

Exit, Voice and Loyalty in the Public Sphere: On the Hollowing Out of Universities and the 'Trojan Horse' Attack on the Muslim Community in the UK

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In his 'Beyond Lamentations' Raphael Sassower picked up on the use of the term 'neo-liberal' and he offered a nuanced consideration of its definitions. He then moved on to consider the ethical imperative for academics / intellectuals to be publically engaged, despite the risks. Sassower is certainly correct to say that the term neo-liberal needs to be clearly defined. In the discussion below we will offer our definition of neo-liberalism as an elite project that hollows out education and communities; relating this to the questions of why academics are not usually public intellectuals and how the UK Coalition Government demonised a dialogic education offered by some schools in Birmingham with a majority of Muslim pupils.

Neo-Liberalism *contra* Dialogic Democracy

Given the current ubiquitous usage of the term 'neo-liberal' in academic debate, some clarification is needed, otherwise the term could easily become empty of meaning. Strictly speaking, such a move is unPopperian, because Popper eschewed 'what' questions taking these to lead to methodological essentialism or mere quibbles (although having the notion of 'Popperian' is problematic for the same reasons).

On the issue of 'what' questions, Rorty is in tune with Popper because Rorty's critique of metaphysics was similar to Popper's critique of methodological essentialism and holism; although Popper did not reject metaphysics *per se* like Rorty. For Rorty (1998; 1999), post-Nietzscheans turned from History to Discourse to posit some domain of ultimate reality, with a neo-clerical academic elite claiming epistemic and ethical authority for knowing this domain and its ability to shape agents. The elite would stand above the 'fallen' majority who would be always already guilty of being produced by discourse. So, when some academics influenced by Foucault refer to neo-liberalism and governmentality as discourses that produce agents, they would be putting forward a position that would be rejected by Rorty and Popper for being an intellectually authoritarian essentialism, despite its claims to radicalism. Such a position would, for Rorty and Popper, assume that the definition of some domain of ultimate reality can drive arguments and research, with agency and events being read off from the definition. Although Rorty rejected any 'vertical' claim to truth, such as socialist or feminist claims, he did nonetheless think that the turn to continental philosophy and cultural theory had been extremely problematic, even though it undermined any notion of truth. This was because, for Rorty, although materialist positions may be incorrect they at least motivated a commitment to some form of change, whereas the turn to continental philosophy and cultural theory led, Rorty (1998) argued, to a retreat from the public. Interestingly, ideas are judged here in terms of their consequences which is in tension with Rorty's general position that vertical claims to truth, such as those made by Marxists, are to be rejected for being vertical claims, irrespective of their consequences, and only read 'ironically' at

‘the weekend’. So, whilst most of Rorty’s (1994; 1998; 1999) work asks for us to reject the ‘representationalist’ problematic which seeks to explain how ideas or language ‘mirror’ reality, it is the case that when he considers political agency, the focus switches to consequences and specifically whether or not a theory may motivate action for change.

Contrary to Popper, we can say that ‘what’ questions are of use in defining a problem-situation, because rather than entail methodological essentialism or mere verbal quibbles, they can frame and connect clusters of interconnected ‘how’ questions. Further, such definitions can be open to revision and contingent upon changing events. With this in mind, we will define what neo-liberalism is, in terms of the attempt to use supply side economics as an exemplar for democracy, with this being the framing problem-situation for asking ‘how’ questions about specific problems and changes in education. For neo-liberalism, the market is an ethical and epistemic exemplar because it allocates resources efficiently, for a fair price, according to consumer demand, from consumers who have – or should have – all the correct information to make informed consumption choices. The consumer is to be sovereign. Of course, contracts presuppose a nexus of social conventions that give them meaning as Durkheim (1984) argued and, as Løgstrup (2007) acutely observes, contracts are not purely instrumental, because they presuppose trust, although clauses will undermine the trust that has to be presupposed. To these issues neo-liberalism is blind: the consumer is an isolated individual acting in a purely instrumental way, with no distortion from external influences such as traditions or social norms.

Democracy is to be modelled on this conception of supply side economics with public services being efficiently allocated according to demand with citizen-consumers having the information needed to make informed choices due to the creation of markets or quasi-markets and the increasing ‘transparency’ of public institutions. For Hirschman (1990), ‘taut’ markets are potentially dysfunctional and slack in an economy is useful, with ‘exit’, ‘voice’ and ‘loyalty’ being ways for agents to engage with firms and political parties whose products and services become problematic. For Hirschman there is no a priori superior response to a problem – it depends on the specifics of the given situation. We will argue here though that for neo-liberals, a functional and desirable market is a ‘taut’ market and ‘exit’ is always the preferred tool for the consumer sovereign. This can be explained as follows. Loyalty would be instrumental and dependent on the goods / service being provided, with the possibility of exiting a relation and breaking loyalty, allowing some consumers, at least in theory, to ensure their demands were taken seriously and acted upon. As for voice, this could be weak because it could be the last option open to those who could not exit. Thus if affluent parents exited the state education system and transferred their loyalty to private education, those remaining would only have the option of using voice but their lack of exit options and the inability of the state sector to gain investment for reform would mean that their voice was weak. Here the process is monologic: customers make demands and if they are not met then loyalty is replaced by exit to a competitor. Voice exists but is often weak because there is no basis for the provider to take a weak consumer with no, or restricted, exit options seriously. With voice the disgruntled may give a monologue to an unresponsive provider.

The omnipresent threat of exit is meant, for the consumer sovereignty conception, to ensure a ‘taut’ provision, where demands by informed consumers are met quickly and with good products and services by firms and public agencies (with the latter operating in quasi-markets to stimulate competition and make exit rather than voice possible); and where poor provision means quick market failure, as a just punishment.

This neo-liberal conception of democracy hollows out the public sphere because it seeks to replace any form of collectivism and value of public life as being good in itself with taut markets based on the pursuit of monologic self-interest backed up with the threat of exit. However, norms do not leave the stage – and indeed they cannot, for as mentioned earlier, contracts actually presuppose norms and trust, and so they cannot be purely instrumental. For neo-liberals, norms are meant to ensure loyalty to the state and this means that norms are conceptualised as emotional and thus efficient means to garner a supply of electoral support for a policy or party. Norms with traction which may challenge this are to be occluded, such as any form of religious or collective belief system which challenged the ruthless pursuit of self-interest. This indicates that whilst the consumer may be sovereign in theory, the actual project of neo-liberalism is an elite project. Moreover, it is not just that the state seeks to use norms as means, with political parties swaying opinion for their own benefit, but that political parties serve the interests of corporate capital. De-regulation in the name of presenting a better range of choice to the consumer means corporations massively increase their profits, at the same time as the distribution of wealth continues to shift from upwards to the super rich.

A dialogic conception of democracy would, in contrast to this, prioritise voice – and a voice between equals. A dialogue between groups in civil society, and between such groups and politicians, over ends as well as means, would be the defining feature of a properly dialogic democracy – a democracy which Dewey (1954) would call an ‘ethical way of life’. Exiting from a dialogue because one did not get the outcome one wanted and making loyalty to dialogic interaction with others contingent upon getting one’s own way would be antithetical to such a conception of democracy. Dialogic interaction would be an ethical end in itself and not a means to realise possessive individualist self-interest. For such a conception of democracy, the point of a dialogue was not to transmit utilitarian wants to another, but to change oneself in the process of dialogue. In place of a narrow cognitivist conception of a monologic voice making demands for a product or service, dialogue would be embodied, meaning that it would be a normative and emotional process. People would be ‘wrapped up in it’ and change would be substantive. It would be different from self-interested parties partaking in a utility maximising negotiation. Such a conception is collectivist because an active and publically engaged citizenry would hold elites to account and seek to remove the plutocratic power of the super rich to control politics and amass vast wealth (Dewey 1954).

Popper may struggle with such a notion though because in setting science up as an ethical and epistemic exemplar, based on the ‘free market of ideas’, agents ended up being conceptualised in a rather narrow cognitive (non embodied) way. Here ideas command

only a temporary loyalty in the permanent revolution of conjecture and refutation, followed by hasty exit, with voice being monologic rather than dialogic, due to the debunker-falsifier expecting rational agents to exit refuted ideas immediately. Nonetheless, Popper (1997) did want citizens to be able to engage in a high level of debate and to hold their elective representatives to account, with political parties being abolished because these, for Popper, make elected representatives focus on the party not the electorate. Whether his vision of piecemeal social engineering (Popper 1945) would allow for this or promote a monologic technocracy of the sort envisioned by Lippmann (1927) is moot. This is because ‘problems’ would be defined according to a scientific method as exemplified in neo-classical economics, which would close off many problems and deny voice to lay agents. Further, the political elite would have influence over the media in relation to policy issues. Rorty came closer to this notion of the self changing through dialogic interaction but still retained the overly cognitive view of agents. For Rorty (1989), agents have a temporary loyalty to a final vocabulary followed by exit, to avoid dogmatism. Here voice is more of an inner voice, reworking an agent’s final vocabulary, rather than a sustained and emotionally engaged dialogue with another – a process which risked the ultimate harm of ‘humiliation’, if an interlocutor had an identity imposed upon them.

Intellectuals, Academics and Students

Sassower (2014) argued that academics should not just lament the state of affairs in the world but get involved in changing them, even if this entails the risk of losing their job, and if academics had learned nothing from their studies of use in this endeavour, then ‘one may reasonably judge their efforts narcissistic (rather than wasteful or meaningless)’ (2014, 53). Academics / intellectuals need to state what the problem is, define an alternative and do something to help realise that alternative (Sassower 2014). Whilst we share the view that academics / intellectuals should be activists and whilst Sassower does not hold that academics / intellectuals are an elite who are necessarily in an epistemically and ethically privileged position, he does move towards the view that academia is potentially an exemplary domain. On this conception of academics as intellectuals some notes of caution are needed.

To start with, we think it is useful to distinguish between academics and intellectuals in a way that is influenced by Fuller (2006). Whereas intellectuals may work to see the ‘whole picture’ and be eclectic in the attempt to recognise and solve clear and big problems, we think academics are better seen as technical puzzle solvers for the most part; i.e. academics tend to be Kuhnian (1970) rather than Popperian. It does not matter whether their research is on material deemed radical or conservative (contra Rorty) because all research will be conserving an intellectual tradition by solving puzzles in a way that justifies that tradition, until a new field opens up. Whereas the natural sciences may (or may not) have a shared paradigm, the social sciences and humanities obviously do not and here we may speak of these domains having a plurality of paradigms. Arguably, revolutions occur when either criticisms of an existing paradigm are taken to

be decisive, which can be a subjective / normative / emotional process as much as a cognitive one, or when a new 'celebrity' academic appears and people start 'applying' their ideas. In other words, academia is not a Popperian dialogic (in theory) open society but more like a Kuhnian closed society. Given this, it does not necessarily follow that academic puzzle solvers will be placed in a useful position to comment on current affairs as intellectuals. Whilst there can be some highly informative and critical documentaries, it is often the case that most coverage of events, and all news coverage, is conducted within terms of reference that are narrow and unchallenging to the political and economic elite. Academics usually fail to challenge this and instead plug a piece of a Kuhnian puzzle into the frame set by elites'.

Furthermore, one may argue that academic radicalism can be a form of capital. So, if a particular sub-discipline requires people to adopt radical theories to solve the necessary puzzles, then this will be done to secure tenure in the US and an 'ongoing' contract in the UK followed by promotion. In other words, publishing on radical ideas can become a means to an end. Academics may apply loyalty to ideas as long as they advance utility maximisation and then exit those ideas. Voice would be more a matter of people in one paradigm monologically denouncing those in a different one.

Given this, one may say that a clear definition of the problem in dealing with neo-liberalism and the restriction of dialogic democracy would have to make reference to academia being defined by exit, voice and loyalty in Kuhnian puzzle solving, rather than an open society where free thinkers are motivated to engage in wide ranging criticism – and activism based on this. The production of academic capital and the desire to engage in activism would be very different from each other. Universities are not really exemplars for intellectuals because the norm is intellectual conservatism whatever the material. Obviously this is not to say academics are necessarily not intellectuals, but it is to say that academics who become intellectuals are doing something different from the usual academic practice. With this approach intellectuals by definition are public intellectuals, whereas academics who are not intellectuals are institutional puzzle solvers who are not engaged in challenging the terms of reference used in the public sphere.

So far our considerations about academics being defined in terms of Kuhnian puzzle-solving apply to modern academia in its pre-neo-liberal phase as well as its neo-liberal phase; although neo-liberalism will further reduce the number of academics becoming intellectuals, given the pressure to achieve 'impact' etc. in the research audit in the UK. In the next sections, we will consider how the turn to the neo-liberal university, which seeks loyalty to a brand, develops a form of education that is antithetical to the development of a dialogic democracy. 'Neo-liberalism hollows out higher education by promoting loyalty to a brand and precluding transformative dissatisfaction. Academics and student customers are meant to be loyal to a brand. For academics this means ensuring that student customers are satisfied with their 'product' and thinking of their university as commanding as much or more loyalty than their paradigm. For students this

means seeing education in terms of brands promoting market advance in the pursuit of self interest rather than membership of a dialogic community'.

Academics self-identify with a paradigm within a discipline with some also identifying with their institution if they deem it elite, but none explicitly identify with a 'brand'. Two points need to be raised here. First, when the UK coalition Government implemented the 'market reforms' in the wake of the Browne Review more than a few academics who self-defined as being members of elite institutions thought 'I'm all right Jack'. Research on how the education system, including higher education, reproduced social inequalities was eschewed in favour of thinking that employment at a particular institution helped augment academic career capital. Some academics became engaged in protests at the way UK higher education was being turned into a market, with such voice ending up being monologic because the Government ignored it; but most practiced loyalty to their puzzle-solving technical domain and their institution if its status was perceived as a form of career capital. In all of this the word 'brand' would be seen as vulgar. Now, and this brings us to the second point, there is an expectation by some managers that academics should be loyal to their brand. Indeed, recently, a lawyer for university management announced that academics should be fired if they have the 'potential' to damage their employer's 'brand'. The blog post where this appeared was hastily rewritten following criticism. A sustained criticism of this view, complete with screenshots of the original post, is available on the [website](#) of the Campaign for the Public University.

Brands may not just be used by academics as a form of career capital, contrary to academics' potential to act as intellectuals and promote the development of an inclusive dialogic democracy, by engaging in wide ranging criticism, including that of their neo-liberal university. When it comes to teaching, universities can seek to win student-customers on the power of their 'brand'. Universities want loyalty to their brand and the government wants increased 'transparency', with audit information, in the form of the National Student Survey (completed by final year undergraduate students), which, by law, has to be posted online. For universities, audit information can be used instrumentally to gain loyalty to a brand if previous customers use voice to give positive feedback about being 'satisfied'. Alternatively, in what is meant to be the taut taught economy, negative feedback about dissatisfaction would encourage a lack of customers and market failure, rather than exit as such.

As mentioned in Cruickshank ([2014](#)), Mary Beard (2012) challenged the idea that the task of higher education was to produce satisfied customers, who then registered their satisfaction monologically via an audit. For Beard, the point of a good education was not to satisfy but dissatisfy in the sense that students should have their pre-conceptions, prejudices and comfort zones challenged. A dialogic democracy requires open minded citizens who are open to changing themselves and an education system which helps facilitate this should seek such dissatisfaction rather than seeing education in terms of products sold to 'informed' consumers. The customer is not always right because education should be a process that changes the values and ideas of the student, or at the

very least expands their horizons to allow them to have a deeper appreciation of different values and ideas. So in discussing universities, the role of the academic as teacher, producing such dissatisfaction, can be as important or more important as the research done, for the development of a dialogic democracy. Of course, the pressures will be strong to conform to the requirements of audit culture and so academics may well lean towards seeking satisfaction than normative / emotional / cognitive change. Nonetheless, it is important to note that academics could affect important change without being intellectuals, providing they did not focus entirely on producing satisfaction and seeking career capital via loyalty to their paradigm and brand.

Before considering more radical ways academics could challenge neo-liberalism and become intellectuals through community engagement, it is necessary to mention how norms can be manipulated and used instrumentally to separate rather than connect individuals, as part of the neo-liberal project to hollow out the university as a site of dialogic practice. Through appeal to the ideology of 'individual utopias' (Giroux 2004, 73), universities depoliticise and frame students within the borders of consumerism and compliance. Those who cannot access education services, in the wider community, are ignored. This exclusion happens at the same time with the creation of the need for 'loyalty' from student-customers, the division between being 'in' and 'out' of education, i.e. between customers who can purchase the brand and those who cannot, being clearly based on privileging market-based approaches over the emancipatory tools which education can offer to students. Complicity with neo-liberalism which ignores the reality of social and economic inequalities is not always done knowingly by students and academics. The solipsistic logic of capitalism (Giroux 1997, 120) extends itself both within and outside institutions, alienating individuals from each other. The concept of loyalty is used to symbolise, on the surface, a type of 'social glue' - a close relationship and identification between an institution's brand and a student's identity is formed. The offering of 'services' to keep customers satisfied is considered by providers as an end in itself, and so this monologic process cannot encompass interruptions and alterations, as it is a closed system. In other words, the standardised form with multiple choice answers becomes the tokenistic form of 'voice', to promote loyalty to the brand in place of any dialogic community. Individual customers are encouraged to feel embodied loyalty to a brand for its quality of service and recognition of their importance, as privileged people who can afford the brand, with their satisfied solipsistic voice registering this via the disembodied impersonal NSS audit.

It is not just the UK coalition government (and the Labour party before them) that have repacked 'student voice' as having an apolitical meaning, but also Student Unions on many campuses and the National Union of Students; whilst fees have leapt up, hardship funds stagnate or decrease and student concerns on these issues are not treated with enough consideration. Access and wellbeing are therefore the two key aspects which have been constantly under threat in the past years. The idea that the campus can and ought to be a site of struggle which has a social and political function in opposing the status quo and driving change is often not to be found in the neo-liberal university. This

marketised relationship between individuals and institutions limits the political dimension and the complexity of dynamics within education. However, it is important to recognise neo-liberalism's weakness: as the monologic approach to consumerism is self-referential, it cannot anticipate and conceive of dialogic practices. The inability to create meaningful social relationships, emotions and practices of solidarity outside of the technocratic, bureaucratic and economic systems can be overcome by academics and students working together against hierarchisation, bureaucratisation and privatisation. The neo-liberal monologic university can oppose this but it cannot enter into meaningful dialogue about it with those agents, because it is a purely monologic elite project predicated upon lone customers seeking utility maximisation and not a collective of interlocutors changing through dialogue.

Creating networks and spaces within and outside institutions to rethink the meaning and practice of pedagogy and its relation to politics is what is needed. The issue here is how to create knowledge within spaces which acknowledge equality of capacity. Interventions are necessary, both from within and from outside of academia, through dissemination of knowledge in an accessible way, community engagement, union organising and through a more dialogic and horizontal, intellectual relationship between academics, students and lay people. The aim is to transform the web of hierarchies of identities which produce dividing differences, and to interrogate and interrupt the dominant, orthodox idea that neo-liberalism is natural, neutral and beyond challenge. One example of such a space is the new Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, inspired by the work of Stuart Hall, which is hosted at a community centre ('The Drum') in the city of Birmingham, rather than at a university, and which brings together academics, students, activists, members of third sector organisations, and the wider population. In a recent meeting, the 'Trojan Horse' debacle (discussed below) was addressed. The CCCS also holds research workshops where activists and academics work together on community issues.

So, there are pressures on academics not to be intellectuals who can promote a dialogic democracy by encouraging and engaging in a wide ranging critical dialogue. Nonetheless, academics may teach in ways that help foster the development of such a democracy and engage with others in activities which themselves, simply by being dialogic, run counter to the dominance of neo-liberalism. Given the pressure in neo-liberal universities such activities may well best occur outside the university. In this situation academics would become intellectuals through practice as much as research.

Trojan Horse: The Attack on a Community and its Dialogic Education by the Neo-Liberal State

In this section we will consider the ongoing 'Trojan Horse' debacle in Birmingham, and use this to illustrate the attack on communities and dialogic school education by the neo-liberal political elite.

State schools in Birmingham with a majority Muslim population had fared badly with many teachers complaining of boards of governors who accepted chronic poor attainment as normal and who consequently established a culture of low expectations. Matters changed for the better once the governors began to change. In 2013 the government inspection body called Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Education) inspected schools with a majority Muslim population, which were later to become embroiled in what is termed by the media the 'Trojan Horse' scandal, and rated them 'excellent'. Academic attainment had increased substantially and any form of intolerance or bigotry was not accepted. The schools were found to be inclusive spaces that fostered understanding and learning. In November 2013 a letter widely recognised as bogus was sent to Birmingham City Council, which claimed that there was a plot to take over and Islamise a number of schools with a conservative form of Salafi Islam. In response to this Ofsted inspected 21 schools and found them to be 'inadequate' in key areas such as 'safeguarding' children from extremism. The Ofsted reports also suggested that exemptions from 'broadly Christian acts of worship' had expired and not been renewed because of the fostering of an authoritarian approach to Islam (Holmwood 2014).

The Clarke Report (2014) commissioned by the Government to investigate the matter stated it was not in its remit to look for 'evidence of terrorism, radicalization or violent extremism' (2014, 12). However, the report went on to say that it 'found clear evidence that there are a number of people, associated with each other and in positions of influence in schools and governing bodies, who espouse, endorse or fail to challenge extremist views' (2014, 12). Further, it stated that '[t]here has been co-ordinated, deliberate and sustained action, carried out by a number of associated individuals, to introduce an intolerant and aggressive Islamic ethos into a few schools in Birmingham' (2014, 14). In contrast to this, the Kershaw Report (2014) commissioned by Birmingham City Council, found no evidence of a plot to promote an aggressive / extremist agenda. It made the following points:

The evidence out of the investigation suggests that some people take the view that there are schools in East Birmingham that are failing Muslim children and in response there are groups of British male governors and teachers, predominantly of Pakistani heritage [who tend to be Sunni not Salafi], which have formed in order to take action to address perceived failings. [...] It is a determined effort to change schools, often by unacceptable practices, in order to influence educational and religious provision for the students served. It is also seen as a means to raise standards. There is no evidence of a conspiracy to promote an anti-British agenda, violent extremism or radicalisation in schools in East Birmingham (2014, 4).

The tabloid press, operating with the simple binary of moderate / good and hardline / bad Muslims leapt of this. The Sun, for instance, shouted that ‘regimes of hate and fear in schools taken over by Muslim hardliners were exposed yesterday’, following publication of the Clarke Report.

As regards the issue of religious education, the following can be said. The provisions of the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced the requirement for schools to hold acts of Christian worship, allow schools with a non-Christian majority to apply to the local SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) for a ‘determination’ to lift that requirement and allow religious education to be non-Christian. In 2007 the multi-faith Birmingham Agreed Syllabus Conference developed a religious education syllabus which focused not on points of doctrine but on ‘dispositions’ (Felderhof 2014). As Holmwood (2014) notes, the 24 ‘Dewey-like’ dispositions include: ‘being temperate’, ‘being joyful’ ‘being attentive to suffering’, ‘being fair and just’, ‘being accountable and living with integrity’, ‘cultivating inclusion, identity and belonging’.

The ‘determinations’ expired but the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, failed to approve their continuance, despite multi-faith support for them in Birmingham. Consequently, majority Muslim schools were meant to default to ‘broadly Christian’ acts of collective worship. As they failed to do this, the Ofsted report criticised them and implied the determinations had not been renewed because the education was authoritarian but the religious education curriculum was anything but. The charge of dogmatism was better levelled therefore at Gove, promoting a narrow and intolerant Christianity, by failing to permit the continuance of the determinations, despite reminders from Birmingham SACRE (Felderhof 2014; Holmwood 2014).

Next, we can consider the issue of ‘safeguarding’. This brings us to the Prevent strategy. Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty, called Prevent ‘the biggest spying programme in Britain in modern times’ (Dodd 2009). The Prevent strategy, which is ultimately the responsibility of Home Secretary Theresa May, sought to prevent radicalisation by using school teachers and university lecturers to spy on Muslim students and report any behavior they deemed to make them ‘at risk’. Although the schools were deemed to have failed to safeguard pupils, the Local Schools Network reported that 80% of the schools deemed to fail to safeguard pupils had actually met the Prevent requirements and that Ofsted is not asked to assess a school’s engagement with Prevent. On the issue of Prevent and universities, some Student Unions and academics have criticised it for having a racialised agenda as it spies on Muslim students whilst not opposing far-right groups (although in theory it should). Among others, The University East London Student Union (2012) and the University of Birmingham Guild of Students (VPEA 2012) voted not to collaborate with the Police’s Prevent officers.

In the build up to this, the political elite and the media had often connected Islam to terrorism and now the ‘Trojan Horse plot’ to radicalise pupils with ‘extremist’ beliefs was counterposed to ‘British values’, with ‘British values’ defined in terms neo-liberal

values. David Cameron, in an article for Mail on Sunday, defined these values in terms of reducing state spending through cutting public services, cutting taxes and putting the emphasis on individuals to support themselves with less reliance on the state (Holmwood 2014). The cuts to public services were to be permanent, given their origin in ‘Britishness’ rather than their origin in a contingent reaction to a financial crisis, which is how they were initially presented. Cameron also continued with his ‘muscular liberalism’ line, initially articulated in his 2011 ‘Munich Speech’, which rejected ‘passive tolerance’ in order to be ‘hard-nosed’ about ‘defending our liberty’ by educating people with a ‘common culture and curriculum’ and ‘shifting the balance of power from the state to individuals’. Individuals should be utility maximising customers making monologic demands on service providers with the religious education being furnished by the public sector for parent-customers being ‘broadly Christian’. The religious education offered by Birmingham SACRE obviously failed this, not by being authoritarian, but by promoting ‘universalistic’ values and an education about the ‘whole person’ which, it can be said, developed an embodied and dialogic approach to democracy as an ethical way of life. So, the political elite mobilised an emotive set of norms which defined Britishness in terms of neo-liberal economic values and connected this to a narrow form of Christianity which was juxtaposed to unBritish authoritarian / hardline / immoderate / extreme Islam and, by extension, terrorism. Britishness was moderate and non-Britishness was immoderate. In this normative environment the reception of the ‘Trojan Horse’ plot by the political elite and the media marginalised the dialogic SACRE religious education and the problems with inequality undermining the performance of majority Muslim pupils before the governors changed, and used this ‘plot’ as normative capital, with the political elite taking it upon themselves to embody ‘British values’.

On the issue of economics, neo-liberalism, despite its individualist rhetoric, and the connection of muscular liberalism to possessive individualism, favours firms over individuals, and the Government has pushed for schools under local authority control to become ‘academies’ which are responsible directly to the Secretary of State for Education. This used to be Gove who, just after a very public row with Theresa May, lost his post in a Cabinet reshuffle, for failing to implement Prevent effectively. In 2010 the Coalition Government passed a Bill to allow local authority schools to convert into ‘academies’. The number of academies has grown over the course of four years from 6% (May 2010) to 53% (February 2014) in the case of secondary school academies (Gove 2014). Low levels of attainment and achievement are the usual reasons invoked by the Government and education trusts in favour of this, along with the argument that being free from local authority control will foster improvement by allowing a freer regime of curriculum adaptation. Academies are companies (limited by guarantee) with charitable exempt status. On the issue of attainment, it has been found that local schools often have higher educational outcomes than academy schools (Boffey 2012). On the issue of autonomy, this is often more apparent than real because the autonomy which is thought to be given to communities actually resides more with the Board of Directors who can pursue relations with private firms to supply services. Having said this though, it is

interesting to note that eight schools which were deemed to be part of the Trojan Horse plot were academies and so eight were the responsibility of central Government.

So, the neo-liberal state pushed for schools to be removed from the control of local authorities and opened up to business interests. Some schools, including academies, with a majority of Muslim students, improved their educational attainment and produced a religious education that promoted dialogic democracy. In the academies this was prioritised above the privatisation of services. Central Government then used a now politicised inspection body (Ofsted) to demonise these schools and by extension the Muslim community.

By using security language to ‘protect’ the wider population, the Government in fact stifled debate about extreme views and practices of the far right, once again blaming and victimising minoritised groups. It privileges the views and identity of the white British population and the interests of Government and the private sector, dismissing any claims to autonomy that other groups have. The dichotomy between ‘moderate’ and ‘extreme’ Muslims, which follows on from such debates, closes off debate, as it mobilises prejudicial norms and feeds the emotional reaction to ‘extremism’ of the population, demanding that people self-identify as ‘not the problematic’ elements of a demonised group in a moral panic. It also places neo-liberalism in a privileged position as moderate, as it is the main framework of analysis which is considered normal, natural, and above all, neutral. Emotive norms are used by the political elite to demonise a group and naturalise neo-liberal practices, with a simple British neo-liberal / tolerant vs unBritish / intolerant binary.

We cannot be neutral: as Freire aptly puts it, ‘when we try to be neutral [...] we support the dominant ideology’ (1985, 17). Cameron’s ideology which informs the narrative of ‘British values’ prioritises securitisation and austerity measures, with the underlying assumption that ‘hardworking British people’ are victims of extremism by those who do not accept ‘hard decisions’: budget cuts and repression. Thus ‘British values’ encompass prejudices and a tendency of assimilation, against voice and dialogue. Those who oppose the Government’s measures are portrayed as confrontational, irrational, a threat to the ‘social cohesion’ of the country. The coupling of austerity, marketisation and racism alienate individuals from each other, so that the government once again assumes a neutral (read: authoritarian) role to ‘solve’ the tension by disciplining the disempowered.

The long-lasting and ongoing legacy of discrimination against minoritised groups plays a crucial role here. Capitalism itself has been founded upon colonialism - with the advancement of equality policies and human rights, state racism has only changed its shape, but remained the same in essence. Hence, success in academic achievement in schools with a majority of Muslim students was seen as a threat; this position of alienating and disciplining minorities is linked in the case of Britain with its colonial past.

Voice is suppressed as a result of the incident being framed as one of emergency, a crisis, a state of exception (Agamben 2003). Muslim students are treated as individuals who are not 'loyal' to the state education system and, it is suggested, with democracy itself. Having discussed loyalty in different contexts we can say that loyalty is precisely the mechanism used by the state to control and manage its population through moral panics and controversies. It is a form of centralised state authoritarianism, prescribing assent to neo-liberal values, which have 'naturalised' the formerly contingent austerity measures and which have an intolerant and essentialist approach to faith and ethnicity, with public life modelled on a narrow and intolerant quasi-Christian secularism and reduced to consumption.

Conclusion

It is important to take the social and political environment into account when considering the production of knowledge. In a neo-liberal environment there are a number of factors acting against the development of a more dialogic form of democracy. Focusing on education we have argued that the neo-liberal university is far from being a potential exemplar for intellectuals to effect change and that schools which promoted a dialogic conception of citizenship came under attack from the political elite who sought to mix hostility to one group with support for the decline of the public sector amongst the wider population.

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