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| Institution: University of Chester | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies | | |
| Title of case study: PREVENT – Funded Anti-Extremist Theatre-in-Education | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2016 – 2018 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): Shelley Piasecka | Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor of Theatre and Applied Drama, Department of Music, Media and Performance. | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2011 – ongoing |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018 – 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This case study details a research project undertaken by Associate Professor Shelley Piasecka, which examined the potential for Theatre-in-Education (TIE) to offer non-discriminatory and holistic ways of delivering UK counter-terrorism strategies. The European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI) adopted Piasecka's research findings to inform the work of the EU in combatting terrorism and youth radicalisation and her research was instrumental in the convening of an expert conference at the European Parliament to coincide with International Refugee Day (2018). Piasecka's research findings have also provided opportunities for practitioners to critically reflect upon and evaluate their work with young people on the subject of terrorism and violent extremism.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The underpinning research was undertaken between 2016-2018 and was a new interdisciplinary study in the intersection between the Performing Arts and the Social and Political Sciences. The research was undertaken by Shelley Piasecka, Associate Professor of Theatre and Applied Drama in the Department of Music, Media and Performance at the University of Chester. The underpinning research stage was funded with competitive Quality Research grants.

2.1 Research Context

The research context was informed with critical readings on PREVENT (Heath-Kelly 2012; Qureshi 2015; Busher et al 2017), and the cultural impact of the war on terror for young British Muslims (Lynch 2013; Qurashi 2018). Research in the Performing Arts, specifically in the field of educational theatre, has tended to focus on the transformational, social, and aesthetic qualities of the art form; see, for example, Bartlett, *Not in my Name* (2011) and Winston and Strand, *Tapestry and the aesthetics of theatre in education as dialogic encounter and civil exchange* (2013). While TIE is well established in UK schools, anti-extremist work is a fairly new development. There is very little research that examines TIE against a critical reading of UK PREVENT, and the impact of the global war on terror on young British Muslims.

2.2 Methodology

In 2016, Piasecka observed two Prevent-funded anti-extremist TIE projects: *Game On* (Reveal Theatre) and *Tapestry* (The Play House), carried out in situ at secondary schools in the cities of Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham. In Stoke-on-Trent, the majority of the learners were white British, and in Birmingham, the majority were from BAME and minority backgrounds. All schools were co-educational and the learners were aged 11-14 years. The observational findings were supported by in-depth qualitative interviews with drama facilitators, actors, and artistic directors. Piasecka also interviewed artistic directors from Zengage Performing Arts on their Anti-Racist TIE project, *Love & Hate*, which was funded by Lancashire Police and Blackpool Council.

2.3 Findings

Impact case study (REF3)

A review of the literature suggests that a disproportionate focus on Islamist forms of terrorism in the Prevent Duty Strategy was a contributory factor in the construction of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment, while Far Right extremism and other forms of terrorism were largely overlooked. Plus, the targeted allocation of Prevent funding reinforced discriminatory beliefs that some communities were more vulnerable to extremism than others. Notwithstanding these concerns, the research found that anti-extremist TIE has the potential to make a positive contribution to the development of critical thinking on the causes of terrorism and violent extremism with young people. Moreover, anti-extremist TIE resists a polarised reading of terrorism as a Muslim concern because it brings into the frame the interdependency of Far Right and Islamist forms of terrorism.

2.4 Research Outputs

The findings were published in a peer-reviewed article for *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Taylor & Francis, 2019 [3:1]. As an indicator of the journal's esteem, the Editor-in-Chief is Richard Jackson – a pre-eminent scholar in the field of Critical Terrorism Studies. The Editorial Board includes Noam Chomsky (MIT, USA); Charlotte Heath-Kelly (University of Warrick, UK); Louise Richardson (University of St Andrews, UK); and Michael Stohl (University of California, Santa Barbara, USA). The research findings were disseminated at conferences and symposiums in England (2017; 2018), Vic, Catalonia (2017), and Brussels, Belgium (2018). In 2018, Piasecka presented a TEDx talk on the theme [3:2].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Piasecka, S. (2019). "Performing PREVENT: anti-extremist theatre-in-education in the service of UK counter-terrorism, a Freirean analysis" In *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol 12 (4) 715-734,
2. **TEDx Talk:** "Using Theatre to Counter Youth Radicalisation." (2018)
https://www.ted.com/talks/shelley_piasecka_counter_narratives_the_role_of_theatre_in_education_in_countersing_youth_radicalisation

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of Piasecka's research is evidenced in three areas. First, the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI) adopted her findings to inform the work of the EU in combatting terrorism and youth radicalisation. Piasecka's research was instrumental in the convening of an expert conference at the European Parliament to coincide with International Refugee Day (2018). Second, Piasecka's observations of anti-extremist TIE has helped UK MEPs and staff to identify new and innovative ways of preventing young people from being drawn into terrorism. Third, albeit ancillary to the first two, the research findings have provided opportunities for practitioners to critically reflect upon and evaluate their work with young people.

4.1 Beneficiaries

- Alfiaz Vaiya: Coordinator of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (2015-2019).
- Julie Ward: MEP North West Region (2014-2020).
- Sajjad Karim: MEP North West Region (2014-2019).
- Anita Tusar: Political Advisor on Extremism, European Parliament.
- Figen Murray: Peace Campaigner.
- Ed Morris and Phil Goss: Artistic Directors of *2engage Performing Arts*.
- Associate Professor Robert Marsden: Head of Media and Performance at Staffordshire University and freelance theatre director.

4.2 Pathways to Impact

Between 2016-2018, Piasecka attended the European Parliament (Brussels), to meet with parliamentary members and staff responsible for shaping EU responses to the threats of domestic and global terrorism: Trevor MacFarlane, Cultural Affairs Manager, Office of Julie Ward MEP;

Anita Tusar, Advisor to Extremist Working Group; Julie Ward MEP and Alfiaz Vaiya, former coordinator of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI).

The dates for the meetings were as follows:

- Trevor MacFarlane: 18/03/16 (Manchester office).
- Anita Tusar: 26/04/2016 (Brussels Parliament)
- Julie Ward MEP: 26/04/2016 (Brussels Parliament)
- Alfiaz Vaiya: 27/04/2016 (Brussels Parliament)

From these initial meetings, Piasecka formed an impact pathway with Alfiaz Vaiya and the European Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI). The remit of ARDI is to promote racial equality and to challenge discrimination in the work of the European Parliament. This pathway enabled Piasecka to raise her research findings with key Parliamentary beneficiaries. In 2017, on Vaiya's invite, Piasecka attended a conference at the Parliament: *Race, Racism, and Xenophobia in a Global Context Conference*, hosted by MEP Cecile and New York University (09/11/2017).

In 2018, Vaiya shared Piasecka's TEDx talk: *Using Theatre to Counter Youth Radicalisation* with Sajjad Karim MEP [3:2]. The talk focused on the need to find better and more inclusive ways of delivering the Prevent Duty. In the talk, Piasecka argued that "it is time to change the conversation" when talking about terrorism with young people.

4.3 Impact: European Parliament

Piasecka's research on Islamophobia and youth radicalisation was instrumental in the convening of an expert conference at the European Parliament to coincide with International Refugee Day. Hosted by Sajjad Karim MEP, the conference was titled: *Promoting Peace, Fighting Youth Radicalization, Fostering a Welcoming Europe* (21/08/2018) [5:1]. In a concept note to European Parliamentarians to promote the event, Sajjad Karim MEP reiterated Piasecka's TEDx Talk to 'change the conversation' about terrorism:

*"Trapped between horrific circumstances and rising intolerance, many who would seek to radicalise find their task simplified. Europe has suffered a series of horrific terror attacks in recent years, which has, in turn, boosted the very rhetoric contributing to that radicalisation. Our previous approaches towards tackling radicalisation have failed, and the results of this failure are becoming more and more apparent. **The time has come to change the conversation**"* (01/06/18). [5:2]

The expert conference brought together speakers on terrorism and youth radicalisation and included a keynote address from Sir Julian King, British European Commissioner, and expert contributions from Piasecka, Figen Murray (peace campaigner), Professor Simon Piasecki (Liverpool Hope University) Dr. Ajmal Hussain (Manchester University), Estelle Cincinatis (European Jewish Congress) and Julie Ward MEP. The importance of the event was underpinned by Sajjad Karim:

"This conference was about bringing together all sections of society to promote positive engagement against radicalisation and to help foster a welcoming Europe. In this respect, we succeeded... In 15 years of being a Member of Parliament though, I have never been so worried. Xenophobia has been on the rise for many years now and has only been exacerbated by the Brexit vote and a rise in populism across Europe... It means our Member States must remain totally engaged in fighting this rise of extremism and collectively, under the banner of the European Union, our commitments must be strengthened" (The Southport Reporter, 2018). [5:3]

The conference was attended by parliamentarians and political journalists, who reported, *"Europe has to stand up and fight for its values if a major crisis is to be averted"* (22/06/18). [5:4]

Of the immediate significance of the conference and Piasecka's expert contribution, Kaoutar Abousmir, Head of Parliamentary Office to Sajjad Karim, said:

"I would like to thank you for your valuable contribution to the success of this week's event... Our exchange touched on subjects of great relevance in the current political climate we find ourselves in, and we must use events such as Wednesday's to continue any momentum gained to help push the issue towards the mainstream of politics, rather than such issues remaining on the periphery. I am confident that we can do so by building on the success of last week's event" (22/06/18). [5:5]

The long-term impact of the case study cannot be easily quantified, given the unstable and shifting political contexts for terrorism, and the subsequent UK exit from the European Union. The aim of the impact case study was not to 'prevent' youth radicalisation per se, but rather to highlight issues of concern, in this case surrounding the discriminatory aspects of Prevent and in doing so to help European politicians to identify inclusive and holistic ways of tackling radicalisation and extremism. The significance of the research can be further evidenced in Vaiya's reflections on Piasecka's contribution to ARDI:

"Dr Piasecka's research aligns to our aims and we have adopted her research to inform our work in the EU on combatting terrorism... Dr Piasecka's pioneering research of anti-extremist theatre-in-education has strengthened our view that polarized thinking about the causes of radicalization leads to marginalized and disaffected communities. In a broader context, her research has enabled policy-makers to see that there are alternative counter-terrorism strategies, which are holistic, inclusive and community-based. We are confident that her contribution will impact on ARDI's priorities for the future" (28/11/2019). [5:6]

4.4 Impact: Practitioners

While the main focus has been Piasecka's work with the European Parliament, her findings have benefited practitioners working in peace activism and anti-extremist theatre. Robert Marsden, a freelance theatre director and former artistic director of Reveal Theatre, responded to the research, saying: *"Piasecka's work ensures that I have a currency in relation to the contemporary debates surrounding Prevent and how theatre and drama is used to explore contentious issues" (19/10/20) [5:7].*

This view is echoed by Ed Morris, *2engage Performing Arts*. In an interview to discuss the impact of the study, Morris cited the political and social significance of the case study concerning the *"reductive nature of Prevent-thinking."* For Morris, and Goss, *"the case study will impact on the development of future anti-extremist work for 2engage Performing Arts [post school closures due to COVID 19]" (19/10/20). [5:8]*

The most meaningful outcome is evidenced in a testimonial written by the peace-campaigner Figen Murray. Figen was introduced to Piasecka's research on Prevent at the European Parliament. Figen's son, Martyn Hett, was murdered in the Manchester Arena Bombing. In the years following the attack, Figen has devoted her life to the promotion of peace. She has worked with the EU-led Radicalisation Network (RAN), the Jo Cox Foundation, and is responsible for *Martyn's Law*, proposed legislation to provide better protection against terrorism for the British public. Figen is a truly inspirational figure and the loss of Martyn illustrates why non-discriminatory anti-extremist work matters. Regarding the impact of Piasecka's research on her work, Figen writes:

"I give talks to young people at secondary schools, colleges and universities about the impact of the [Manchester] attack on our family. I target young people as I believe they are going to be the future educators, policymakers, law makers and parents of the next generation... As a result of [Piasecka's research] I have reflected on my own work with young people. [It made] me realise that I need to put more faith and trust in my audiences, and I will include a space for deeper discussion. I usually give a talk and then invite questions about the talk. I realise now that I also could ask the audience certain questions to generate more insight in students" (04/11/2019). [5:9]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Expert Conference at the European Parliament, Brussels: *Promoting Peace, Fighting Youth Radicalization, Fostering a Welcoming Europe* (21/08/2018).
https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/promoting-peace-fighting-youth-radicalisation-fostering-welcoming-europe_20180620_EP-073136A_DBA_077_p **EU Parliament Multimedia Centre and photographs.**
2. European Parliament, MEP Office: **Concept note.**
3. Southport Reporter, 22.06/18. <http://www.southportreporter.com/869/page-11.shtml> **Press Release.**
4. The Parliament Magazine:
22/06/18. <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/radicalisation-everyone-must-take-responsibility-for-what-is-happening-parliament-told> **Press Release.**
5. Head of Parliamentary Office to MEP, 22/06/18. **Email.**
6. Former coordinator of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI); 28/11/2019: **Testimonial.**
7. Freelance theatre director and former artistic director of Reveal Theatre, 19/10/20: **Letter.**
8. Artistic director of Zengage Performing Arts, 19/10/20: **Letter.**
9. Peace Campaigner and mother of Martyn Hett, 04/11/19: **Testimonial.**