can't be 'do *dua'*.

Hamza recites a line from Surah Al-Asr in the Qur'an and highlights two concepts within the verse to explain his motivation for engaging with the Prevent agenda. He contrasts *amanu*, signifying a belief (in God) with the verb *amilu* which refers to the act of 'doing righteous deeds'. His position is that simply believing in or talking to God is insufficient and in that vein acts upon this teaching through his work, justifying his engagement as a form of religious duty. The next line in the verse translates to 'and advise each other to truth', which goes some way to describing the action he speaks passionately about and is performing through his workshops. Hamza is driven by Islamic principles that transcend the act of prayer and materialise in a

physical undertaking for the collective good, syncing religious teachings with theories of responsibilisation and active citizenship.

His criticism extends to Muslim governance structures such as mosques as he explains in more detail why he is motivated to work in the space and how this is framed by his faith. He also introduces the concept of *zakat*, a pillar of Islam and system of social welfare in the form of an obligatory tax that all Muslims pay annually to those in need. According to the Qur'an, there are eight categories of people who qualify as recipients of *zakat*, and Hamza interprets his work in relation to one of the eight categories:

> Some people aren't prepared to dig and build what you need to build, because it's easy to say you know, *sabr* [patience] and pray. No man, those are important facets of our faith but you've got to roll up the sleeves. You think about the resources that some of the *masajid* [mosques] have got, but they have to get funded to deliver on something? The eighth condition of *zakat* is what? *Muallafa al-qulub*, to change the hearts. Yes; the poor, the needy, the wayfarer, the hungry, all of that [some of the more commonly recognised recipients of *zakat*], but Allah says the eighth condition of *zakat* is *muallafa al-qulub* – changing conditions of the hearts. What's more changing conditions of the hearts than this? I'm saying if we understood the faith properly, we'd be doing it.

Hamza essentially interprets his work as a form of compulsory charity he roots in the idea of 'changing conditions of the heart'; undertaking this obligation because, in his opinion, mosques are failing to take action. For practising Muslims, religion often serves as the framework for many aspects of life and for the practitioners mentioned in this section, has been a principal motivator for them to engage with CT/CE policy in Birmingham. Hamza's reading of religious obligation transforms belief into collective action and he is driven by the philosophy that 'social action and civic participation starts with us' though, as demonstrated, interpretation is personal even within the framework of religion as a stimulus for engagement. For the individuals mentioned in this section, religious obligation can be rooted in verses of the Qur'an, intrinsic and sociological doctrine (such as predestination and communal responsibilities), elements of the fundamental five pillars, or a defensive rebuttal against terrorist groups that manipulate and misrepresent Islam. The next section continues to document personal motivations provided by participants, exploring the effects of radicalisation in their personal lives.

Personal experiences of radicalisation

Somebody known to practitioner was radicalised

Practitioners like Imaan, whose brother was sentenced under the Terrorism Act 2000 (TACT) as mentioned in the previous section, are driven to engage because of personal interaction with radicalised friends, family or acquaintances. This adds to understandings from the motivations literature which suggests that personal or direct experience of extremism is often behind the involvement of grassroots practitioners with P/CVE agendas (Lehane, 2017). Imran explains how his encounter with two individuals planning to travel to Syria was the impetus for his organisation to take on Prevent work, citing the suffering of their families as his motivator. The BCC Prevent Coordinator also provides a personal account of the radicalisation of his cousin

at university, expressing regret that the individual was unable to be stopped before stabbing the scholar who was helping to deradicalise him, and frustration that mosque politics on sectarian grounds enabled his descent into radicalisation to be overlooked initially. The Prevent Coordinator feels strongly that a nuanced approach from Prevent is crucial in addressing the misconceptions and oversimplification that hinder the treatment of vulnerable individuals, and contributing to the development of this area is a fundamental driver behind his participation.

Malik's case is interesting because it details a similar experience which he also credits as the main motivator for his engagement with Prevent, narrating the story of a fellow *madrasa* [Islamic educational setting] graduate who attended the sports club he cultivated (pre-Prevent) and announced:

> 'we can't play football anymore, it's *haram* [forbidden], it's against the religion, this country is a *dar al-harb* [land of war, often referring to a place where Muslims are persecuted]' and we were just so focused on football, I just said to him, look, if you don't like this, go live somewhere else, go live in a cave if you don't like this country, just in the context of like… get lost and let me play football. And then six, seven months later, he's on BBC News, him and six others, and they were arrested as TACT offenders, they were gonna commit an attack in Halifax at an EDL march and they were arrested and that's the moment that hit me. I started to think that this guy had shown vulnerabilities of being at risk, you know, he was at risk of radicalisation and extremism. I hadn't picked that up because I was more focused on the football. And naturally I wouldn't because I didn't even know about Prevent, well I knew about Prevent but I was anti-Prevent because of the anti-Prevent agenda such as the Cage and the Mends [advocacy groups often deemed extreme by government] etc. And I'm not saying they're bad and I'm not saying Prevent's good but we were taught within *madrasa* that we're looked down upon and we're targeted [Muslims] so anyone trying to do positive work [through the government], it was always seen as negative.

Malik describes being ill-prepared to deal with the statement made by his peer and it is this sense of guilt, not dissimilar to the feelings conveyed by the Prevent Coordinator about his cousin, or Imaan with regard to her brother, that served as the driving force behind his engagement.

> If I had Prevent training or knowledge of Prevent I would have recognised that this is a vulnerable person at risk of being groomed or radicalised, whatever. I never had that. So my motivation is someone that I knew personally, someone that I graduated with, someone who was a fellow *hafiz* as well [somebody who has memorised the Qur'an]. That was one motivation. And the second motivation was a sense of guilt in the sense that I had the Islamic knowledge [to counter his arguments] but I was more focused on the sporting element rather than what he was saying. So there was a motivation that was drawn out by guilt in the sense of, I should have said, hold on a second, everyone stop playing football, you said this is *dar al-harb*, however, there's this *hadith* in Bukhari and this *hadith* in Tirmidhi [collections of teachings] that says live by the law of the country that you live in, and love for your neighbour what you love for yourself, for example. So there were counter-narratives to what he was saying. Rather than going into that sort of practical debate with him and discussion which would have been the right thing to do, I was like, go live in a cave somewhere and we'll carry on playing football. Now I've managed to tell myself, you know, five years later that it wasn't my fault but at the time, when I saw the news breaking, when I saw what was happening, I was like, I've led *taraweeh* [prayers performed in Ramadan] with this kid.

The guilt articulated here is palpable and forms the basis of an emotive catalyst for pursuing participation in this area (Shanaah, 2021). The fact that Malik was trained in Islamic theology but failed to utilise it to counter

his friend's harmful views adds to the regret he harbours, and additionally weaves religion into his motivation, though the primary driver here is somebody else's radicalisation and the emotional aftermath this elicits. This further highlights how difficult it can be for practitioners to separate religion from their work in the space, as will be explored in the next chapter. To atone for his perceived shortcomings, Malik is now focused on safeguarding other young people in his community through the work of his organisation. These accounts relate to friends or family members that have been radicalised, but some practitioners attribute their engagement to their own individual experiences of radicalisation.

Radicalisation is part of practitioner's personal history

Senior youth worker Yasir reflects on how the 1994 Yemeni civil war galvanised many of his friends to travel to the country in its aftermath, a course of action he says he narrowly avoided. The hindsight with which he recalls the juncture forms the basis of his motivations to engage with CT/CE locally,

> I just so happened to kind of miss the boat around that period but can you imagine how easily it would have been for me to go and do what they did? It's so easy, I remember hanging around with them before they went. You can quite easily gravitate towards it and I'm looking at it from a point of view of how close or how easily I could have been radicalised when I was younger. And I am actually trying to prevent young people from being in that position as well, making dumb choices and decisions about their lives and how to respond appropriately and better.

Yasir is not the only youth worker to recall a time at which they felt within reach of radicalisation. For Haroon, working on the Prevent strategy actually provided him with a framework through which he was able to make sense of a circumstance he found himself in as a teenager in Birmingham. After attending what he believed to be a study circle and witnessing footage of bombings, rape and decapitated babies in Yugoslavia, the man leading the event quoted a verse from the Qur'an.

> I was very very lucky – my friend, he was a Qur'an *hafiz* and when he translated it he goes the geezer's chatting shit you know. He said 'it doesn't mean that bro, the geezer's turning the words around, let's do one.' We left and never thought nothing of it. But as we've got older and now I'm looking back on it, I can make sense of what was going on. That was radicalisation then but no one knew what radicalisation was, until now.

Profoundly, Haroon believes that without knowledge acquired through Prevent's partnership with the youth service, he would fail to recognise that the situation was an attempt to radicalise himself and his friends, and this serves as a motivating factor for his engagement with Prevent and the facilitation of CT/CE projects at his youth centre. Yasir and Haroon recall close encounters with conceptualisations of radicalisation in their youth but some practitioners committed more wholly to extremist ideology, later becoming disillusioned. Rashid became part of a radical organisation and uses this first-hand experience to dissuade young people from following in his footsteps.

> I used to be with Hizb ut-Tahrir, I used to be with Al-Muhajiroun, I spent a lot of time with Abu Hamza al-Masri [hook-handed Egyptian cleric]. You know the leader of Al-Muhajiroun – Omar Bakri Muhammad, OBM? OBM used to come to my house. This is the main driver [for his involvement with Prevent] because I suddenly learnt about these organisations. They'll talk the talk and they'll give all the slogans, you know, and all the testosterone but really these individuals are there purely, purely

> as a media-savvy organisation. It's all about their own profile in the media, glamorising themselves up with total disregard for the negative destructive impact they're having on the Muslim community.

Rashid claims to have seen the true nature of 'radical, medieval and cruel' organisations that recruit young people and then abandon them, seducing teenagers with 'ideas of grandeur' to travel to Syria, ruining families and communities for their own publicity gains. After emerging on the other side through his own personal process of deradicalisation, he asks what Muslim communities are doing to address this problem, regardless of what he says are widespread views on a 'useless and depressing' Prevent strategy. Rashid's own response to this is to work with CT/CE policy locally, though he might find it disappointing, to try and prevent young people from causing harm to themselves and others, and this position can be understood by referring to Shanaah's argument (2021) that individuals who have previously been involved in protesting and activism are motivated to work in the counter-extremism space.

BCC's Prevent Coordinator argues that individuals with personal experience of radicalisation, whether via themselves or their wider networks, are drawn towards CT/CE work and make suitable candidates to engage successfully. He also points to what he perceives to be an increase in these types of practitioners in the field, 'back then, it was rare to say you knew someone who was radicalised whereas now it's quite common for people working in counter-terrorism to say they had a family member who was radicalised, we all know someone who could have been in that space'. Whether this can be explained by an increase in people generally being drawn towards extremism or the development and growth of the CT/CE space is unclear, however, harbouring regret at not being able to stop a friend or relative, or in some instances one's own self, from being radicalised acts as a motivator for some practitioners in Birmingham to undertake work on Prevent or the CES. This is echoed in the wider literature that suggests Muslim volunteers perform active citizenship in response to (direct or indirect) trauma such as racism or Islamophobia (Barylo, 2020), though the concept of trauma might be broadened to include the impact of radicalisation and how, in processing instances of trauma, practitioners actively engage in CT/CE as a form of responsibilisation. Further, in applying the theory of participants as 'connectors' (Spalek, 2014), it is implied that practitioners build relationships (with communities and service users) by focusing on similarities in relation to shared life experiences and this is evident in the accounts of Yasir, Haroon and Rashid above.

In examining the personal motivations of practitioners, discussion has considered those that refer to a sense of religious obligation and instances of first-hand radicalisation serving as instigators. The next section explores the final sub-category of personal motivations for CT/CE engagement.

Skillset and positionality

Individuals cited varying and unique motivations for engagement with CT/CE, such as a desire to emulate a late parent's peacebuilding efforts (Fatima), to pursue one's academic interests around the impact of counter-terrorism (Sara), to use the opportunity to learn about an elusive policy (Owais) and to raise the profile of

their organisation so they may appear ‘on the radar’ of the Home Office for future funding (Shazia). Some simply declare a passion for counter-extremism (Zayd), a wish to make a difference before they retire (Nasreen) or the aspiration to help shape a society divided by hate (Zak) into a Britain that their children will feel proud to contribute to (Idrees).

In contrast to literature on the fervent engagement of critical community practitioners (Banks, 2007), however, not all participants express the same implicit passion for the work. Some claim that their specific skillsets or unique positionality render them ideal candidates to work on CT/CE and this forms the guiding and motivating principle behind their engagement. Personal efficacy is a commonly cited factor in the literature on CT/CE engagement (Lehane, 2017; Shanaah, 2021) and Muslim participation in politics more broadly (Easat-Daas, 2020), and participants here explain that their self-perception as well-placed, skilled and experienced to deliver on Prevent/Counter-Extremism actually serves as a motivator for their involvement.

Sofia, in fact, says she initially resisted any involvement with CT because she had become Muslim and felt it was ‘cliché’ to work in the field of terrorism. It was only after she concluded that Muslim voices were missing that she acted upon a perceived responsibility to utilise her background in conflict resolution and academia to contribute a perspective that was not just Muslim, but also experienced and meaningful.

> I attended a workshop and the person who was speaking about radicalisation didn't actually have a background in any shape or form, it was literally just about, oh, there's funding available, we need funding as a civil society organisation, so let's apply for Prevent funding with our ‘let's help Muslim women cycle’. This is the kind of stuff you've seen, right? They need the money, so they proposed their project and then from the side of the Home Office, they need the community engagement, so it's like win-win for both sides. It doesn't really make sense from either perspective but that's what happens. And then you have someone who, yes, knows a lot about working with Muslim women and also a lot about working with communities or social work or whatever, but they don't actually have that whole background about preventing extremism. But I thought I had that. So that was another motivation.

Sofia believed she could bring specialist experience to the field, as well as intervening from a Muslim perspective, and this compelled her to engage after initially hesitating. Imaan also possesses a bespoke skillset around ‘cultural understanding’, developed in response to her family’s circumstances when they sought assistance for her brother’s vulnerabilities, and she believes this, alongside her qualifications and background in community work, is unique to her organisation. Believing hers is the only service to be able to provide nuanced and culturally sensitive support in this way is a motivating factor for Imaan to engage with Prevent and help other families in similar situations.

> Families who don’t have the skillset like us will struggle, that’s why we set up [name of organisation]. And you know what, since then it's definitely served its purpose. ‘Cause a lot of people do turn to us and yeah, they can go to like mental health services or they can go to like Women's Aid or wherever, but why they turn to us is because we have that cultural understanding. They feel that genuine sort of relation from us so when they come and see us they know that we've been through similar things.

Imaan reveals that the city council observed the support that her organisation was offering, at the time restricted to general wellbeing and mental health, and approached her to engage with Prevent in exchange for financial and other in-kind support from the likes of Breakthrough Media. Incorporating Prevent work into her remit was a 'really scary decision' she says, 'a lot of people were warning us off, calling it devil's work and these really harsh things' but she decided that it was like any other policy that existed to help citizens but had gained a negative reputation because of underhanded practice that was carried out unintentionally (and historically). For Imaan, the personal experience of a family member's radicalisation combined with her objective to support women, background in youth and community development and the 'people skills' developed through previous work experience in the city motivated her to take on Prevent as part of her remit. The bringing together of these divergent skills and traits led Imaan to self-identify as well-suited to a partnership with BCC Prevent and it is this positionality that serves as her main motivation.

> Everyone wants to help in the world and I thought, why not start from home? Let's start from Birmingham. They've got these problems. They've got women who are unaware and uneducated. And my family personally, we've been a victim of these kinds of issues because of the lack of awareness my mum maybe had, or the lack of support my brother had, maybe we could help other families avoid what we went through.

This kind of unique vantage point is echoed by BCC's Prevent Coordinator as a motivating factor in his account of how the personal experience of his cousin's radicalisation coupled with his place within official 'multi-agency' structures meant he was able to 'shape debate and conversations' and inspired him to work more closely with Prevent as a strategy. Amar, too, raises the issue of cultural competency and understanding, and the linguistic and interpersonal skills this entails, as a motivator for his work in the space, providing an example of being called to a school where concern was provoked amongst teachers by a child who had been reading the *Qaida*, a beginner's book for learning Qur'anic Arabic, at lunch. Rather than pursue a referral, Amar encouraged the child to 'keep it up and read it as much as you can because your faith is what's gonna help you at the end of the day'. Even though Amar is not Muslim himself, he exercises his intercultural skills and multi-faith knowledge to engage with Muslims he encounters through his work for WMCTU, citing his ability to empathise with individuals in this way as a huge source of motivation for him. Although he struggles at times with challenges he faces on the job, he is encouraged and emboldened by his capability to draw upon proficient understandings of cultural and religious complexities to support people, 'and that can only come from someone who has a belief themselves.'

Discussion thus far has covered the divergent and heterogeneous personal motivations for engagement with CT/CE in Birmingham. The diversity and difference captured is evocative of a dynamic and fluid local policy space, which is itself a product of an ambiguous and unstable embodiment of CT/CE centrally. The next sections explore motivations inspired by humanitarian principles.

Collective

Motivations in the previous section are underscored by the personal beliefs, experiences and skills of practitioners. Some participants connect their motivations to the improvement of wider society, also evidenced in the motivations literature (Schlegel, 2022), and explain their engagement as means of a) empowering and b) helping communities. Though similar, the latter relates to simply aiding while the former refers to a more in-depth process whereby power or authority is transferred, in this case to communities, in order to support themselves. The language of empowering and helping that distinguishes these sections is employed by participants to frame their engagement and its underpinnings.

Empowering people

Participants speak generally about being driven to empower the communities they live and work in, as well as newly arrived pockets of communities perceived to be more vulnerable to extremism, engaging with Prevent and the CES to attempt to bring this to fruition. Through her work with WMCTU's Community Resilience Team, Hanna endeavours to 'empower' communities to 'participate in democracy', teaching minority ethnic attendees at a workshop in the east of the city about protests and petitions, 'I thought, gosh, the fact that they think that you're not allowed to do these things in Britain, like, wow'. Hanna responds to her remit of community engagement in a broad capacity that fulfils personal objectives (inspired by her socialist beliefs) to empower communities around issues of democracy and social change as well as the prevention of extremism. This touches upon the theme of practitioners exercising personal agency in the implementation of their CT/CE duties, explored further in Chapter 7 and considered alongside case studies that involve the purported 'empowering' of individuals and communities through CT/CE.

Tahir has been involved with CT/CE work for many years, both formally and informally, and draws upon his background as a military historian to empower young Muslims by teaching them about the Muslim, Hindu and Sikh soldiers that fought for the British Empire in the First and Second World Wars. Tahir advocates this as a method of preventing radicalisation in the belief that awareness of these efforts will ground and invest young Muslims in British society and render them less inclined toward domestic terrorism.

> I talk about how they lived and ate together and in some cases fought and died together. This is my main goal, a lot of these people that live in Britain have made a contribution, please don't see them as outsiders and lesser beings, they've got a stakehold. And I say to the kids from ethnic community backgrounds, look, please don't let anyone make you feel like an outsider.

Tahir applies his knowledge and experience to empower young people to develop a sense of belonging and a resilience to anti-British rhetoric propagated by radicalisers while simultaneously educating broader sections of society about historic South Asian contribution in the hope that this will prevent the marginalisation of minoritised and Muslim communities. Practitioners here have described specific motivations of empowerment underpinning their engagement with Prevent and the CES. As covered in Chapter 2,

empowerment discourse is read as a technique of the state critical to the production of active citizens (Ragazzi, 2016), though research has demonstrated the potential for its subversion, paving the way for an aperture in which Muslims who engage are able to cultivate a site of agency and negotiation (Mesok, 2022a). Though the empowering here applies to recipients of practitioners' work rather than the practitioners themselves, it is evident that empowerment discourse is pervasive in CT/CE work locally and as later chapters will show, impacts upon practitioners as well as communities targeted. Nevertheless, the personal objectives pursued here by Hanna and Tahir, to empower communities through principles of socialism or military history, are facilitated by the fluidity and dynamism of the local scene.

Helping communities

The incentive to help communities holds different meanings for participants. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Owais sees Prevent as a form of neighbourhood policing. Far from the reputation he says it has for being a 'secret squirrel organisation', it facilitates his constant presence in the communities he polices, permitting him to build relationships and offer ongoing support. Many practitioners claim their main motivation is to help and serve communities and Prevent provides them with the resources, structure and networks to be able to continue and progress the work they undertake, resulting in appreciation for a strategy they deem to have material impact.

Nadia left a stable job to join BCC Prevent and counteract the 'racist fuckers [who] see a brown child and see risk' in her work training the education sector in how to approach counter-extremism measures from a more nuanced understanding, 'subverting the system to make things right for children'. Nadia says her role is about creating 'safe spaces' for young people, contentious because although some literature supports the notion of safe spaces cultivated by CT/CE practitioners for the benefit of difficult conversations (Osorno Hernandez, 2021), participants and scholars highlight how strategies like Prevent and the CES are perceived to deny the space for discussion (Pilkington and Acik, 2020) which can itself become a driver of radicalisation (Pilkington, 2018). Newly constructed spaces made available to practitioners through CT/CE locally will be considered further in the following chapter. Nadia believes her ability to 'speak Muzlim' enables her to address the unconscious bias that can problematise referral processes and is passionate about reforming the familiar securitised model of Prevent to protect the formative experiences of Birmingham's children and young people, 'this is **my** community I can see here, so I need to do something. Alright, I get paid well, that's fine, that wasn't the motivator at the time because I wasn't paid that well then. The motivation was about trying to make things right'. She denies being driven by financial or career-related motivations, predictable as a means of self-presentation, however, discussion in the following chapters suggests that participants do indeed perceive money and status to form the basis of others' engagement.

Maryam distinguishes her work from others in the space who profit off of CT/CE to suggest that altruism should be the only driver for practitioners, 'I don't agree with it. I am only working in the community for the community, that's what it should be about', hinting at the perception of Prevent as an industry (to be examined in the following chapter). There are, however, instances of instrumental engagement indicated by some participants who accept that their motivations to help are entwined with the provision of funding and may therefore take on a 'two birds, one stone' (Malik) approach to participation in which practitioners must 'look at where the funding is' (Kashif). While this could be analysed as an absolute motivation, the complexities ingrained require the more nuanced deconstruction explored in Chapter 7's discussion on the application of agency in the field.

In contrast to this position, some participants divulge that Prevent association has actually damaged the credibility of their organisation but that the consequences of reputational impact are superseded by their commitment to helping communities.

> My husband at the time was arguing that I shouldn't take on Prevent because it's gonna ruin my work, he kept saying it. And it probably is true but it helped us in a different way. My mum said it's *qadr* Allah*,* you did it, it's benefited you in different ways, maybe it has taken your business but *koi nahi* [never mind] you wouldn't have been able to do half the things you've done for people. (Imaan)

For some, helping people through Prevent or the CES means producing something tangible. Nasreen concludes that dialogue is insufficient so uses BCC Prevent money at her disposal as a PEO to help Muslim communities, whether she considers the strategy to fundamentally target the demographic or not, in the conviction that her actions in the field allow her to 'give back' and make a difference.

> For a long time I felt I wanted to do something, bring about a change, work very much in the community. And I think this journey has helped me bring about a personal change in my own understanding. It's not enough to just have a conversation, it's about helping communities, helping those that feel victimised, that feel subjugated […] for me on a personal level it was about where can I start making a difference or put a slight dent into something in society? It wasn't gonna be sea-tide change, it was going to be something minimum. But something proactive rather than just having conversations.

In Ragazzi's (2016) revision of Mamdani's paradigm (2004), the good Muslim is elevated from a passive figure to perform an active function, drawing upon 'authentic' cultural capital to produce material results. Nasreen has realised this aim in the form of the *madrasa* lessons facilitated for children of newly arrived immigrants that attend her women's forum, detailed in Chapter 7.

For some practitioners, the motivation to help constitutes part of a greater philosophical outlook that speaks to justice and benevolence. Tahir's work is guided by the motto 'goodness breeds goodness' and, despite the Qur'anic root of this conviction, propels his engagement in the belief that doing good by helping others has a positive effect on his own wellbeing. Similarly, Sara explains how she is driven by a 'a very strong sense of outrage and injustice' to which the solution is to do something 'practical' and 'good'. Through the work of her

organisation preaching counter-extremism in schools, she is able to witness attitudinal change in children that she describes as a 'satisfaction'.

As well as helping communities by proactively 'doing good', participants are clear that preventative work is the most critical facet of 'helping' and forms a key element of this type of motivation. Police practitioners make a clear distinction between normal policing and policing through Prevent, the latter being the only aspect of policing where officers are able to act before a crime has happened. Comparing this to regular policing where contact is made after adversity, the opportunity they are afforded by Prevent to engage in a pre-criminal space is cited as a motivational element to work in the department. Community practitioner Fatima trained as a social worker and shares a similar motivation behind her career change, being inspired to move into preventative work to 'nip in the bud' issues faced by young people after spending so many years dealing with the aftermath.

Some participants hold specific motivations in relation to helping through prevention; Umair feels a responsibility to stop the spread of conspiracy theories in his community and Adam was initially motivated by witnessing converts to Islam become seduced by radicalisers before they had time to acculturate and 'mellow out'. Hamza's motivation to help communities also weaves Islamic knowledge with preventative efforts as he describes feeling impelled to address the regulatory criteria of religiously-inspired lectures that may contribute to the radicalisation of British Muslims.

> The internet has become a place of free rein, people can say what they want and it can go unchecked. It's interesting that if you travel abroad to Dubai or some Muslim country, everyone knows what they're gonna say in the *khutbahs* [sermons]. A lot of the time the *khutbahs* are faxed out [state method of pre-screening content]. Here, there's no regulation. In Pakistan or Qatar, you can't just be like oh we're gonna have a *dars* [lesson], we'll just get this space and we'll have *duroos* [plural of *dars*] every Friday. No, that'll get raided. Whereas here, that's the thing, you have this free, unchecked space where people can put on conferences or do talks where you don't know who the speaker is or where they've come from.

Comparing stricter regulations of other countries with the unregulated environment he perceives to have flourished in Britain, Hamza claims that young people radicalised around the time of ISIS's campaign were fed a skewed ideology and had minimal religious insight. Citing the treatise of *birr al-walidayn*, a collection of teachings about being kind and dutiful to parents, as evidence, he suggests that a basic understanding of this key principle would have prevented individuals abandoning their families for Syria. These ideas have shaped Hamza's perception of the type of radicalisation able to unfold in Britain today, provoking his work teaching young people how to resist harmful ideologies and narratives. Again, his motivations to help are anchored within an Islamic framework, substantiating the argument that, for many practitioners, divorcing their faith from their work on CT/CE is complex (following chapter). Though Hamza relies on what he believes to be legitimate religious teachings in the battle against radicalisation, his explanation here demonstrates that his motivation is to protect young people, distinct from being driven by religion itself, and he draws upon his repertoire of faith-based knowledge to help young people, and policymakers, understand the trappings of

extremism. Similarly, in the examples below, practitioners apply a religious framework to prevent young people from radicalisation but make clear that though they employ religious counter-arguments, they themselves are not compelled by religion. The relationship between redemption and extremism tells a more nuanced tale about the condition of 'vulnerable' young people in this area and the practitioners who attempt to help.

Reframing redemption

Tahir's work empowering young people to become stakeholders in Britain as a method of preventing radicalisation was introduced in the previous section. He draws further upon his experience as a military historian to actively prevent young people from what he perceives as the act of seeking redemption by subscribing to extremist ideologies. Tahir says the young people he encounters are burdened with guilt from minor sins they have committed in their teenage years and are drawn towards radicalisers' glorification of jihad as a way of absolving themselves of the sins and shame they carry. Although his preventative work is bound with understandings of the religion, Tahir himself is not motivated by any religious obligation, rather he describes simply wanting to help young people, stop them joining extremist organisations and encourage them to rid themselves of the guilt they bear. He says the best form of counter-terrorism work is to show young people war paraphernalia and describe injuries likely to occur in combat, claiming to have stopped a 'number of guys going abroad' through this approach. Tahir, who has collected a museum of WWI and II apparatus and modern warfare weapons, explains how he disseminates it to help communities in Birmingham.

> I recreate a battlefield in Syria or Libya and I say these are the sorts of things you would be up against, this is a landmine, this is a 40mm grenade shell, and what I'm doing in all of that is I am showing them that if you walk on any of these contraptions, if a bomb drops near you, these are the injuries you're looking at. Is it worth you going over to another country you don't know anything about, talking to somebody on the internet that you've never met and you can't trust? You can't even trust your own cousin with your car keys, what makes you give over your life to someone on the internet you've never met, why would you do that? So you are going over because you think that your guilt can't be forgiven but it can. What have you done that's so bad? Have you killed someone? Have you raped someone? I mean I could understand if that was the case but what have you done? So you've had a few relationships, you've drunk some beer and you've smoked some skunk. I'm sure God can forgive you but forgiveness has to start with you and you have to forgive yourself.

Tahir's objective is to relieve young people of the burden of guilt that stems from minor sins, and from trying to absolve themselves of this guilt by dying in the name of a so-called jihad. To do this, he uses his professional experience to convey the horrors of war in a palpable way; his contribution to serving local communities.

Malik is also motivated by witnessing the radicalisation of young Muslims in their quest for redemption. His analysis of the success of contemporary extremist narratives forms the basis from which his, and Tahir's, motivations emerge. He proposes that many Muslims, at transformational stages of life, experience a religious epiphany in which they return to the *deen* [religion] and seek answers online, and that this is where radicalisers prey on the vulnerable.

> Naturally then, as a Muslim, the first thing you do is start repenting and you get your *musalla* [prayer mat] out and you start praying. And that's when you're in need of God. When we're happy, we tend not to. The problem is absolutely there [radicalisation], but it's not there in your face, it's there hanging around just in the air, waiting for that moment, for that vulnerable person to say, yeah, that's where I'm going. So because of that vulnerability waiting around in the air, waiting for you, to grab you and take you in, it's a bit like *shaytan* [Satan] whispering to you saying yes, come to me, come to me. You have the choice to go. You can say yes or no, but there could be a point in your life where you say you know what, I'm going there because I've sinned all my life or I've done something bad so I'm going, that's the only way I can get a cure or forgiveness or redemption. And that's why I think it's a topic that does need discussing and there's work that needs to be done.

Like Tahir, Malik too is motivated to guide the young people he says fall victim to radicalisation in their journey towards a path of righteousness as they attempt to atone for their sins. He mentions the notion of *waswas*, the whisperings of the devil tempting the believer into sin; here referring to that sin as radicalisation, subscribing to an extremist ideology incompatible with Islam. The false belief that Tahir and Malik both reference, when young Muslims are 'preyed upon' and manipulated into believing that joining an extremist organisation or committing an act of terror will absolve them of previous sins and bestow upon them an honourable standing, is the dangerous cognitive opening that motivates these practitioners to engage with CT/CE and counter it by providing young Muslims with a more forgiving framework.

In summary, engaging with Prevent or the CES for the purpose of helping communities is a common motivating factor. In his role as caretaker of local young people, Kashif balances these incentives to engage with CT/CE against mitigating factors for his involvement.

> Whatever I do with young people, the only reason I would do it is if I know there's a benefit for them, whether it's through learning or whatever, unless there's something for them, I'm not gonna do it to tick boxes, I'll be honest with you, I don't work like that. The thing is we're supposed to be there to advocate on behalf of young people, we're not supposed to put them in positions where they're vulnerable, where they get labelled – we're there to break down them labels.

He touches upon not only what he *will* pursue to help his young people, but also what he *will not* accept, explored in further detail in a discussion on the boundaries practitioners draw in the following chapter. It is clear that some individuals who engage with CT/CE claim to be doing so for the collective good of their communities, whether that be to empower those they feel are disempowered, to help reshape debates around sin and redemption, or to improve experiences of young people citywide. These nuanced stimuli contribute to the diverse array of motivations that reflect the dynamism and fluidity of local policy and the ambiguity that characterises the space at a central level, revealing more about the experiences of practitioners and contributing to the fulfilment of RQ1. Motivations that speak to personal and collective reasoning have been explored thus far. The following section speaks to motivations that are related to policy itself.

Policy-related

Some practitioners root their motivations for engagement in policy itself; either to enhance delivery of Prevent or the CES, particularly to improve perceptions of the strategies on the ground, or to 'have a steer' by attempting to be active and influential in CT/CE policies that participants acknowledge will be implemented whether they engage or not, a finding substantiated by broader research on the engagement of practitioners with Prevent (Ahmad, 2021).

Improving perceptions of Prevent and the CES

A large number of police practitioners state a clear motivation to work on Prevent in order to improve perceptions of the strategy within communities, particularly in order to address the toxic legacy prevalent amongst Birmingham's Muslims, and Muslim police practitioners in particular feel well-placed to 'plug the gap' between authorities and communities (Ahmed). Amar entered the space to tackle opinions he believed to be inaccurate on both sides of the spectrum and engages to provide counternarratives, not just to communities who hold the strategy in poor regard, but to call out bad practice within the police when he sees it, 'not to inflate my ego but I feel I have achieved that, people are more conscious about what they say now because they know they'll get some comms from me coming through and I've done that on a number of occasions'. Amar has used his position in WMCTU to confront actions, information and processes he deems unhelpful or offensive and has resultantly been able to help shape some of the terminology used by the department. Without his participation, some of these matters would have remained unchallenged, an accomplishment that continues to motivate him.

Some community practitioners also cite reparative motivations for their engagement, particularly with regard to bringing together typically pro and anti-Prevent voices, 'initially, I had really big visions – we can bring together like Cage, Mend, and the council and I thought, we can fix this!' (Imaan). Sara, too, cites the dichotomous dialogue that plagues CT/CE as a motivation for her engagement, 'all these groups spend their whole time obsessing about the other which is why I don't like the whole polarisation thing and think it's a bit gross. I suppose that's what motivates me.'

Haris, an independent practitioner, is more critical of communities, castigating them for failing to understand a strategy which he deems integral to a cohesive society. His reproval is targeted particularly towards the British Pakistani community, and it is in this space that he aims to dispel myths about Prevent and educate the public:

> There's this apathy that's pervading the British Pakistani community and has done for quite a long time. A lot of our people, and I'm referring to British Pakistanis here, they've got their blinkers on and they're not really bothered about what's going on around them […] I see how simple-minded people are. The less educated people are, the younger people are, the more susceptible they're going to be. And illiteracy, it's rife in our community. It's dangerous for there not to be something like this, it's dangerous.

Haris possesses a similar motivation to other practitioners mentioned in this section in that he is striving to help communities and improve the perception of policy by delivering CT/CE locally, however, he holds communities accountable for their own alleged apathy and unwillingness to engage. Though clearly responsibilised (Ragazzi, 2016), he appears to reify the good Muslim/bad Muslim paradigm and demonstrates the internal policing of suspect bodies argued in Chapter 2 (Mamdani, 2004; Cherney and Murphy, 2016; Qurashi, 2018; Abbas, 2019a; Abbas, 2019b). This atypical motivation, inconsistent with the findings presented thus far, further substantiates the heterogeneity of a local policy space which is engaged with and exploited by a variety of practitioners from a plethora of backgrounds for myriad reasons.

Practitioners in this section describe being partially or wholly motivated to implement CT/CE in order to improve perceptions of policy and address misconceptions in community, policy and so-called anti-Prevent spaces. The following section considers more nuanced policy-related motivations to engage.

Having a steer

When discussing grounds for engagement, many practitioners posed the question, 'if I don't do it, who else will?' and it is this moral dilemma that guides the common thread in the final section on practitioners' motivations. The objective to 'have a steer' is distinct from the previous section on 'improving perceptions' as the latter helped make sense of more operational actions, often involving measurable changes and outcomes, and targeted the actual design and delivery of projects. In contrast, 'having a steer' is about engaging in a less quantifiable way since it describes how and why practitioners answer the moral question posed at the beginning of this section and appertains to debates on Muslim-state engagement covered in Chapter 2. The theme is separated into two further sections, although these overlap in places. The first conveys the motivations of practitioners who embrace the opportunity to engage with government in order to scrutinise and improve policy, subverting poor practice. The second is a form of representational engagement in which individuals participate because of a perceived lack of 'inside' voices within the system, occupying the space out of a sense of duty to their communities.

Critical engagement

'This is how you change stuff, by engaging with people and by pointing out issues, by criticising stuff.' – Sofia

Participants practising a form of critical engagement attempt to bring about change by cooperating with the mechanisms of policy in order to challenge its structures and implementation. Their participation may be a response to the observation of inefficacious delivery, 'either I do it, or I just keep criticising what is already out there, and I saw it first-hand, honestly it was a shocker' (Umair); or a proactive attempt to appraise and reform policy, 'my story really is about engaging with it without endorsing it' (Raheem). Sara's involvement was anchored in both; feeling outraged by 'people in charge not thinking strategically or ethically' and after

initially resisting in order to keep her 'hands clean', she grew tired of 'sitting in cafes whinging about what the heck was going on and who was being funded' and attempted to navigate the polarised local scene.

Sulaiman's motivation to participate is deeply embedded in the consequences of policy on local communities, of considerable significance in a city that has been the subject of so many CT/CE events.

> I thought okay, you have to get engaged with this because otherwise this issue, which is so important and affects Muslim communities, it constructs Muslim communities, we need to be in there and just deflect some of the attitudes […] I don't think it's healthy to just be on the outside and criticise because that gets quite boring and it's important to know how it works and some of the logics behind it. I just thought, you can't leave it alone because it would gather momentum in the wrong hands.

He acknowledges that his involvement may be considered 'radical' by pockets of communities but remains motivated to be 'around the table in the delivery of it'. Other practitioners echo these sentiments, articulating the exigency to be 'challenging some of the deficiencies and inequalities that exist within the system' (Zayd), with much mention of being on the 'inside' in order to bring about social change,

> these debates are happening anyway, we can't stop them. Would you rather us sit in the room contributing and maybe correcting some of the views or do you just want to boycott and stand outside and sulk? What difference is that gonna make? (Sofia)

In contrast to other stimuli elucidated in the chapter, these underpinnings were couched within stories of how practitioners felt exhausted (and somewhat defensive) as a result of communities interrogating their engagement with CT/CE policy. In discussing motivations, participants began by relaying some of the justifications and philosophies that they draw upon in response to questions from communities, such as embracing the opportunity to question policymakers, shape delivery and 'take control' locally. These narratives often point to practical outcomes through which practitioners are able to observe some effects of their involvement, and this serves as further motivation for them to continue dialogue. Sofia, for example, explains that language used by non-Muslims in the discourse around Prevent and the CES has improved and contemplates whether this would be the case if Muslim voices had not contributed. Engagement for these practitioners has provided an avenue to critique and influence elements of policy, either in response to substandard practice or as a proactive attempt to protect their communities. The final section explores a policy-related motivation which approaches engagement from a slightly more complex perspective.

Representational engagement

'If you're not delivering it, someone else is going to deliver it and not the way you want for the community you're living in.' – Malik

Motivations captured in this section are framed by practitioners as a response to the dilemma posited earlier, 'if I don't do it, who else will?' and take the form of a representational engagement in which individuals work with Prevent or the CES to represent the voices of their communities at a local and/or central level. Participants are propelled by the presumption that if they fail to accept the opportunity to participate, individuals with limited cultural competency or vested interest in the outcomes of the work will execute it anyway, leaving CT/CE to be administered without any 'inside' influence. This cohort of practitioners engage

almost because they feel obliged to, rather than necessarily being motivated by their own values or objectives. They suggest that if there were more critical Muslim voices within Prevent or the CES, they would not feel as much pressure to participate; rather they are filling roles and occupying space within the system in order to represent the interests of the targets of CT/CE policy; their communities.

Examples from this perspective include Tahir who was embarrassed to admit he had contributed to a WRAP training video but capitulated after being told by a civil servant that if he did not participate, he would be replaced by a 'more right-wing' individual who would be unlikely to approach the task from the same critical angle. Similarly, Sulaiman, in acknowledging his disdain for the strategy he contributes to implementing, is galvanised by the potential of an adversarial substitute, 'it's creating more problems than it is doing good, still, but they will always be able to find somebody to do the work. They'll find white people to do it if our people don't do it, and I think the outcomes will be much worse'. Outsiders are perceived to condescend and target local communities through approaches that lack nuance,

> if we don't do it, who else are they gonna get to do it? I'd rather we have some kind of control than somebody else who ain't got a clue who comes in and tries to preach […] you understand where I'm coming from? If we don't, they're still gonna do it but without any kind of qualms about what you've gotta say and not taking on any of your valid points so I'd rather be a bit of a part of that process. (Kashif)

In further clarifying his incentive to engage with a strategy he remains unconvinced by, Kashif touches upon the sacrifice he makes in order to represent the needs of his young people and the toll this takes on him as an individual.

> If you're not involved in it, they get people who don't give a shit, making assumptions about our communities or working on our communities in a way that they think is fit. As much as it's hard for me to even wanna do this agenda, I'd rather be involved in it so that we've got some kind of influence in how it's put out there […] but I still have my moments where I think, am I doing the right thing?

Participation, for some, is complex, multifaceted, and preceded by a dilemma, themes that are explored in a discussion on the grey area in the following chapter. Individuals like Kashif describe an engagement with policy that is almost brought about under duress, as a last resort that the practitioner may be embarrassed to admit to or continues to struggle with. This is in contrast with conclusions from the motivations literature (Lehane, 2017; Shanaah, 2021; Schlegel, 2022) and positions explicated throughout the rest of the chapter. While some struggle with occupying the middle space, as will be illustrated, participants like Imran manage to deflect criticism and embrace the unique position he claims to operate from, acting as a broker between communities and the state in an arrangement that he believes to benefit all.

> People said to me 'I heard you're reaching out to Prevent, no, no, don't do that, you're selling out your religion, man, don't do that. You're gonna be a snitch and we ain't gonna come to your project, don't be a sell-out over this money business, don't do it', this is what they say. And I'll be like, look, man, we need to do something because my opinion of Prevent is if we don't engage in it, and we've been given the kind of power to be involved and help our communities, that will get taken away from

> us and it'll be done **to** us, right? It'll get done **to** us rather than like at the moment we do it ourselves and we can help and support some of the ones that are vulnerable.

For Imran, being able to participate in the local implementation of Prevent symbolises a form of power he feels has been entrusted to him, 'we're in power, we can help people'. He explains that the authorities approach his organisation if they 'suspect somebody [of being radicalised] then they can talk to us as community people and we can help them, but if that's gone, they're going to kick the door down, take the computers and there'll be a lot of *behsti* [dishonour].' In applying this power, Imran conceives of his ability to step in and gently assist families as an honourable means of addressing radicalisation, upholding a perceived responsibility to Birmingham's Muslim communities that characterises this form of representational engagement with CT/CE policy locally.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to explore motivations for engagement (RQ1), a crucial first step in understanding the experiences of practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham. Discussion has presented a diverse and nuanced spectrum of motivations, underpinned by various moral, pragmatic and idiosyncratic principles and philosophies that participants have articulated as their instigations or drivers for local involvement with CT/CE. In line with the existing body of literature, the data suggests that a perceived moral obligation is among the greatest motivational factors (Lehane, 2017; Shanaah, 2021; Schlegel, 2022) and supports the notion that the 'passion of the faith discourse provides a sharp contrast to the instrumentalism of the policy narrative' (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008: 841). In other words, practitioners draw upon their faith as a catalyst for engagement with contentious strategies they often fundamentally disapprove of, and to further guide their participation in the field. A good example is that in his account of engaging with a strategy Rashid deems 'useless' on the basis of a deeply rooted adherence to the interpretation of his faith, he pauses mid-sentence to call upon his Lord and ask for the strength to continue to present a positive view of Islam through his involvement with Prevent, 'may Allah help me always'. This, and other instances mentioned, demonstrate how participants who identify religion as a motivator frequently refer to passages of the Qur'an and Islamic teachings in their reasoning (Shanaah, 2021), connecting their work on CT/CE to scripture and strengthening claims that, for some practitioners, Islam requires social action.

A key observation, again noted in the wider literature (Schlegel, 2022), pertains to practitioners citing multiple motivations, at times non-linear and evolving throughout the course of their engagement. This points to how motivation is multidimensional and subject to fluctuation, in parallel with, and I would argue attributable to, the dynamic local policy space. The emerging body of literature on motivations highlights a considerable overlap between the few studies carried out, suggesting that 'we are on the path to understanding general motivational drivers for those working in the P/CVE sector' (Schlegel, 2022: 957). This study presents new and

unique perspectives that have been organised into categories relating to personal, collective, and policy-related bases.

In contrast to the position that CT/CE is performed through a lens of securitisation, scholars propose that practitioners approach the field positively, upholding noble intentions (Schlegel, 2022), and that participation grants individuals the prospect of authentic representation of their communities (Pearson, 2020). While this is undoubtedly the case for some practitioners who feel well-positioned to help or remain optimistic about the potential for change, I have argued that it is clear that others experience feelings of embarrassment, regret or shame, and can feel pressurised or coerced into participating rather than enthusiastically embracing the opportunity. Equally, while engagement may be positive, it does not equate with 'authentic' representation as some practitioners inevitably engage opportunistically. I found no examples of engagement for entirely financial purposes (although instrumentalism does factor and will be considered in Chapter 7), but it may be expected that participants would not self-report such a basis. Participants did, however, make reference to peers in the space who they perceived as 'slaves to the cause because they rely on funding' or who engage 'because it pays for their mortgage', a theme explored in the following chapter.

This study also challenges arguments identified in Chapter 2 suggesting that the 'trusted' Muslim increases their social status through engagement with CT/CE (Ragazzi, 2016). Though apparent for some practitioners, the data captures the experiences of individuals who prefer to keep their involvement discreet in apprehension of community condemnation and reprisal, and because they profess to be pursuing engagement solely in the conviction that they are able to help young people, Muslim communities, or their existing service users. I have additionally problematised the contention that the CT/CE field is 'built bottom-up by individuals and their personal motivations' (Schlegel, 2022: 958), a position which will be considered throughout the thesis but I have argued here is an overstatement of practitioners' influence.

The data reveals a distinct middle space in which many practitioners, far from being wholly for or against Prevent/Counter-Extremism, adopt an innovative stance from which to engage. As noted, 'reasons are not the same as motivations and so getting at the underlying motives behind some of the answers can be challenging' (Shanaah, 2021: 764). Despite this, the in-depth accounts provided by participants are rich and multi-layered and 'in the absence of a theory that deals specifically with motivations for engagement in counter-extremism' (Shanaah, 2021: 756), I have argued that the CT/CE space locally is a site of heterogeneity and variability.

In addition, I have further argued how different types of practitioners, be they employed by the police or local authority, expected to engage with policy via their employment through the youth service or association with a funded community organisation, or individuals galvanised to seek out involvement independently, might hold similar or disparate motivations. What is an issue for one is often more or less an issue for others. For instance, BCC's Prevent Coordinator was mobilised by his cousin's radicalisation comparable to community

practitioners and individuals operating from a policing perspective appear equally as influenced by religion as those who establish proactive CICs, also capturing how practitioners from non-Muslim backgrounds are similarly driven by their religious principles to protect faith and prevent radicalisation. Ambitions to utilise one's cultural competency, community credibility, passion for countering extremism, aspiration to influence policy or represent a collective group appear to be spread across rank, institution, ethnic and religious background, gender and experience. Inevitably, institutional context will affect norms and processes, and individuals employed directly by BCC as a PEO, for example, will have access to more funds and potentially more autonomy to pursue their own personal motivations with Prevent budgets, as explicated by Nasreen in her mission to produce a tangible impact. This will be considered further in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, overall, the motivations articulated transcend the categories of practitioner; the most significant difference points to practitioners who were suddenly expected to undertake Prevent work as part of their job (i.e. youth workers) and therefore might not have initially held any motivations to engage, and whose experiences of navigating, and often later embracing, this involvement will be further considered.

This chapter has also argued that a divergent set of motivations inspire practitioners in Birmingham to engage with Prevent and the CES. While the wider literature suggests that Muslims often respond to their positioning as suspect communities, and the misrecognition they experience as a result of these strategies, by resisting policy (Pilkington and Acik, 2020), data presented here depicts how some individuals are mobilised to engage with the very structures and discourses that stigmatise them. The ambiguity of central policy, and the dynamism this inspires in the local scene, produces the conditions for a further level of variability and diversity in the construction of practitioners' motivations, the heterogeneity of which can only further contribute to the complexity of CT/CE policy overall.

The next chapter will continue the focus on practitioners' interpretations of policy, considering how these conceptualisations translate into guiding principles for local practice.

Chapter 6 – Perceptions and practice: Interpretations of local policy

This chapter expands the understanding of CT/CE practitioners' experiences in Birmingham and seeks to answer RQ2, investigating how participants interpret the implementation of policy locally and how these perceptions guide their practices in the field. The chapter is split into two sections. The first considers how practitioners make sense of policy on a macro level, varying from positive impressions and innovative evaluations to perceptions of policy operating as a nefarious and unjustified 'industry'. The second connects these positions to the personal approaches and practices adopted by participants in their engagement, considering questions such as: What frames participation and how does religion factor into this? How do practitioners position themselves in relation to policy and community? What boundaries do they draw? And how do they justify their decisions to themselves and their networks?

The chapter contributes to literature on street-level bureaucracy and the application of agency to consider new and innovative ways that critical community practitioners implement policy on the ground, as well as speaking to broader debates in scholarship on CT/CE policy that frame counter-terrorism as an industry appropriated by myriad actors. Literature on religion is also drawn upon here to help make sense of findings in which religious teachings feature heavily across a number of themes. The chapter will argue that the fluidity and nuance of the local policy space (made possible by the ambiguity of central policy) enables practitioners to steer and conduct engagement via their own moral, ethical and spiritual convictions. Discussion will also problematise positions on the concept of 'safe spaces' to propose that rather than being closed down by policy or cultivated by grassroots practitioners, participants exploit the local scene to open up new spaces in which they are able to explore religion with their service users, fulfil their own personal objectives, pursue professional development, publicise the profile of their organisations or disrupt the polarisation of CT/CE in Birmingham. Weaving together literature on governance, policy and religion aids a multifaceted understanding of the data presented.

Perceptions of policy

This first section examines the interpretation of policy and is organised into accounts of Prevent as a positive force, Prevent as an industry, and Prevent as a means for spreading Islam. The CES is not explicitly named in these headings, owing to the more established status and acknowledged history of Prevent, though practitioners associated with the CES contribute to the data in the ensuing sections.

Prevent as a positive

As established in the previous chapter, CT/CE policy is interpreted and engaged with in a multitude of methods across a spectrum of reasons. This section captures the sentiments of participants who interpret Prevent (and

to a lesser extent, the CES) as a positive force, considering some of the ways in which they draw benefit from policy for themselves, their service users, or their wider communities.

Though many practitioners (particularly participants not directly employed by BCC or WMCTU) espoused critical or conflicted views on policy, some passionately advocate for Prevent/Counter-Extremism and welcome the opportunity to work in the space, interpreting Prevent as a constructive mechanism of support so long as it is not entrusted to 'the hands of people who want to make money' (Jamil). Touched upon in the previous chapter and explored in the following section, engagement for financial benefit is a contentious element of the local CT/CE space. Police practitioner Kamran also objectively regards Prevent as a source of merit and virtue, attributing its pejorative reputation to the engagement of (what he judges to be) unsuitable practitioners, 'I'm quite passionate about it, I'll be honest with you, I'm so pro-Prevent, I think it's one of the biggest, best projects that's ever been delivered. Unfortunately, the problem is the people that are delivering on it are sometimes not the right people, but it's the best thing'.

Like Kamran who is clear in his support for the strategy itself, Imran – who has been a recipient of a significant portion of the local authority Prevent budget for many years – is also grateful for what he perceives to be a compassionate and understanding approach to countering terrorism.

> It's something that we're very fortunate to be able to have in this country. It's basically an area where we can work with police, CTU, government and address this issue together. Some other countries don't do that, they just have a CTU department and any sort of element of extremism they sniff out, they go in heavy-handed.

Imran conceives of Prevent as a softer approach, perhaps owing to its longstanding and convoluted history with cohesion, in comparison to policies adopted elsewhere which, in his opinion, are more punitive and conducive to community damage.

Malik carries out Prevent-funded diversionary sports activities and is often questioned by community members and colleagues about partnering with a strategy they deem harmful. He compares the sessions he is able to run with Prevent money with what he would be able to offer without to emphasise his interpretation of policy as a useful resource capable of providing learning opportunities and experiences for young people in his community. In responding to anxieties, he says:

> take the word Prevent out of it, what we're doing, is it wrong or right? [They would say] you know what, what you're doing is actually brilliant because not many people offer this, what they offer is just literally the football and then say, okay, see you next week and bring the £2 subs money with you and make sure you get your shin pads and your shin guards and this and that. Whereas we're saying, here's the football, you don't have to pay. Here's some pizza and chips and whatever, you don't have to pay. Here's a workshop which is quite entertaining and quite fun and quite engaging. Here's an opportunity to get a qualification to become a referee. Here's an opportunity to get a qualification to become a coach, enhancing your chances of gaining employment. Here's an opportunity to go and visit an England game, or visit stadiums, ice skating, hockey, whatever it may be. Is that a bad thing? Take Prevent out of it, is that a bad thing?

Far from problematising Prevent, Malik appropriates it as a useful tool to help individuals develop in his community, emulating and enacting principles of youth and community work made possible by his engagement with a counter-terrorism policy. Youth worker Kashif reflects on a similar experience during the first deployment of Prevent in Birmingham in which he utilised his centre's Prevent allocation to design and undertake a project that enabled him to intimately learn about his young people in previously impenetrable ways. Regardless of his many criticisms of the strategy, he appreciated the degree to which it allowed him to connect with his service users.

Others credited policy with facilitating personal development such as the acquisition of business skills, work experience, and networking opportunities, going so far as to suggest that Prevent helped shaped them into people they had aspired to become. Some explanations for understanding policy as a benevolent endeavour are rooted in the work itself, some relate to the material and financial benefits it can offer, and others point to personal development, the latter being confirmed by broader literature that captures instances of youth workers interpreting Prevent in terms of self-development opportunities (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010). Not all perceptions of Prevent are as positive, however, and the next section provides insight into the perception of Prevent as an 'industry'.

Prevent as an industry

'I always thought Prevent was a bad idea, now I think it's a good way to make money.' – Haris

As discussed in Chapter 2, CT/CE policy has gained recognition as a commercial enterprise that benefits those involved and serves to justify its own purpose (Mueller, 2006; Miller and Mills, 2009; Stampnitzky, 2013; Faure Walker, 2022). This is a multifaceted perspective that participants come to make sense of from a number of angles, expanded on in the following sub-categories.

The role of 'experts' and communities in the inflation of extremism

Prior to Brexit, Rashid was a member of a well-known EU-funded CT network and through this experience developed an understanding of Prevent as part of an international multi-million-pound industry that is cultivated and overstated to financially benefit those who work in the field.

> I have been at European conferences where I've been sitting on the table with a few researchers and academics who have said 'we could do with another attack, we'd get more money for research'. I'll be honest with you, I've sat there, they're laughing and remember, always a true word said in jest […] so it became an industry and when it became an industry, it became in an individual's interest to keep the threat level high.

Reflecting the wider literature, Rashid claims that threat levels (that indicate the likelihood of domestic terror attacks), are exaggerated by policymakers and that practitioners feed into this narrative by manipulating situations to create unwarranted referrals, simultaneously justifying the exigency for their roles.

> Why did they start referring kids for growing beards or asking for prayer rooms? *Alhamdulillah* [praise be to God], he's adhering to his faith! But no, they label him an extremist, Channel referral, get the police in, blah blah. Okay they've tidied it up, they've kind of tightened up some of the loose ends but that mindset still exists because I need all these referrals to keep my job. (Rashid)

Kashif also suspects the problem of radicalisation locally is misrepresented to uphold the broader industry, 'it's not been a huge kind of thing here… they want it to be because if it does exist to that level, they keep themselves in jobs.' The perception of the industry is an agreed-upon notion but while some practitioners apportion its construction to policymakers, others look closer to home. Police practitioner Amar, who is not from a Muslim background himself, implicates austerity measures in his assessment of the situation, concluding that the manufacturing of constant radicalisation discourse for financial gain, whether essential for the continuation of community development or not, has irretrievably damaged Muslim communities.

> I would go as far as to say the community victimises themselves. Because in order to gain funding, you need to show there's a problem. So when groups are saying, 'we're doing this in the community', you think, well is the problem actually that big that you need that much money to be pumping into it? So this level of radicalisation, it's been heightened by members of the community themselves who have been gaining from it, because if there's an absence of problem then there is no funding, if you say there's a problem, there's funding.

Kashif has witnessed this first-hand through the implementation of Prevent at his centre, calling into question the religiosity of practitioners he perceives as contributing to the formation of the 'industry' locally.

> A lot of them people have done our communities a disservice, I'm being honest. And as practising Muslims, they've sold out big time, to the point where they've painted a picture of the community that doesn't exist, not that I recognise. 'Cause it fits in with their agenda and getting more funding, you can make a problem look worse than what it is.

Discussing the actions of Birmingham-based Prevent-funded CSOs, Rashid advances the argument of a locally-constructed industry in his narration of a community organisation fraudulently parading individuals as potential extremists to evaluators in order to justify objectives and secure further resources.

> to maintain their Prevent funding, in order to tick all the right boxes on their quarterly returns, [they] would over-exaggerate the threats of the young people that they're engaging with. And at most times would blatantly lie. I know of projects, when the individuals would come in to assess the project, they would intentionally bring in their own sons and their nephews and things like this, selected people to sit there […] and in front of the individuals doing the evaluation say 'yeah, you know what I mean, I used to look up stuff around ISIS all the time. I used to think about going to Syria, but since I joined this project and once or twice a week, we get together and play football, all of a sudden now I don't want to go Syria.' And they were getting away with this.

The story may sound far-fetched but is developed as part of a broader theme on the use of agency with funding in the follow chapter. The notion of the industry is predicated on the exacerbation of 'Muslim problems' and the impression of available funding to tackle them, 'Hindu friends and Jewish friends said to me, do we need to blow ourselves up to get the money that our young kids need to do these activities?' (Raheem). Contrary to cohesion initiatives, this can nurture a distance between Muslim communities and the

rest of society and has the potential to foster disharmony (touched upon in Chapter 2), creating a wider chasm for grievances that could lead to radicalisation.

Raheem accuses individuals who engage with Prevent or the CES of fuelling an industry they must strive to upkeep in order to justify their own existence. BCC's Prevent Coordinator agrees that CT/CE has grown into an industry, but speaks from an antithetical perspective to critical community practitioners to suggest that the projects funded by his department are in fact constantly struggling to obtain resources and make a living from their work whereas anti-Prevent organisations, in his opinion, 'like Mend and Cage have probably had more currency and more funds raised as a result of their opposition to Prevent, and have therefore made more money out of Prevent than people working on Prevent have!' He posits that advocacy groups capitalise from peddling anti-Prevent narratives in communities and, in driving claims about the anti-Prevent 'industry' into a different space, describes academics working on Prevent in binary categories of for and against, arguing that critics of the strategy become successful academics through a focus on Prevent which he believes ignites controversy that is attractive to funders and universities.

The Prevent Coordinator has years of in-depth knowledge and experience of Prevent (and Counter-Extremism) in Birmingham and while he puts forth completely opposing points to those shared by participants, he does reach the same conclusion that CT/CE operates as an industry in which (both practitioners and) 'anti-Prevent people can ride a wave' to economic success. Unpacking processes of commissioning in the Birmingham space, the next section offers a brief insight into how projects are selected – in what is referred to by Sara as a 'marketplace of bidding' – and how this contributes to the local perception of Prevent as an industry.

Commercialisation of local practitioners

Faysal has been part of multiple Prevent-funded CSOs, designing and delivering a plethora of CT projects nationwide over the last ten years and, having recently withdrawn from funding arrangements with local authorities, now feels comfortable expressing his discontent at what he perceives to be 'the commercialisation of CSOs'.

> Have you been to what they're calling the beauty pageants? My God. So now, the way that providers get commissioned is that the local area will basically create a providers' event, and it is literally like a beauty pageant. It's regional, they will get the coordinators from every single area and they'll get all the providers [CSOs, organisations, practitioners]. So there's a question about where are they getting the providers from? Obviously they're going to hit the current list, they're going to hit their favourites. For their favourites it's going to be a given, they just need to turn up anyway, just to tick the box. Where's the space for the new providers? It was an absolute joke because I was in the room. And the other providers who are basically your commercial competitors are in the room as well, along with the coordinators. You're on a stage and you're literally doing a show. You go 'ta-da, hey! We were set up in 2012 and we've got a little Muslim woman in a niqab recording a counter-narrative for us!' Oh, I felt so uncomfortable and I really took issue with the Home Office.

He denounces the 'distasteful' practice of encouraging organisations to face each other in contest as 'utter nonsense, can you imagine the discomfort of CSOs competing with each other for contracts? If that got out

into the public domain, there would be no credibility at all'. Faysal is not alone in his critique of the process of commissioning projects, but he did provide the most detailed account of a system he says favours longstanding CSOs, ensuring their contracts are renewed without having to justify recent or proposed work. This touches upon concerns around unprofessional or fraudulent practice, to be considered further in Chapter 8.

Kashif, too, condemns funders for encouraging inexperienced and ill-equipped projects that appear superficially appropriate to bid, resulting in the types of meaningless work mentioned by practitioners throughout the thesis and in-depth in Chapter 8.

> It was the hot potato a couple of years ago, you know, Prevent this, Prevent that, there's money everywhere, money for the Muslim community, that's how it was seen. And then if they ain't getting their targets, it's because they're giving money to the wrong organisations. Everybody can say I'm a self-appointed community organisation that does this and this and I'm only working with my mum, my aunty, my sister and my daughter or something. That's how a lot of these organisations have worked, people have been very clever. I blame funders, funders have set up organisations against each other.

Echoing criticisms around the pitting of practitioners and organisations against one another, Kashif explains how the opportunity to secure funding and exposure through CT/CE has contributed to the development of Prevent as an industry in Birmingham. Participants speak about other practitioners as 'businessmen' and 'poster boys' for the local authority, funded in exchange for publicity in spite of minimally viable work. Organisations are perceived to 'jump after money that is ripe for the taking' (Tahir), suggesting that despite the data presented in the previous chapter, financial benefit is indeed a primary motivation. This can, however, ultimately lead to substandard work, 'when there's a profit involved, the quality of the service always suffers. You've got organisations who will get lots of funding and the delivery is not very good because they want to keep most of that money so they'll bring in crap facilitators because it's a business isn't it?' (Kashif). Technically, any profit made by CICs should be reinvested into the organisation or spent for the benefit of the community, though 'massive profiteering' is perceived to be an outcome of the local scene. It is of significance to note that projects and practitioners deemed complicit in this practice are funded largely by the local authority, rather than WMCTU, likely owing to the former's larger budget and lack of internal department of professional standards (see Chapter 8). In the formation of a CT/CE industry in Birmingham, Prevent is more heavily implicated than the CES; again the latter is newer and smaller in scale than Prevent, but evidence of meaningless work and exploitative practices in its portfolio will be touched upon in later chapters.

Discussion has considered nefarious realisations of the CT/CE industry Birmingham but also captured are those who simply interpret Prevent/Counter-Extremism as a neutral source of funding, either to continue work they are already implementing or to advance their organisation or personal development, drawing upon

CT/CE resources in pursuit of these objectives as opposed to the prevention of radicalisation or fostering of cohesion.

Prevent simply a source of funding

As per the previous chapter, the city's senior youth workers, though initially apprehensive to accept a potentially damaging agenda, embraced the opportunity to provide experiences for their young people. Shazia says her project was so desperate for money when she was originally approached that she had no qualms as to its attachments because of the financial stability it could offer, and Malik explains how the prospect of an income through Prevent encouraged him to formalise work he was carrying out with young people through the city council rather than with mosques. He explains why *imams*, leaders of mosques who possess religious knowledge, are ideal candidates to carry out CT/CE work (formally or informally) but are restricted by a lack of resources.

> I feel ashamed that there's not enough mosques and *imams* in the community that can do these types of work. Why should it be me? I am nowhere near as qualified as them. It should be the *imams*. However, how'd you get an *imam* to do it when a schoolteacher's salary should be thirty thousand pounds a year, but a mosque teacher's salary would be twelve thousand? Someone asked me, why am I not an *imam*? Why am I not doing this work in a mosque? Because I'll be honest, it is about money as well, you have to put food on the table.

This connects to the instrumental engagement that motivates some practitioners to implement Prevent/Counter-Extremism (touched upon in the previous chapter), and while it may not always serve as the primary driver for participation, the perception of Prevent as an industry is critical for some participants who justify their involvement as the accessing of public money that is similarly abused by others in powerful positions.

> I thought number one, this is taxpayers' money which is enabling somebody's wages to be paid. And this was around the time of the expenses scandal, don't forget, where we got to hear about MPs who were using money to pay for their frigging dogs and cats to be fed and have kennels and shit. So why not Muslims who are the most discriminated group in the country at the moment have a bit of money? That might sound a bit cringe, but why not? (Sulaiman)

Similarly, in his endeavour to encourage places of worship encountered through his work at WMCTU to accept the funds made available through the CES's security funding scheme, Amar reasons, 'look, we all pay our taxes, you're just getting your tax back, you know, everybody else is taking it, so why are you losing out? If the money's available, take it!' The notion of 'taxpayers' money', referenced here as a legitimate facet of the CT/CE industry for appropriation, is contrary to broader arguments in literature on grassroots organisations that found Muslim respondents answered as 'British citizens rather than Muslims', disapproving of the practice as taxpayers themselves and rebuking uncredible Muslim groups (Lakhani, 2012: 197). Examples of this were also evident in the data as some participants expressed outrage at those they deemed to be exploiting 'public money for personal gain', emblematic of a corporatist form of engagement with government identified in the broader literature (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010). The same conclusion was drawn under the Coalition government's move from a multicultural approach to Prevent, in which Muslim groups fighting

extremism were perceived to have squandered funds, to 'muscular liberalism'. Later chapters will argue, however, that the constant fluctuation and lack of clear direction have enabled the practice of exploiting public funds, as a manifestation of the industry, in successive iterations of Prevent and indeed into the CES.

Debates around the eligibility of money on the basis of its public generation aids some participants in resolving dilemmas faced around whether or not to engage with CT/CE, discussed later in the chapter. Perceptions of Prevent and the CES thus far have covered instrumental and pejorative readings. The final section, below, explores an alternative and innovative interpretation which enables practitioners to approach engagement in personally fulfilling ways, made possible by the nuanced local environment.

Prevent as da'wah

Senior youth worker Yasir experienced initial unease at the edict to implement Prevent in its first Pathfinder phase, 'it was almost like a tool to spy on the Muslim community… that was my initial thought when it first came out, I was a bit dubious.' As an employee of the council, he did not possess the autonomy of an independent practitioner electing to engage with the strategy and struggled with his conscience until he found that Prevent actually provided him with *more* freedom as it unlocked a space which had been previously denied to him.

> Back then we weren't allowed to talk about religion. Faith-based practice or faith-based intervention was almost frowned upon, it was like, you can't talk about Islam to these kids, why are you doing that? It's not a *masjid* you know, you can't do that. So it was almost like a legitimate way of actually having that conversation with young people and I felt comfortable with that as a Muslim. I felt… the inner side of me, not the professional, but the Yasir inside me felt… *masha'Allah* [Arabic phrase meaning 'what God has willed' and used to express joy at something] you know what, if I could give some type of knowledge, whatever knowledge I know, that could help a young person and better him and raise his consciousness and use faith as an intervention to help them to kind of think differently about themselves and their life and their position in society, you know, *masha'Allah*. So for me that was the best thing about Prevent. I felt it enabled me to do that. It almost gave me the legitimacy to say – no, you **can** talk about faith and feel free. You know, we work for Birmingham City Council, we don't work for the Muath or Green Lane [local mosques]. So it was that green card that allowed me to say, yeah, you can do this. I can talk about religion and no one can say nothing to me because actually, I'm doing Prevent work! I'm cool, I can do indirect *da'wah*. And that was quite empowering for me as a worker.

Yasir interpreted the brief of delivering Prevent as performing *da'wah*, something typically conceived of as being the work of a *da'ee* or missionary. After initial reluctance to engage, he found that implementing the agenda actually opened up a space for him to explore shared values and weave his own spiritual beliefs into his mentorship of young people, a privilege he describes as empowering. Beliefs and histories that transcended cultural divides of the local demographic became a mechanism through which he felt able to not only help the community, but also fulfil the personal honour for a Muslim that is to be able to carry out *da'wah*. This act was legitimised by locally-directed policy and so Yasir conceives of Prevent as a liberating tool. His approach to satisfying the remit was rooted in his belief that if young people understood more about

Islam, as opposed to being taught why extremism is bad (conventional Prevent model), they would be less vulnerable to radicalisation.

Despite being initially disempowered to consent to participation, Yasir, along with the young people at his centre, utilised the opportunity to organise study circles in which they could ask scholars questions about simple issues like girlfriends and marriage, rather than extremism or jihad.

> We brought in young *sheikhs* [teachers] that were wearing Nike trainers and the *jilbabs* [Arab-style robes] and looked quite cool and would talk in a certain way and they connected with the young people but they were vetted by the CTU. They were also paid quite well. A lot of these young people didn't have no understanding of their religion. The *masajid* have no idea. The last place they would go was the *masjid* for any information.

By using Prevent as a vehicle, Yasir was able to bring in dynamic teachers to assist his young people in exploring religion; an act that was deeply fulfilling, and also previously denied, to him. His reference to contemporary sheikhs in fashionable attire speaks to the discourse on the construction of a deculturalised Islam in which 'Western born-again Muslims' (Roy, 2004: 25), beginning to research and practise their faith more seriously, must navigate the crowded 'Islam market' of religious methodologies (Inge, 2017: 76). As stated, Muslim youth workers in positions of trust and responsibility are ideally positioned to facilitate the development of young people (McDonald, 2011), most conventionally for the purposes of fulfilling policy objectives but as demonstrated here, also in performing a version of Prevent-funded *da'wah*. Contrary to literature covered in Chapter 2 that suggests Prevent closes down sites of frank discussion for young people in particular (Pilkington and Acik, 2020), Yasir harnessed Prevent to cultivate an environment in which he not only provided his service users with a space to explore intimate and sensitive topics, but in doing so was able to find an element of spiritual fulfilment so profound it was almost difficult to reconcile with the strategy.

> It was the ammunition for us to say actually, the way to deal with this [radicalisation] is to **give** young people Islam, not to stop them from being Muslims. To me that was kind of like… I like this. I don't like the label of it being Prevent work, I like doing the kind of *da'wah* stuff but not to necessarily say, oh this is Prevent!

The confliction articulated here by Yasir hints at the disharmony and resulting pressure that can affect practitioners working on Prevent/Counter-Extremism, considered later in the chapter.

Malik, an Islamic studies graduate who shunned the expected route of becoming a teacher in a *madrasa* or an *imam* in a mosque (given the low salaries previously mentioned), describes a similar initial reluctance to engage. In combining his passion for sport with his Islamic credentials, he (independently) created a space in which he could carry out a form of informal *da'wah*, attempting to forge a career in community work guiding people towards religion through sport. When it started out, the team was predominantly made up of *madrasa* students and this was the first thing he sought to address.

> Why am I going to preach to the already knowledgeable? So I said let's open this team up and bring in different people of faith, non-faith, and informally I was managing to do some form of Prevent work, if that makes sense. When they ask would questions or far-right rhetoric or narratives from an

> Islamist point of view, I would counter those conversations after the games sitting down in the social rooms or whatever. Then someone introduced me to the [BCC Prevent] team and they said come to this meeting. I said no chance. I'm not going to this meeting, I'm not going to meet anyone like that because my understanding of Prevent was spying agency, MI5, MI6. Anyway, I went and sat down and I heard other CSOs speaking about the work they do and I was like oh my God, I do this exact same thing, but I don't get paid for it, they're getting paid for it! And all they're doing is actually giving the true version of Islam to people and giving support mechanisms of diversionary activities. Like, I do this, I've been doing this since 2011. What's going on? How come I'm not involved in this?

Malik's primary intention was to use his religious education to administer *da'wah*; to share with others what he believed to be the authentic nature of Islam which would in turn prevent radicalisation. His work was already established, his organisation 'cherrypicked' (picked up in Chapter 8) by BCC to be formalised and funded; with engagement simply supporting and expanding pre-existing activities. Prior to engagement, Malik felt his lack of secular education inhibited him from articulating his points in an 'educated voice' and that his use of 'street language' and slang was holding him back. Prevent, then, actually provided Malik with a comfortable space in which he could counter harmful views and spread positive messages about the religion. Here, he said, nobody asked where he achieved his A Levels, they simply appreciated his knowledge of sports and his Islamic expertise. Prevent fostered an inclusive platform that allowed him to carry out *da'wah*, authorised his payment for this endeavour, enabled him to combine his skills, and helped him develop his knowledge and experience.

This offers a fresh perspective to literature that argues Prevent prohibits Muslims from practising their Muslimness (Bonino, 2013). It is distinct from the section on religion as a motivator for participation in the previous chapter because, as illustrated, neither Yasir or Malik were at all motivated to engage with CT/CE. Once thrust upon them, the realisation that Prevent could become an avenue for *da'wah* began to take shape. These findings demonstrate a progression from the conclusions of previous studies highlighting enthusiasm to correct misrepresentations of Islam and Muslims (Shanaah, 2021) in that participants surpass this objective to pursue so much more than defending faith.

In the wider literature, Muslim volunteers conceptualise their work as a form of implicit *da'wah* (Barylo, 2018). Here, participants acknowledge Prevent work, typically conceived of as an exercise in securitisation, as a basis for explicit *da'wah*, supporting the contention that the tradition of *da'wah* itself has undergone a reformulation (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996). *Da'wah* is a specific pursuit for these practitioners, and individuals like Jamil who uses his international training as a *da'ee* to undertake CT/CE work in Birmingham, that is intimately connected to performances of active citizenship but remains deeply personal. Religion more broadly is drawn upon by other participants and used as a framework through which to engage with Prevent and the CES in myriad ways; outlined at the end of this chapter.

This concludes the discussion on practitioners' perceptions of CT/CE policy, positing that Prevent (and the CES) are interpreted in a number of ways, ranging from a positive resource for personal or collective development, the constitution of a nefarious and meaningless industry, or sites to explore spiritual and

religious objectives. I argue the variation and appropriation of these interpretations are emblematic of a nuanced and fluid local policy space that is itself reflective of profound ambiguity at a central level. While the CES inevitably features in these perceptions, particularly in contribution to the notion of the industry, its underdeveloped form has retained the spotlight on Prevent. Significantly, diversity in perception was more closely attributed to local authority Prevent activity than that of the CTU, again likely owing to the former's greater portfolio of work, partnerships, budget, and more proactive recruitment of providers. Differences identified across types of practitioner were unremarkable.

The chapter thus far has addressed the first half of RQ2 and explored practitioners' interpretations of Prevent and the CES in the local space. The remaining sections will speak to the second half of RQ2, considering how perceptions identified guide the practices of participants at a local level.

Approaches and practices

The first half of the chapter explored practitioners' perceptions of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham. The second half expands upon these perspectives to offer insight into the personal principles, boundaries and frameworks that participants use to guide the operational element of their engagement. For example, if practitioners are concerned that policy is exploited for monetary gain (Prevent as an industry), what sort of checks and guidelines do they use to assess their own intentions so as to avoid contributing to this understanding? Practitioners' motivations have been discussed in detail in the previous chapter, but what else frames their work? The remainder of the chapter is split into sub-sections investigating the 'grey area' that many participants claim to operate within, intentions they make, and boundaries they draw. The chapter concludes with an explication of how practitioners use religion as a framework to approach their engagement with Prevent and the CES.

Grey area

'I always say I'm a libertarian… but I do Prevent.' – Nadia

The idea of a 'grey area' in the local CT/CE space, somewhere between policy and community, and the pro and anti-Prevent camps, is central to this study. Few studies acknowledge this in-between space and fewer still consider the dilemmas faced by practitioners occupying it (Spalek, 2013; Lewicki et al., 2014), overlooking the complexities of engagement. Participants make reference to a 'big fat grey area that everybody misses' (Haris) and relay the difficulties of operating from a 'middle ground' between communities and authorities in Birmingham, attempting to establish balance and not be seen to be 'picking sides' (Imaan). Tahir provides the example of a former colleague who struggled to maintain their position in this grey or middle space, shifting from being openly critical of the government to 'doing a 180'. He sums up the situation many practitioners find themselves in.

> The problem with this line of work is that it doesn't bring you any brownie points, you get criticised by the government or Home Office and you get criticised by some members of the community because they just think it's horrible […] you have to become hardened because the community don't really accept you anymore so you just hop over to the other side.

Tahir theorises that many practitioners who find themselves in this in-between space quickly become coerced into assigning their loyalty to funders after embarking on work, but some, like Haroon, resist this and attempt to perform a mode of critical engagement by maintaining ties with communities and authorities. He acknowledges the importance of being able to draw upon different vernaculars to achieve credibility and success within spheres of both policy and community in his carving of a middle space.

> Me, I tell you straight, I can do both worlds – if you want me to be ghetto, I'll be ghetto, if you want me to be professional, I can be professional because I'm trained around that. If you're gonna go into these hierarchy meetings, you need to be professional. You don't want people saying 'fucking hell, there's another Asian guy, can't fucking speak English properly'. We need people who are educated but then you gotta change your skillset when you're talking to certain people, it's interpersonal skills. Now I've been to meetings yeah, and there's people speaking well good English yeah, and then I'll be like 'bro, be honest with me, don't gimme none of that bullshit, tell me how it is' and they don't have another mode, they still try to be like a Bounty so I'll be like 'safe'. Some people you ask and they'll say 'okay you want me to be honest with you yeah, all this is bullshit'. When you get them down to that level, then you can get the conversation going, take your white voice off man – that's how it is.

Haroon makes clear his own position and also offers an observation about others in the space. He describes a group of practitioners that he likens to himself; capable of speaking articulately in meetings with government representatives but also able to communicate with him on a 'real' level, being critical about policy and its shortcomings. He also refers to 'Bountys', a derogatory colloquialism to denote individuals with a minority ethnic background that are brown on the outside and white on the inside, like the coconut-filled chocolate bar. These practitioners, he says, are unable to take their 'white voice off', they have embodied Tahir's notion of hopping over to the other side and lack integrity, unlike Haroon who is confident in his ability to slip in and out of domains, affording him a degree of authenticity within community spaces while still engaging with policy.

Haroon did mention, however, being restricted by his appearance; a sentiment echoed by Zayd who, gesturing to his beard and my hijab, declared, 'me and you can't hide who we are'. Zayd felt strongly that other practitioners of minority ethnic backgrounds who were less visibly Muslim were able to embed themselves deeper into the policy world, being 'up the arse of Prevent people' in a way that was not attainable to him. This denial of access, however, has only strengthened his position in the grey area in that he has not been given the opportunity to hop over, 'even though it's so hard for us, we have to straddle both worlds, we have to not get emotional'. The process of negotiation he has experienced has helped refine and reaffirm his intentions to help people, not to criminalise anyone and to try and 'do the pure version of Prevent' that he feels is politicised in both realms.

Youth worker Yasir also highlights the controversies and complexities that can accompany being staunchly for or against CT/CE, reflecting on a decision he made to decline the offer of a job which would have forced him into being more vocally pro-Prevent.

> I'm glad I didn't take the role now because of [the association with] Prevent. The line is there and I kind of twiddle in and out of the lines so I go one side where I'm really for it and I'm like yeah it's important we do this and then when I hear certain things that have happened like teachers referring kids for saying I live in a terraced house… I think, what the hell is going on? This is way out of hand, this is just wrong, we've got to stop this.

Citing the well-known case of the misinterpretation of 'terraced house' as 'terrorist house', Yasir talks through his thought process, exhibiting cognitive dissonance as he wavers from frustration at overzealous reporting at the initial stage to acknowledgment that referrals are rigorously checked before being submitted to Channel. He recalls how criticisms can make him feel 'dubious' about the work he is undertaking, but this is often counteracted by a conversation with a member of the BCC Prevent team who help 'realign' and give him a 'sense of purpose again'. This inconstancy illustrates the insecure and fluctuating nature of the grey area for many individuals, his wavering between anger and support for Prevent and the CES vacillates as policy seesaws centrally and continues to metamorphose locally. Declining the position he was offered has allowed him some freedom to critique, although he still feels somewhat restricted because of his ongoing intermittent association with CT/CE. He describes reading reports published by advocacy group Cage and thinking, 'yeah I agree with that but I can't shout it loud as a practitioner who works for Birmingham City Council who has done Prevent work and delivery'. By 'holding back' and adhering to these implicit rules for practitioners engaged in CT/CE, Yasir is able to maintain relationships with local Prevent networks but still recognise criticisms made by those who are anti-Prevent. He makes clear that he will not cross over to either side completely, 'the thing is about me, I make my own decisions. I'm not swayed by anybody and there's no affiliations, I'm not part of this *jama'ah* [community] or this group. I hear what everyone has got to say'. Though infused with challenges (see following chapter), straddling both worlds (Abbas, 2019) is extremely important to practitioners like Yasir, permitting engagement with CT/CE while maintaining face within communities.

Whereas some practitioners oscillate and struggle with feeling torn between realms, others simply embrace the grey area and their place within it. Sulaiman purposely attempts to disrupt the narrative, attending a Prevent talk to try and interrogate the agenda and doing the same at a Cage event.

> I like being in the grey zone, in the middle. And I think there should be a disruptive thing, we should play a disruptive role. I mean, I might be naïve, it might be that politics is a black and white game. But I just think there might be a different sort of way to do it which means engaging, getting into the space. I'm not saying engage with the discourse to legitimise it but just to get into spaces, you know.

Sulaiman's critical engagement may not be unique but his articulation of it stands out. While he accepts and validates the in-between space, Nadia takes this position further in her claim to embody it:

> I'm a mixed-race mediator, I did Islamic theology, I did Arabic, my mum's a socialist, I've got rights that run through my blood. I saw an opportunity to bridge polarised positions and I'm good at that because I'm mixed-race! It's that thing about being able to stand in both positions, emotionally and spiritually and intellectually.

Nadia feels that her place within the grey area is an expression of her own self and that her upbringing and personal experiences render her well-suited to disentangle perspectives rooted firmly in the pro and anti-Prevent camps. She actively embraces this role and draws upon idiosyncratic vernaculars and cultural reference points in order to achieve success, for example, utilising her ability to 'speak Muzlim' as well as penetrate local policy (alike Haroon).

Zayd is also accepting of his position in the middle space, interpreting the (aforementioned) 'seat around the table' it affords him as a privilege. From this platform he says he is able to bring community concerns to the attention of officials and report back to communities on behalf of policymakers and the local authority; without this seat he says 'you can shout all you want but no one will listen'. The responsibility of representing his community forces Zayd to accept the seat and exist in the grey area, a unique position which he acknowledges can be difficult for himself, his peers and also future practitioners from minority ethnic backgrounds that may have to implement CT/CE agendas. To address this, he proactively delivers lectures to cohorts of students on Youth and Community Work courses at local universities, many of whom come from minority ethnic backgrounds or practice in the communities they also live in. Here he teaches them about the importance of recognising their position in the middle, reminding them that they belong to both spaces and acknowledging that they may sympathise with grievances voiced by their communities about authorities in the city. Zayd offers advice, recalls anecdotes and answers questions, encouraging future practitioners to begin to think about navigating difficulties they may encounter working in the grey area.

Welcoming the middle space is more difficult for some participants who can feel paralysed by the 'polarisation of Prevent' and struggle to find their place within a 'politicised, sensitive sphere' that propagates the use of denigratory terms such as 'house Muslim', appropriating derogatory language to describe Muslims who are obsequious to government (Sara). Finding oneself in the grey area can leave practitioners feeling 'stuck in the middle' and isolated, 'the only people who really understand are other Muslims who also work on this so I'm just so glad to have that because otherwise it can be a very lonely experience […] to be pressured from both sides' (Sofia). Sofia finds herself in a sort of in-between space but appears less comfortable than other participants, she is not there by choice, rather she feels forced by groups on either end of the spectrum whose positions she says can be 'sickening'. Like Sara, she says she is labelled by both parties, but attempts to use her imposed position to improve her own practice.

> I'm either a sell-out or an extremist so whatever. I know what I'm doing and I think you just need to get to a point where you are self-reflective and self-critical because maybe this side has a point and maybe the other side has a point. So constantly thinking through what you're doing is actually also helping you. And it actually prevents you from being one of them, who's just stuck in their corner and doesn't see anything else. (Sofia)

BCC's Prevent Coordinator also mentions barriers to communication with those on the other end of the spectrum, enforced by organisational rules and regulations that restrict him from sharing platforms with certain groups. In articulating his personal stance, he mentions the derisive term 'Prevent-wala', appropriated to describe an individual who works or 'cheerleads' (Hussain, 2022) for Prevent (the suffix 'wala' is used in a number of Indo-Aryan languages to associate a person with an occupation or activity). The Coordinator responds to this epithet by referring to his critics as anti-Prevent-walas, suggesting that the positions are more similar than would appear, 'with Prevent-walas and anti-Prevent-walas, what you get is almost the same circle on both sides, the same types of people coming up. And then you've got people in the middle who are sympathetic but sit in that grey area'. While this would indicate that he perceives himself as more of a Prevent-wala than other practitioners who may be able to maintain a relative distance from authority structures and establish a firmer position within the grey area, he notes that the sites are not as fixed as they once were, a sentiment substantiated by other participants who argue that the local Prevent/CES space continues to evolve and that individuals who implement the strategies reflect this. This may be jeopardised, however, by the recommendations of the IRP in which Shawcross (2023) concludes there should be no room for Prevent practitioners to be critical, effectively closing down the grey area. As evidence, the report attempted to 'expose' an academic and former WMP practitioner who has collaborated with the government on a long-term basis and continues to assist WMCTU and train its CTAG in an advisory capacity. In attempting to vilify practitioners working to improve Prevent and the CES at a structural and operational level both nationally and locally, advocating for communities whilst successfully engaging with authorities, the future of the grey area is called into question.

This section has explored how practitioners define and situate themselves in a grey area within the local CT/CE space, and how this shapes the way they approach implementation. The following section considers how participants frame their engagement through the setting of intentions.

Intentions

In Islam, the concept of intention, or *niyyah*, differentiates acts done for the sake of Allah from those done for any other purpose (to fulfil personal desires, to attain worldly benefit, to please others etc.) and holds great significance for Muslims who believe that all actions are judged according to intentions, meaning even good deeds without sincere intentions are not accepted as such. The importance of *niyyah*, and the weight of the scriptural guidance that contextualises it, encourages Muslims to constantly check and renew their intentions for daily decisions, thus strengthening the connection between the physical and spiritual and emphasising that every action should be purposeful. Defining the relationship between intention and engagement with CT/CE is paramount to some practitioners who make reference to intentions in the rationale for their work and draw upon the paradigm of intention-setting to guide practices on the ground. Throughout fieldwork, many participants spoke of their 'pure' and 'genuine' intentions in response to the criticism and

backlash they encounter, insisting that they entered the space with 'clean hearts', sincerity, and a desire to help and serve their communities as a means of pleasing Allah. This concept is linked to the religious obligation that some practitioners cited as their motivation for engaging with the work initially but is explored in further detail in this section to convey how participants described the process of setting and checking intentions as integral to their ongoing conduct.

Yasir, for example, who earlier in the chapter recounted his initial discomfort at the implementation of Prevent at his youth centre, describes taking the mandated programme of work and, after setting his intentions, moulding it into something he felt was enriching, namely providing spaces for young people to explore their religion from a generationally-relevant perspective. The act of framing of his intentions enabled him to overcome the conflict he experienced as a result of being in a state of constant flux between the competing pull of community groups and authorities.

> Sometimes the best way to do it is just completely detach yourself from all the exterior forces and just get on with the work because as long as you can see the benefit in the work and you can see your intentions, and I look at it like my intentions are good and I'm helping young people and I'm doing something constructive and I'm helping them become better young people, as well as my own personal intention would be about helping them become better Muslims.

Kamran describes visiting an authoritative figure from a local mosque at a time when he was being called a *munafiq* [hypocrite] and traitor by community members who opposed his engagement with WMCTU, 'I didn't even know what the word *munafiq* meant but I knew it was one of the most derogatory words you could use towards a Muslim'. He explains how the individual encouraged him to check whether his intentions were in line with Islamic principles and confirmed that the work he was involved in was merely a medium for supporting vulnerable people, 'I knew what I was doing was on board and fully in compliance with Islamic values but when people are constantly throwing remarks then you suddenly start doubting yourself'.

The concept of intention is so integral in Islam that a mundane act can become a form of *ibadah* [worship], simply by reframing and refining the intentions that underscore it. Rashid, who has implemented various forms of Prevent delivery and training as well as informal and independent mentoring speaks in detail about the intentions behind his work.

> Look, *rizq* [provision] is from Allah, nobody can take it from me and nobody can give me more than what Allah has ordained for me and we all prosper, work and survive because of Allah. But you gotta go back to your intention, what was your intention for doing any form of Prevent work? The intention wasn't to tick a government box, my intention was to protect individuals from causing harm to themselves and harm to others, my intention is that individuals do not misinterpret the beautiful religion of Islam, do you understand? My intention is that individuals do not take the name of the prophet *sallallahu alaihi wassalam* [peace be upon him] or the name of Allah in order to justify violence or the killing of innocents and my intention is to ensure that Islam is presented and understood in the way it should be. My intention is not the payment and the funding side, that's not my intention. Because I tell you, if that was my intention I would be bloody inundated with work, I'd have so much work I would not be able to deal with it. But the reality is that's not my intention, I'm not gonna compromise and I'm not gonna misrepresent anything.

Rashid clarifies what his intentions are and are not. If he intended to financially benefit from his participation with Prevent, he could do so to great effect, he says. He goes on to provide an extremely rich and nuanced account of the compromises he will not concede to (following section) but his explanation for engaging with Prevent is quite clearly entrenched in the performance of his faith and intention-setting is therefore an important element of his involvement. He, and other practitioners, claim that their good intentions are apparent to local communities, and that even if people disagree with their actions, the intentions and sincerity that underpin these activities and interventions are generally appreciated.

There are times, however, when noble intentions are insufficient, as is the case with Tahir who says he 'went in with good intentions and got shafted', referring to his treatment by authorities and ostracism from communities. Zayd also alludes to an interesting point about responsibility; responding to concerns that information gathered under the guise of CT/CE may be used unethically, he absolves himself by reiterating that his intention is just to help. This raises the question; if practitioners suspect that the work that they are involved with might cause harm to individuals or communities, is it enough to disregard these anxieties by foregrounding one's own intentions or should individual intentions always prioritise the promotion of the collective wellbeing and prevention of harm? The data suggests that there exists the space for the critical community practitioner to decide.

The concept of intention, especially that rooted in the Islamic faith, plays a key role in the engagement of many practitioners and can shape, limit and validate actions undertaken in the field. The following section considers the setting of boundaries in the framing of participation.

Boundaries drawn

Discussion has covered some of the complexities woven into approaches taken by practitioners enacting Prevent/Counter-Extremism, from navigating their place within the grey area to the significance of considering intentions behind participation. Once individuals have taken these steps to pursue engagement in the local CT/CE space; many then establish boundaries, often to ensure avoidance of the pitfalls described at the beginning of the chapter.

Introspection

Participants speak about the importance of being true to oneself and thinking through the consequences of any work undertaken in the realm of CT/CE. Before agreeing to participate, Sofia asks herself, 'who is it benefiting? And how do I feel from a moral and ethical point of view about the kind of work that I do?' Reflecting in this manner is a significant method for her to decide whether or not a role or project aligns with her values and will be useful to individuals beyond herself. If the answers do not comply with her principles, she declines to participate.

Rashid explains a similar process of internally scrutinising proposed engagement, which he links back to intention-setting.

> I'll always check my intention. So when I've been asked, I'll evaluate that project for myself – will this be for the betterment of the community? Would it be beneficial for the young people or is this purely exclusively just a process to tick a box? So I look at that project and I'll say, how much autonomy do I have within this? Will they allow me a free rein to base things on my expertise and my knowledge? Hence why I walked away when the Home Office said 'you're not gonna talk about foreign policy, mate' and I said, 'no, I'm not willing to compromise, I'd rather walk away' and I did. So I look at it from that perspective as well, how much autonomy do I have? And then the other reason I've stepped back from certain projects is okay, what's the accountability framework like in this project? What kind of data are they asking from me? Are they asking for just nominal data, just numbers and age groups and things like this or do they actually want names, addresses, dates of birth? And if it's the latter, that's more harm than good, because as much as they say 'no, no, we don't do anything with it, this is just quantitative data' – nonsense, it's going somewhere.

Here Rashid progresses from interrogating his own intentions to the intentions of the project and those of the funders. He considers factors such as the control he is afforded (following section), the utility of the work, and practical issues around data protection. He mentions a framework of 'harm over good' which he draws upon to help him decide whether or not to take on a project. Interestingly, he roots this principle back to his religious beliefs, articulating harm to local communities or to perceptions of his faith as a boundary he chooses not to cross, in harmony with participants motivated to engage in order to correct misconceptions of Islam explored in Chapter 5.

> ultimately, sometimes when I'm about to do a project and I feel uneasy with it, and if it starts questioning my mind, at the end of the day, if you are doing more harm than good, how are you gonna face Allah? Easy, just don't do it. Quite simply, that's one of the ways to do it [decide], I think – am I causing more harm to the *deen*?

Rashid relies upon this 'harm over good' barometer as a sort of litmus test for engaging, explicating how it permits him to reconcile his actions with his moral and religious convictions.

> If I go out now to Tescos and buy a bottle of booze and sit at home and get drunk, it's *haram*, I'm doing wrong but who am I damaging, really? I'm just damaging myself and what am I impacting on? The relationship between me and Allah. This is just between me and my Lord. However, when I'm working with a group of young people, any young people, doesn't have to be Muslims, and I am misrepresenting issues which are around this *deen* and this religion, or I'm causing them harm by way of their ideas or putting them in a position of harm then no longer is that sin just between me and my Lord, now I am contributing. And I'm responsible for that sin amongst a group of people. So that's another thing that I use for my balancing as well, and at the end of the day I conclude that I'd rather go to Tesco and get a bottle of vodka than do that [deliver work he disagrees with]. Because at least that's just between me and Allah. But if I'm identifying people at a greater risk than they should be, or if I'm suppressing something then that is between me, that group, and Allah; it's far worse [the sin is multiplied].

Questioning himself about the aims and integrity of a programme of work and reflecting on the concepts of harm and sin assist Rashid in his decisions and conduct in the space. He is clear that he would rather purposefully commit a sin which can only affect himself as the individual, no matter its weight, than

misrepresent Islam or unintentionally cause injury to others by potentially labelling them for the purpose of making a Prevent project appear successful.

Retaining control over content

Rashid mentioned a reluctance to compromise on material about foreign policy in his training packages, a criterion which he says has inhibited him from receiving funding centrally (he is instead commissioned through other organisations and local authorities). His insistence on retaining control over his message – a threshold which protects him from equally 'doing a 180' or becoming a 'poster boy' for the government – precipitated a critical distance he now appreciates, despite previous attempts to forge direct relationships with funders at the Home Office. Sara also recalls a similar experience in which her organisation was in discussion to be under closer direction of the government but, ultimately, refusing to relinquish control of their content was a parameter delineated by herself and her co-director.

Youth workers, initially hesitant to implement Prevent and potentially securitise their relationships (Thomas, 2018 in Osorno Hernandez, 2021), devised strategies to navigate the terrain and rectify some of the 'damage done […] from the way it was designed from the top by government' (Haroon). Kashif discusses the boundaries he instils at his youth centre demarcating the programmes that he will and will not approve third party organisations to deliver to his young people. This ranges from content:

> we've got no choice when it comes centrally-defined by our heads of service but the control that we've got on it is the delivery. There's certain things, if I don't agree with it, it ain't happening. I don't care if it's your number one priority, if it's something that I think is not good for my young people, honestly take your funding and get out. I won't do it.

to data protection and the gathering of names:

> we don't give no names in. That was one of the first things I said, I'm not putting people's names and addresses because if you want us to do this preventative kind of work, you don't need to know who they are.

Kashif provides an example of a CIC, piggybacking on his centre as a site to deliver a Prevent programme, that implored the young attendees to post counter-narrative messages on their social media platforms, a request he refused to authorise on safeguarding grounds. In elaborating on the utility of projects, he reaffirms the position held by participants in the previous section; the only reason he will agree to CT/CE initiatives, he says, is 'when there is a benefit' for the young people he advocates on behalf of and insists on retaining 'quite a bit of control of how and what is delivered'. Guidelines governing content were commonly articulated but boundaries that pertain to issues of funding also significantly factor.

Financial criteria

Sara's organisation was providing preventative training to schools that could no longer afford the commissioning fees, resulting in an 'ethical dilemma about whether to take Home Office money' as she had set 'very narrow parameters' at the time regarding their sources of sponsorship. Sara says that despite the boundaries she had established, which was to refuse government money and approach the work from a more

'community-friendly' stance, she nevertheless lost many personal friends as a result of her work's CT affiliation. She explains how this collateral side effect encouraged her to broaden her parameters and consider applying for Home Office support which would ease the pressure on herself and her colleagues, enabling them to provide training at lower costs. Sara then negotiated her budgetary boundaries in a creative manner so that her organisation could financially benefit but she was able to maintain a distance, using a charity as a 'buffer' to acquire the Home Office funds and then subcontract her organisation to deliver. This means she is now able to maintain control over the programmes they offer, uphold the separation between herself and the government, and provide her organisation with the funding it needs to develop. Sara demonstrates how the boundaries she forged have been significant in shaping her engagement but are also dynamic and amenable to negotiation.

Tahir also reflected on adjusting the financial boundaries he upholds but in reverse to Sara, expresses becoming more wary of sourcing CT/CE-related funds from the Home Office after receiving community criticism for prior engagement with Prevent. He concludes that taking money from the government is more problematic than beneficial (see section on disengagement in Chapter 8) and has established new boundaries restricting himself from accepting government resources, 'for me, I've set the agenda'.

Others demarcate boundaries around funding in different ways; Malik, for example, will take Prevent money directly to pay for workshops (venue hire, food etc.) but will not allow his organisation to profit. Like many participants who describe a 'battle' against authorities regarding the sharing of attendees' personal details, also noted in literature on Prevent (Qurashi, 2018), Malik, too, stipulates the importance of withholding the names of his service users as a benchmark for engagement.

> I'm confident saying yeah, I am doing Prevent work and if they asked me what are you doing, am I spying on anyone? No, I'm not. Am I giving names to anyone? No, I'm not. What I'm doing is providing activities for young people and we give them some food, keep them off the street and we give them some advice, information, and guidance that they can disseminate however they want. I'm not an ambassador, I don't walk down the street saying 'I do Prevent work' but there is space to say 'yes, I do work which I class as youth engagement' more than anything.

Reframing his role in terms of 'youth engagement' and defining boundaries around funding and information-sharing has allowed Malik to reconcile his Prevent involvement with his position within local communities. Other practitioners point to specific boundaries that they use to help frame their involvement; for example, implementing Prevent but not the Prevent Duty because the latter is considered damaging, restricting work to the realm of 'violent extremism' as opposed to extremism as the former is perceived as a more confident space, and making a point of refusing to limit work to Muslim-majority communities. The setting of boundaries is a useful practice for many individuals that implement Prevent/Counter-Extremism and can remind them of their moral and ethical standpoints, their loyalties to communities, and their spiritual beliefs during the course of their engagement. The boundaries they carve out are not right or wrong, not necessarily formalised and or even spoken aloud, and subject to constant negotiation, but they can offer guidance and

comfort to practitioners active in the space. While this study does not contend that policy is necessarily subverted by the actions of practitioners as argued in understandings of street-level bureaucracy (Prior and Barnes, 2011; Osorno Hernandez, 2021), the practice of drawing boundaries can be understood as a reworking, and sometimes refusal, of elements of Prevent/Counter-Extremism objectives. This, in turn, contributes to the heterogenous implementation of Prevent and the CES locally.

Participants mould and structure their actions through the setting of parameters such as rerouting funds through a third party to maintain a stance of 'independent' implementation. I argue this agentive practice is made possible by policy that, as demonstrated by Sara's shifting of boundary lines, is subject to change; reflective, too, of the fluctuation as well as ambiguity of the CT/CE space. With regard to the varying experiences of practitioners, it might be expected that employees of BCC or WMCTU possess less influence over implementation than independent practitioners and while this might be the case, youth workers – mandated by BCC to deliver Prevent – articulated the most rigorous set of boundaries in the data. This is perhaps explained by the fact that much of their work was prescribed and they had not opted to become CT/CE practitioners, as well as in defence of the unique and valuable position they hold between community and authority in the safeguarding and gatekeeping of young people (McDonald, 2011). Participants involved with the CES did not refer to the drawing of boundaries, likely owing to the ambiguous language of BSBT and the cover this provides, diminishing the requisite for the protection of practitioners' reputations. Similarly, police practitioners, governed by more robust professional strictures, are not as (openly) active in the shaping of guidelines that frame their remit.

Discussion has considered how some practitioners employ religion to help refine intentions and, at times, assist in the drawing of boundaries that stipulate their engagement with CT/CE. The final section further investigates how the framework of religion is referenced by individuals who draw upon faith to guide their behaviour and actions more generally in the course of their engagement with CT/CE in Birmingham.

Religion as a framework

'I always refer everything to my faith and you know what, *masha'Allah,* the law of this land is basically telling you what Islam is telling you to do. So if you practice one you can't go wrong.' – Kamran

Although this study did not specifically set out to explore religion or its relationship to Prevent or the CES; religion in general (and not just Islam) features prominently in the data, documented so far in discussions on religious obligation as a motivator and the significance of intentions. This section considers how some practitioners (once engaged) fuse the work they undertake and their conduct in the field with broader religious teachings and values, often leaning upon faith as a significant source of guidance and referencing religion as a perspective from which to approach their participation.

Amar is sustained by his belief in a higher power in the face of challenges at WMCTU that are outside of his control. He explains how he relies on his spiritual philosophy when confronted with poor practice and corruption in the CT/CE space, guided by a moral framework for what constitutes honest and dishonest work.

> we've got people at our level in the police force and in the council that are working, plodding along, doing what they need to be doing but don't challenge anything and that's the disheartening part because we believe in *haqq da kam* [honest work], right? So when there's something *haram* and people don't care about it, it frustrates you because if you're trying to live off the principles of your faith, doesn't matter what you do but it's gotta be an honest living, *haina* [innit], and you're seeing all this happening and you're thinking it's also my role to be challenging this as well, if you're living from a righteous point of view. And you do and you get nowhere! But the only way I manage to deal with it is the fact that our work is just to walk the path, that's all it is. **Now** I think to myself, my journey isn't to be outing people. If I have a belief in a supreme being, ultimately this is His game, right? It's not my game, so I can't dictate the outcomes. All I can do is just walk that path and say what I need to say. But I don't put pressure on myself to say I need a result at the end of it. I can't get a result because it's not my game, I just gotta carry on walking. So that's the way I see it now, you know as they say *meri vas di gal nay* [it's not in my power], you know what I mean? That's not in my hands at all innit, you just gotta carry on doing what you're doing and that's all you can do. It's not easy because you see it and you're thinking 'grr'. And if anything, you feel like an idiot because you're part of that process. That's what kills you the most. And inside it gets to me thinking – you're part of this, you're allowing this.

This extract provides a detailed insight into Amar's process of initially challenging actions he perceived as manifestations of 'dishonest work' in the field and experiencing frustration when his concerns about other practitioners and organisations may not have been acted on. Rather than continue to try and fight corruption fruitlessly or completely disengage (as others describe in Chapter 8), Amar reflects on his own actions in the face of fraudulent and bad practice, relaying in great detail the conflicting emotions he battles as he attempts to continue to work on Prevent without transgressing his moral convictions. Though he relinquishes control, and to some level responsibility, by placing his faith in a higher power, he struggles to distance himself from feelings of complicity on a human level, the impact of which will be considered further in the following chapter.

Zayd also references his religious values in the confrontation of corruption encountered in the field. Upon discovering that a BCC Prevent project was not delivering sessions it had been paid for, he insists that while he could turn a blind eye, as he feels colleagues are happy to, it is imperative that he questions the practitioner culpable because he believes that he himself will be questioned about this, and every other injustice, by God in the hereafter. While two completely different responses to corruption, both Amar and Zayd derive comfort and direction from their faiths, using respective religious teachings to guide their actions when confronted with malpractice in the field.

When aspects of engagement become difficult, participants remind themselves that their reward comes from God and this reliance can help them cope with antagonisms in the policy space as well as backlash emanating from communities. Salma, who acts as a gatekeeper, facilitator and translator for BCC's PEOs to hold a forum for newly arrived migrant women housed in a white working-class area of Birmingham, says, 'if you believe

that you're gonna get reward from Allah for everything you do in this life and life is so short, it's much easier, you have to put your mark on the people around you and at the end you get blessings from Allah'. Salma's role in the forum is crucial; she explains that Prevent officers have zero traction in the community and she assists free of charge because she is worshipping God by serving others. She was also promised a job by BCC staff, something she has accepted is unlikely to materialise, but again she refers her sustenance back to her Creator, 'if it doesn't, it's not worth it, it's in God's hands'.

Nasreen offers an interesting and more complex account of pleasing God through her work. Though not initially driven by Islamic principles to engage with Prevent, she has recognised that her position within the local authority team can act as a conduit for her to fulfil some of her own personal and spiritual ambitions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the carrying out of good deeds is significant for Muslims and, in explaining initiatives she has established at the aforementioned women's forum, Nasreen describes setting up a *madrasa*. Whilst this act benefits the children that attend, and the mothers who may have requested it, Nasreen is clear in rationalising this as a good deed in her own record with her Lord, something she is keen to accrue for her personal redemption. She refers to this act as a *sadaqah jariyah*, a very specific and unique type of ongoing charity that is believed in Islam to benefit a soul even after it has departed this world. Types of *sadaqah jariyah* may include building a water well or planting a tree; as long as the well generates water or the tree provides shade, the soul who facilitated this act of charity can continue to reap rewards many years after it has passed. Educating others (i.e. through a *madrasa*) or caring for orphans would also qualify; if those individuals then grew up to continue do good, the initial act of facilitating the education could be a form of *sadaqah jariyah* for a Muslim.

> Where else would I get the chance to start a *madrasa* in the sticks of Birmingham, do you know what I mean? It's all little deeds where I probably just give a little helping hand, do you understand? Outwardly I may not seem like someone who's practising [religious] but you know... don't judge. For me, this is *sadaqah jariyah*, totting up all of my little deeds, my little post-its in that little [metaphorical] box there.

Accruing good deeds, or 'brownie points' in this way is an investment in Nasreen's *akhirah* (Hancock, 2020: 149) that is integral to the Muslim's daily practices (Cebecioglu, 2020), as she demonstrates how engagement with Prevent can be recast as a good deed with the correct intention. She goes on to detail how the *madrasa* classes specifically aided the 'troublemaker *goreh* [white] kids', who initially resisted the presence of the women at the centre, in understanding the new community and claims that a multicultural group of mothers and children have now participated in flag-making workshops, skating classes and the cultivation of an edible garden. Nasreen, therefore, feels successful in her endeavour, 'that's what makes me really emotional [starts to become teary], it's like you walk away and you feel like you've achieved a little bit. And that little glass jar of mine that I keep putting in little post-its of good deeds grows'.

This detailed account explains how a personal understanding of religion frames aspects of the work that Nasreen is given a degree of autonomy to carry out as part of her responsibilities. Setting up a *madrasa*

benefits the community in receipt of it (as well as, according to her, potentially bridging racial divisions in the area) but Nasreen evidently believes she is also prospering on a personal and spiritual level from this effort. She uses her position as a Prevent practitioner and the money at her disposal (for preventing radicalisation) to carve out an act of *sadaqah jariyah*, facilitating Qur'an classes partly because she believes it will be written as a good deed for her in her own record with her Lord, interweaving faith into her implementation of Prevent in search of a reward from God. This problematises the broader understanding of *sadaqah jariyah* as an 'investment in humanity […] an act which is not about self-benefit, but rather all of creation' (Keskin and Yucel, 2020: 29) as the data centralises the fulfilment of Nasreen's personal objectives through her act of perpetual charity – does she become upset because she has helped facilitate the education of children or because she has been able to accrue 'brownie points'? Would she still be motivated to establish the *madrasa* if the promise of individual reward was not available? In the treatment of Salma, and the subsequent withdrawal of support for the forum (following chapter), personal gain arguably factors into endeavours of *sadaqah jariyah* which can be understood as a frame of reference for conduct in the space.

Nevertheless, it is evident that participants invoke religion in performances of active citizenship and draw upon the matrix of Islam to connect their piety to practice, blurring the boundaries between the sacred and mundane (Barylo, 2017) to recast CT/CE engagement as a new form of religiosity. An example of this 'Islamic political subject', engaging with CT/CE as a form of *da'wah* they hope will benefit them in the hereafter (Fadil, 2006), is manifest in Umair's explanation of the *ibad-ur-Rahman*, a Qur'anic description of faithful believers committed to carrying out good actions, 'the slaves of Allah, when they walk on the earth, they walk with modesty, they don't walk as though they're gonna knock the mountains down with their chest open'. Not only does Umair attempt to espouse these qualities in his own approach, his engagement constitutes the opportunity to disseminate the characteristics of the *ibad-ur-Rahman* with his young people as an alternative to discussing the topic of extremism explicitly.

Discussion has shown that many practitioners, Muslim, non-Muslim, employed by BCC/WMCTU or independently commissioned, approach their CT/CE engagement through religious frames of reference that incite active citizenship, and that Muslim practitioners in particular may act upon teachings that require them to act as *khalifahs*, responsible for the wellbeing of the earth and its inhabitants (Hancock, 2020). While it might appear that practitioners are working *fi sabilillah*, for the sake of God (Keskin and Yucel, 2020); nuanced first-hand accounts, explored here and in later chapters, problematise this argument and call into question the role of individual agency.

Conclusions

This chapter has contributed to the overarching aim of the thesis to expand the wider understanding of the experiences of Prevent/Counter-Extremism practitioners in Birmingham and has addressed RQ2, considering

how practitioners interpret the implementation of policy locally and how these perceptions guide their practices in the field. Discussion has shown that Prevent in particular is disparately conceived of as a positive force, a manufactured and self-serving industry, and an avenue for *da'wah,* and has illustrated how these interpretations impact on the actions of participants who articulate the occupation of a turbulent grey area, the boundaries they establish in the course of their engagement, and the appropriation of religion as a framework – from the setting of intentions to the implication of broader teachings in responsibilising the battle against injustice or responding to confrontation. RQ3 is also partially considered in that some perceptions and practices are interpreted as opportunities, i.e. performing *da'wah*, fulfilling religious objectives, and disrupting the narrative of the grey area.

Though CT/CE policies are widely judged to be underscored by Islamophobic principles, as covered in Chapter 2, and participants themselves articulate a broader 'agenda across Europe which is basically to remould Islam so it becomes palatable to the West' (Rashid), the data presents an alternative understanding of the ways in which religion, and Islam in particular, is centralised in the implementation of Prevent/Counter-Extremism in Birmingham. The chapter paints a picture of a fluid and dynamic local space in which practitioners are able to guide their participation via their own moral, ethical and spiritual convictions as opposed to the dominant safeguarding or securitising narratives reviewed. This theme will be explored further in the consideration of agency in the following chapter, however, the prominence of religion points to an immensely nuanced local scene, made possible by a centrally-administered ambiguity and locally-cultivated dynamism that enables the city's practitioners to conduct their engagement according to individual interpretation.

Recent debates suggest, contrary to scholarship claiming Prevent and the CES have closed down 'safe spaces' (Mythen et al., 2012; Ragazzi, 2017b; Ramsay, 2017; Stanley et al., 2017; Spiller et al., 2018; Lockley-Scott, 2019; Pilkington and Acik, 2020; Younis and Jadhav, 2019), that grassroots practitioners seek to develop and maintain such environments in local contexts (Osorno Hernandez, 2021). This chapter problematises these positions, arguing that rather than striving to cultivate safe spaces, CT/CE practitioners exploit the local environment to open up new spaces; to explore religion with their service users, to fulfil their own spiritual objectives, to develop themselves personally or professionally, to raise the profile of their organisation or to disrupt the polarisation of CT/CE in Birmingham. Further analysis of these spaces and their utilities will be examined in the remaining chapters.

The following chapter advances the understanding of practitioners' experiences by considering the more practical dimensions of their engagement in the field.

Chapter 7 – In the field: Practitioners' experiences of implementation

The preceding chapters have explored practitioners' motivations for, perceptions of, and approaches to participation. This chapter shifts from discussions around perspectives associated with becoming involved to ask: what does it look like for practitioners on the ground once they are engaged? It begins by offering fresh insight into some of the challenges faced by participants as a result of engaging with policy, followed by sections on forms of support and training that are available to practitioners and recommendations for future practice. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the expression of agency in the implementation of policy – to what degree are practitioners permitted autonomy over their work? Is it frowned upon to be 'creative' with funding and should this be expected in a climate of austerity?

The chapter seeks to address RQ3 and RQ4, considering the problems and opportunities participants identify in the course of their engagement and the extent to which they are able to shape their own personal and professional objectives. It contributes to the overall aim of the thesis to expand the understanding of CT/CE practitioners' experiences in Birmingham and will show how the ambiguity of policy generates hostility, curtails resources, and fosters the conditions for agentive engagement. Discussion will draw upon literature on CT/CE policy and its securitisation of Muslim communities, the implementation of street-level bureaucrats and, beyond the framework of street-level bureaucracy, the potential for individual agency to subvert policy objectives. This approach has been adopted to best make sense of the data, taking into consideration the effects of the policy spiral on the local scene, the impact of subjective agency on the negotiation of participation, and the significance of maintaining occupancy in the grey area for the critical community practitioner.

Challenges

Discussion first considers types of challenges faced by practitioners, from community backlash to an increased risk to personal safety, and proceeds to contextualise the effects of these reactions on participants' work and wellbeing, revealing some of the ways in which they attempt to reconcile and negotiate difficulties faced. Understanding these experiences is significant in answering the research questions and can offer insight as to why some individuals disengage from the space. Confrontation faced by practitioners as a result of involvement with CT/CE is extremely common but rarely documented and while it may act as a barrier to effective engagement, an appreciation of the cost that participation can have on the individual makes an independent important contribution to the field.

In his study on the motivations of CT/CE practitioners referenced in Chapter 5, Sadi Shanaah (2021) highlights the exigency for research on barriers to participation. This has been touched upon in studies that reveal how Muslim police officers working on CT endure resentment from their own communities, attributed by the

authors to Islamic teachings that prohibit Muslims from spying on one another (El-Awa and Spalek, 2012). Other research exposes how 'moderate interlocutors' (though not necessarily Muslim) involved with both the state and community are branded sell-outs (Chowdhury and Krebs, 2009: 398; Cherney and Murphy, 2016), and in Spalek's theory (2014), it is acknowledged that 'connectors', working in domains of low legitimacy, can be seen as troublemakers in both realms. More recently, the CCE produced a report (2019b) on the abuse of 'counter-extremists', concluding that seventy-eight per cent of the Prevent/Counter-Extremism Coordinators and CSOs surveyed had experienced abuse, intimidation or harassment for accepting government funding to carry out CT/CE work. The report was picked up in the IRP which declared the routine persecution of associated individuals, including Muslims in receipt of death threats, unacceptable and concluded Prevent was not doing enough to support or 'empower' its practitioners (Shawcross, 2023). Shawcross connects the treatment of Muslim practitioners to the 'disinformation and demonisation' that surrounds Prevent (2023: 8), disregarding critique of the ambiguous and oscillating strategy to instead blame 'Islamist-led' campaigns within Britain's Muslim communities (HM Government, 2023a: 27) that discourage engagement with Prevent and undermine its work. To counter these voices in the hope of limiting abuse, the government has pledged to create a dedicated unit within the Homeland Security Group to rebut misinformation, tackle 'myths', and 'defend the practitioners who help protect communities' (2023: 162).

In spite of the government's clear assessment, alternative perspectives are offered by Shanaah (2022a) who analyses quantitative data to suggest that a large majority of British Muslims are supportive of other Muslims who are active in countering extremism and Ragazzi (2016), who argues that 'trusted' Muslims implementing Prevent/Counter-Extremism increase their social status through participation. The empirical data presented in this section makes a significant contribution to this under-researched area.

Types of challenges

Backlash from community and social circle

'I've literally had people take a step back when I tell them what I work on! Physically, like 'woah'!' – Sofia

Negative responses to CT/CE involvement stems overwhelmingly from the communities in which practitioners exist and work. The terms 'sell-out', 'traitor', 'snitch' and 'spy' appear repeatedly in the data, with participants being 'called out' in public spaces (Sulaiman), 'frowned upon' by long-term friends (Yasir) and 'accused of being an Uncle Tom by your own community who basically try to disown you, saying "traitors, they are more interested in their own bank balance", almost thinking that you're making millions out of this' (Idrees). Practitioners receive a barrage of abusive messages, particularly in the wake of global terror incidents perpetrated in the name of Islam which they perceive to act as catalysts for their increased vilification, causing positive work to be 'undone'.

Denigrated as government pawns, participants talk about the stress, 'constant headaches' (Amar) and anxiety incurred and describe how 'self-preservation to stay in the field' (Tahir) can feel like the only option left. For some, this act of self-preservation takes the form of turning their backs on sections of their communities and aligning more closely with other CT/CE practitioners (aforementioned notion of 'doing a 180'). The dichotomous positions of pro and anti-Prevent and the overlooking of the grey area colour binary criticisms aimed at practitioners from communities, 'the way they see it is it's us and them. They're like, "why are you working with the *kuffar* [non-Muslims]? The government are against us" and all that kind of stuff' (Imran).

The conceptualisation of Prevent as an industry surfaces frequently, 'people think well, he's probably on the Prevent gravy train' (Idrees), as monetary gain is equated with CT/CE involvement and often believed to be the primary motivator for practitioners' engagement.

> I bought a car on finance about a year ago and they said, 'oh, they pay well to spies now, don't they?' You can't do anything! Basically, if you buy some new clothes or something and you look smart, they're going to say, 'oh look at him man, he's getting *haram* money, the government are giving him money.' That's what our people are like. And so you end up building that sort of reputation, which, you know, some people did say about me, about my staff, even within my own networks […] family members, cousins, would say to my mum, 'we heard he's working with Prevent, this is really bad, he's a government spy. Do you know your son?' My own cousins! I would go to weddings and youngsters would tell me, 'you know what they said on that table, they were eating *roti* and they were saying watch out for him, he's a spy for the government.' (Imran)

Aware that he is perceived to be 'rinsing Prevent funding', Imran is not the only participant to suggest this can spill into intimate circles as celebrations like weddings and Eid days become tarnished and time is spent trying to convince disapproving '*jahil* [ignorant] relatives' of the virtue of CT policy (Imaan). Reactions from friends and family vary from initial concern, worries about 'selling out', counsel to disengage and more uncompromising rhetoric. Behaviour around practitioners is discernibly monitored, 'mates watch their Ps and Qs' (Zayd), while others are cut off entirely.

> I lost personal friends, and this was when we were refusing to engage with the Home Office! So we were absolutely sticking to our very narrow parameters at the time but there were people who would just literally stop talking to you. People who invited you to like major life events, whether it was weddings or birthdays or whatever, just stopped talking because you were now labelled as **for** Prevent or taking dirty money or selling out or that discourse and that really… it's just not very nice. I suppose one of my many weaknesses is I like to be liked and so to have horrible stuff online about how you're some sort of like treacherous wench who is taking the gravy is just horrible. I feel outraged by the rudeness really, people who had been in my house and drank my tea and then didn't even have the manners to say what are you doing or have a conversation or say are you taking Prevent money? 'Cause at the time I could have said well, no. (Sara)

As disclosed in the previous chapter, Sara shifted the boundaries of her engagement as a result of losing friends through initial association with the strategy. The abandonment actually contributed to her decision to accept Home Office funding she had previously declined, exposing the significant and tangible effects that being shunned by friends and family can actually have on practitioners and work that is carried out. While some may retreat in response, others exemplify Tahir's theory of 'doing a 180' and only deepen their

involvement. This can further isolate practitioners from their critics or conversely, at times, result in the softening of unforgiving opinions when close relationships are at stake. Nadia, employed by BCC's Prevent team, refers to her son's involvement at university with the NUS's 'Preventing Prevent' campaign to oppose the strategy on campus, '[he] came home from uni and said "I can't talk to you anymore Mother, I have to prevent Prevent!" I was like, well Prevent pays your rent mate so we need to have a discussion about it.' For some, a conversation around the complexities of engagement with CT/CE can be sufficient in reducing tensions.

Dialogue is a useful tool for practitioners tasked with allaying the concerns of sceptical colleagues in an attempt to foster cohesive implementation, however, is not always successful as Kamran recalls the provocation felt from Muslim officers within WMP.

> they felt like I was a traitor, that I sell Prevent for the police, and I'm not playing the victim card here but I think I was tarnished because I was the one breaking those barriers, there was only me and another Muslim officer. I could not believe what I had to go through internally.

This touches on support structures available to practitioners – to be picked up later in the chapter – but evidently, engagement can cause friction for participants professionally. In interviews for this study, some practitioners disparaged others they felt lacked a critical distance from policy, making reference to 'native informants' and 'sell-outs' who attempted to over-assimilate with white colleagues through appearance and the appropriation of language.

Reactions thus far have amounted to verbal resistance and social and professional distancing but there are times when retaliation can prove more sinister.

Threats to personal safety

Raheem narrates second-hand instances of two colleagues, one whose house was firebombed because of his engagement with Prevent and another who was punched in the face. As previously stated, he characterises his own involvement as a 'critical engagement' and retaliation he has witnessed has caused him to practice caution in the publicity of his contribution and degree to which he performs as a public-facing 'Prevent practitioner'. He is not the only participant to relay concerns around personal safety because of their work on Prevent or the CES.

> I'm not gonna lie, I did feel a bit like, what if someone attacks us? 'Cause you're thinking extremism, you're thinking big, it's not just something small. 'Cause like when Prevent came around, there was this whole narrative around people saying, if you're living in the UK, you should just go and carry out these acts [of terrorism] and whatnot. You just never know when someone's going to completely lose it and do whatever they want. So I think all of our staff did have in the back of their mind that imagine somebody was to come and just kick in the windows of our office. When you're in that field of work, you will have that kind of mind frame. And when people find out you work for the Home Office and whatnot, you get like 'oh they're snitches, they're sell outs.' (Zahra)

Zahra's trepidation is compounded by the moral panic discourse around domestic terrorism and resonates with Adam and Zayd who also worry on a local level about security measures at the council offices they work

from, well-known as the local authority Prevent base. They spoke at length about feelings of paranoia and anxiety over being attacked as they left the building, citing what they say is a substantial anti-Prevent lobby in Birmingham as justification for their concerns.

For some participants, fear manifested into tangible danger. Asiya received so much verbal abuse, 'being called a traitor, being accused of taking lots and lots of money – I wish I did!' that police were forced to visit her home when threats were made to her life. BCC's Prevent Coordinator also divulged the extent to which he is routinely attacked online and how this evolved into a personal safety risk.

> it is hard, it's tough. You get death threats as well – I've received many. I've had many briefings from the police. I was followed in Birmingham, there was a person who was following me from the car park across. When one of the [terrorist] attacks happened, we were doing a commemoration outside the council house and there was commotion and somebody was caught with an axe and it was the same guy that was following me […] so those things are difficult but they're the kind of stuff that people don't see and most people will just say that's just part of the job, isn't it?

Improved personal safety processes are picked up in the discussion on support but the Coordinator reiterates that those involved with CT/CE should not expect to be respected, 'you have to make a choice – if you're working on Prevent, you're not going to be popular. If you go to a networking event, the minute you walk in the door, people are gonna say there's a spy coming in. So there are certain sacrifices that you make'. Despite the requirement for police protection at his home, the Coordinator is unwavering in his mission and remains committed to tackling extremism. Some, like Asiya, have disengaged as a result of their traumatic experiences (see Chapter 8) while others adopt strategies that disallow the publication of their engagement outside of official circles.

Discussion has examined some of the types of challenges faced by practitioners. The following sections delve further into the effects of these circumstances on participants.

Impact of challenges

Tarnishing reputations

Imaan believes her organisation administered the most successful Prevent projects in Birmingham but that this resulted in the greatest negative impact on her business. She describes being heckled at events, interrogated by her customers, pranked at her place of work, and slandered in the community.

> It was affecting the business because they'd say about everything 'oh, is this funded?' [referring to furnishings at her centre] and I was like, the government are not gonna pay for pots from Morocco! This is our own money. But even repeating that constantly was very disheartening. Having people say 'oh they're funded anyway' was really disheartening because this was all ours. Apparently, I heard from other sources that, oh, women don't come here because of our association with Prevent, they felt like they'd be spied on or they don't trust the building.

In the end, Imaan concluded that her involvement with the strategy had 'killed off' her business and triggered the local community to deem the centre a 'Prevent hub'. Her profits became so unsustainable she was forced

to rebrand and refresh the company, changing the name in the hope that the association with Prevent would wither. She continued to work with the Prevent team because of her belief in the integrity of the agenda, instead undertaking outreach work with the local authority as detailed in Chapter 4.

While Imaan struggled with the label of Prevent rather than the work itself, Asiya's experience was more encompassing, though she too was driven to fold her organisation and relaunch under a new name after her participation earned her the title of 'the Prevent girl'. Asiya was abused online during her stint with Prevent and has found that the notoriety this effectuated has travelled with her as she now tries to navigate work in other areas.

> It is very very challenging trying to make them understand […] as soon as they see my name they're like 'oh, weren't you Prevent? We don't want the Prevent legacy, we don't want that association.' And then having to rebuild that trust [...] it takes a lot of time for them to actually feel comfortable with me. I don't want to be in the forefront or the limelight again.

Her involvement with Prevent not only affected her organisation at the time, which sought to empower and educate women against radicalisation, but continues to affect her career options after her departure. Asiya grew disillusioned with Prevent's focus on ISIS-related extremism and had become more interested in what she terms 'everyday forms of extremism' (such as HBV), which fall under the remit of the CES. Despite this seemingly obvious fit, her traumatic experience of Prevent engagement served as a deterrent to considering a partnership with Counter-Extremism.

> To be honest, because of the legacy in Birmingham… I mean on a personal level, I was abused terribly by lots of people for working with Prevent. And a lot of women refused to engage with me because of that. And these were the very women that I needed to engage with. So I think because of that and now looking at it in a broader sense, I don't want that association with BSBT or Prevent because I won't be able to engage with those women who I want to support and who need the support. That was probably my greatest challenge, trying to shake that off. Trying to shake off the abuse that came with that and the mistrust that came with that legacy. I mean, it's still there.

Asiya explains how affiliation with Prevent, encumbered by its problematic local history, has actually been a barrier to carrying out effective work with deserving recipients. Prevent and the CES are not distinct enough to warrant engagement with the latter, and even in completely unrelated fields within the third sector, her reputation has been tarnished to such an extent that she continues to struggle to develop meaningful relationships. In addition to impeding professional endeavours, the next section considers the impact on practitioners in a personal capacity.

Effects on the individual

'You'd think… shit man, what are we doing this for?' – Sulaiman

Participants articulate some of the emotions bound up with engagement and the challenges it brings, from feelings of embarrassment (Nadia) and disappointment 'it was upsetting for me, crippling me in the back of my head – the damage that was being done' (Yasir) to fatigue 'we had a lot of passion and energy at the time but we're burned out now' (Imaan) and total regret 'I wouldn't get involved in something like that personally

ever again' (Noor). Some participants are primarily concerned with the hangover of association after being 'burned' by community backlash (Tahir) while others reflect on the guilt and relief that frames their experiences of emerging unscathed because they concealed the true nature of their work from communities (explored in the following chapter).

Challenges mentioned can take a toll on the physical and mental health of the individual; as was the case for Asiya who was left feeling overworked, underpaid and constrained by the Home Office, 'because of the stress and the amount of work involved, you don't get to switch off. And I needed to be healthier… having to face these battles on a daily basis, it can drain you.' The extent of her distress, she says, was beginning to negatively impact her young daughter and this was one of the reasons she decided to withdraw her participation and seek work in an 'environment where I don't have to watch my back all the time.'

For others, the undue scrutiny manifests in different ways. Zahra is plagued by a constant burden to spot signs of extremism (brought on by a terror attack perpetrated by an individual revealed to be living in close proximity to her organisation's offices). The effects of responsibilisation on the CT/CE practitioner are palpable as Zahra punishes herself for what she determines to be a failure in her performance of active citizenship, 'it does get in your head as a practitioner, you're thinking, why did I not notice it? It does fall down on you'. Hanna similarly struggles with a perceived responsibility and duty to communities, both in terms of protecting them from radicalisation and simultaneously not stigmatising them, describing a 'can't win' situation. While Zahra and Hanna attempt to respond to the impact of challenges from positive perspectives, others experience 'engagement fatigue' (Raheem) and their dismay can lead to a complete departure from the space (following chapter).

As previous chapters have shown, some individuals seek a spiritual succour when dealing with backlash; the BCC Prevent Coordinator, however, describes his approach in the language of the strategy itself: developing resilience. As well as growing a thicker skin, he says the key is to remain open to conversations with critics (arguing for the validity of the grey area) unlike other well-known Muslim figures who adopt a defensive approach.

> You just have to have a look at Sara Khan and the grief that she gets – and I don't always agree with what she says or does – but everybody automatically assumes that she was created by government […] and what that can do is it can harden your own resolve so she just said 'eff it, come on everyone, take me on, I'll take you on as well' and that divorces her further from the community because then people don't trust her. I've just taken on quite a lot of the criticism and just opened my door to have conversations and talk to people, I've been in rooms when people have sniggered and said, 'oh look at him, he's just there from the government, he doesn't realise he's being used'.

In contrast to Sara Khan, who in her book writes about being labelled a 'native informant' and 'apostate' (Khan and McMahon, 2016), the Coordinator attempts to address criticism from his flexible position within the grey area, though evidently remains the target of a great deal of abuse. Many participants, also operating from a middle space, describe responding to criticism through a method of questioning their conscience akin

to the setting and checking of intentions covered in the previous chapter, referring to the carrying out of 'checks and balances' (Rashid) internally and with colleagues (next section) to prioritise the 'greater good' (Kashif), viz., the wellbeing of their communities.

Sara was also forced to reconcile her conscience after being dropped by friends (as mentioned), clarifying a process of refining the intentions of her organisation's work, considering the positive impact it was having against negative feedback received, and then being forced to 'get over herself' in order to continue.

> We sat down quite a number of times and said, 'look, are we doing this wrong?' And we felt we weren't. [We were] giving young people space, de-stigmatising conversations and we felt like this is really good and we're making an impact. We just felt well, all this noise and drama and politics, actually, does it matter? Okay, so people don't like us but actually, so what? And anyway, if they're that rude, does it matter? If someone is like, shouting at us on Twitter, does it matter? So I think we really got over it.

'Getting over it' was perhaps achievable for Sara because of the 'we' she indicates, relying on the support of her colleagues in the face of resistance, continued in the following section. As well as undertaking introspective checks and embodying buzzwords such as 'resilience', some participants take practical steps to mitigate the impact of challenges. There are those who choose to disengage completely, conceal partnerships or financial arrangements, and individuals like Zayd who attempts to pre-empt controversy by preparing future youth and community practitioners for adversity. At the time of interview, Imaan was in the process of converting her organisation from a CIC to a charity in the hope she would 'feel more confident having a charity number behind me'.

These various steps and approaches are critical for the survival of practitioners in the local CT/CE space but what is noticeable from the data is the distinction between challenges articulated by police practitioners and those experienced by participants employed by the local authority or independently engaged. It is important to note that challenges are not universal and police practitioners in particular, with the exception of the internal resistance Kamran recalled from Muslim officers outside of the CTU, felt that implementing Prevent was no more likely to incite backlash than other elements of policing. This could be explained by the perception within minority ethnic communities (Bowling et al., 2003), and Muslim communities in particular (Awan et al., 2013), that certain sections of society are perceived to be policed unfairly, establishing contexts of low trust (Spalek, 2010) and fractious relations with the authority. Police practitioners, therefore, may anticipate friction in the implementation of their duties, as intimated by Kamran's response to external criticism, 'because I'm wearing a uniform, I'm a pig, I'm a traitor? Oh really? Well I'm proud of what I am', widening the distance between such individuals and communities. This is in contrast to community practitioners who are often regarded with degrees of insiderness by communities they live and work within. Other practitioners in possession of more freedom to move through communities owing to their white or white-passing status also experienced less conflict (and were surprised to hear of the experiences of colleagues), as did participants associated with the CES who exploited the innocuous title of BSBT and

dissociative slogan 'we are not Prevent' to similarly avoid discord. Significantly, local authority-associated participants with the highest profiles (such as the Coordinator and director of the largest BCC-funded CSO) experienced some of the most acute hostility.

Discussion has shown how practitioners implementing Prevent and the CES are prone to experiencing animosity and opposition. I argue the ambiguous condition of CT/CE policy in the UK has exposed its practitioners to the extensive abuse they face. The 'failed and friendless' origins of Prevent (Thomas, 2010; 443), torn between the DCLG and the Home Office and unsure of its principal objectives, contributed to the tangential, and at times exploitative, work carried out by groups and individuals (see Chapter 2) that helped to construct the image of the CT/CE practitioner as insincere. In so doing, Muslim communities, subject to increased securitisation by CT/CE policy which itself has been authenticated by the participation of Muslim practitioners who 'inflate' vulnerabilities (mentioned in Chapter 2 and explored further in the following chapter), are mistrustful of Muslims who work on the CT/CE agenda. This toxic cycle, which, despite improvements, continues to flourish in the fissures and fluctuation of policy, contributes to the difficulties faced by practitioners who attempt engagement at the local level. Nevertheless, through their very existence, the challenges outlined bolster the notion of the grey area and illustrate some of the competing pulls experienced by practitioners in Birmingham. In this vein, the following section provides a more in-depth analysis of the support that is required by, and provided to, practitioners in the space.

Resources

Support

Discussion has covered how backlash, and the expectation of it, can cause individuals to face internal dilemmas around whether to engage, continue to engage, or withdraw participation. Once in the field, however, practitioners describe how a lack of support (not initially written into the interview guide but foregrounded by participants) significantly impacts their overall experiences, leaving many seeking informal and, at times, innovative outlets.

The topic of support for practitioners involved with CT/CE remains under-researched but it is more broadly recognised that the work of critical community practitioners is burdensome (Banks, 2007), that social workers in the realm of preventing extremism, vulnerable to burnout and secondary trauma, receive poor support from colleagues and supervisors (Haugstvedt, 2022), and that the adoption of outreach engagement (as outlined in Chapter 4) presents challenges for psychotherapists who are ill-supported in their work in the community; suffering isolation, role confusion and the blurring of boundaries (Rogers, 2014). In the sphere of Prevent and the CES, Shanaah's Muslim counter-extremism activists complained about insufficient material (next section) and moral support from the government (2021) and the CCE's aforementioned report into the abuse faced by practitioners indicates that individuals, when confronted, are unsure where to turn for support

(2019b). Overall, a deficiency in provision has been noted. The following discussion contributes fresh and in-depth insights to this debate.

Paucity of support

'Off the record, I'd say the support is completely rubbish, it's crap. Officially, I can't say that.' – Adam

The majority of participants expressed dissatisfaction with existing support structures and describe feeling overlooked and undervalued. And while some believe support mechanisms exist but are not easily accessible, 'people will come in with a lot of heavy stories and it's just hard to walk away after you finish work. Prevent should probably say we've got this available so if you need it, it's here' (Zahra), others speak of an outright absence, 'there's been none, I've just been left in the open and that's what has made my life difficult' (Tahir).

Senior youth worker Yasir questions the role of supervisors in meeting this need (identified as critical in Rogers, 2014; Haugstvedt, 2022).

> We didn't get any kind of real clinical supervision in terms of how do we help process some of the things that we're going through, where we were supported, where we felt empowered to keep doing what we were doing. It was almost like you do it but you're like at every stage: how do I feel now? Do I feel comfortable? Is this safe ground? But there was no support for us. Our managers just didn't have a clue.

Yasir was in need of emotional guidance in the implementation of the Pathfinder phase but also held concerns about safety and security; when young people asked sensitive questions he worried about unwittingly accessing illegal material in his online research attempts, 'actually, how do we safeguard us as workers? Our managers didn't understand enough about the issue, it was almost as if they were coming to us for the answers'. Presumptions made about the possession of knowledge or authority on the issue of radicalisation is picked up in the upcoming section on training but points to a finding that Muslim individuals often feel they are expected to bear an intrinsic understanding of extremism which might therefore contribute to the lack of support and training provisions in the local space.

Zayd also evokes his Muslimness to suggest that Muslim practitioners actually require more, not less, support.

> I don't think there's space for me as a Muslim practitioner in Prevent to kind of vent that frustration or openly just say, look – these are my struggles. 'Cause as a Muslim practitioner, I feel with this agenda, we're kind of like stuck in no man's land. There's certain people in the community that probably understand the programme but generally, Prevent is toxic. So when you're out there, you're seen as a spy or a sell-out or a stooge for the government, you know? All of those things. And then when you're in your officer's role, when an incident happens, at times it can be like you're almost having to apologise for your community to your peers.

Engaging with CT/CE in Birmingham as a Muslim practitioner is like being in 'no man's land' for Zayd who brings together ideas previously discussed around the grey area and challenges faced as a result to reinforce the significance of appropriate support for Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners locally.

These accounts of access, or lack thereof, to support confirm that many individuals working in this space are struggling. Some told me they were frustrated, had nobody to talk to, and were taking on too much without due consideration for their wellbeing, 'it can get a bit heavy and weigh on your mind' (Umair). Many felt let down by managers and funders, and it seemed at times that the interviews conducted for this study provided an initial forum in which participants could 'get things off [their] chest' (Sulaiman). I received a handful of post-interview emails and messages thanking me for providing the opportunity and space to 'vent', with a number of participants even describing our conversations as being 'like therapy' during interviews, 'it's very therapeutic because no one else really listens to us' (Sara). Participants gave up their free time to provide me with data for my research but so many had such positive responses to the conversations that it became apparent that for some, the interview might be one of the few forms of available 'support' in their purview. Participants like Zahra, Tahir and Raheem explained that they rarely found the opportunity to reflect on their involvement with Prevent/Counter-Extremism and that our meetings helped them to process their feelings, formalise opinions and make sense of their positionality in the field. A few participants asked for second interviews to be arranged so they could continue the conversation despite my questions being answered, and I received several follow-up phone calls when participants experienced something frustrating in their work or wanted to talk through a recent incident. For some, interactions undertaken for this study had inadvertently become informal outlets of support, a topic considered further in the following section.

Informal support

Owing to the dearth of formalised support made available to practitioners working in the CT/CE space in Birmingham, individuals come to rely on each other for guidance and encouragement. When asked about where they turn for support, many participants named other practitioners in the space, describing peers with 'similar mindsets' as 'Godsends', attributing their capacity to remain active in the space to the informal chats they routinely have with each other. Zayd, who leans upon colleagues across the youth service, city council and WMCTU, says 'that informal support becomes like my clinical supervision, you know, I sort that out myself because there isn't anything officially in place'.

Insider/outsider

As the city's senior youth workers – unique to the study in that they were not proactive in their initial implementation of Prevent – became obliged to undertake new and controversial projects, manage criticisms and battle internal crises, they found no support from either local or central government and were forced to carve out an informal forum through which they would bounce ideas, seek advice and share concerns, and then trickle this moderation of thoughts and guidance down to staff at their respective centres. The youth workers that constituted this network are Muslim but this raises the question of whether support is best provided by insiders (other Muslim or minority ethnic practitioners), outsiders, or whether the distinction is irrelevant. Most participants were clear in their specificity for support from those with a similar background. Sara says other Muslim practitioners act as a moral compass for her and describes the importance of 'talking

your ethics through with people that understand where you're coming from because otherwise you feel really alone… reflecting from a faith perspective, just checking in and asking – what am I doing? Is it right?'

Sofia also underscores the significance of Muslim confidants,

> I have a couple of people that I know I can go to and I know they have similar approaches and similar experiences and they understand me, and that has just been such a lifesaver because I have been really really disappointed by a lot of my non-Muslim colleagues, I feel really let down. So having other Muslims who work on the topic, this has just been amazing. And then you realise that a lot of the stuff you have to deal with when engaging and just this thing about being in the middle, being stuck in the middle – the only people who I felt really understand that are other Muslims who also work on this. So I'm just so glad to have that because otherwise it can be a very lonely experience.

Sofia expands on the difficulties bound up with remaining in the grey area here as she describes a position so isolating that practitioners a) need extra support, and b) require support from those who have comparable experiences and are able to comprehend the nuances of their work. Multiple participants highlight faith as a fundamental and unifying characteristic in individuals they seek support from and some broaden the parameters from faith to ethnicity, 'you know the conversations that BAME practitioners have with each other that they don't have with other people? [We] analyse it from a BAME perspective so having BAME workers there is very different, you don't feel like you're fighting the system yourself […] it's supportive, it's validating' (Nadia).

Nadia articulates what many other participants intimate, she derives comfort from other Black, Asian and minority ethnic practitioners because they recognise and understand the complexities involved. She provides examples of how, in the course of support she has provided to colleagues, they have managed to redirect and refine work so that not only are the conversations she mentions a form of support, she believes they are instructive in the delivery of a more culturally sensitive version of Prevent across Birmingham. The support offered by practitioners with similarly minoritised backgrounds permits an unspoken understanding of the grey area. Idrees describes phoning another participant at 'crazy hours of the night' when he's 'really on edge' if he wakes up stressed or has been recently criticised at a family gathering. He describes how his peer is able to parallel these emotions with his own experiences, remind him why he is involved with the work, and resolve his worries.

Contrastingly, Imran prefers speaking to an 'outsider', disclosing a relationship he has developed with a practitioner from a different area.

> I run things through with him. He's a white guy, he's non-judgmental and for some reason, it's weird, I feel quite comfortable talking to someone who is not from our religion or from our community. Because there's no elements of judgment there. It's a bit weird man, but for some reason I feel like I could tell him more than I would be able to tell a brother, you know, it's weird but I just grew to learn to trust him. And he's never abused that trust.

This indicates there is no definitive rule for what support should look like and mirrors the insider/outsider debate surrounding researcher positionality outlined in Chapter 3. While many open up to those they share

likeness with, others value the impartiality of an 'outsider' and touch on potential consequences of seeking guidance internally, 'if it gets back to a certain person, my job's fucked' (Haroon). Overall, practitioners appreciate the support of individuals with some form of common background, whether internal to their communities or work environment or not,

> that's the only way it'll work because you don't need someone patting your back or helping you wipe your tears. You need someone who knows what's going on and who is convinced that what you are doing, in your role, and in what you're facilitating, and what you're helping to provide, is right. (Haris)

Informal support as a burden

Haroon feels that CT/CE practitioners 'are left with a lot of shit to deal with', contrasting specialist support he says is provided to other professionals with the situation locally,

> they can go and offload, we don't get that. Some of the safeguarding issues that my workers and myself have dealt with, sometimes when I go home I'm like 'is that fucking really happening?' You know what I mean, we ain't got that support, where we can go to a counsellor and sit down… it does traumatise us.

Because of the absence of formalised avenues, he too leans upon colleagues and his line manager for counsel but is concerned about the impact of this weight on those individuals – practitioners who are also dealing with similar issues.

> Who is there to listen to us? Who is there to listen to my manager? Ok there might be a time where I go to my manager and moan, tell him what I'm feeling, but because of what he has heard from me it's not fair on him… he's thinking 'fucking hell, my staff is going through that, I've got a duty as a manager' but then who is his manager? And who are they going to? I don't think there's no structure for professionals to get that help. And there's no investment. They talk about 'we need to do this and we need to do that', but they need to invest in their own professionals, they need to have that support there. We have to do it informally, I know there are certain people I can phone up in the service and moan and groan at them and they'll take it, and they can do the same to me. Yesterday I had one colleague phoning me, throwing everything on me and then after half an hour they phoned me back and thanked me for giving them the chance to moan and let it out.

Haroon is able to obtain informal support from his manager in the youth service but still worries about whose responsibility it is to then absorb some of the stress from that individual; reiterating the difficult nature of CT/CE work, the paucity of structured resources and the disregard for the wellbeing of practitioners active in the space. He speaks at length about another participant who delivers Prevent/Counter-Extremism elsewhere in Birmingham in a similar capacity.

> Sometimes I'm not gonna lie, I phone [practitioner] and I say a lot of shit to him and he tries to support me but then when I put the phone down I think 'shit, what have I done? I've just thrown all my shit on him and he's gonna be thinking of me now which is gonna mess his day up. He's gonna be thinking what can I do to support him?' But how much shit is he going through himself?

Other participants also recognised the potentially damaging effects of impressing upon practitioners, making reference to passionate individuals who go 'over and beyond in their own time' (Zayd) to support colleagues in the space, as well as the young people and communities they engage with.

Innovative forms of support

Having a 'moan' or a chat with a peer delivering similar work has been identified as restorative for some practitioners. Others describe more unusual forms of support, such as Nadia who privately sources her own supervision from a psychologist with Muslim heritage, 'so he gets what I'm talking about', and Nasreen who arranged bespoke case management support with a colleague on a monthly basis after finding herself 'frazzled' and struggling to remain detached.

Asiya received online support in the form of a group of CT/CE practitioners instructed by the Home Office to defend her when she was being trolled on social media,

> there was a network of us, the RICU team and practitioners working with Prevent. So for example if I was on a show and I was being abused, a few of them would jump online and tweet in support of me and call out the abusers and things like that.

While not personal one-to-one support that assisted with her wellbeing or personal safety, this online presence did help her feel less alone when she was targeted. Another mentoring scheme innovated by the Home Office encouraged Prevent practitioners to partner up with teams outside of their own locality; Nasreen was yet to attend the scheme and had only come across the email by chance, but was looking forward to the prospect of meeting her equivalent from Haringey Council to share stories and experiences. These forms of support, however, were restricted to local authority Prevent practitioners (the small number of individuals that constitute the team) and would not be accessible to the majority of participants, even those commissioned by BCC to implement Prevent independently or through their CSO.

Imran proposed another unique support mechanism to address the trauma he ascribes to himself and his team which would involve a neutral individual in possession of the right 'credentials' and knowledge of the local scene to provide support to practitioners and organisations on a one-to-one basis without working directly for the city council or police.

> I was thinking that would be a good role for you, as somebody who's like a 'listener' for the Prevent projects. My idea would be like… even for blokes, it's not a problem, I wouldn't have a problem talking to you about like, you know, stress with my family, like, how do I feel about Prevent and things, how's the project going, do I need help with reports, all that kinda stuff. We need someone independent that we can talk to. And then you have a relationship with [BCC Prevent Coordinator] where you meet him once a month and then you give him a run-down of like, what projects are thinking or where they're struggling and individuals within a project that need help or whatever. We could talk to you about a really sensitive case that we felt quite traumatised us as individuals. Because we need someone there that can do that clinical sort of thing like 'I went to this family and I saw this happen and it really affected me badly, but I can't tell my team, I can't tell other people, because, you know, I need to show the management type of front' so, yeah… I personally think we need someone that allows us to have that, to get things off our chest.

Imran craves the type of support that many participants have described receiving informally from colleagues but he suggests formalising a position so that the needs of practitioners can be fed back to funders and managers. He stresses that the relationship between practitioner and 'listener' must remain confidential so that 'nobody can force you to say what we've told you without our consent' which implies the primary

function would be to support the practitioner rather than improve policy, although potentially fulfilling one should impact the other.

After conversations for this research, a few participants with whom I shared multiple interactions conceived the idea of a practitioners' support network for all individuals delivering on Prevent and Counter-Extremism in Birmingham. The concept was to provide a 'safe space', to appropriate the language of policy, for practitioners to discuss their feelings, share tips, learn from and about each other and also upskill themselves and their staff. It was suggested that the network remain a neutral space, operating independently of the city council or West Midlands Police and would act as 'group therapy' (Zayd) and a 'critical friend' (Hanna) for all practitioners. Group or peer-based support as opposed to supervision that is task-based or managerial provides practitioners the 'opportunity to discuss, debate and agonise with colleagues [as] a vital part of keeping critical practice alive and the critical practitioner motivated and supported. A team of like-minded peers is, of course, the ideal setting' (Banks, 2007: 148). One of the overarching aims of forming the network was to develop longevity and introduce accountability in an attempt to avoid the 'parachuting' in of unsuitable workshops and practitioners perceived to be delivering unsustainable and insincere work, detailed in the following chapter. Though independent, the network was under discussion with staff at WMCTU's Community Resilience Team (now the Strategic Engagement Team) who were keen to help facilitate before the pandemic called activities to an end.

Significantly, policing appeared to emerge as distinct in terms of support; BCC's Prevent Coordinator describes its stronger and more established provisions (possibly owing to the complex nature of police work more broadly) in comparison to the 'work in progress' support available to his staff and commissioned organisations. While this perception is maintained by some police practitioners, others point to internal conflict with anti-Prevent Muslim officers (previously mentioned) and force-wide associations accused of further problematising the job of a Muslim engaged with Prevent.

> I believe Muslim police officers are especially vulnerable and they're victims of this [being inadequately supported]. They might not admit it but I know I've had phone calls from certain Prevent officers, they obviously want to talk to me about it and get it off their chest and you know what, they're my colleagues at the end of the day and I will go the extra mile for them… but I'm not the professional and there should be a body for them to turn to. […] what you can't tell me is that when I need support, go and speak to AMP [Association of Muslim Police], how's AMP gonna help me when there's members within AMP that are anti-Prevent? I'm sorry, but that's how it is. (Kamran)

Kamran dismisses services provided internally by Occupational Health as inappropriate, recommending that Muslim officers and staff involved in the implementation of Prevent require niche support from an approved professional who possesses sound understanding of both faith and policing; a sentiment echoed by Amar who also feels 'let down' by internal mechanisms and questions the absence of bespoke support for minority ethnic officers. Though police practitioners may be externally construed as catered for, it is palpable that their nuanced requirements for support are also lacking.

The data shows that practitioners across the board, from policing and the city council to those engaged by the youth service or independently commissioned, struggle with implementing elements of Prevent and the CES. Practitioners often resort to relying upon equally overburdened colleagues for comfort and guidance or alternatively attempt to carve out informal and innovative networks of support to facilitate their ongoing occupation of the space. As stated, the literature on support for CT/CE practitioners is limited and tends to focus on the lack of guidance from central to local structures (Lakhani, 2012). The data presented here, therefore, and its nuanced considerations of Muslimness and the effects of professional oversight on a personal level makes a significant contribution to the field. Literature on street-level bureaucracy mentions coping mechanisms (Tummers and Bekkers, 2014) but this refers to the exercising of autonomy and discretion (next chapter) rather than actual forms of support. Related literature on social workers implementing elements of extremism prevention suggests that tools such as peer support, debriefing, supervision and critical reflection can improve social workers' wellbeing as well as their practice, recommending professionalising these methods to assist individuals' work-related stress and potential for job retention (Haugstvedt, 2022). In the local climate of constant fluctuation, the stability that such mechanisms are able to provide for CT/CE practitioners could enhance the governance of the space, though it is worth noting that the context examined here is distinct from the general position of street-level bureaucrats in that the latter are generally not as stigmatised by communities and do not, therefore, rely in the same way on local actors and collectives for their legitimacy.

There are no 'set recipes' but in order for practitioners to develop critical consciousness and improve their experiences in the space, the 'role of dialogue with oneself and colleagues' can reinforce values and cement commitment (Banks, 2007: 151). The IRP does not explicitly recognise the issue of support, or lack thereof, in relation to practitioners but it does acknowledge the importance for 'frontline professionals' to have a 'trusted point-of-contact with whom they can discuss concerns in a candid manner' for the purposes of 'assisting effective Prevent delivery' (Shawcross, 2023: 109). The report simply makes an observation of this 'informal working relationship' without recommending the formalisation of any structures to further sustain or sponsor the practice. What is incontrovertible is the effects that engagement with CT/CE can have on the physical and mental wellbeing of practitioners and the exigency for a strategy to abate the current circumstances. I argue that the clear scarcity of support is itself a cause of the inconstancy of CT/CE in Birmingham; police and local authority practitioners transfer interdepartmentally and individual practitioners and CSOs emerge and disengage as a result of the negligence they experience in the face of the contentions intrinsic to engagement. The lack of support contributes to the capricious local scene which remains in sync with policy instability nationally.

In conjunction with the discussion on support, the following section considers the provision of training.

Training

There is limited research on the training of CT/CE practitioners but what exists paints a picture of outdated and sparse provisions. Koehler and Fiebig (2019) identify fourteen areas of knowledge that P/CVE practitioners should be versed in (such as ideology, legislation, psychological processes, mental health awareness, communication strategies, counselling methods) and analyse twelve training courses for personnel in the field to conclude that not only are the majority of practitioners unaware of such courses, content is often unsuitable; widening the gap between academia and the practical realities of intervention providers. In a report commissioned after the Manchester Arena bombing, the Greater Manchester Preventing Hateful Extremism and Promoting Social Cohesion Commission found Prevent training to be 'inconsistent and, at times, inappropriate and inadequate' (2018: 86), acknowledging that Ofsted had previously identified WRAP training as superficial. Training materials are found to focus unduly on 'Islamist' extremism (da Silva et al., 2020) which, in light of the IRP, will likely intensify. Perhaps most significantly, Shawcross himself lambasts the state of training in the IRP, describing resources that are 'not fit for purpose' and 'irrelevant to local needs' but that, in his estimation, are not confident enough in recognising 'Islamist ideas, narratives and behaviours' (2023: 100, 101). Shawcross underlines the relevance of localised spaces that are shaped by insufficient and externally produced training, resulting in a disparity in approaches to tackling ideologies and a lack of subject matter expertise amongst local practitioners. He attributes this to the high level of turnover among civil service staff, which I argue reflects the nature of a fluctuating local space that practitioners traverse with ease, moving through departments, funding streams, strategies and authorities depending on how much agency they are able to exercise or resources made accessible to them at any given time. While Shawcross cites insufficient training as a threat to the future of CT/CE delivery, I argue policy, and the dynamic space it occupies, is in fact a product of its own confused and erratic past. Nevertheless, he advised the development of a new centrally-directed training package, in place of WRAP, which is to centre on ideology and grievance narratives but, if the recommendations of the IRP are faithfully executed, will not address actual communicative methods of delivery. As stated in Chapter 2, the CCE (far from remaining distinct from Prevent) will now be in charge of all Prevent training administered nationally.

Unlike studies mentioned which focus on the analysis of online courses rather than individuals in receipt of them (Koehler and Fiebig, 2019), the following contribution centralises the experiences of practitioners, considering what is made available, potential reasons for a deficit, and thoughts on forms of training that providers would like to see prioritised at the local level.

Lack of adequate training

'It's left to the individual.' – Amar

Across the board, participants condemn the lack of CT/CE training on offer in Birmingham. Zayd, through his role managing the cohort of BCC Prevent-funded CSOs, has become concerned with the 'massive inconsistencies' this causes.

> What people are doing, they're tailor-making their own stuff, and what happens with that is it kind of gets diluted from person to person […] it's quite frightening, particularly the practitioners and some of the projects that we're funding, their level of understanding or lack of understanding of Prevent, or when they're going out and they're talking about Prevent, it's like they're getting it all wrong, particularly projects that **we** fund. So there isn't a consistent piece of training to say, you know what, every single project that's gonna go out and advocate on behalf of Prevent, they need to know a, b, and c; these are the three things that they need to do.

Not restricted to BCC, I observed a series of WMCTU-funded workshops delivered by practitioners commissioned through the TIF who had no background in CT or CE, had only started reading up about Prevent the night before the first session, and continuously referred to the strategy as an 'organisation' during presentations. Zahra highlights how deficiencies in knowledge can affect the quality of implementation, 'the Q&As… oh my God, sometimes it can be so bad'.

Participants complained that when training did exist, it was 'inappropriate and offensive' (Kamran) and failed to adequately explain the phenomenon of radicalisation, 'I went to the Home Office and I sat there thinking, this is all rubber dinghy rapids man, you guys don't have a clue… that's how I felt' (Nadia). 'Rubber dinghy rapids' is a reference to the 2010 film 'Four Lions' in which incompetent extremists compare attaining paradise by committing acts of terror to being on a water ride at an amusement park. Nadia points to arguments that consider motivations for adventure, romance or belonging as opposed to an overreliance on religious ideology or outdated ideas such as the conveyer belt theory (covered in Chapter 2) to suggest that training should encompass contemporary debate.

It is imperative to consider why the disclosure of poor quality training was a universalising opinion among participants. The first conclusion formulated from the data suggests that individuals are simply expected to take care of their own needs, as is typical of neoliberal workplace culture (Crowley and Hodson, 2014) and expected of the responsibilised practitioner. Many stated they were not offered training opportunities and that subject knowledge had been gained through self-learning and independent research which at times felt 'quite lonely' (Nasreen).

> If I'm being honest, the training isn't the best. A lot of it is self-training, it's down to you to do a lot of reading in that sense, really, to understand what the roles are about, the groups, the new groups that are emerging, the difference between right-wing, extreme right-wing or how that's broken down further now. I'm only really just understanding a lot of it is self-taught in that sense. It's self-generated and you're sort of learning on the job all the time. (Owais, WMCTU)

While some feel this approach to training is insufficient, Zak, also from WMCTU, embodies the responsibilised practitioner in his vehement belief that the onus lies with the practitioner to fulfil their own training needs.

> If a person takes on this role, they should expect to do a set amount of self-training, they should already have a genuine interest in this and do a certain amount of reading on geopolitical issues or the differences between different faiths or take an interest in the wider world, all the nuances between community cohesion and violent extremism that we discussed, so when they come to this department, they're not just starting from zero. I'd like to see that and I'm not sure we've always done

> that. […] it's the responsibility of the person to educate themselves. We have enough time to do it, we just need to use our downtime constructively.

Zak is clear that practitioners should take control of their own training needs but determines most are not 'self-motivated'. To combat this, he contributes materials to the aforementioned police-wide CT app in the hope that colleagues will attempt to educate themselves, explaining that informed practitioners appear passionate which in turn improves the quality of engagement. Participants from policing in particular were concerned about training, or lack thereof, potentially because community practitioners and CSOs often bid for resources so must present as knowledgeable on the subject matter and experienced in techniques of engagement. Police practitioners are more likely to expect on-the-job training but, as evidenced here, training days offered are not always sufficient or appropriate.

Community practitioners, commissioned through both BCC and WMCTU, also felt under-trained but on distinct grounds; it was assumed that because they were Muslim and 'from the community' they possessed an inherent understanding of issues like radicalisation and extremism that would translate into implementation. This is perhaps an effect of the securitised lens through which Muslim communities are widely perceived owing to the prominence and permeation of strategies like Prevent and the CES. Many participants felt they had been 'left to get on with it' (Shazia), under an 'assumption that you're the expert and on that basis we're giving you the money and hopefully you'll do a good job of it' (Umair). Umair describes this as a 'a double-edged sword kind of situation, on one side it's like wow, yeah, really good. But you have to also look at the ramifications of it as well. You have to remember that we're not bulletproof. As a human, you can also break up as well'. Without adequate 'capacity-building training' around foreign policy, institutionalised racism and theology (Malik), individuals may falter when questioned and this, in turn, can negatively impact self-confidence in their abilities.

Practitioners are also 'dropped in the deep end' (Sulaiman) with regard to methods of delivery and facilitation, particularly critical when addressing complex and contentious subjects with problematic histories though, interestingly, not an area discerned by Shawcross. The provision of training in these skills would support Banks' description of critical community engagement (2007) that stipulates the need for attention to be paid to the whole context that practice takes place in; which, for this study, must acknowledge the toxic legacy of Prevent in Birmingham. Nasreen reflects on the difficulties she encounters entering 'very private spaces' for 'very intrusive conversations', learning techniques of engagement through trial and error, spending 'months and months to get that buy-in'. Initially unprepared for the 'doors closed' in her face, she had to draw upon her own cultural and religious frames of reference, in lieu of facilitation guidance, to reach the stage where 'the *maulanas* [religious teachers] started warming and after a while offer you Pakistani chai and biscuits'.

Suggestions for future provisions

Since it has been established that there is a dearth of adequate training, engendering a cohort of providers who 'don't have the expertise' (Haris), it is of value to consider which types of training practitioners deem

constructive and would like to receive. Building on first aid and basic WRAP training (the extent of provisions on offer), participants submit that academic accreditation, courses on conflict resolution, Islamic theology, cultural sensitivities, personal safety, facilitation skills and an ongoing commitment to teaching political and current affairs should be provided by funders to holistically equip practitioners and generate meaningful engagement. Some participants wished to prioritise training on emotional wellbeing (Idrees), religion (Haroon), bespoke guidance on the local demographics (Amar) and policy (Fatima) while the preference for routes to formal academic training was clear in many conversations.

> The problem I have is that most of those who are engaged in delivery have no professional training around Prevent. They didn't have to have any prior qualifications, you know, so they just applied to jobs. And if they had some skills or whatever, they were invited. And that's been one of my criticisms of the Prevent agenda in terms of human resources, there is a lack of accreditation about those who are involved in it. So you could have people who actually come into the Prevent world for other personal reasons than just helping the Muslim community or other communities. (Shakeel)

Shakeel circles back to motivations for participation, framing his position around the understanding that engagement for purposes other than to help communities is disingenuous and also stipulating that as well as a passion to help, individuals should also be educated to effectively do so. Faysal, too, calls into question the eligibility of senior CT/CE practitioners.

> Out of the fourteen Prevent Coordinators I work with, only one has a Master's degree in some kind of politics. These are specialist roles so where is the competency and capability? And if they aren't coming with the academics or some kind of solid capability, why isn't there a responsibility or a duty for them to do that? Why shouldn't every single Prevent Coordinator have to do a Master's in counter-terrorism? Come on. Like every year, why does a Prevent Coordinator have to be nominated for an MBE?

Faysal questions the public endorsement of individuals he perceives as underqualified to act as authoritative voices on CT/CE in the first instance. Adam, himself, did not receive any training when he joined the local authority Prevent team but strongly believes that Prevent managers and funders should be encouraging all practitioners to seek learning opportunities; he recently completed a Prevent diploma at the University of Derby but has been unsuccessful in his attempts to convince fellow practitioners to follow suit. The lack of training provided to individuals who deliver on behalf of Prevent/Counter-Extremism constitutes a major finding of this study to which WMCTU's Community Resilience Team did respond by planning a training event for its funded projects, though this ultimately did not materialise. Practitioners from the reformed Strategic Engagement Team claim to provide bespoke training to projects commissioned through the TIF fund as and when required.

Overall, the data reveals that deficiencies in support and training impact all practitioners in the local space, affecting those associated with the police, local authority, Prevent and the CES, from senior Coordinators to independent providers contracted to deliver a handful of workshops. Though a universalising element of the local practitioner experience; Muslim participants in particular, expected to possess an inherent understanding of the topic and preventative mechanisms, were subject to further negligence. The data shows

they are, in fact, often in need of additional support owing to their difficult and precarious positions within the grey area. Making sense of the insufficiencies in training invokes the notion of the responsibilised practitioner and active citizen, in this case the 'trusted Muslim', in charge of meeting their own professional needs as well as contributing to the policing of their communities. I also argue that training is inadequate, outdated and inappropriate because of the state of central policy, never quite sure whether it is addressing cohesion or religious ideology, or focusing on 'Islamists' or broader safeguarding vulnerabilities. The section, then, evidences how the ambiguity of policy further contributes to a local CT/CE environment in which overlooked practitioners are able to fall through the many cracks that constitute the space. Implicating the experiences of local practitioners, Shawcross himself acknowledges the exigency for central government to correct its shortcomings (though referring solely to the teaching of extremist ideology) so as to inform 'good practice for local delivery' (2023: 104).

Agency

As covered in Chapter 2, research on the employment of agency in the context of Prevent, that is, practitioners' ability to self-direct the CT/CE work they are involved with, recognises the localised repurposing of funds beyond the prevention of radicalisation and extremism (Osorno Hernandez, 2021) to acknowledge evidence of appropriation and reinterpretation (O'Toole et al., 2016) that is generative of 'local PVE stories' (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010: 139). This is in spite of literature pointing to the post-2011 constraining of local authorities by the OSCT that is posited to have reduced 'autonomy over the direction and content of Prevent activity' (Thomas, 2014b: 490). The remainder of this chapter examines how agency is exercised by participants, considering how this is sanctioned by themselves and/or funders and reflecting on its impact in the local space. The chapter thus far has addressed RQ3, exploring problems and opportunities encountered in engagement and views on how these are navigated. This section will speak to RQ4, considering the extent to which local practitioners are able to shape their own personal and professional objectives.

Expressions of agency in the field

Agency encouraged in the local space

As mentioned in Chapter 4's analysis of Birmingham as a site of exceptionality, the BCC Prevent Coordinator asserts that the city, 'possibly better than any other area in the country' to engage with Prevent, operates a nuanced and autonomous approach to implementation, 'government don't put a noose around your neck and say "oh, you must do it this way, you must support this group", you can make it happen organically'. Under his management, BCC-associated practitioners reported having 'total control' over the direction of their work, attributing the hands-off approach of BCC to the eventual winning around of communities.

> I've always been given the freedom to speak and deliver how I want and that has proven to me that they're not here to use us as puppets. 'Cause that was the thing you would get, people saying they're

> trying to make you a puppet. No, because actually I sit in the driver's seat. So I have respect for the team, they're good *masha'Allah*. (Imaan)

Even youth workers, initially disempowered to refuse engagement, spoke of the 'freedom' with which the local authority permitted staff to remould initiatives, 'it wasn't a rigid thing […] we were able to change a lot of the stuff that was given to us' (Kashif). For Kashif, this meant not just tailoring programme content but also targeting the work at specific individuals, 'the right young people', perceived to be more at risk. This notion that Prevent is adaptable and unique to each local authority, and that such jurisdiction is centrally sanctioned, is reiterated by a senior Home Office representative who shared his opinion at a community consultation event in Birmingham that Prevent is not an overarching project administrated by the Home Secretary but simply a pot of money given by the local authority to local people to run local projects in ways they see fit. The narrative presented so far would suggest that funders and strategic leads overseeing Prevent and the CES locally do not insist on inflexible terms when allocating resources and that some practitioners are open to engagement because of a perceived level of control over the work that they deliver. Consideration of how this localised power manifests in acts of discretion and the impact of this on implementation is to follow in the next chapter. Individuals cited here, particularly the Prevent Coordinator and Home Office Director, exemplify street-level bureaucrat discourse in their promotion of a relatively autonomous application of policy divorced from a central designation. The data also captures participants who exercise agency in innovative ways that are more detached from the type of autonomy advocated by senior practitioners. The freedom with which Prevent/CES Coordinators locally are able to shape programmes of work, I argue, is productive of a heterogeneous and malleable space that practitioners recognise and then further adapt to suit their idiosyncratic needs. These routes are pursued proactively and convey the application of agency beyond understandings put forth by street-level bureaucracy literature that attributes agentive action to a deficit in practitioners' knowledge of policy (Hill, 2003).

Practitioners take initiative to exercise agency

'We're creative in how we sell it.' – Kashif

In austere times, individuals and organisations apply for CT/CE funding because it is the most easily accessible source, even if preventing radicalisation and tackling extremism is not the most important issue faced by their communities or a major element of the work they actually intend to carry out. This type of instrumental engagement, touched on in Chapter 5, enables the facilitation of Malik's community sports project, 'there's not enough public funding, we're doing this [community] work anyway, bring it under the umbrella of Prevent. Let's ensure that we meet the objectives of Prevent as well and utilise the money for our great work that we're doing at the same time'.

Youth workers, too, have come to view Prevent as a legitimate funding stream at a time where cuts have diminished avenues previously accessible to the service.

> The golden age of youth work's gone in terms of resources and stuff. So that's where we've had to be very clever to look at where the funding is. And sometimes it goes against what youth work is all about 'cause youth work is supposed to be spontaneous, but we've had to adapt. The thing is, working under the Prevent agenda is quite fluid and loose as well. People are very creative in how they say they're meeting the agenda, if you understand where I'm coming from. You know, you could be doing trips with them, get them food, and you might have a little five-minute discussion about something and people will paint that like we've done this, this, and this. (Kashif)

Kashif acknowledges the stringency intrinsic to a programme of work but also describes a 'fluid' local space able to be appropriated for the provision of material services to his young people. Initial concerns around 'putting young people into a box that said "potential terrorists"' were allayed by the 'free trips and food after every session' and brought about by the 'creative way we done the work'. Kashif also outlined a baseline parameter for only agreeing to implement work that would not negatively impact his young people, 'if I thought it genuinely compromised their personal safety in terms of safeguarding, there's no way I'd let Prevent come in'. He felt that some of the generic work he was undertaking with his young people on a daily basis was sufficient to 'fit into the Prevent agenda' and therefore felt comfortable exercising his agency in the application of Prevent funds to bolster this.

Other practitioners are not necessarily allied with cohorts before delivering Prevent in community spaces but equally argue that the creativity they employ in their implementation of the strategy affords valuable experiences to its recipients. Nasreen, on behalf of BCC's Prevent team, has cultivated spaces for women in Birmingham where the focus is not necessarily radicalisation but funding is administered innovatively to facilitate engagement she feels should ultimately be covered by cohesion policies. She says of the women that attend her sessions,

> they're treated as subordinates all their life and now they have this one hour every week to just **be**. And they come and they feel like they can breathe at these forums. And they may talk about just things with their in-laws or how their children are now nurses or doctors but they haven't looked back on their parents. And they felt all their lives all they've done is been like maids in the house and not appreciated – is that Prevent? I don't know, but it opens a space where you start getting engagement in these very hard-to-reach parts of the community.

Nasreen cites a longstanding objective of Prevent – and P/CVE programmes internationally – to access 'hard-to-reach' communities and give a voice to the (supposedly) silent (Macnair and Frank, 2017), a notion that contributes to the racialised and gendered tropes that epitomise the empowerment discourse (Mesok, 2022a). The constitution of Nasreen's forum, therefore, is a credit to the local authority's portfolio of 'successful' work and she interprets that a service has been provided to members of the community, whether radicalisation serves as an integral part of the conversation or not.

Participants frequently spoke about forms of 'indirect Prevent work' with many (including senior practitioners from within BCC and WMCTU) commending the approach if 'good work', regardless of tangential links to extremism, was being carried out. The consequence of this practice, however, contributes to literature discussed in Chapter 2 that argues engagement with CT/CE policy, irrespective of its authenticity, serves to

further securitise Muslim communities, considered in the following chapter from the perspective of practitioners. Raheem describes an encounter he had with an individual seeking funding to carry out work on honour-based violence from an Islamic perspective who, when questioned about the disregard for Hindu and Sikh communities affected by the issue, responded, 'brother, the only way I can get money to deal with this problem is to call it a Muslim problem'. Raheem believes that many practitioners in receipt of CT/CE funding are involved only at a transactional level, 'none of these organisations want to be doing Prevent anyway, Prevent is just a mechanism for them to get the money […] the only way people could do the kinds of activities these organisations are doing is by taking this money, and with it comes the consequences'.

Agency and reciprocity

The position of senior practitioners, youth workers, and individuals employed by the local authority in relation to the practice of exercising agency in the local CT/CE space has been introduced. 'Connectors', or practitioners who are able to maintain a somewhat further distance, are depicted in the data to have developed novel approaches to agentive engagement. These participants exploit the knowledge that their community space and/or service users are sources of value to the local Prevent/CES team to address a divergent set of needs. The practice is based upon the piggybacking of successful pre-existing community sites and collectives (previously touched upon) that are often approached by Prevent/Counter-Extremism practitioners in possession of resources that need to be spent, particularly within a specific timeframe.

When I first met Fatima she had been helping other Prevent practitioners with their workshops, was setting up her own community hub, and had just received a small amount of money from WMCTU to deliver Prevent sessions at her new venue. She had approached the Prevent team at BCC about becoming a commissioned service (their budget is far more substantial) and was asked in turn to first host workshops that the local authority had paid practitioners to deliver at centres that had reneged on hosting (because of issues with unprofessional conduct, unsuitable audiences and poor attendance – see next chapter).

> [PEO] contacted me saying that there is another project that is going to be ended and there are some sessions already in place that need to be delivered, but change of venue is needed. So would I be able to facilitate? [PEO] said 'I know you wanted to talk to me to look at your project but in the meantime, can you facilitate these?'

Fatima accommodated the request but as her setting was barely established, turnout was limited to under ten and she was forced to recruit individuals by phoning them the day before, sending broadcast WhatsApp messages and offering lifts, 'at the moment, the flow of the service user is not as good as we want it to be'. Kashif reported a similar situation in which a CSO due to deliver a programme at a neighbouring youth centre was in a bind when arrangements fell through and its objectives needed to be fulfilled. He agreed to host 'purely because I hadn't been able to give anything to my young people in a while'.

> I think the only carrot they've got to dangle is we'll pay for the whole project, we just need your young people. It's always been the way, we've got access to young people so they say we wanna come into your centres with our agenda. And they've done it at the right time when there's a lack of resources.

> They had a ready-made group, they didn't have to do nothing […] so they [CSOs] need established groups like us. They need us more than I need them. (Kashif)

Though uncomfortable with 'commissioning out youth work', practitioners like Kashif acquiesce to provide enriching experiences for their service users. However, not all youth workers agree with this outlook; Haroon says he often rejects similar requests because 'my young people ain't radicalised'. This also points to relations between the layers and levels of practitioners in the local space as established CSOs approach in situ youth workers in the knowledge of their policy experience, 'ready-made' recipients and hunger for resources.

During fieldwork, I encountered two groups who did adopt Prevent on their own terms, engineering engagement to innovatively fulfil their personal and collective ambitions. Their case studies are shared below.

Case 1 – 'Potters Wood'

I spent time with a recently formed group made up of mostly British-born Pakistani women who had married young and whose children were starting to become more independent, freeing up their time and altering their responsibilities. The women, many of whom attended school together in Birmingham as young people, were 're-entering' society after twenty years spent at home in the service of their families; now looking to socialise, keep fit, and cultivate their own hobbies. Organiser Maryam explains how the group came about organically and did not initially attempt to source external funding.

> I just started meeting up with friends and going out during the day to eat, but then obviously you're gonna get fat do you know what I mean?! I can't afford to do that every day and my partner didn't like the fact that I was going out every day. […] we couldn't go to children's centres anymore because our children were over five, we couldn't go to an ESOL class because we already knew English, we tried all these avenues you see… nobody would have us, because we spoke the language and nobody thought that we had an issue, so why would we need to have a group? So we just decided to get together and I put it up on Facebook a couple of times and [PEO] messaged me saying I've seen your group and do you wanna all come down here? Even though I wasn't after funding, I'm not a mug. So you want me to bring fifteen women to you, and why? Would it not be easier for you to come and see us if you wanted to know more about the group? Do you know what I mean? I knew it was more about ticking their boxes. (Maryam)

The group required an inexpensive space to socialise that would provide members the opportunity to spend time together outside of their homes; here they learnt cake-decorating, jewellery-making and had makeup tutorial classes, splitting the fee of the class facilitator between themselves each week. The women were denied access to spaces like ESOL classes, where they would be able to attend local centres free of charge, because they were 'integrated' and spoke native English. After being approached by Prevent, they signed up to host a series of free workshops (on topics such as internet safety, the emerging far-right threat and spotting the signs of radicalisation) and received a generous sum for each session (held at a rented church) which was spent on food, rent and other resources for the group.

Their relationship with Prevent funding was innovative and mutually beneficial. Maryam was not unaware that the Prevent team had a budget to spend and needed to evidence how funds had benefited target communities, however, she negotiated that the local authority invest in her group on her terms; in its current

location and independent of another CSO that BCC attempted to combine with her forum. At the time, BCC was funding a women's CSO in the wider community district whose numbers had been dwindling because of the organisation's very public partnership with Prevent, inviting criticism and deterring individuals from using the space. Maryam was conscious of controversy surrounding this CSO and understood that her forum was of value, a fact she was more than happy to capitalise on. The Prevent team held the resources but could not easily access communities while Maryam's group possessed the 'community presence', was not necessarily in need of Prevent training as members did not present as 'vulnerable' but were grateful for the money and the space it allowed them to pursue their own objectives.

Maryam and her group embody the notion of minority women as enterprising actors exercising agency in the face of austerity, as touched on in Chapter 2 (Emejulu and Bassel, 2015). The extent to which strategies like Prevent need grassroots organisations already in existence is evident in the chasing of Maryam by BCC Prevent, and while the strategy might seek its own exploitation, 'its logic also enables women to own a separate self-assertion, resisting and subverting state and local agendas, even as CVE seeks to assert these' (Pearson, 2020: 95).

Case 2 – 'Castle Heath'

Another women's group formalised by a local authority Prevent officer in fulfilment of the 'hard-to-reach communities' objective consisted of around twenty-five to thirty women originating from various countries in the Middle East, North Africa and the Horn of Africa who had recently migrated to the UK, many as asylum seekers or refugees, and had been housed in rundown apartment towers in a predominantly white working-class area of the city. Through the forum, the women were offered assistance with myriad issues, from housing to employment, but felt they were not in need of initiatives around extremism or radicalisation; they attended simply because they were desperate for help and Prevent was the only source of funding and support they could access. This relationship benefited the local Prevent profile which was seen to be achieving objectives by penetrating new and 'closed' communities and provided the women with some level of formal assistance as they struggled to access other avenues. It is also an example of the more recent outreach model of Prevent work outlined in Chapter 4.

Nasreen, the practitioner convening the forum, relied on Salma – an attendee-cum-Prevent volunteer who spoke Arabic, English and Somali and was therefore able to communicate with the whole group – to encourage attendance, translate during sessions and act as a general aide. Nasreen began by assisting the group with social issues they were facing such as problems with housing, help with benefits and approaching neighbourhood police to report instances of racism they experienced in the local area.

> So all these little piddly things, well I wouldn't say they're piddly, these important issues for these individuals about their wellbeing, suddenly started getting resolved so that brought about an element of reassurance so we deal with anything from confidence-building to tackling issues around Islamophobia to tackling issues about you know, how does extremism manifest in their communities? The lack of being appreciated, the lack of having their basic needs met, if they are like vulnerable

> families that have come from God-knows-what nightmarish conflict areas of the world, do they come and are they welcomed or is it more difficult and what does that breed in terms of vulnerabilities? (Nasreen)

Nasreen described how the forum evolved from a group of meek, shy and timid women to a collection of strong, feisty and 'empowered' individuals, a transformation ostensibly achieved through Prevent work. However, the group also began to recognise that the Prevent team was as much in need of the forum for its own local portfolio. When the women grew in confidence and started to ask for additional help with *madrasa* classes for their children, for example, they negotiated until they were satisfied with a teacher, location and time. They asked for Eid parties with henna artists, spa treatments from a Prevent-associated salon and catering. They requested a trip to the seaside and were particular about which minibus they wanted to travel in. Salma explained that the Prevent team began to hold back when the group asked for help with things like funding for training courses and other vocational opportunities, 'I know there a lot of other resources but we don't know how to get them and [Prevent staff] are not really helping in that field. Because if they help in that field, they are gonna lose us.'

Salma felt that if the women were truly 'empowered' and provided with the resources they required to govern their own community, Nasreen would lose the forum – on paper a Prevent success story able to access so-called 'hard-to-reach' communities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Salma also disclosed the promise of a job at the council in exchange for the work she carried out organising the forum and co-delivering sessions. As time passed and no opportunity materialised, Salma grew tired and was considering withdrawing her participation, aware that her absence would result in a much smaller turnout of attendees, 'I thought about it and it is a lot of commitment and lot of hard work. Because the ladies are not really interested in [Prevent staff]. If I'm not going there, the ladies will not come.' She mentioned that some of the women had also become disgruntled with recent unfulfilled requests and were no longer keen to attend, exercising their choice to abandon the forum when it failed to meet their expectations in providing meaningful solutions to their ongoing social problems.

Analysis of this case study demonstrates the ways in which both the local Prevent profile and the collective of women benefited from engagement, but also discernible is the fulfilment of the personal and religious objectives of the Prevent practitioner, setting up a '*madrasa* in the sticks of Birmingham' (for members of the Castle Heath forum) in contribution to her 'post-its' for the *akhirah*. This circles back to the discussion on religion as a framework for engagement, and while other studies have observed a feminist rationale for exploiting 'CVE' workshops to resist local patriarchal powers (Pearson, 2020); the data presented here depicts Nasreen's religiously-inspired motivations for exercising agency in her management of the BCC Prevent budget. This example captures a multilayered and nuanced materialisation of the ways in which the localised implementation of Prevent has served three divergent purposes, yet not one of them amounts to the meaningful prevention of radicalisation. I argue that CT/CE policy is exploited in myriad ways by different actors and authorities themselves and that this is enabled by the ambiguity of policy centrally and the

dynamic space it operates within locally. While some scholars conclude examples such as these case studies to be evidence of women taking ownership of Prevent to shape and ultimately subvert policy (Pearson, 2020; Qureshi, 2021), I argue the exchange is more complex and that while policy is not completely destabilised or reconstructed by local actors, agency exercised in the apertures of local implementation permits the temporary interplay between community and authorities, for as long as the latter allows. This reading also problematises the concept of the 'trusted' Muslim's engagement with CT/CE (Ragazzi, 2016) and supports the argument that Prevent's empowerment project has created an avenue for women to harness available resources and cultivate the local space as a site of negotiation (Mesok, 2022a), though I would stress, not subversion. Both case studies depict novel relationships between Prevent, practitioners and community milieus; authorities crave a presence in community spaces and willing members to engage with policy, and local actors are amenable to accessing resources for the fulfilment of personal or collective objectives, rescinding participation when they no longer deduce benefit.

Evaluating agency in the field

'It's nice if Muslim women can ride a bike, but is this the kind of project that's needed?' – Sofia

Independently commissioned organisations and individuals, as well as practitioners who work for the local authority, expressed degrees to which they self-direct engagement to achieve their own personal and professional goals. In spite of the autonomy with which the BCC Prevent Coordinator claims to impart the strategy locally, critique of local projects abusing agentive privilege has sparked concern, triggering a warning that the practice is only acceptable to a limit and that 'meaningful work with actually no benefit to Prevent objectives, like we had with Prevent 1 under the Labour administration' (BCC Prevent Coordinator) will not be approved. The local authority now carries out closer supervision of funded projects to avoid supporting a cohort of CSOs unable to demonstrate a significant contribution to the discourse.

> if you're gonna do Prevent work it needs to be targeted. If it's gonna be diluted then it's not OK. If it's still covering Prevent and you're doing the wider stuff I'm comfortable with that but if Prevent becomes an afterthought then this isn't the funding pot for you. I see loads of groups think it's easy, come to us having never done Prevent before but think that holding football sessions will be enough. It won't be. (BCC Prevent Coordinator)

Since 2020, in an attempt to limit criticism of its projects and maintain higher standards of work, BCC's Prevent team identified groups it could no longer endorse owing to their excessive limiting of Prevent objectives and discouraged them from applying for further funding. This has resulted in the departure of two long-standing CSOs from the network and those in charge of administering resources are called upon by practitioners in the field to further acknowledge failing or unsuitable work in a similar manner, 'money should not be spent to sustain a project to do something random' (Imran). Though the days of trivial 'community cricket, horse riding and trips to the cinema' (Sara) Pathfinder activities funded in Birmingham are over, participants call attention to more subtly tangential examples (like those depicted) that they attribute to deficiencies in managerial

scrutiny. Sofia questions the lack of an evidence-based approach to commissioning, 'why do we think this works? And where's the evidence? Or are we just saying, "oh, we'd like to do this now". But why? Where is it coming from?' she believes should address 'creative' pursuits that are perceived to undermine broader engagement. While projects are criticised for modifying remits to include buzzwords such as 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' to qualify for resources (Ragazzi, 2016), some in the operational space suggest that this is in fact a deliberate framing, arranged by the government so that Muslim-led organisations have no choice but to access money through CT/CE avenues.

> It's another mechanism in order for the government to manipulate, in my opinion, certain third sector organisations to include Prevent in aspects of their work. So basically, we cut off all the other channels of funding but the general funding that is still available to you is funding through counter-terrorism. We know you've got people to pay, you've got the rent to pay, you've got all this. So really and truly you're in a predicament that you either take it or you close down. I think it's also a mechanism for the government for their statistics to say 'oh, why is the Muslim community complaining about Prevent? We've got four hundred and sixty-five third sector Muslim organisations who are happily working on Prevent.' Because for some of these organisations, if there are other routes to funding, they would never take Prevent money. But because everything else has been closed off they've got no choice. (Rashid)

This account supports arguments covered in Chapter 2 that elucidate the reshaping of partnerships between CSOs and local government as a result of austerity, forcing organisations to engage with controversial funding streams, such as Prevent, to stay afloat (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015; Qurashi, 2018; Osorno Hernandez, 2021; Rex and Campbell, 2022). Rashid interprets the practice of permitting Muslim-led organisations to exercise creativity as a means of increasing the cohort of Muslim Prevent practitioners which serves as a defence against critics (who asseverate the strategy's securitising effects) through examples of Muslim cooperation and endorsement. Standards of evaluation and accountability touched upon in this discussion on innovative practice are examined in further detail in a broader context in the following chapter.

As the data shows, senior practitioners and independent providers describe their negotiation of policy locally, albeit in different ways. Police practitioners are less likely to admit to self-direction in the course of their engagement which is to be expected owing to the more rigid structures and regulations that they operate within professionally, however, they are able to develop a degree of agency with respect to groups they encourage to apply for, and choose to fund through, the TIF and the Community Resilience Team, in particular, espouse some autonomy over where they pursue engagement. Participants associated with the CES did not stand apart from Prevent practitioners in this regard, likely for reasons previously discussed, that is the ambiguity and nascency of the BSBT programme and its own undetermined direction.

The analysis presented in this section problematises the body of literature (previously detailed) that perceives CT/CE policy as a securitising mechanism which is restrictive in its understanding of agency and offers an alternative perspective to claims that under 'Prevent 2', trust and funding was removed from Muslim communities who mobilised on an unfunded basis internally (Thomas, 2017). The data also contributes to the

discourse on Muslim communities' reluctance to participate with a strategy interpreted as a surveillance infrastructure (Qurashi, 2018) as this and previous sections have shown how participants are clear about delineating boundaries and confident in curating participation on their own terms. Insisting on engaging through an outreach model that has replaced the 'invited space' (evidenced by participants like Maryam who refused to transport her members to a Prevent venue at the request of the PEO); local actors took control, renegotiating the terms of forums to achieve their goals.

This study is situated within this body of literature, acknowledging both the pernicious effects of CT/CE policy as well as recognising the possibility for individual agency on behalf of those who engage, though, in contrast to research on agentive capacity in P/CVE, concludes that practitioners are not able to subvert policy, as evidenced by the decision taken by leadership at BCC Prevent to revoke and limit some expressions of autonomy. This contradicts claims made that local actors are able to redesign centrally defined outputs through their engagement; far from raising 'Muslim women to the corridors of power' (Qureshi, 2021: 23), I argue this option is available only to a select few, namely Sara Khan, who, as discussion has shown, is highly derided amongst Britain's Muslims and appears to have embodied the '180' theory. The findings presented here offer a more nuanced perspective, demonstrating how the exercising of agency is an integral component to remaining in the grey area and contesting the notion that Muslim women develop 'ownership' of local Prevent or take meaningful information to policymakers for the solving of social problems faced by their communities (Pearson, 2020). Rather, the data shows the ways in which local actors, involved in myriad ways, with various understandings of the work and divergent reasons for engaging, exploit the instability and continuous 'spiralling' of policy and the gaps this generates to exercise agency in the dynamic local space. Here they are able to follow their own objectives, fulfil their own aims, and draw upon resources to support their own work.

Initial research on the topic of creative agency predicted its suppression after the Home Office's strict post-2011 overtaking (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010) though actors have been proven to circumvent this to access resources for creative means. The IRP and Home Secretary, however, assess that 'Prevent project funding has focused too broadly on wider community initiatives and insufficient checks have been conducted on those we fund' (HM Government, 2023: 14), recommending that funding is henceforth restricted to 'groups and projects which challenge extremist and terrorist ideology via counter-narratives and activities' and not 'allocated towards general youth work or community initiatives that do not meet these criteria' (Shawcross, 2023: 159). This would suggest that conditions described in this section have been acknowledged as poor practice on behalf of Prevent funding bodies and will be regulated and evaluated more carefully in the future, though the success of Shawcross's recommendations will largely depend on local delivery which itself will undergo a shift towards regionalisation, as mentioned, bringing local practitioners under closer supervision of regional managers reporting to the Homeland Security Group. As the post-2011 remodel induced little

effect, it is imperative to consider the extent to which the IRP's assessment will signify a closing down of avenues for agency and how this might holistically impact on the local scene.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to answer RQ3 and RQ4, paying attention to some of the practical components of participants' experiences on the ground. It argues there is an exiguity of training and support provisions available and demonstrates how some practitioners respond to this oversight by exercising their agentive capacity to fulfil personal or collective objectives to render their engagement worthwhile. The role of the critical practitioner is 'complex and challenging' (Banks, 2007: 151) and participants' experiences within the grey area are further impeded by what the data shows to be essentially non-existent systems of formal of support or training.

Neil Basu, former head of counter-terrorism policing in the UK, condemns the IRP for accusing practitioners of 'lacking focus and clear guidelines, training, boundaries and standards, but whose fault is that? Many were unsupported volunteers in badly affected communities' (Basu, 2023: para 5). This reaffirms how training, support, opportunities for the interpretation of objectives, the setting of boundaries and encountering challenges are all interconnected in the gaps of the local space; as this chapter has attempted to illustrate. Discussion has considered how the issues, intersections and oversights of central policy practically impact on the experiences of practitioners on the ground locally, at times neglecting and at times emboldening those involved to pursue their own conceptualisation of engagement. Shawcross proposes to improve training (via the CCE) and limit expressions of agency in an attempt to close gaps locally, although this has been unsuccessfully attempted at previous junctures in the policy spiral.

Discussion has shown how practitioners implementing Prevent/Counter-Extremism in Birmingham are subject to extensive abuse and I have argued how the ambiguity of policy, and its construction of the insincere CT/CE practitioner exploiting local opportunities, is largely to blame. Data presented on the theme of support as a coping mechanism in the face of abuse surpasses concepts put forth by literature on street-level bureaucracy to explore practical solutions to challenges faced in the field. The application of agency demonstrated in the local shaping of policy also goes beyond understandings present in such literature to depict how 'connectors', operating from a greater distance, develop novel approaches to agentive engagement in the local space.

Analysis problematises the expansive body of literature that perceives CT/CE policy as a securitising project which is restrictive in its interpretation of agency and contributes to the discourse on the participation of Muslim communities in their own policing by elucidating the delineation of boundaries and renegotiation of engagement on practitioners' own terms. The chapter has therefore acknowledged both the destructive effects of CT/CE policy whilst recognising the possibility for individual agency but ultimately argues that,

contrary to research on agentive capacity in P/CVE, practitioners are not able to subvert policy or affect centrally defined objectives. Instead, the exercising of agency in the gaps generated by the 'spiralling' of policy is construed as integral to allowing the critical community practitioner to remain in the grey area.

The freedom with which local actors have been shown to operate in this chapter is sometimes a result of inappropriate and inadequate mechanisms on the ground, such as a lack of accountability, poor evaluation measures, and fraudulent practice. The following chapter seeks to explore these tensions and consider the complexities bound up in the interpretations and negotiations that constitute local implementation in Birmingham.

Chapter 8 – Tensions encountered in the local space

This chapter investigates some of the problems and antagonisms encountered by practitioners in the course of their engagement with Prevent and the CES in Birmingham. During fieldwork, I asked participants about challenges they faced in terms of community backlash (Chapter 7) but, save for mentioning Prevent's problematic legacy in the city, did not pose any initial questions in relation to the difficulties or tensions mentioned in this chapter. Participants, however, continuously raised the themes covered, indicating the significance of the following findings to local experiences of implementation. Observational data recorded from attendance at workshops and events complements the arguments presented.

The first half of the chapter lays out some of the most substantial and critical issues identified, namely the facilitation of unsuitable workshops, unprofessionalism, opaque and nepotistic conduct, and purported instances of fraud and corruption. The second half of the chapter considers the impact of such tensions to ask: how do these findings manifest in the operationalisation of Prevent and the CES locally and what does this mean for practitioners' experiences? Insight is offered into processes of accountability and evaluation, the sustainability of work, competitive practice, antithetical effects of CT/CE, and disengagement from the space. Discussion will argue that these tensions are permitted to foster as a result of the gaps in the direction and governance of CT/CE policy at a national level that are reconstructed in the local space. The chapter speaks to RQ3 in examining broader problems identified by practitioners in the course of their engagement and explores how these are navigated. The second half of RQ4, analysing some of the ways in which engagement is fulfilled and measured, and RQ5, comparing experiences across the different authorities and distinct strategies, will also be addressed.

The chapter presents empirical examples to join threads considered in isolation in earlier discussions and weaves together theories from literature on policy development, governance, street-level bureaucracy, agency, and critical community practice to apply a multilayered perspective that is most appropriate to understanding the data captured. Concepts from street-level bureaucracy scholarship, such as 'creaming' and the ways in which actors hold each other accountable 'sideways' are complemented by arguments around the iatrogenic effects of opaque CT/CE policies operating in a spiral. This unique set of circumstances is conducive to the creation of unique local sites in which tensions are able to flourish. This also foregrounds the hybrid practitioner and enables a consideration of the multiple levels of agency at play in the local space, introducing a further level of nuance to previous arguments around agency and the subversion of policy. The chapter problematises recent literature that describes CT/CE practitioners working together in harmony (Lehane, 2017) to argue that the unpredictability of the local space and the actors that are shaping it operate in a symbiosis that, ultimately, enables practitioners to emulate policy.

Problems on the ground

Discussion begins with some of the more innocuous issues encountered by participants in the implementation of policy. These problems do not relate to structural matters or macro-level corruption and may not always be intentional; instead, they can be understood in terms of bad practice, poor planning and perfunctory efforts.

Unsuitable activities

Synonymous with the assessment of misdirected Canadian CVE projects (Macnair and Frank, 2017) and earlier Prevent projects (Roohi Ahmed, 2015), many participants raised concerns around activities perceived as 'preaching to the converted' (Zak), an observation I also made after joining a number of workshops targeting communities where the majority of attendees were other local practitioners and professionals. 'More often than not, you've got more Prevent providers in the room than you have community. I got to a point where I was like, why am I still coming here to listen to [practitioner] do his PR campaign?' (Faysal).

A lot of the time, this outcome seemed fortuitous; practitioners had attempted to advertise events but struggled to garner interest, though there were instances when the approach was more calculated and it appeared that 'appropriate' audiences had been curated so as not to attract critical voices to consultations. I received a WhatsApp message, for example, inviting me to an event to discuss community tensions around the No Outsiders campaign in which the practitioner explicitly requested that only 'educated women with like minds' should attend. Tailoring engagement in this manner is not always the case, however. Another criticism of local activities suggests that unsuitable audiences are borne out of negligence.

I attended a number of workshops examining the ideologies of the far-right where groups of South Asian women, whose children and wider networks are not actually at risk of this type of radicalisation, were taught how to spot its signs. I was told by a participant (who was critical of this arrangement) that the two practitioners delivering these sessions (not interviewed for this study) were themselves unhappy with the set-up but had been commissioned by the BCC Prevent team to deliver. Despite the location of the workshops (and therefore the audiences) being inappropriate, according to the participant, the practitioners had been paid and were therefore required to fulfil the sessions, despite the lack of any needs analysis or due consideration for potential recipients.

Similarly, I was present at a number of workshops where attendees were not proficient in English and communicated mostly in Urdu or Punjabi but high-level content about cognitive openings (to radicalisation) and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) was delivered in English. Other events were poorly attended, with sometimes as few as four or five individuals, or ill-thought-out, as in the case of the organisation that provided halal catering at their input for Eritrean Orthodox Christians who were abstaining from meat for lent. The facilitator of the space, who permitted the CSO to deliver at his centre, was unimpressed that the cohort was presumed Muslim because of their ethnicity.

I attended a BCC-funded workshop at which the majority of attendees had recently witnessed the practitioner delivering the same presentation at another local centre they frequent. Instances such as this are another example of how activities lack impact, are often recycled, and disseminated to the same groups of individuals in the same few settings. Participants note that content is often simply implemented in areas of high Muslim population to benefit facilitators and funders and should instead 'only be organised when there is a need' (Haroon).

During the course of my fieldwork, the local authority ran a series of workshops (each respectively delivered by a separately commissioned practitioner) on the overarching theme of parenting at a women's centre in a predominantly Muslim area. I attended the course, replete with many of the evaluations made above, for example, practitioners were commissioned to deliver whether content was relevant to attendees or not (again, sometimes in a language that the audience was not proficient in) and not all were necessarily parents or caregivers (members of the BCC team also invited colleagues within the wider council department to counterbalance low take-up). A colleague of the organiser referred to the course as an 'absolute waste of taxpayers' money' as workshops were designed to be targeted at families deemed vulnerable and already known to authorities rather than hundreds of pounds spent per session to cater for a small number of largely miscellaneous recipients. Those attending told me they were keen to join because their participation resulted in a certificate which they believed would assist them in gaining employment as dinner ladies and playground assistants.

Participants suggest the practice of delivering workshops to unsuitable audiences can ultimately be explained by laziness, box-ticking, and a general disregard for utility so long as evaluation returns appear successful.

ESOL classes

Another practice I observed on multiple occasions, by projects funded through both the local authority and WMCTU, was the co-option of ESOL classes for the purposes of delivering Prevent/Counter-Extremism. The classes offered a captive audience that required no recruitment, participation was mandatory for students (English classes prescribed for job seekers etc.), and attendees were often Muslim which, again, portrays the provider as successful in accessing the 'hard-to-reach' communities that policies seek to penetrate, irrespective of whether the audience has actively consented to hear about extremism or not.

At a WMCTU-funded workshop at a Bangladeshi women's centre, an ESOL class was taken over by an inexperienced CSO presenting a slideshow about Prevent on a laptop. Samosas were given as 'rewards' and CTU representatives handed out vanilla lip balms on which the phone number of the national anti-terrorist hotline had been covertly printed to look like an unassuming barcode. CTU staff told the women that the lip balms, should they be noticed at home, would not raise alarm (the packaging was plain apart from the phone number disguised as a barcode) and advised them to call the number if they were worried about husbands or sons; though their understanding of these instructions, and the entire session, was 'really low' according

to the practitioner facilitating. The CSO was funded by WMCTU to deliver a sequence of workshops which I was invited to attend by the director of the organisation. At the second, we turned up at a different centre to discover no women present but were encouraged by staff to wait for two ongoing classes – gardening and sewing – to finish, should the cohorts wish to join. It was then arranged for the presentation to instead be delivered to a pre-entry level ESOL class which was due to start, meaning students' understanding of English was limited and tasks like signing the workshop register proved difficult. The ESOL teacher was happy to oblige, however, and even offered classes she taught at other centres as potential sites for the CSO to complete its workshop quota. The practitioner refers to the mutual benefit derived here in the form of reinvigorated lesson content for the ESOL teacher who was on hand to offer assistance but essentially did not have to lead a class whilst the director of the CSO did not have to facilitate a space, advertise the workshop or recruit attendees, 'it's really hard to get people to take up the workshops so I think so this has been really good'.

Practitioners delivering on behalf of the CES demonstrated similar approaches, offering financial incentives to interrupt in situ ESOL classes in the city to impart CE messaging. Haris, who is a facilitator of a learning centre in a predominantly Muslim area and also a Prevent practitioner, was approached by Birmingham's Counter-Extremism Coordinator when the government first announced that funding for her role would likely be cut the following year. In order to showcase effective work in the city for the best chance of contractual renewal, the Coordinator needed to evidence workshops to justify the strategy's worth. Haris was offended at being approached as his attempts to contact the Coordinator had previously gone unanswered; he believed she was piggybacking off similar workshops she had seen Prevent colleagues facilitate at the centre and felt the Counter-Extremism team was 'desperate'. Nevertheless, he arranged for the Coordinator and the Counter-Extremism Engagement Officer to have access to four ESOL classes of Pakistani students but advised that the cohort's understanding of English was not at the required level for the content and that practitioners should consider using their 'community languages'. Again, presence was registered and, according to Haris, if students failed to maintain near-perfect attendance, lost access to further free classes and certificates and risked 'falling out of the system'. Despite the captive audience, the workshops were 'dull' and 'a waste of time' (Haris).

ESOL classes have long been politicised sites, from the 2016 Casey Review which equated the language proficiency of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, in particular, with poor integration – to which ESOL classes became the antidote (Casey, 2016) – to the refocus on English language classes under the CES, as covered in Chapter 2. The data shows how these spaces continue to be constructed and appropriated by those working in the local CT/CE arena; entwined further in that now they are not only often brought about because of these policies, they are at times overridden by local manifestations of Prevent and the CES when actors opportunistically exploit ESOL spaces in their individualised implementation of the strategies. The observations also construe how far removed central policy (the aforementioned allocations for ESOL classes

under both Prevent and the CES) can be from 'street-level' implementation as spaces are renegotiated on the ground locally, additionally providing an alternative position to the agency argument in the previous chapter as recipients of the ESOL classes are not able to exercise the same degree of consent as the women in Potters Wood and Castle Heath, for example. What this does reveal, however, is insight into the levels of agency available; here the hybrid practitioner who is neither wholly professional nor lay (Prior and Barnes, 2011) demonstrates self-direction through her engagement while attendees are bound. The section ties together threads from earlier discussions on street-level bureaucracy, agency, and deficient resources in the analysis of ESOL workshops. If the hybrid practitioner, whose developing CSO did not actually operate within the realm of CT/CE before receiving WCMTU funding, was provided adequate training and/or support, the workshops may still have been opportunistic but content would have been delivered with more confidence. The anticipation of challenges faced by practitioners also factors as language classes afford not only a ready-made audience but a significantly lower risk of critical voices (particularly if content is not sufficiently comprehended). The next section continues the evaluation of the utility of workshops through the opinions of participants.

Efficacy of workshops

'We're too top-heavy just delivering workshop, workshop, workshop, but there's no impact and there's no need.' – Zayd

Haris concluded that the 'pointless' Counter-Extremism/ESOL workshops he facilitated were not 'meaningful or constructive' and left his students confused after 'information they hadn't the remotest interest in was rammed unceremoniously down their unsuspecting throats'. He acknowledges the likelihood, however, that in official estimation the workshops appeared successful depending on evaluation measures in place to assess impact (upcoming section) though their value lay predominantly in the fulfilment of the objectives of the practitioners themselves. Other activities observed during fieldwork were deemed so unsuitable that they were withdrawn mid-delivery; I turned up to a session in a series of workshops (invited by the BCC Prevent team) held in a run-down office building on the outskirts of the city centre which had been aborted without any notification because of the unviability of location and inadequate attendance.

A number of participants complained about other practitioners asking for help (either with an audience or a space) to deliver workshops they had been commissioned to carry out. Practitioners on BCC's Prevent team were conscious of workshops that were 'owed' to them and sometimes sought venues for these to be fulfilled on behalf of the commissioned practitioner, again with seemingly little regard for how popular those spaces might be with potential audiences. Discussing a colleague in the process of attempting this, Zayd asks, 'but what if nobody wants them? You can't just push workshops, it's an ineffective use of resources. Every year I feel like we just throw away two or three hundred thousand pounds'. He suggests a more resource-efficient alternative,

> the model that we've got is, you've got these twenty workshops but I don't know what the rationale behind booking those twenty workshops is. What's the feasibility? What's the need for it? I'd much rather we have the money in the bank. If you need a workshop, then you can buy in whoever you want to come and deliver that workshop. Because there's no guarantee that you're gonna need twenty. Then what [practitioner] ends up having is workshops left over.

For Zayd, the approach taken by some members of his team is inauthentic and causes tensions for his internal relations and ability to collaborate with colleagues, reducing the circle of 'BAME' and Muslim comrades that practitioners have been shown to rely on for support. The section has considered some of the ways in which workshops can be problematic, ineffective and at times serve practitioners over recipients. The ambiguity and volatility of the local space is evident in the transition from teaching Muslim women to speak English as a mechanism of countering extremism to overriding the objective in fulfilment of the remit of local agentive actors paid, but not actually trained, to counter extremism in somewhat inappropriate and opportunistic workshops that might be interpreted as a manifestation of the perceived Prevent 'industry'. The next section considers unprofessionalism more broadly.

Unprofessionalism

During fieldwork, I turned up to a number of sessions that had been cancelled without warning and was informed by participants about how certain practitioners who renege on 'fifty per cent of the sessions they schedule' (Faysal) incite a level of unprofessionalism that was becoming a source of annoyance for many in the space. The manager of a community centre was so unhappy with this pattern, she informed members of the CTU Community Resilience Team that Prevent activities would no longer be welcome at the setting, a decision which left a fellow local authority practitioner (who claimed it was the third time a centre had severed ties that year) embarrassed to be associated with the overall brand.

Practitioners are also accused of poor communication, with many participants feeling particularly ignored by individuals that sit within structures like the local authority, 'you have to go after her, after her, after her and you lose your breath. She never commits to anything. And all the money and the funds is in [her] hands, so it's just a little depressing' (Salma). Similarly, Maryam was contacted by members of the Counter-Extremism Team who were interested in accessing the women's group she facilitated,

> one day she'd be really eager to get something sorted the same day, and then we wouldn't hear from her for weeks. That was how [she] operated and I got sick of chasing her up. When you are such a small organisation and you're doing all the legwork, there's only a certain amount of time that you can give to people.

A number of other participants had similar complaints about BCC practitioners representing both Prevent and Counter-Extremism and felt frustrated with insufficient communication, poor timekeeping and a habit of 'flaking'. Haris was specific in attributing this issue to Asian practitioners over their counterparts, 'white people respond to their emails and calls; with these guys, it's the complete opposite. These people leave you hanging, no sense of time propriety, no manners, no common sense. It's farcical.' He believes WMCTU

operates in a more professional manner because their teams are not as predominantly Asian, claiming that police practitioners would always arrive fifteen minutes early to events whereas he worried whether local authority practitioners would turn up at all. While it might be valid that there is a greater lack of professionalism at BCC, it is likely that (instead of race or ethnicity) departments such as Professional Standards (PSD) within WMP enforce a stricter culture than exists for the local authority Prevent team which, according to the Coordinator, possesses more autonomy, and as will be explored later in the chapter, is not subject to stringent evaluation measures.

Other instances of unprofessionalism reference a BCC Prevent and Counter-Extremism practitioner (working in collaboration) treating attendance at workshops as a 'tick-box' exercise,

> they made a good point of taking most of the cookies away and not actively sitting through the workshop. Now that was massively inappropriate because they're paid, I'm pretty sure that they logged out of the office the entire morning and they both fucked off together. And I'm really pissed off with that. They came, they sat, they had some cookies and then they pissed off. Tick box. (Faysal)

Broader complaints around pressure being impressed upon community members to provide testimonials for activities, filming at workshops without consent, and a general shift towards quantity over quality with regard to engagement were also reported. The findings presented here are the opinions of participants who express how such obstacles and aggravations continue to shape their experiences of working in the field, ultimately making it more difficult for them to engage and fortifying the challenges they face which may further entrench their position within the grey area. While disapproval has been directed towards peers; funding bodies and authorities such as BCC are also lambasted for failing to routinely pay the organisations and practitioners they commission on time, leading to a perceived lack of appreciation amongst participants.

> my practitioners get pissed off, some of them wait eleven months sometimes for a payment of about nine hundred to a thousand pounds. When you make someone wait for eleven months, you're basically telling them that you don't value them. What does the *hadith* say? That you pay the labourer before the sweat on his or her back has dried? If they do not fund us, we crash. That's it. (Faysal)

For Faysal, complacency forms part of an 'autonomous' local system that upholds ambiguous methods of measuring value and encourages 'organisations to bullshit' to prove impact in order to secure funding for the following year, causing further anxiety for providers. Poor governance is an integral issue which links to the sustainability of work and capability of organisations to survive, mentioned in the IRP and explored later in the chapter. Shawcross's recommendations speak to this theme too, as the proposed regionalisation model intends to eliminate 'local politicking and professionalise delivery' (2023: 107).

As previously mentioned, WMCTU is overseen by PSD within WMP which enforces measures of professional conduct for police practitioners; although not a panacea as soon after I concluded fieldwork, a member of the Community Resilience Team was convicted of conspiring to supply Class B drugs and resigned ahead of dismissal and a subsequent barring from policing. This does, however, demonstrate how WMP ensures compliance with the College of Policing's Code of Ethics (2023) to expose misconduct. As intimated, the

problems encountered by participants in this section heavily reference BCC as an authority and its team as individuals, both of whom are relied upon by independent practitioners to facilitate elements of their engagement. As BCC practitioners are relatively secure in their employment (unlike the precarity faced by commissioned providers) it may be that efforts to act professionally are not as diligent, or as Nadia remarks, 'it's like Animal Farm, people get a bit of power and all of a sudden it becomes four legs good, two legs bad'.

Unprofessional conduct is an impediment to local practitioners, often further problematising experiences of engagement. Matters of sustainability, for example, obstruct practitioners' implementation and form another barrier to effective participation, at times forcing independently commissioned providers (and practitioners from separate authorities) to navigate the politics of unhelpful local teams as well as distrustful communities. The next section explores another fundamental concern in the field that has been touched upon throughout the thesis: transparency.

Transparency

'We always try and tuck that word [Prevent] and wrap it around something completely different, we don't call it Prevent, call it Made in Britain or something, let's wrap it up in something else.' – Yasir

Discussion thus far has explored some opportunistic and unprofessional local practices that shape the experiences of practitioners. The discussion on transparency touches on more considered courses of action. Some practitioners promote a candid approach that is appreciated by funders and can establish a project on a more long-term basis,

> a lot of people, they'll run day trips and it's more around Asian social isolation and stuff. They don't openly say it's from Prevent. Whereas Prevent will respect the fact that you say you work with them, then they're going to want to work with you a lot more 'cause then credit goes to them. Unfortunately, it does work like that, they want credit for it. But if you're not gonna say that you work with them, you're not embarrassed to take the money but you're embarrassed to say that you're working for them… it's one of those ones. (Zahra)

Shakeel also claims that as a local authority, BCC 'came clean with communities' in admitting that Prevent was 'focused entirely on Muslims, regrettably' and this honesty won the authority the autonomy that central government initially sanctioned.

Overall, however, participants describe how practitioners (often including themselves) are not entirely transparent about the work that they carry out on behalf of, or funding obtained through, Prevent/Counter-Extremism, preferring to 'take money on the quiet' (Raheem), often because they are 'shit scared' (Zayd) of repercussions. Shazia claims the key to avoiding 'negativity' from community networks is to undertake engagement covertly.

> No one has sussed out what we're doing yet because we done it undercover! And I think the best way to do it is undercover. We didn't really advertise it; we were just lucky that no one actually questioned it to be honest with you. I think if you do a poster and say you are going to talk about

> radicalisation and extremism, there will be a reluctance. So sometimes the workshops are done without really acknowledging that it's gonna be about that and then we just get on with it. We haven't gone out and said that we're coming to do any counter-terrorist work or anything like that.

To navigate the ambiguity and maintain a veneer of neutrality, many describe using a form of 'cover' to mask their participation. Examples of this include using the name of an overarching or adjacent project, 'we weren't using BSBT as our project name, I wouldn't say we hid it as such but it wasn't upfront' (Noor) or concealing employers or affiliated institutions, 'sometimes we don't say we're Prevent, we just say we're city council' (Nasreen). Evidently, these were often independent decisions made by the practitioner to protect themselves or their organisation from the types of backlash explored in Chapter 7, but at times this approach was reported to be recommended by a BCC representative. Maryam says she was advised not to add Prevent branding or 'logos' to promotional material for the workshops facilitated at her centre and another practitioner says he was instructed to refer to his project as 'Home Office-funded' rather than naming Prevent explicitly. Zayd made clear this was against official guidance which stipulates that any group or individual in receipt of Prevent funds must declare so in efforts to improve the legacy of Prevent through 'good' projects it supports.

Wordplay with job titles and, even departments, is another method applied to introduce uncertainty; for example, Shakeel explains that when the 'Prevent Schools Coordinator' was perceived as threatening, the role was changed to 'Resilience Advisor' to appear less inflammatory. The rebranding of the BCC Prevent base to the PIP Directorate is interpreted as a 'concealment of what it really is' by Tahir who also raised a concern around the Counter-Extremism Coordinator pursuing him for work under her remit by assuring him she was simply a 'Community Coordinator' for the council, making no mention of her employment through the Counter-Extremism Strategy despite his reservations about any further CT/CE engagement. Haris also raises the issue of transparency of Counter-Extremism staff in Birmingham, noting that signatures (e.g. Community Engagement Officer, Directorate of PIP) made no mention of the Counter-Extremism Strategy.

> I think it's paradoxical actually, because through their narrative they want community organisations to speak about CE and Prevent and all the rest of it, they want us to fly flags and things like that, you know when they've given you money to do certain things in the community. So they want you to use all the promos and everything else to ensure that everybody knows where the money's come from, they don't want us hiding. And then they're actually hiding in plain sight themselves.

While this is specific to the Counter-Extremism Strategy, the tactic is not dissimilar to Prevent's approach of 'packaging in the language of safeguarding' (Nasreen) which Haris himself admits to adopting – following the example set in the field – but for Tahir the lack of transparency signifies 'a major issue because they are just not telling the truth.' Many participants reference Project Champion as a mistake that should have served as a lesson in transparency with local communities but ultimately perceive that the local implementation of Prevent and the CES continues to be carried out 'under a guise' (Kashif).

Transparency, or lack thereof, is a recurring theme throughout the data and is typical of a policy spiral in which the implementation of policy 'becomes increasingly opaque, even to those working within it' (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023: 32). Opacity is observable on multiple levels, between the operations of strategies and authorities, in the enactment of practitioners' engagement both internally and externally, and, crucially, in the conscious deception of Birmingham's communities. It does, however, speak to RQ4, as participants have articulated how manipulating transparency, for example, employing a 'cover', is a technique through which fulfilment of personal or professional objectives is achieved. In this vein, the next sections continue to investigate more nefarious practices that are said to take place.

Corruption

Corruption and fraud are similar acts in which financial or personal benefit is achieved through deception or dishonest conduct. Fraudulent practice is characterised by the causing of unlawful loss or gain through concealment or misrepresentation, whereas corruption involves not just the 'misappropriation of funds, but also the abuse of entrusted power' (Moiseienko and Izenman, 2019: para 1). Fraud is arguably a form of corruption but will be considered separately in the chapter to consider tensions where financial gain, in particular, is sought. Following on from examples of opportunistic unprofessionalism, these sections on fraud and corruption delineate more serious instances of purported unprofessional or improper conduct, calling into question the structures within which CT/CE policy is managed locally to consider how these alleged practices impact on the experiences of practitioners.

'Nepotism lives long!'

The funding of 'friends' and inexperienced individuals with personal connections to local Prevent teams is noted in the wider literature (Silverman, 2017; Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022) and as mentioned, research reveals that, historically, certain (Muslim-led) CSOs were nominated and coached through the process of acquiring funds for Prevent projects (Qurashi, 2018). The former head of the now-defunct department that housed Prevent at BCC describes a process by which CSOs and practitioners already carrying out community work would be cherry-picked by the team, 'we know the projects and the people who are serious about what they're doing and therefore we would encourage certain organisations to bid with the hope that, provided they meet the Home Office criteria, they will get the contract to run the programme'. Similar practice has been interpreted as the misuse of resources by local authorities 'accused of funding groups with whom they already had established networks, regardless of whether these organisations had the capacity, knowledge or experience to achieve the aims of Prevent' (Lakhani, 2012: 195). It is expected that managers might offer support and opportunities to their networks and choose to commission organisations they feel have evidenced successful engagement, however, the concepts of nepotism and favouritism are more broadly recognisable in the wider CT/CE sphere (for example, in the connections between Sara Khan, her sister at RICU, and her co-author's connections to Breakthrough Media, as well as the entanglement between

Breakthrough Media, M&C Saatchi, Horizon PR, and the Home Office) as touched upon in Chapter 2. British CT policy is claimed to be 'determined by a narrow group of officials bound together by mainly elite family backgrounds [and] a shared allegiance to dominant economic interests' (Blakeley et al., 2019: 39), indicating a structural-level nepotism that is, it is claimed, reflected by practitioners on the ground.

The practice of favouring personal networks is identified in street-level bureaucracy research as a coping mechanism adopted by frontline practitioners who, in exercising autonomy, resort to 'creaming' (cherry-picking); relying on a 'limited number of select clients' to ease the burden of the street-level bureaucrat by endorsing hand-picked 'easy, well-defined cases rather than difficult, amorphous, and time-consuming ones' (Vedung, 2015: 16). Practices described in the literature can be understood in the framework of 'creaming', and the concept can be applied to data collected for this study, identified by a significant number of participants who felt that local authority Prevent funds in particular were being awarded to 'mates' (Sulaiman) who were 'milking the system' (Kamran) in a localised reimagining of the 'Ottoman Empire' (Umair). 'It's general consensus amongst the community that Prevent in the city council is corrupt and you have to be friends with people on the inside, you have to know each other, to be acquainted, and there's a lot of brown-nosing, it's common knowledge' (Haris). While this study is not in any way validating Haris's claims; what is undeniable is the substantial number of practitioners who express frustration with the state of the commissioning and managing of projects, with two participants disclosing that they felt like 'whistleblowing' and others complaining of 'sycophants' and relatives making up the cohort of providers and staff members on or connected to the team, 'certain organisations get all the funding, not because they are doing the best work but because of who they know' (Kashif).

Zak connects nepotistic practices to accountability (upcoming), describing 'too much cosiness between a few individuals who don't seem to be accountable to anyone wider, and who's going to challenge them? Somebody that obviously wants to sign their own P45'. Faysal proposes robust evaluation processes as a solution,

> the problem is that a lot of people in the local authority don't understand the difference between networking and nepotism. That's the literal definition of corruption, funding people who are favourable to you. My issue is: what are you funding with this corrupt commissioning procedure? You're funding shit, I'm sorry. I know this very well because I have asked OSCT to evaluate our projects. I've literally talked myself out of a job because I think that the mission is more important.

The BCC Prevent Coordinator acknowledges the claims; 'people think well, he only supports groups or projects that he likes, it's a friendship circle, it's a closed circle, you get all of these accusations all the time' but this fails to ameliorate the concerns of participants regarding the supposed misdirection of public funds. Save for two practitioners who delivered workshops as part of the parenting series previously mentioned, the local authority did not fund any projects to work on far-right extremism, despite CTLP guidance and recent Home Office statistics evidencing a greater number of Prevent referrals made for the far right than for 'Islamist' extremism (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2023). The reason for this anomaly, seemingly unreflective of

the needs of the local landscape, is attributed by one participant to the nature of the *biraderi*; the 'links and networks between individuals and families along the lines of kith and kin [that] are a key organisational feature of the British Pakistani diaspora' (Akhtar, 2013: 2). Haris disapproves of what he perceives to be British Mirpuris – originating from the Mirpur district of Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir – working together in their own 'syndicates' and 'cliques', commissioning one another and 'keeping out' Punjabi Pakistanis and non-Pakistanis.

> This particular section of the council is like Pakistan. I'm not happy with their set-up and their representation. In Birmingham, it's like a *pind* [village] man, you gotta think about who's connected to who and who knows who, it's the bloody *biraderi*, it's a Mirpuri thing. Our people [Punjabis] are city dwellers, they're more educated, they're different. Vast majority of Mirpuris have got village mentality, their thinking is from their elders; make money by any means necessary.

Again, this study does not remotely subscribe to these polarising claims, but the purported insular nature of Prevent at the local authority, also identified by many other participants, has led Haris, a Prevent practitioner who believes in the objectives of the strategy, to question his involvement at the local level.

> If people like me get put off the Prevent agenda and accessing funding to help kids then the whole country is gonna lose. We'll just think we won't enter this sphere because there is corruption and you have to know someone on the inside to make headway in the area. This is the sort of thinking that their practices are going to nurture indirectly.

Another consequence of nepotism identified by participants is the diversion of funds from communities they are earmarked for because they are consumed by allegedly disingenuous organisations and individuals 'cherry-picked' by senior practitioners.

> Funding will only work if it reaches the people it's meant to reach. If you're giving it to organisations that don't let it get filtered down to the people you're supposed to get to, funders think 'yeah, we've invested'. You ain't invested nothing, money ain't got to the people it was meant to get to because you've given it to organisations out there for their own making. (Kashif)

Kashif implicates 'creaming' in propping up the notion of the industry that benefits individuals and deprives communities from cohesion-related resources. Sofia is less concerned with community provisions but is concerned with the 'harm' caused by the disregard for actual extremism-prevention, 'I really get angry. It's like, okay, you've got a nice position and you'll get lots of money. What about everyone else? What about the people actually affected by this? What about the mum who lost her son because he left for Syria? What are you guys actually doing?' To answer this, the IRP recommends a further due diligence procedure around the recruitment of intervention providers that includes a scouring of social media accounts (2023), though this seems to be a deterrent for 'extremists' becoming commissioned, rather than the personal networks of the local authority workforce.

Institutional malpractice

'What I have to say would border on whistleblowing.' – Faysal

Some participants claim that members of the local authority Prevent team act unethically when dealing with organisations and practitioners, allegedly misreporting on behalf of projects that fail to deliver, with particular regard to the 'fudging' of evaluation returns that should evidence the work of the commissioned service. It is suggested that as Birmingham is in receipt of more Prevent funds than other authorities, BCC is under pressure to appear active and this is claimed to lead members of the team to, when sent evaluation forms from funded projects, 'tart them up, jazz them up, pimp them, and then send them off to the Home Office'. It is conjectured that the team have at times been under no doubt that quarterly returns are falsified (some even suggested that members of the team responsible for managing projects are guilty of fabricating these forms themselves) because staff overseeing programmes have attended scheduled workshops that were not being fulfilled. Instead of addressing this by questioning the truthfulness of evaluation documentation, staff are accused of opting to 'protect' projects that appear successful on paper, 'they will continue funding the project, gloss over it and will present it in such a way that it's doing wonderful work' (Rashid).

Participants felt it was common knowledge that the continual underperformance of certain projects is overlooked, '[project] is too big and too important to fail, that is really tragic, man',

> [project] survives because the right people in the right places are pushing those buttons. Now how much of that is corruption? How much of that is just good practice in commissioning? When we look at a delegated function of Prevent, then my question is where is the authority? And where's the responsibility coming from? What's happening in areas like Birmingham is institutional corruption in funding. (Faysal)

The questions raised here point to the agency exercised by the local authority in managing Prevent in a localised manner recommended by the IRP to be reined in. As noted, however, two CSOs identified as consistently underperforming (by partners at WMCTU, a member of the BCC team and community settings that facilitated work) were supposedly told by the Coordinator not to seek further funding because their work was being externally questioned, '[he] is very clever, he told them don't apply, you're not gonna get the money, you know, it's been highlighted. It makes him look bad as well, innit? Because they funded them for so long and no one's been monitoring them'.

Other significant instances of allegedly poor or corrupt practice as noted by participants refer to the apparent selection of particular Engagement Officers to manage projects that are controversial so as to avoid the exposure of shortcomings, and a situation whereby funds placed in the account of a CSO for administrative purposes were said to be subsumed and not returned to the local authority. A more sinister example reported is that of an organisation that is funded, despite recognition of its alleged failure to conduct innovative or meaningful engagement, because of its willingness to use Home Office-administered software that 'borders on the parameters of acceptability in terms of monitoring and tracking' and is able to surveil service users through its app.

It is important to note that reported issues of nepotism, favouritism or institutional malpractice were not associated with CTU Prevent in this study, potentially owing to the influence of WMP's internal PSD and the robust vetting of staff and associates or the fact that funded projects through the TIF are small in number.

Fraud

Projects not delivering

Fraud is defined as the misappropriation of funds through dishonest means (Moiseienko and Izenman, 2019). Throughout this study, there has been frequent mention of projects and practitioners failing to adequately deliver work they have been commissioned to undertake; in other words, fraudulent practice. As this has been touched upon in other sections, this discussion will not present all of the data where instances were mentioned but instead will consider one such example of this type of purported fraudulent activity and its effects on the participant involved.

A local authority practitioner visited a project commissioned by BCC to discover that workshops were not, and had not, been taking place – no classrooms at the venue had been booked for the purpose – despite quarterly returns claiming thirty-six one-hour workshops had been carried out to deliver counter-extremism content to young people in the area. The practitioner sought advice from partners at WMCTU (who had not funded the organisation) because he considered them stakeholders who, though lacking jurisdiction, would be keen to avoid the overall reputation of Prevent being tarnished by fraudulent conduct. He was advised to collate evidence and email the BCC Prevent Coordinator to enquire about reporting processes. The practitioner was extremely distressed throughout this period, asking to meet me several times outside of work premises to help put together a timeline and gather evidence to submit. He described the situation as 'hanging over his head' for weeks, upset that he had made the discovery because of the immense stress he felt at having to declare the wrongdoing (though he believed it would be 'covered up' to protect reputations) whilst balancing the moral implications of potentially not reporting the situation and therefore allowing it to continue – 'I lose either way'. His perspective was that most of the staff at BCC were 'office workers', detached from actual community work and disinterested in how this practice affects communities on the ground because they are primarily motivated by personal and professional development that can promote their progression within the sector.

As a result of the complaint, there was an admission from the CSO that workshops had not been delivered and dates fabricated, with an offer to host a workshop that the local authority practitioner would be welcome to attend. As mentioned, the project was advised not to apply for local authority Prevent resources for the following year, however, continues to flourish from multiple similar sources of funding.

Rashid (making reference to a different organisation) ties together issues at the heart of projects that receive money and fail to deliver: a localised approach is deemed to permit a practice which is fraudulent, covered

by institutional malpractice, and enabled by poor evaluation measures (upcoming), as well as connecting such observations back to the boundaries he draws for himself in the space.

> It's at a local level. The fact is so much funding was thrown at [CSO] even though they knew that this project is not delivering. I know that their yearly returns and quarterly returns were being manipulated and moulded and fabricated all to show a different image. And now they've disappeared. There was over eighty thousand pounds that was unaccountable, eighty thousand pounds. But the thing is, because it had the fit, because Theresa May had visited the project – oh my God, what a wonderful project, what a wonderful programme, what a wonderful initiative – we've all got to jump on it, this is what we're living under! So that's why I won't compromise. You want me to take that foreign policy slide out? You know what, keep your funding.

Rashid frames his own engagement in relation to the underperformance of fraudulent projects. The next section explores a type of fraud committed by projects that do deliver.

Double dipping

Obtaining more than one source of income for the same piece of work, referred to as double dipping, is another fraudulent practice reported and observed during fieldwork. Similar to, but more deceptive than, the duplication of work where 'money has gone out to three different organisations to do the same kind of work in the same kind of area', double dipping is explained as when 'an organisation has bid to two different funders to do the same work' (Zayd).

There are two parties that stand to benefit from this action and Faysal describes both; first is the institution that funds pre-established work, '[organisations] are just being funded to do what they're already doing, but now it can come under the badge and the label of Birmingham Prevent, which makes Birmingham look good'. Second is the organisation pocketing surplus funds for one iteration of work, a practice described as 'not unethical, but illegal' by Faysal who is concerned about cases being exposed, again correlating the supposed sanctioning of double dipping to the localised, non-standard approach that BCC operates.

> Look, there are organisations that are double funding, I know this happens. I have a very strong suspicion that there are organisations in Birmingham that are triple funding and possibly quadruple funding. That for me is a scandal, man, and when it comes out my conscience is going to be clear and I'm going to be very far away from this when it blows up, because it will, because people will get pissed enough to start banging those FOIs in. […] I'm really sore about the massive amounts of money that have been allocated to some of these projects that I've mentioned as double, triple, quadruple funding. I know from my experience it's a free-for-all. Coordinators have not had any real direction centrally from the Home Office so quite simply it's down to discretion. So that means if you want to keep your 200k this year for doing eff all, your Coordinator just has to say so.

Faysal implies that Prevent Coordinators are aware that the practice of double (or potentially multiple) funding takes place and are not active in challenging it, in fact suggesting that street-level bureaucrat techniques of exercising discretion are employed for mutual forms of benefit. He cites Birmingham as complicit in the overarching (and supposedly nationally-administered practice) which is not something this study can verify; however, what would appear to be an incident of local double dipping was accidentally observed during fieldwork.

I was invited to attend an awards event by friends from a sports club, separate to my research. The organisation hosting the event was involved with BCC Prevent which I was aware of, but also a number of other initiatives, one of which I believed to be linked to the event. I happened to sit next to an individual who, while exchanging introductions, told me she was an independent researcher in attendance to evaluate a twelve-week programme carried out by the organisation for a funder she was not able to disclose. When I mentioned I was a PhD student researching Prevent she explained she had carried out lots of counter-terrorism and Prevent research for the Home Office who contract consultancies (made up of freelancers like herself) to find out how young Muslims would respond to various government counter-narratives. I was curious about the undisclosed funder and asked if the individuals partaking in the programme were aware of who this was; her assurances were later disputed by friends who participated.

After the event, I arranged a fieldwork conversation with a member of the local authority team who confirmed that the independent researcher was nothing to do with BCC but showed me returns completed by the organisation stating that the workshops and sessions associated with the event I attended were carried out as part of their BCC-funded Prevent work. This seemed to suggest that the organisation had received money from two separate sources to complete the same programme. The local authority practitioner was disappointed but not surprised and wondered whether the organisation was perhaps even receiving 'triple payment'.

The problem with this action is that the deprivation of resources that should be benefiting communities (as mentioned in relation to nepotism) will be recognised as fulfilled and meaningful work by funding institutions. According to the practitioner, if communities later complain they are underfunded, the government stance is, 'well, we gave the money to your community, it's not our problem if you're still suffering'. Owais, too, claims that money obtained for the community often fails to make a positive contribution because of a lack of accountability and that this lax approach in turn encourages other groups to similarly 'abuse the system', making it more difficult for practitioners to defend the brand in an effort to ultimately overcome Prevent's toxic legacy.

Double dipping is another example of fraudulent practice that appears to be committed by some practitioners in the local CT/CE space and continues to negatively affect others, as well as wider communities in Birmingham. Discussion has considered reports of projects not delivering work they have been funded for, double dipping, and other actions such as the exaggeration of threat and fabrication of service users (mentioned throughout the thesis) in order to provide insight into the suggestion of unethical processes that exist locally.

Including this data has been a source of confliction and such conversations more broadly present problems for minoritised researchers involved in the study of similar topics; I do not wish to implicate or demonise practitioners for engaging with policies that already pathologise whole communities, however, I feel a

responsibility to participants who continuously raised these points, stressing how controversial issues affected their experiences and ability to implement what they perceive to be 'good' and sustainable work in the space. I have attempted to document these themes at the culmination of an unpacking and understanding of policy in the local space that highlights how its construction paves the way for such practices. Exploitation of the holes and apertures that exist in the local space varies from the exercising of agency to some of the more extreme examples conveyed in this chapter (as reported by participants), made possible by the unmitigated maelstrom of the policy spiral nationally. The point, ultimately, is that fissures exist, and while some practitioners operate within these openings, others' experiences are impacted by their exploitation. They report feeling torn (like the BCC practitioner uncovering non-existent workshops), frustrated, and powerless, questioning their own involvement – which makes remaining in the grey area more problematic – as they struggle to defend participation to sceptical communities. They may experience an increase in external challenges faced while, internally, tensions develop between practitioners, organisations and authorities. Participants may then seek support but are left unsure where to turn. The lack of formal provisions brings the cycle back to the practices and approaches explored in Chapter 6 as they rely on self-imposed frames of reference – checking and refining intentions, cementing and reconstructing boundaries, and drawing upon religion as a 'matrix' that delineates conduct and provides support in the course of practitioners' engagement.

The first half of this chapter has presented some of the problems associated with the operationalisation of Prevent/Counter-Extremism in Birmingham, in relation to RQ3. The remainder will draw together findings from other themes throughout the study to explore the impact of some of these tensions as experienced and observed by practitioners, considering how problems encountered are navigated in the course of engagement.

Impact

Accountability and evaluation

For the purposes of the study, accountability and evaluation are understood as connected but distinct constructs. Accountability relates to governance and is a useful concept to frame this discussion on answerability, responsibility and account-giving in the space – what structures are in place to check that providers are delivering work they are paid for and who is blameworthy if this is not given due attention? Evaluation is the assessment of the success and significance of the work of projects and practitioners and should consider measures such as the meeting of objectives, value of programmes, obstacles to future work, and overall impact. Evaluation should be carried out by funders for the purposes of strategic insight but some practitioners and projects also make attempts to evaluate their own impact (through questionnaires provided to attendees at the beginning and end of sessions, for example). The two are intrinsically connected, though, and literature demonstrates how the conceptualisation of accountability has evolved over time, broadening

from traditional concerns with finances and regulatory compliance to consider how stakeholders are expected to achieve 'negotiated accountability'; considering all facets of operations, from programme formation to implementation and evaluation (Ospina et al., 2002). In this understanding, managers must consider both upward pulls to be accountable to funders and policymakers and downward pulls to be responsive to communities and supporters (Ospina et al., 2002) while the street-level bureaucrats that implement policy are also said to be held accountable in various ways; bottom-up and top-down but also 'sideways' by peers in the space (Hupe and Hill, 2007). This framing can help make sense of some of the data presented in the chapter thus far, i.e. practitioners questioning how efficiently other projects spend money, and is useful in contextualising the discussion on accountability and evaluation.

It has long been acknowledged that Prevent projects are subject to superficial evaluation (Roohi Ahmed, 2015) with local authorities provided minimal guidelines to gauge successes and failures (Lakhani, 2012) and feeble attempts at assessment carried out in short timeframes that have functioned to 'buttress the strategy with a veneer of respectability through academic collaborations' (Qurashi, 2021: 4). Alongside projects, evaluation of the competence of practitioners as individuals is overlooked (Fitzgerald, 2016) and reference is made more broadly to a 'bloated, unaccountable system' of CT brought about by an undemocratic policymaking process that excludes public participation and miscommunicates the threat of terrorism (Blakeley et al., 2019: 38). Notably, these conclusions are acknowledged in the IRP as Shawcross declares that inadequate mechanisms of evaluation left him unable to determine demonstrable impact of Prevent-funded projects (though he only met with six across the country).

The burden of accountability

The majority of participants felt strongly that there was little to no accountability of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham. Some place the blame firmly on organisations and practitioners implementing policy on the ground,

> I'm gonna say it how it is and you can quote me on this – a lot of organisations are exploiting Prevent, they're taking money, they're not investing in the communities, they're not delivering the projects. What I would say is those organisations need to be looked into with a fine-tooth brush. Do that and you will see where the problem is and it's not at the top because the Home Office do give out funding and it's great, what they do. But that's taxpayers' money, that's you and I contributing towards those projects but there are a few organisations that know the tricks of the trade and they know how to put in the best applications. They take that money and nothing is ever delivered and I would say that there needs to be a thorough review of the whole process. Who's taking the money? What've they done with it and how many projects have they actually delivered? And there should be checks actually, an independent panel comes in and sees that work has been delivered, randomly on the day that they are claiming and let's see. (Kamran)

While others accuse managers of failing to efficiently oversee projects under their direction, owing either to a laissez-faire approach or wilful negligence,

> There's no evaluation process. There's no accountability. So it all comes down to who's the manager and who's running where Prevent comes out of in each council. It's 'have the money and you're my

> mate so I just trust that you'll do the right thing with it and send me back anything shoddy that you want, where you put in random numbers of people who tend to your workshop'. None of it's ever checked. None of it's ever verified. I know first-hand a lot of it's untrue and I'm not talking about just [name of CSO]. They're giving money to groups but there's no accountability. (Umair)

Sara points out the irony of a strategy accused of overreach that fails to adequately govern those acting on its behalf,

> the worrying about spying makes me laugh because if they knew how, I mean I shouldn't probably say this, but **literally** no one ever looks at our stuff [returns] which I find slightly terrifying in a different way. But like, if you believe the stuff that comes out about Prevent, you would assume that there's like huge levels of control. And there isn't.

Participants claim it is widely acknowledged that promoted activities do not take place but that organisations and individuals are not held to account because funding authorities do not seem to scrutinise projects and practitioners they commission, 'they need to be looking at questioning what's going on in them projects – how many officers who authorise the funding actually go and sit in a session that's been delivered?' (Kashif), 'who'll actually check up on what you do?', (Tahir), 'how genuine are those claims?' (Kamran). While practitioners place the onus on funders who 'should have the resources and the capacity', it is suggested that managers lack the tools to implement the wider measures of negotiated accountability now required (Ospina et al., 2002).

Police practitioners felt that historically both WMCTU and BCC had been remiss in holding practitioners to account but that in recent years WMCTU had tightened up processes so projects funded by the local authority now stood out as examples of poor governance.

> There's a heck of a lot of money that's been pumped out over the years and when I landed here I would ask okay, so what have you got for the returns? Where's the accountability? You're giving of thousands of pounds to groups to do projects but what have you got in return? I think we need to be a bit more gutsy and challenge people and it's changing now with where the funding's going, it's more robust, but that's come after how many years? (Amar)

Amar highlights the local authority's purported negligence but also apportions blame to communities themselves, suggesting that community complacency has allowed individuals to absorb money intended for the wider collective, essentially absolving authorities of some responsibility, 'what's lacking is the community holding the community to account'. Zak, too, critiques BCC's approach but implies that communities are equally as frustrated and that unaccountability serves only to amplify Prevent's toxic legacy.

> [CSOs] come up with something fabricated and nobody can hand on heart say, 'I use them, they supported a case of mine and they did a great job'. In fact, sometimes we're struggling to find **anyone** who can say this organisation is good. So who are they supporting then? Sometimes you get this large suspicion about shell organisations and it doesn't do Prevent's name any good at all. It's not just distrust questions asked within the police, it's the communities that notice this too. They see that an organisation's suddenly got a new fancy office or they see them on the news appearing with some MP or something and they go, 'oh, so what do they do? What have they delivered for that? That's a lot of money'.

Whether communities are similarly infuriated or partially responsible, it would seem that the local authority's supposedly lenient approach to holding projects and practitioners to account is a significant issue for other practitioners in the space, partners within WMCTU, and potentially communities more broadly. Opinions shared by local authority practitioners point to an overarching hands-off approach within the department that applies to team members as well as commissioned services, 'as much as I've tried to keep myself busy, I've not got no leadership direction around what I should be doing' (Adam), that might not improve until individuals in post move on or measures are enforced externally, perhaps as a result of the IRP.

Methods of evaluation

'There needs to be more evidence. A really honest look at actually, what's this organisation ever delivered?' – Zak

Methods of evaluation carried out by practitioners during activities in the form of statements or sad/smiley faces in a Likert scale format were provided to attendees at the beginning and end of some workshops, but how is the work of projects and practitioners more holistically evaluated to measure how successfully objectives have been achieved, how work can be improved, and whether further funding can be justified? Most practitioners claimed, in parallel with accountability, that evaluation is absent in practice.

> To what extent are they evaluating the actual impact of what we're all doing? I'm confident 'cause I'm a nerd and evaluation is one of my interests and we use various forms of research to try and measure. Obviously it's preventative stuff and we can get into that boring academic conversation about how do we know if we have prevented something, but there are things about behavioural changes and attitudinal changes and engagement levels, all of that stuff we can record. And we do it because that is partly what our organisation is about but to what extent is that happening on all the projects? I don't know. I think that, again, is a problem. The local authorities are given like a sense of autonomy and they just do their own thing, which in a way is really great. But in a way it means if evaluation and accountability is not something that they put at the forefront, not what they're necessarily interested in, then a lot of projects know that, and then are not expected to account for what they're doing and there's no real evaluation process. (Sara)

Discussion has demonstrated in various ways the independence with which BCC is able to administer Prevent and the CES locally. Sara questions the freedom with which the team directs the strategies and the autonomy transmitted, from BCC-employed street-level bureaucrats to further detached 'connectors' commissioned on short-term and alternating bases as they enter and depart the local CT/CE space episodically. She draws attention to both the advantages and challenges this brings, and while confident in the evaluation mechanisms employed by her own organisation, attributes the localised approach and inconsistencies that characterise it to the wilful exploitation of resources and opportunities by local practitioners. 'Living off the same story' (Rashid), i.e. organisations that once justified funding allocations but are never again re-evaluated, is cited as an example of this exploitation by many participants, 'they might have done one good piece of work but guess what? That shouldn't last forever' (Kashif).

Others denounce the preference for quantity over quality; Sara explains how figures reported to BCC are crunched into a 'price-per-person' evaluation by the time they reach central government, so a talk that cost

five hundred pounds and was delivered to hundreds of children at an assembly looks 'better on the books' than one-to-one mentoring that might have been more meaningful. This encourages practitioners to 'manipulate the data' according to Faysal who struggles with the format of 'bullshit Excel documents that are not qualitative in the slightest'.

Reflecting on her experience delivering a BSBT project, Noor describes an evaluation process at complete odds with the reality of its success on the ground.

> I just feel like so much money's pumped into projects like this where the outcomes are not really what you want them to be. From the reporting perspective everything was done by the book so everything was done to a T, it looked amazing at the end but it's not as everyone has made it out to be. The Building a Stronger Britain thing… in my opinion, it victimises Muslims more than empowers them or protects them from anything. I'm telling you man, it's a load of bullshit. It just makes you think we're doing shit for no reason, like no one's getting nothing out of this other than us getting money to pay for our jobs but we're not actually benefiting anyone in society.

Discussion has shown how processes of evaluation are deemed to be largely non-existent, embellished, or at times completely dishonest. Again, participants referred mostly to local authority-administered work, describing WMCTU funding as more difficult to obtain and presumably, therefore, more strictly evaluated. Noor's account of her involvement with BSBT conveys little distinction between Prevent and the CES in this regard but the data depicts that while scrutiny of projects and policy may be lacking, local practitioners hold each other accountable through a 'sideways' approach.

The future of accountability and evaluation?

As stated, since 2020, the local authority claims to have been attempting to slowly improve accountability. This can be evidenced by the CSOs discouraged from reapplying for funding and the introduction of a 'rigorous moderation process' and 'theory of change methodology' in order to measure impact and evaluation that encourages the 'accumulation of Channel referrals' (Nasreen) in place of 'all this loose stuff [providers] have been doing' (Zayd). Since then, Shawcross's assessment of tangentially linked projects 'far removed from Prevent's key objectives' (2023: 27) prompted his recommendation for the creation of a Standards and Compliance Unit 'to investigate complaints from Prevent practitioners and the wider public' (2023: 162). This was, in fact, pre-empted by participants who proposed similar 'scrutiny panels' to consider funding applications and the evaluation of projects as well as complaints,

> it cannot be from Birmingham, it should be external from a different city. You'd think they'd have set something like this up, it's common sense, but this is where I think we got it hugely wrong. There should be a scrutiny panel assessing those bids and not being influenced by anyone. And if they feel that they fit the criteria, let's do it. And then they should be also scrutinising later on, what have they achieved? Let's see those results. (Kamran)

Accountability and evaluation are key areas of interest identified in the data, significant to practitioners and policymakers alike, and while many of the findings presented are not contradictory to suggestions made by the IRP, the study disputes Shawcross's conclusions that resources are granted to individuals or groups who are 'sympathetic, or even supportive, of extremists and their ideas' (2023: 30). The data suggests that some

providers might take advantage of funds perceived to be easily accessible and not stringently supervised; but this may be a means of supporting other work that communities would struggle to obtain resources for, or it may be simply a source of income for some who view it as a legitimate career. Ultimately, realisations of accountability and evaluation appear different across the spectrum of individuals and authorities involved; Hanna underscores not just the responsibility of funders to evaluate engagement but also the organisational learning that authorities can gain from maintaining relationships with providers through the assessment of their work, while Zak's priority is to 'see those bills' after deeming application bids to be notoriously vague about where money will be spent. Transparent and meaningful measures of evaluation, participants suggest, will produce valuable engagement, nurture integrity and instil confidence in CT/CE policy locally.

As previously stated, as well as the Standards and Compliance Unit, Shawcross's attempts at achieving transparency through evaluative efforts seek to implicate the CCE in the reviewing of all Prevent advisory boards, panels and products. In their response to the IRP, John Holmwood and Layla Aitlhadj point out the irony of appointing the CCE and its Commissioner, neither of which have been subject to evaluation themselves, to oversee a strategy perceived to be morphing into a 'dangerous political project' (2023: 81) and in the vein of favouritism, appears to have been selected without due process.

This discussion draws together findings from other themes throughout the study, connecting purported nepotistic practices, an overarching lack of transparency, the interpretation of Prevent as an industry, and the central concept of the grey area to consider how a laid-back approach to accountability and evaluation locally has bolstered the powers of street-level bureaucrats and connectors in their implementation of Prevent and the CES. The constant fluctuation of central policy and the fractured local space this engenders has left oversight in the hands of local practitioners who demonstrate the interconnection of tensions explored; for example, commissioning friends and relatives is more likely to result in a relaxed approach to accountability, and poor governance and unprofessionalism would suggest that work is less likely to be meaningfully evaluated. As with the findings on the application of agency, local manifestations of accountability and evaluation evidently serve to benefit some practitioners, enhancing their overall experiences and enabling the capacity with which they are able to shape their personal and professional objectives to remain relatively independently governed and measured. Other practitioners struggle with the effects of what they perceive to be gaping holes in the management of local implementation. If the recommendations of the IRP are fulfilled, the local governing of Prevent providers will be escalated to a central regulation – itself not answerable to an overseeing administration – which originated from the devising of a national strategy that catastrophically failed and was never able to clarify its position in relation to Prevent. If more robust measures of accountability and evaluation are introduced, it is possible that other themes explored in this thesis – the exercising of agency, unsuitable workshops, opaque commissioning procedures, and instances of fraudulent malpractice – will be impacted in ways that will further reform the local landscape.

Discussion has covered the fundamental tensions that impact on the experiences of practitioners locally and shape the wider CT/CE space in Birmingham. The following sections touch upon some of the other issues identified by participants as significant and instrumental in their experiences of local implementation.

Sustainability of work

The issue of sustainability, implicating the prevalence of short-term funding models and the insecurity this fosters, is addressed in broader literature on critical community work (Henderson, 2007), CSOs within CVE (Barzegar et al., 2016), the IRP, and also by participants who describe the local commissioning framework as 'an absolute tragedy' that allows projects running on twelve-month funding to 'crash and burn' while a handful of nominally-impactful CSOs remain funded for 'legacy' (Faysal). Bringing together issues around evaluation, support and partnership-working into the debate on sustainability, Faysal claims that Birmingham authorities fund small organisations based on a 'corrupt framework' and critically fail to sanction multi-year funding that would encourage consistency, so should therefore expect superficial outcomes. Others also indicate this system is conducive to ineffective work.

> There's a sort of patchwork type of approach […] a horizontal spread of it, it's tried to do so many things, but it hasn't gone deep enough in terms of sustainability, it hasn't lasted long enough, they do something for a little while and then they leave it, and a lot of practitioners will tell you this – they don't continue to fund us. Where are the sustainable long-term projects that deal with systemic issues? (Sulaiman)

As well as commissioned providers, participants cite the high turnover of practitioners employed directly by BCC and WMCTU, something that police practitioner Amar attempts to mitigate by introducing his whole team to communities he engages with rather than operating a single point of contact approach that is common practice within policing. Many participants raise the issue of the young people and communities left in the lurch after a twelve-week programme comes to an end; Haroon compares the sustained work he feels happens around knife crime to the meaningless and inconsistent work that is delivered on radicalisation and extremism at his centre. Some practitioners also describe feeling 'dropped' themselves, transitioning from being 'in the in-crowd with a parking spot underneath the Home Office' to experiencing 'non-existent' support when the government decides the CSO is no longer of benefit.

To address these issues (and reduce the training costs Shawcross associates with high personnel turnover), the IRP recommends lengthening the Prevent funding cycle to between two and five years, a significant increase on the annual system that currently creates short-term projects and, according to the report, encourages meaningless work. This is accompanied with the caveat that the Homeland Security Group should develop enhanced strategies for evaluation of Prevent-funded projects and that longer-term funding would be provided to only 'the very highest risk local authorities and projects which have already demonstrated their effectiveness' (HM Government, 2023: 17). The precarity caused by an unsustainable system of

commissioning, made possible by the fluid and incoherent nature of CT/CE policy, deeply impacts on the experiences of practitioners in their struggle to forge a space in the local scene, replete with all its tensions.

Competition and cohesion

As noted, Prevent/Counter-Extremism funding can also instigate intra-community and wider tensions rooted in envy and competition (Birt, 2009; Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; O'Toole et al., 2011; Thomas, 2012; Osorno Hernandez, 2021) and Muslim communities in particular are seen as privileged because of budgets for perceived 'Muslim problems' (Raheem). 'Non-Muslim workers were thinking Muslims are getting all the funding in the Muslim areas. They're causing the problems and they're getting all the funding! Another stick to beat us with!' (Kashif). This causes tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities (arguably a factor in the radicalisation of the far-right), as well as between separate minority ethnic communities as Bangladeshi and Pakistani community organisations, for example, are set up to work against each other, competing for their separate communities. Many instances of intra-project rivalry were reported, such as the local CSOs 'met with resentment and jealousy' (Nasreen) by other organisations that failed to meet funding criteria and remain 'burnt up about it' (Imran).

It is claimed that a culture of competition is nurtured in Birmingham, 'there's more bloody politics than with flipping mainstream politicians!' (Umair), 'there was never a relationship with any of the other projects' (Sulaiman), 'who are your biggest challengers? It's possibly other BAME people' (Idrees). And finally, tensions between Prevent and the CES are exposed as Maryam explains how she later discovered that Counter-Extremism staff had been telling a PEO (both within BCC) that Maryam was too busy for a conversation with Prevent as the BCC practitioners competed for groups and spaces to deliver their workshops in the battle for new forums. This supports arguments developed in sections on unsuitable workshops and the strained relationship between Prevent and the CES, as well as potentially causing further divisions, antithetical to the aims of social cohesion.

Pandora's box

'Prevent has caused more extremism than it's prevented!' – Haris

In the vein of CT/CE causing conflict for intended recipients and practitioners in the course of their engagement, a number of participants argue that Prevent 'actually ends up creating more problems than solutions' (Raheem), yielding 'iatrogenic' effects in the attempts of policy to prevent radicalisation and create active citizens, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Lindekilde, 2012; Cherney, 2016; Pilkington and Vestel, 2021). Kashif says the young people that attended Prevent programmes at his centre were more interested in Manchester United losing a football game than extremism, 'being radicalised is the furthest thing from their mind, I'll be honest with you, it felt like we were coercing them to think in that kind of way', citing an example

of a service user not knowing how to 'read *namaz* [prayer] but calling himself an Islamic soldier' in a graffiti tag after learning about ISIS. He mitigates the risk by demarcating boundaries that impose restrictions on what he will now allow at his centre, 'there are certain things we don't need to show them… you might open something up that you can't close after.' Kashif explains how engaging with Prevent forced him to reflect on his purpose as a youth worker and duty to protect young people, sharing concerns that he was exposing them to 'a Pandora's box' through implementation of the strategy.

Rashid also draws attention to the Pandora's box effect, claiming that facilitators and practitioners often do not consider audience suitability and are instead intent on delivering deradicalisation workshops to individuals that are not radicalised,

> what that does is inadvertently open up the minds of these individuals to inquire further around Al-Qaeda. You've opened them up, you've exposed them. So rather than bloody taking them away from it, you've actually drawn them to it. On this agenda, you could easily do more harm, even if your intention is good. You know what I mean? You could switch somebody from having no thoughts around joining an extremist organisation to suddenly feeling justified in the plight to do so, if your approach is wrong. You've got to be very mindful and tread carefully.

Tying together his concerns with his 'harm over good' framework of intention-setting, Rashid offers insight into the internal conflict that participants experience from their positioning within the grey area, complicating whether or not they engage and governing the ways in which they do.

Connected to the Pandora's box effect is the matter of where individuals who do have questions, whether Prevent/Counter-Extremism has placed them there or not, go for frank discussions. Many participants felt that Prevent had closed down safe spaces (in harmony with literature presented in Chapter 2), driving intrigued young people exploring issues like the Syrian civil war 'underground' for answers and leaving practitioners unable to have the open debates they once did.

Disengagement and alternative work

Cutting ties

For some participants, the impact of tensions explored in this chapter became too much to shoulder, ultimately causing them to disengage from the space. Faysal explicitly cites the malpractice he says he witnessed as motive, claiming to exercise his agency and withdraw participation as a form of 'conscientious objection'.

> I extricated myself because I've got very direct, first-hand evidence of the corruption. It's like a toxic, domestic relationship. It's taken a long time… either you exit by being exited or you exit yourself. I've killed everything off because I don't want to be a part of a framework that is institutionally corrupt. (Faysal)

Haris also disengaged from further involvement with either Prevent or the CES after experiencing unprofessional conduct, citing the aforementioned situation in which he was promised future funding by the Counter-Extremism Coordinator for the facilitation of last-minute workshops at his setting.

> I was reflecting afterwards on those meetings with her thinking, 'this is England, man'. If this was Pakistan or someplace like that, okay, it's expected. You gotta give something under the table, you've got to take them out for dinner, you've got to do all that stuff, wining and dining. I accept that, I've done that. But this is England, this is Rome, you know. And here those things are unthinkable, unacceptable.

Others fell out of sync with Prevent objectives to implicate communities; Sara, for example, says she was asked to support the idea of a women's hub at which community members were supposed to 'come and tell us about their terrorist sons'. When she explained the kind of resources that would actually benefit communities instead, her ideas were rejected and this marked her exit from the official space (her organisation continues to undertake Prevent-funded work through a third party but is no longer an officially-funded BCC CSO). Tahir lost the 'willpower' to sustain engagement when authorities continued to ignore the role of foreign policy as a driving factor in radicalisation, and Raheem became exasperated with the stagnancy of the scene overall, 'I go to meetings and I hear people expressing opinions that I heard in 2008, I feel like nothing's moved on'.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Asiya's health suffered as a result of being constantly trolled and abused online and this became one of the primary reasons for her disengagement. She also found it difficult financially to survive on the 'nominal amounts of funding' she received for workshops and felt constrained by what she perceived to be Prevent's rigid understanding of extremism that left her 'treading on eggshells'. For Asiya, disengaging has provided her complete autonomy over her work but the negative experiences have left her cautious; she now questions anything she is invited to – will she be subject to abuse? What will the context be? Will the link be made to Prevent? She says, 'but I don't have a script to work to anymore! I'm a lot more independent and free'.

Alternative forms of engagement

'I don't need Channel. I am Channel.' – Yasir

Participants that had disengaged were keen to talk about alternative work they believe to be a more effective means of countering extremism as well as broader forms of community work that should complement the local space. For some, to circumvent some of the tensions explored in this chapter, an improved approach takes the form of the same work but funded bottom-up by communities themselves, though sustainability has historically threatened informal attempts. Faysal has little desire to adapt the work he so passionately believes in but irreparable relationships with authorities means he will be taking his intellectual property and bespoke initiatives overseas, 'we don't know exactly what it's gonna look like but we do know, one hundred and ten per cent, we are never going to do anymore CVE work in the UK'.

Tahir is re-energised to resume work in the field in order to advocate that more Muslims have been killed by Muslim terrorists than non-Muslims. He intends to set the course for a different narrative, subverting work he used to be involved with that he now feels 'played into the agenda' and contributed to the trope that Muslims are extremists. He attempted to counter extremism through Prevent structures but it 'went wrong' and now wishes to raise money through independent sponsors to create a platform for diverse communities to tell their own stories and 'derail all the shit generated by the media'. The effects of engaging with Prevent, and attempts made to involve him with the CES, had significant personal impact on Tahir's mental wellbeing and it is only after a period of time and reflection that he has been able to consider re-engaging on his own terms. Evaluating the efficacy of the UK's strategies to counter terrorism and extremism, he observes how, in his opinion, mundane actions like those of Liverpool F.C. player Mohamed Salah have been more impactful than the millions poured into Prevent projects.

> Some of these football yobs who have seen Salah play, seen him pray, they have seen him read the Qur'an and they've thought he's actually not a bad guy, he gives to charity, so they think Muslims can't be that bad… and he's scoring so many goals, the only one he's terrorising is the goalkeeper – which is fine. So it is voices like that that have helped to break down those barriers, he has done more to challenge extremism.

Some participants have moved on from official engagement but continue to attempt to make a difference in their own way, with their boundaries drawn further afield. Whether that be informally, through other third sector structures or lucrative international partnerships, it is essential to acknowledge that Prevent (and the now defunct CES) are not the only means by which Birmingham's communities are able to have significant and valuable conversations and interventions around radicalisation and extremism. Others, involved in implementing Prevent since its introduction to the city in 2006, have grown tired of the ever-changing face of policy – vacillating between approaches and objectives – denouncing strategies they believe to be disproportionate to the scale of the issues they seek to address. While radicalisation is a concern that participants agree should be safeguarded against; their work with Birmingham's communities flags a plethora of competing and chronically underfunded issues.

> Why aren't we getting that level of funding for work around youth violence? More people are getting killed on our streets, never mind going abroad doing what they're doing. They need to change the narrative. We need to start doing some constructive work with these kids. People don't even talk about Prevent anymore! It's almost like, fuck off about Prevent, we don't talk about Prevent. Honestly you ask these kids about Prevent, they're not interested. Radicalisation? No. You talk about youth violence and it's like 'yeah man, my bredrin got stabbed up the road'. That's far more pertinent to them, that's going round in their head right now, not what's happening on the other side of Syria. (Yasir)

Participants talk about 'scaremongering' in relation to perceived threat, believing the actual issue to be 'miniscule' in comparison to the remit of strategies like Prevent. These practitioners are employed or commissioned by CT/CE policies but still overwhelmingly regard the 'constant radicalisation discourse' as damaging and ineffective, 'it's too much overkill, we're workshopped out now to be honest with you', at times

questioning the need for their own participation, 'a colleague at the CTU said to me… we're preparing this army but there's no war for us to fight'. Differentiating between independently commissioned providers and practitioners employed directly by BCC or WMCTU, it is often easier for the former cohort to cut ties with unhealthy funding relations than the latter, although employees may disengage by transferring interdepartmentally (as alluded to), coming to consider their engagement until such a time as a 'sticky plaster' (Amar) for issues that remain unresolved at a strategic level.

Conclusions

This chapter has addressed RQ3, considering broader problems identified by practitioners in the course of their engagement and steps taken to disengage from the space in order to navigate these. Also answered is the second half of RQ4, reflecting on some of the ways in which engagement is fulfilled and measured and RQ5, comparing experiences across the different authorities and distinct strategies. Discussion has explored a number of tensions encountered in the implementation of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham, some structural and some attributed to other local actors and senior practitioners. Though criticism has been made of practitioners, it is imperative to acknowledge that malintent cannot be claimed; it is foreseeable and perhaps inevitable that individuals and organisations will exploit available resources and localised circumstances, particularly in a climate of austerity. Authorities have also been heavily implicated in this discussion, however, it is possible that in their own ways, members of the BCC team perceive their actions to be beneficial to individuals within their networks and supportive of the development of local organisations, even if this potentially translates into pejorative effects on wider communities subject to inefficacious initiatives through the renewal of the securitised lens through which Britain's Muslim communities are governed.

The role of managers, and their access to both organisational decision-making and resources, is pivotal (Henderson, 2007). This is summarised in the local context by Faysal, 'the commissioning framework, the local politics, the nepotism, the corruption, the lack of impact, honestly, it is so much based on visuals and what the Prevent Coordinator thinks of you. The structures that exist locally are as corrupt as the system allows them to be'. Though, as conveyed, there has been some evidence of steps taken by authorities to attempt to address standout examples of malpractice (e.g., devising exit strategies for CSOs, investigating criminality). Nevertheless, the data stresses the significance of the local space, drawing attention to an obscure yet malleable set of structures overseen by senior street-level bureaucrats exercising practices of discretion and 'creaming' and upholding seemingly poor standards of accountability and evaluation; a situation inspired and advanced by the ambiguity of Prevent and the CES on a national scale.

In the theory of the active 'trusted' Muslim, the 'frontier between the trusted and the suspect is an extremely fine line that is constantly negotiated. The 'trusted' of yesterday can become the 'suspects' of tomorrow and

vice versa' (Ragazzi, 2016: 733). This is bolstered by recent empirical evidence publicising the withdrawal of projects unwilling 'to toe the line' (Holmwood and Aitlhadj, 2022: 53) and through data captured for this study that demonstrates how practitioners struggling to maintain a position within the grey area can feel coerced into committing 'a 180' or alternatively disengaging from the space altogether. In exploring tensions, the chapter has demonstrated how, contrary to claims made by other studies of grassroots practitioners, Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners in Birmingham are not 'building their own community' in which they can 'share their skills and experiences, teaming up when necessary to found an organisation, to support one another, or simply to chat on social media' (Lehane, 2017: 125). The local space is, in fact, revealed to be laden with tensions that pit practitioners and organisations against one another in competition. Also problematised is the conception of practitioners 'carving a space' from which to operate as a community (Lehane, 2017); I argue that while practitioners inevitably draw upon their personal experiences in the implementation of policy, many have no desire to carve or exist within the space on a long-term basis. The local scene has been revealed to be fluid and fragmented and this study proposes that practitioners in acknowledgement of this are able to appropriate it in myriad ways, often for the fulfilment of their own personal, spiritual or financial objectives. For many, their occupation of the space is transitory; far from attempting to build a community, participants demonstrate the ways in which they are able to move through the space, exploiting opportunities and drawing upon resources in their subjective interpretations of Prevent as a site for *da'wah* or expression of agency, for example, participating and disengaging when involvement ceases to serve their circumstances or relations sour. In this way, practitioners emulate policy through the conditions it foments for them to operate within; that is, dynamic, fluctuating and unpredictable.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study by summarising key findings that relate to the research questions set out in the introduction, evaluating the significance of the data and contributions made. Also considered are the study's limitations and future opportunities for research.

Introduction

This thesis set out to investigate the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham. This is a significant, and under-researched, inquiry which speaks to the problem of understanding why individuals whose identities and communities are supposedly targeted and securitised by CT/CE policy would pursue engagement with its structures. Birmingham provides the location for the case study owing to its prominence as a geographical site in the global counter-terrorism arena. The thesis has argued that the experiences of Muslim and minoritised practitioners in the city are shaped by the ambiguity inherent in the central administration of policy, demonstrating the ways in which local actors, with various understandings of the work and divergent reasons for engaging, exploit the instability and continuous 'spiralling' of CT/CE strategies and the gaps this generates to exercise agency in the dynamic local space. To address the core problematic, the following questions directed the research:

1. What motivates practitioners in Birmingham to engage with Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy?
2. How do practitioners interpret the implementation of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy locally and how do these perceptions guide their practices in the field?
3. What problems and opportunities do practitioners identify in the course of their engagement with Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy in Birmingham and how are these navigated?
4. To what extent are local practitioners able to shape their own personal and professional objectives and how are these fulfilled and measured?
5. How do perceptions, practices, problems, opportunities, levels of autonomy, methods of evaluation and general experiences of engagement differ across the primary authorities administering Prevent in Birmingham (Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Counter-Terrorism Unit) and across the two distinct strategies (Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy)?

The study is situated within literature acknowledging both the pernicious effects of CT/CE policy as well as recognising the possibility for individual agency on behalf of those who engage. In reviewing the development of policy, a gap was identified in information delineating the structures and functions of Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy, at both a local and national level. To address this, a mapping exercise depicting the intersections of these key strategies and their workstreams (Appendix 1) was undertaken and makes a contribution to the broader literature on counter-terrorism/counter-extremism policy.

Analysis was carried out using a conceptual framework that draws together multiple mid-range theories to respond to the rich and nuanced data captured. Literature on critical community practice has grounded an understanding of the practitioner, or 'connector', and theories on governance, responsibilisation, active citizenship, street-level bureaucracy, and agentive action are complemented by scholarship on motivations and the intersections of religion and political participation, social action and citizenship to form a theoretical repertoire which has been valuable in providing a reflexive lens for data analysis. This repertoire, and the data it makes sense of, can be understood within significant broader research around the engagement of Britain's Muslim communities with the state and literature on policy development and design.

The conceptual framework was applied in the analysis of the empirical chapters. Chapter 4 contextualised the local Prevent/Counter-Extremism space, unpacking the intersections of local policy and its conflicts to show the spiral in action. Chapter 5 explored practitioners' grounds for engagement with Prevent and the CES in Birmingham to outline how a diverse set of motivations – underpinned by various moral and pragmatic philosophies – is reflective of an ambiguous and unpredictable policy space nationally and a dynamic scene locally. It argued that participants are able to transcend the conventional model of 'practitioner' and that their work may problematise normative notions of collective action, illustrating that in the distinct middle space many practitioners, far from being wholly for or against Prevent/Counter-Extremism, embrace an innovative stance from which to engage. Chapter 6 first examined how practitioners make sense of strategies at a macro level, varying from positive impressions and innovative evaluations to perceptions of policy operating as a nefarious and unjustified 'industry'. It then connected these positions to the personal approaches and practices adopted by participants to explore the boundaries they establish in the course of their engagement. In so doing, discussion contributed to literature on street-level bureaucracy and the application of agency to consider new and innovative ways that critical community practitioners implement policy on the ground, as well as speaking to broader debates in scholarship on policy that frame counter-terrorism as a Machiavellian industry. The chapter again identified the ways in which the fluidity of the local space permits agentive action and also problematised the concept of 'safe spaces'. Chapter 7 explored the practicalities of engagement to convey how provisions for training and support, opportunities for the interpretation of objectives, the setting of boundaries and the encountering of challenges are all interconnected in the gaps of the local space. It argued that the oversight of central policy compounds the extensive abuse faced by individuals and impacts on the experiences of practitioners on the ground locally, at times neglecting and at times emboldening those involved to pursue their own conceptualisation of engagement. Chapter 8 investigated problems encountered in the field, from unprofessional conduct to the misallocation of funding. Discussion contemplated the impact of these tensions – permitted to foster as a result of the gaps in the direction and governance of central policy – manifesting in issues of accountability, evaluation and sustainability.

Overall findings and contribution to the field

Findings suggest that the Frankenstein nature of CT/CE policy in the UK creates an unstable environment in which practitioners encounter and, at times, exploit apertures to interpret policy objectives for the fulfilment of their own personal, spiritual or financial ambitions in the local arena. I argue that Prevent's ambiguous objectives – vacillating between cohesion, safeguarding and national security – became further complicated by the introduction, and subsequent dismantling, of the CES; while the IRP has only added another spin to the policy cycle (Walker and Skoczylis, 2023). Posthumously, the CES continues to muddy the Prevent waters with the entwining of the CCE, the independent arm of the former Office for Counter-Extremism, under the direction and oversight of post-Shawcross Prevent, a motion achieved through the 'quiet' withdrawal of the CCE's charter so as to avoid its own violation (Oborne and Mulla, 2023). It would seem that the Counter-Extremism Strategy's attempt to maintain a strategic and operational distance from Prevent has proved unsustainable. Moving forward, this indicates that localised versions of CT/CE policy (as explicated in this study) will become more difficult to maintain as a result of a blanket regionalising reform (Shawcross, 2023). Similar overhauls have been unsuccessfully proposed at earlier junctures, however (Lowndes and Thorp, 2010; Thomas, 2017), only for the pendulum to return; much like the short-lived deployment of the CES into the local infrastructure of Prevent in place of a previously-established cohesion agenda.

The principal tenet of the thesis centres around the impact of Britain's counter-terrorism/counter-extremism policy operating in a constant state of flux. During the course of the study, the Counter-Extremism Strategy was terminated and discussion has charted its deconstruction but argued that, if the disordered policy trends in the area are recognised, this dismantling will not necessarily signal its demise. With this in mind, in November 2023 the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Michael Gove, asked the Treasury for £50 million to rebuild the Counter-Extremism Strategy to address what he perceived to be radical ideologies at pro-Palestine demonstrations in the fallout of the Israel-Hamas war (Parker et al., 2023). Echoing early critique of Prevent's dually-funded administration (Thomas, 2009), ministers involved with the plans assigned responsibility for the failings of recent CT/CE initiatives to both the DLUHC and the Home Office, while Gove has stipulated that the focus should be on 'supporting moderate Muslim voices and improving English language teaching' (Parker et al., 2023: para 11). The fixation with cultivating 'moderate' Muslims and funding ESOL classes, yet again, emerges in the policy space, despite acknowledgment that the approach has proved unsuccessful multiple times in recent history. This form of policy amnesia, prevalent in the CT/CE arena, will now likely precipitate the reinstatement of previously doomed policy objectives and perpetuates the racialisation of language in the securitisation of Muslim populations. Data presented further adds to this by demonstrating how ESOL classes may be additionally exploited by connectors or practitioners commissioned to work within the space in order to maintain a veneer of credibility or utility.

The constant chopping and changing, with seemingly no evaluation or planning, has created a culture of autonomy and agency for local practitioners, evidenced beyond the realm of the street-level bureaucrat

employed by authorities, and exercised by independent practitioners who have been shown in the data to engage with Prevent/Counter-Extremism in innovative ways. In the knowledge of the ever-shifting scene, practitioners are inspired to seek opportunities in pursuit of their own aims and objectives, as well as those of their communities or organisations.

Policy may be failed, but I argue it is far from friendless (Thomas, 2010). Local manifestations attract a multitude of individuals who exercise agency to achieve their goals; whether they crave the prospect of a career, the opportunity to explore religion with service users, fulfilment of spiritual beliefs for personal gain, or simply resources to continue generic community work in austere times. Policy is poorly managed centrally which shrouds it in ambiguity from the start. It then reaches locally; not just one authority, but multiple, tasked with implementing strategies in ways congruent with their distinctive institutional norms. Further confusion is introduced in the form of competing policies that are operationally conflated with Prevent, the CES or cohesion agendas. Thereafter, external actors enter, not just those situated within the authorities overseeing policy (BCC and WMCTU), but practitioners and organisations commissioned to implement policy independently, some of whom then outsource engagement to further-detached providers. Throughout the journey, actors engage with policy on their own terms. Some in the belief that they are fulfilling religious obligations, some truly passionate about the societal issues of cohesion and radicalisation, and some agentively or exploitatively in pursuit of instrumental goals. While agency may be enabled rather than constrained (Mesok, 2022a) in the fissures of the local policy scene, this study does not conclude that practitioners are able to subvert policy (Pearson, 2020). Instead, it suggests that local street-level bureaucrats employed by authorities overseeing Prevent and the CES in Birmingham are often the key to its potential for appropriation.

This study has sought to understand how Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners engage with CT/CE policies locally. It has long been posited that the CT/CE apparatus securitises these communities; so why would individuals participate? Broader research suggests that many initial Prevent-funded community projects were simply box-ticking exercises (Brown, 2019) – has much changed? In addressing RQ1, the study argues that the dynamism and malleability of the local scene encourages the participation of a heterogeneous group of practitioners with a diverse range of motivations. This network of disparate practitioners only contributes to the ambiguity of the space and their participation forms part of the cycle. Problematising existing research (Lehane, 2017), the data has shown that motivations are not always benevolent and that practitioners are not necessarily carving a space to remain. Instead, their participation is often transitory, as the discussions on *da'wah* and disengagement have shown.

To answer RQ2, the study illustrated that interpretations of policy are also divergent, from the perception of a pernicious industry to a site for religious exploration or opportunity to progress professionally. Actions taken within the framework of these understandings demonstrate how participants find practical ways to implement the ethics of faith in their work; not just through drivers for engagement, but also in responding

to challenges, the setting and checking of intentions, and the drawing of boundaries as faith emerges as a holistic guide to engagement in the field. Literature suggests that policies like Prevent have made active citizens out of the general public (Spalek and Lambert, 2008). This study shows how, while this may be true, at times the matrix of Islam (Barylo, 2017) becomes the catalyst for engagement. Faith is paramount in the 'ongoing renegotiation of boundaries between the state and civil society and between the public, private, and personal' (Dinham and Lowndes, 2008: 841) as individuals engage with harmful strategies as a form of charity work or social responsibility in order to counter negative portrayals of Islam (Peucker, 2021). Surpassing ritual performance to enact and embody teachings in the policy space, some Muslim practitioners are able to redraw 'the limits of what is "religious" and what is not' in the articulation of their participation (Barylo, 2017: 1).

The thesis also contravenes arguments that participation increases the social status of the 'trusted' Muslim (Ragazzi, 2016) to demonstrate that while some enjoy the privileges of policy association, many prefer to stay under the radar, pursuing only a pragmatic engagement in the faith they are able to help their young people, service users, or wider communities. Practitioners play a difficult and often uneasy role (Banks, 2007), existing in the contentious 'grey area' beyond conceptions of the 'moderate' or 'radical' (Mamdani, 2004) or, in the case of the Prevent/Counter-Extremism practitioner, the 'sell-out' or the 'extremist'. This 'grey area' rejects binary understandings of CT/CE policy but is often laced with personal challenges and bureaucratic tensions for the practitioner, as explored in the answer to RQ3. Discussion pertaining to RQ4, considering the extent to which practitioners are able to shape their own objectives, conveyed more nuanced perspectives of existing in the grey area as practitioners in the case of the Castle Heath forum were able to derive disparate advantages from the same initiative. This was possible only up to the point of cooperation with a senior street-level bureaucrat, who also sought to benefit both personally and professionally, and was able to reflect the ambiguity of policy nationally by exercising practices of discretion in its local reconstruction.

Q5 has been addressed through comparisons presented in the discussion of the empirical chapters, essentially concluding that the CES operated in Birmingham much like early Prevent – lacking transparency and winning no friends. A subsequent striking finding in the comparison of authorities and strategies relates to the contrast between BCC and WMCTU in their administering of counter-terrorism policy. Though the two authorities began on an equally untrusting footing with regard to the implementation of Prevent in the city, the more stringently imposed regulations and governing of departments such as PSD overseeing WMCTU appear to restrict the freedom with which police practitioners are able to autonomously administer the strategy. Despite critique leveraged at CTU Prevent, police practitioners interviewed seemed willing to learn and adapt; for example, admitting mistakes made by certain groups funded through the TIF and attempting to rectify this by holding training events and activities to improve output. The empirical chapters have thus provided answers to the research questions and offered unique and multilayered insights to the field; both in terms of contributing to the understanding of policy and in shedding light on the evolving and innovative ways

in which CT/CE practitioners engage, divergent reasons **why** they engage, **how** they engage, and what engaging means for them in terms of consequences. More profound reflection on these perspectives would improve policy more broadly.

The thesis contributes primarily to literature on the effects of CT/CE policy, theories on agency and street-level bureaucracy, debates on Muslim-state engagement, and scholarship on Islam as a sociological concept and a matrix for interacting in society. Concepts are brought together to enrich understandings of how a middle space is created and experienced, and how fractures in the design and direction of the policy spiral create fissures in its local operationalisation. Engaging within these openings invites opportunity for some practitioners but invokes adversity for others, further problematising their position within the grey area. Implications of the sum of this suggest that continually poor evaluation of policy and constant fluctuation of its underpinnings will continue to nurture the types of engagement documented. All of this points to the fact that, more often than not, the critical community practitioner is struggling. Youth worker Kashif compares Prevent to an iceberg; a strategy, he says, that is only vaguely transparent and remains unforthcoming about what he considers to be nefarious activities conducted under the surface. Despite this conviction, he still implements CT/CE work in his community (with boundaries drawn and informal support networks carved); an example of the critical engagement that so many practitioners in Birmingham pursue.

Limitations

There are, of course, many limitations to this study. Besides the obvious relatively small sample size that does not permit generalisability to the wider field or a quantitative understanding of practitioners' engagement, critical practitioners are 'always in a state of "becoming" – developing their awareness, ideas, analysis and capacities through their conversations and actions in collaboration with others' (Banks, 2007: 134). This means that for some participants, it may have been the first time they had considered the questions raised. Answers are therefore not definitive but simply mark a juncture in each practitioner's stage of awareness in the process of existing in the space. Additionally, individuals may have offered desirable responses, as noted in similar studies (Haugstvedt, 2022), or practiced self-censorship in response to the subject matter (Andrews, 2020). Also evident is the extent of the level to which conclusions can be drawn; while policy is analysed, the study cannot make claims about the aims, intentions, or efficacy of policy. Instead, it has attempted to examine the ways in which local realisations of policy impact on the experiences of its practitioners.

Future research

Missing from the research is a consideration of the chronological journey of CT/CE policy and an account of how the numerous iterations differentially impacted practitioner experience. Though mentioned where appropriate, a more rigorous large-scale piece of research could map the experiences of practitioners on to

versions of Prevent, the CES or cohesion policy in operation at the time. Future investigation could also compare the experiences of Birmingham practitioners with those of other localities as well as through a wider scope considering the impact of gender, race, and religion.

Nevertheless, this first step into understanding the experiences of Muslim and minority ethnic practitioners involved in the implementation of Prevent and the CES in Birmingham has demonstrated the innovative ways in which engagement is pursued in the fissures of an incoherent policy space.

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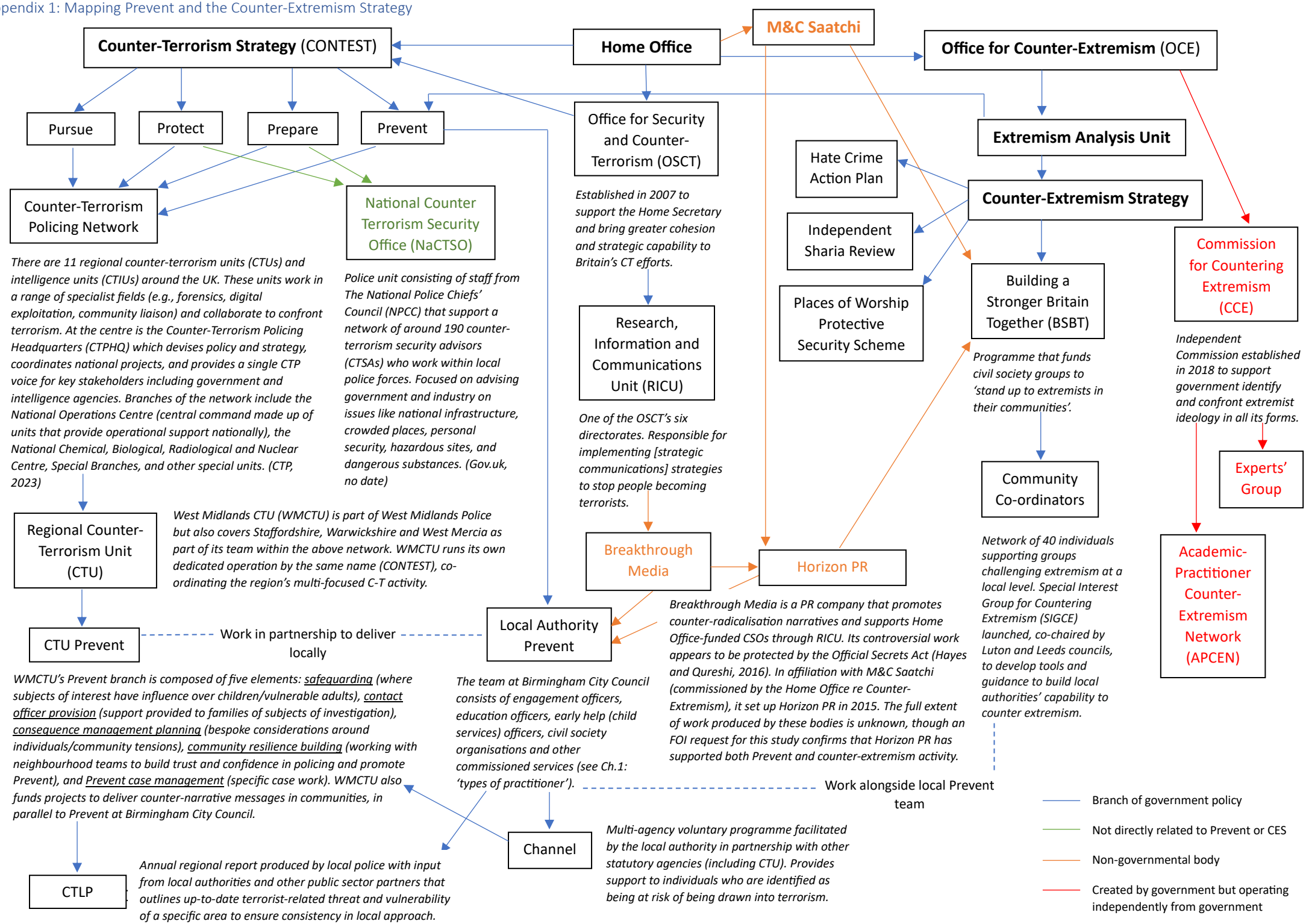
Appendix 1: Mapping Prevent and the Counter-Extremism Strategy



Appendix 2: Encounter with ethics

Attempting to gain ethical approval to carry out my research was a prolonged and painful experience that resulted in an overdue complaint and a wasted year of my PhD. The complaint document itself was fourteen thousand words and detailed the discriminatory treatment I received from the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) which was reformed after the complaint was processed. Revisiting the complaint to reflect on the experience for this section was a difficult exercise, forcing me to confront a time of my PhD I have tried to forget.

I applied for ethical clearance through the School of Languages and Social Sciences where I was situated, as every other PhD student in my department did. I was immediately informed that ethical approval for my study must be granted by the university's highest ethics body, UREC; an initial indication of the perceived sensitivity of the topic and the university's interpretation of its legal obligations. While I took no issue with this at the time and simply wrote a new application in the specific format required; in hindsight, I question the threshold measurements for this decision. I was told at the time by a former member of UREC (representing the School of Languages and Social Sciences) that he knew of only one other PhD student in the department who had been asked to apply through UREC and so I wondered if the word 'radicalisation' was an influencing factor on this requirement or whether the decision was arbitrary. The projects belonging to other students in my department, some proposing to observe behaviour in illegal spaces, were deemed low risk enough to be granted a favourable opinion upon first application through the school-level ethics system. I was therefore forced to consider what this meant for the kind of research I proposed to pursue – was it deemed risky to conduct any research on counter-terrorism? Or did it depend on the identity of the researcher?

Sadly, the committee took issue with me as a Muslim undertaking the research, believing I must be biased and that I would embody a pro-Muslim/anti-Prevent stance (despite the fact I had worked on a Prevent project for the university). I was called 'biased' outright seven times in the first set of comments alone. I was also referred to as 'arrogant' and 'presumptuous' for, among other things, believing I would be able to speak to practitioners in the Prevent world, despite me explaining that I already had pre-existing relationships with many owing to previous work. The impression that the committee, and specifically the chair, seemed to have formed of me was not in harmony with who I was or what I was seeking to do, so my supervisors and I attempted to deconstruct this by meeting with them, offering further background information and clarifying any misconceptions that may have occurred. I was only condescended and patronised further.

The process lasted a full year and I submitted new applications or amendments most months that passed. Some of these were lost, some were never read, and I was regularly locked out of the online system UREC insisted I use. As far we could ascertain, revisions requested were often arbitrary and made little sense to me or my supervisors. I was asked to change or remove things that were only present in my applications at the request of the committee, and the committee constantly opposed wording or sections they had previously

approved of and had remained unchanged. At one stage the committee brought in independent reviewers, who were not scholars of the social sciences, to assess my application and provide their recommendations; this became another significant obstacle.

A further distressing requirement was made for me to attend a committee meeting and defend myself in person. The meeting consisted of lengthy discussions around wording that had already been changed many versions earlier (and was therefore redundant) and the stand-in chair reading out national statistics he had looked up relating to Channel referrals which had no bearing on my PhD. At the meeting, members of the committee accepted that I had made many concessions and that there would be nothing left to amend before granting a favourable opinion save for providing an extra recruitment poster. This turned out not to be the case. Agreements like this were made after most interactions with UREC but were never upheld as additional requirements seemed to emerge out of nowhere in each following correspondence.

From my perspective, the committee seemed intent on encouraging me to give up on the PhD. For example, the chair seemed to take pleasure in informing me that only one other student had ever been summoned to defend themselves at a committee meeting in person before and that the individual abandoned their PhD as a result of the experience. This student, the chair told me, intended to prod participants with a homemade device for their study. Neither myself nor my supervisors could fathom how my research, which proposed routine interviews and observations typical of the social sciences, posed a similar level of concern to a study in which physical harm was to be caused to participants.

The committee was particularly concerned about what I would do if I met a radicalised individual, despite me explaining how unlikely this was given that I was proposing to speak with practitioners involved in the implementation of strategies antithetical to this. Still, I agreed to any requirements and comments they made in this regard, but it seemed as though the committee could not see past their assumptions about what lay behind the overarching policy that framed the topic I was interested in. Members of the committee did not seem to be comfortable with me carrying out research in the area, no matter how much I assured them I was not interested in investigating the concept of radicalisation, simply the experiences of consenting practitioners. They seemed worried that I may be critical of Prevent and did not appear satisfied even when presented with evidence of a body of academic literature grounded in empirical research that offers critique of Prevent (and similar strategies) from within a well-established position.

The committee questioned my objectivity, my capability and even my intellect, raising issues about what they perceived to be spelling mistakes, for example, but were actually terms and acronyms common in my field (i.e. assuming I was mistaking CONTEST for 'context'). This is just one example of how what UREC was demanding of me was far beyond the scope of ethics – beyond even the phenomenon of 'ethics creep' (Haggerty, 2004: 391) or the 'indeterminate bureaucratic procedures' that threaten to 'strangle' research (Monaghan et al., 2013: 65) – to surpass what is required of PhD students or researchers at Aston University.

It also conveys the exceptional treatment I was subject to; if I had, in fact, made a typo in an application, should that bear any impact on whether or not my project receives ethical approval? Would any of these insignificant issues have been raised if it had been somebody else applying to carry out the same research?

The chair of the committee sent aggressive emails to me and about me, claiming I had not turned up to meetings that had never been arranged and missed deadlines that had never been set. The committee took issue with me suggesting that codemixing might occur in interviews in the form of Arabic greetings or Islamic expressions to develop rapport (i.e. *salaam* instead of *hello*) and conflated religion with ethnicity, enquiring as to whether individuals from 'all ethnicities' (meaning non-Muslim) would be participating in my study. They questioned the sample size, which my supervisor clarified was larger in number than the sample for her own PhD. The committee extensively critiqued my information sheets and supporting documentation until discovering they were based on templates found on the UREC website, constantly contradicted their own requests month upon month, regularly changed their minds about what they required and in which format they required it, and even suggested that my supervision was not robust enough which might serve as a further potential reason for withholding a favourable ethical opinion.

Despite being confronted with all of this, and dealing with a catalogue of mistakes on behalf of the committee with regards to lost applications and a plethora of administrative errors, my supervisors and I kept to the highest standards of ethical conduct. We discussed making a complaint several times throughout the process and came very close on more than one occasion. We held back reluctantly for two main reasons. The first was our belief that making a complaint mid-process would heavily delay the procedure even further and, although I felt strongly that the way in which I was being treated was unjust and unethical, the last thing I wanted to do was prolong the time it was taking for me to gain approval and in any way exacerbate the discriminatory behaviour I was being subjected to. My supervisors advised me to continue with the process, despite how untenable it became, and seek to complain if and when approval was finally granted. The second factor that affected when we logged a complaint was the committee's promise that every time amendments were requested, they would be the last and final requirements. We were stuck repeating the process every month or so, maintaining in good faith that the process would end at the next stage.

The inequitable treatment and unreasonable obstacles summated in a wasted year and restrictions and limits placed upon my research in the long-term. When finally granted a favourable opinion, I was not permitted to carry out any interviews in public spaces such as cafes, which would be the norm for research in my discipline, nor to obtain verbal recorded consent despite providing academic evidence as to why this is suitable when discussing sensitive topics such as terrorism and radicalisation (Mills et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2021). My information sheets and consent form were dense with discussion of radicalisation and appeared intimidating. Other restrictions were also introduced toward the end of the process as the committee failed to process my final application before GDPR guidelines were introduced, despite confirming with my supervisors this would be the case.

Throughout this drawn-out process, I watched other PhD students in the department apply for, and be granted, ethical clearance within one month and move on to begin their fieldwork. Not only did I lose a valuable year in time, I lost a great deal of momentum for my project which I had to then battle to regain. A number of individuals I had proposed to interview changed roles and positions so I no longer had the established relationships I set out with and I had to take a job as a teaching assistant in a community school to try and build up new contacts that worked in the area. I also had to rebuild my confidence after beginning to question myself and my place in academia, my perceived biases and my (relatively new) Muslim appearance in the university and in the field. I became hyperaware of my visible Muslimness and felt uncomfortable in a space I had previously been very happy occupying. I worried that others would not take me seriously either and that perhaps my choice of dress was a barrier to colleagues and peers finding me competent and/or professional. I have also found that I am now overly cautious with how I conduct my research, who I speak with, how I collect data, and how I analyse it; I am constantly interrogating whether I am being biased towards Muslim communities or overcompensating for this anxiety by regulating my actions too strictly.

It is disheartening to think that the topic of my research, or the proposal for me as an individual to undertake it, constituted additional levels of scrutiny and unique treatment, especially because I exceeded what would ever normally be required of the ethics process. I believe the committee was not comfortable for me, as a Muslim woman, to carry out this research and acted unethically because of this (this perception was also shared with me by academics in the department who were uncomfortable expressing their views openly). But what does this mean for strategies like Prevent and how research on counter-terrorism policy is carried out in academia? Who is best placed to have these discussions with communities that are affected by counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies? If gaining ethical clearance to carry out research is such an arduous and traumatic experience for some individuals, who will be the researchers that are deemed the authentic or authoritative voices? And what does this experience reflect about Prevent/Counter-Extremism on a broader scale? If the committee responsible for making ethical decisions at my institution was this apprehensive for me to conduct the research, how are the practitioners contributing likely to feel? These are individuals that receive backlash from communities, disapproval from family and friends, trolling on social media and sometimes even death threats. If I, as the researcher, am feeling insecure or hesitant, how are they to feel as the participants who are generously sharing their stories and experiences? Recent research has highlighted how research ethics committees and boards, driven by principles from the natural sciences, are ill-suited to address issues of terrorism within social scientific research (Mills et al., 2020) and ethnography in general (Bell and Wynn, 2023). They are said to 'impose "silly" restrictions, are in constant search of a problem, lack expertise, and apply inappropriate principles', instead being 'preoccupied with protecting their institutions from any legal liability that may result from the proposed research' (Morrison et al., 2021: 275). Scholars call

for a complete review of ethics processes, policies and procedures as well as trust for active researchers (Connor et al., 2018).

A favourable opinion was finally granted after a year of battling the committee, though the conditions insisted upon placed restrictions on many elements of the study. I continued only with the God-given support of my family and friends and sheer stubbornness. The university recognised, to some degree, that I had been subject to improper treatment and resultantly granted me an additional year of funding to account for the time I was unable to progress with the project. It also subsequently effected an expansive remodelling of its system of ethical approval, brought about partly because of the evidence of my experience.

Since my encounter with ethics, I have discovered similar studies centred on the interviewing of Prevent and P/CVE practitioners which comparatively reported that obtaining ethical approval was 'not an onerous task […] and there was no great risk to the participant group in question' (Lehane, 2019: 4) with researchers stating they were under 'no obligation' to report participants to Prevent if they held concerns (Andrews, 2020). Given the accounts of counterparts not racialised as Muslim who report having very little difficulty, my own experiences raise concerns around institutional racism and Islamophobia in academia (Mahmud and Islam, 2022), and the disbanding of the committee lends validity to this possibility.

'Academic settings can be spaces that nourish your intellect, shaping you into a critical thinker whereby you discover and form interests of your own. However, these spaces can also become forums for ridicule, injustice and discrimination' (Akel, 2021: 35). The differential treatment I endured taxed my emotions and commitment (Monaghan et al., 2013) but the work I began with Birmingham City Council on an unrelated research project in 2019 – which involved devising a research design, training the team, carrying out analysis and presenting findings – became critical in rebuilding my confidence and helped me to remember how much I enjoy research and every aspect of the process. How this position assisted with my PhD research, as well as related issues of gaining access, is elaborated on in Chapter 3.